

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Lassoing
Lara

N.J. WALTERS

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*®

Lassoing Lara

N.J. Walters

Brody Courage wakes up after a night out with his brothers and finds himself naked and tied to his bed with no idea how he's gotten there. Just when he thinks he's going to have to rip apart the headboard to get himself loose, he hears someone entering the house. He thinks it's one of his brothers and calls out for help, but it's Lara Jacobs, his childhood friend and neighbor.

He's humiliated to have to ask her help and swears her to secrecy. She's quiet and pale and leaves after releasing only one arm. When Brody finally gets himself out of bed, he finds a pair of red lace panties stuck near the footboard – a perfect match for the red bra he'd glimpsed Lara wearing when she bent over to untie him. It's then his memories of the night before start to flood back. He spent one hell of a night in bed with his neighbor.

Now he wants another. One he can remember. But there's the little problem of Lara avoiding him...

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Lassoing Lara

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LASSOING LARA

N.J. Walters

Dedication

Thanks to my husband, who never fails to inspire me.

Chapter One

A groan woke him. It took Brody Courage a moment to realize the low, tortured sound had come from his own throat. His head felt as though a stubborn horse had kicked him and his mouth was as dry as a mid-July afternoon in West Texas. He lay there, eyes closed, not moving as he assessed the damage.

What the hell had he done last night?

The last thing he remembered was going into town with his brothers J.T. and Marshall and hitting the Last Chance Saloon for some pool and a few beers. It was rare for the three of them to be home at the same time as Marshall was usually gone, working for a secret U. S. government agency. His brother didn't talk about it and they didn't ask. Both he and J.T. knew that whatever their brother did for the government wasn't pretty, but it was necessary.

They'd drank a few beers, ragged on one another as only brothers can and shot some pool. It hadn't taken long for the women to start circling. J.T. wasn't interested. Not anymore. He had his wife Tori waiting at home and he barely noticed other women. Marshall was a one-night stand kinda guy. His work didn't allow for a serious relationship.

As for himself, he had too much work to do to even think about getting involved in a permanent relationship. Maybe when the house renovations were done and he'd met the deadline for his next book. One-night stands weren't his style. Hell, he didn't know what he was looking for anymore, so he'd smiled and sent the women on their way last night.

Well, all except, Lara. Feisty Lara Jacobs was the daughter of a neighbor. They'd practically grown up together. A tomboy through and through, Lara could ride and rope with the best of them. She'd also been a thorn in his side most of his life, chasing

behind him and his brothers whenever possible. But they'd also been friends. She'd been like one of the guys, laughing and romping and getting into trouble right alongside the Courage brothers.

She'd certainly changed from the skinny teenager who'd dogged their every step. Not that she was a kid any longer. Now, from what he'd seen, she was all woman. She was still lanky, her short black hair chopped off shorter than most guys', but there was no mistaking the fact that she was a well-put-together female.

She'd joined them for a few games of pool. Watching her lean over the table to take a difficult shot had certainly been an experience he wouldn't soon forget. Her jeans had pulled tight over a nicely rounded ass. Her legs seemed to go on forever, making him wonder what they'd be like wrapped around his flanks as he thrust into her. Her breasts were on the small side, but firm and full. As a man, he could appreciate them. As a friend and a neighbor, he was going to keep his distance.

And thinking about Lara wasn't going to help him remember what had happened last night. All it was doing was making him horny. He'd certainly tied one on, which was unusual for him. But the past few months he'd been working on a deadline for his next book, plus renovating his house during every free second. It had felt good to cut loose with his brothers. But now it was time to pay the piper for that excess.

Knowing he'd put off the inevitable long enough, he took a deep breath and cracked open one eyelid. The sun was streaming in through the window. He swore under his breath, but forced his other eye open.

He blinked several times before things settled down. The room looked the same, the walls bare, the furniture sparse. Yup, he'd made it home last night in one piece. He'd have to thank his brothers for that.

It was time to try to move. He started to roll, but something tugged on his arm, pulling him back. "What the hell?" He turned his head, ignoring the throbbing at the base of his skull. What he saw made him swear again. His wrist was tied to the

headboard. An experimental tug assured him that his other wrist was in exactly the same condition.

He was also buck naked under the sheets that bunched at his waist.

Taking a deep breath, he tested the strength of the binding. If this was his brothers' idea of a joke, he was going to kill them. He swallowed hard as his stomach roiled. He'd definitely had way too much to drink last night, which was totally out of character. He liked to maintain control. He didn't like the idea of being at the mercy of someone else's whim.

Whoever had done this to him would pay.

Images started to flit through his foggy brain. A full, firm breast, long, bare legs, a nipped in waist. Brody lay there, momentarily stunned. Had he brought a woman home last night? If so, there was no one here now. He listened, but could hear no sound coming from the rest of the house. Had she left him like this on purpose? And who in hell was she?

He raised his head and looked around as best he could, given his current situation. There were no female clothes strewn about, no shoes or purse. Nothing to give him a clue as to how he got into his present condition. He caught a whiff of soap. It was light, not his usual woodsy blend. He could also smell sex. His cock stirred, tenting the sheets slightly.

Great, now he was not only tied to the bed, but his dick was hard as a spike. Plus, he had the mother of all hangovers. He had to put his mind to work figuring out how to get out of this mess he'd gotten himself into.

He'd have to yank the slats out of the bed frame. It wouldn't be easy. He wouldn't be able to get much leverage, given his position. But he had faith in himself and in his strength. He'd do it. He tested the thin wooden post holding his right hand and then his left. The one on the right wiggled more. Wrapping his fingers around the bar, he pulled, applying even pressure on the top where it joined the crossbar.

The wood creaked, but it didn't break. A bead of sweat trickled down his temple as the heat of the day pushed the room from warm to uncomfortable. It was unseasonably warm this spring, even for West Texas.

The sound of a door slamming was music to his ears. One of his brothers must have come by to check on him. They'd razz him about this for the rest of his life, but at this point he didn't care. "In here. That you, Marshall?"

As long as it wasn't his sister-in-law Tori, he was fine. J.T. would kill him if Tori saw him naked. Not that he'd volunteer that information to his brother, but he'd find out. Tori certainly wouldn't be able to resist telling him.

Boot heels echoed on the bare wood floors as whoever it was came closer. The bedroom door pushed open and he grinned in spite of his predicament. He'd be free in no time.

His grin faded as he recognized his rescuer. Lara Jacobs. "What the hell are you doing here?" he growled. This was the last thing he needed.

She frowned, her face paling as she took a step back.

Brody ignored how good she looked. Her black hair was tousled, her full lips were parted slightly. She was wearing her usual faded jeans, which fit her slender body to perfection, outlining her subtle curves. The sleeveless, blue blouse she wore was plain, with no hint of lace or any other feminine detail. Like her jeans, it was functional. She was pretty, but not beautiful, not by society's standards. Yet, his cock grew harder and sweat broke out all over his body.

As he watched, she licked her lips. He barely swallowed a groan. He wanted to lick her lips for her. How would they taste? For some reason, he thought they'd taste sweet, like cherries. He frowned. Why was he even thinking about her lips? His brain must be even more muddled than he thought.

She was staring at him. No, not at him, at where the sheets were tented. His embarrassment translated to anger and he barked his next command. "You just going to stand there and stare or are you going to untie me."

She swallowed hard. "Sorry. Ah, I'll untie you." Lara sidled over to the side of the bed and picked at the leather strap holding his left hand captive.

"Don't tell anyone about this," he muttered. Last thing he wanted was for this incident to become the talk of the county.

She paused and glanced at him. "Don't tell?"

"Yeah, you think I want folks to know about this? I don't even know how the hell I got here."

She paled further and nodded, quickly going back to work. As she pulled at the leather tie, he relaxed slightly in spite of his pounding headache. He could trust Lara. If she said she wouldn't tell, then she wouldn't. She'd kept a lot of secrets when they were kids. He could depend on her.

Her fingers trembled slightly as she worked. Muttering under her breath, she shifted her position to get a better angle. As she leaned down, the top of her blouse gaped slightly giving him a perfect view of a racy red lace bra.

Brody's fingers curled. He wanted to run his finger along the edge of the lace and slip beneath the fabric and discover what was beneath. A flash of soft, pale skin and a puckered pink nipple went through his brain. Imagination, nothing more. He'd never seen Lara naked, but he'd imagined it. More than once over the years.

His breathing increased as her nearness got to him. She'd be soft, yet strong at the same time, a heady combination. Not that he'd ever approach her. Lara was a forever kind of woman and he wasn't ready to settle down. Not yet. That didn't stop him from speculating though.

He caught a whiff of her soap or lotion or whatever it was. It was light, with a hint of floral to it. It was familiar somehow. He snorted. Of course it was familiar. He'd known her for years, had probably smelled it a thousand times. It was the situation and her nearness making it seem suddenly sensual and inviting.

“There you go.” She released his left hand and took a step back. He lowered his arm and flexed it slightly. It was a bit stiff. Other than that, it felt fine. “I’ll be going now.” She turned on her heel and started toward the door.

“Hey,” he called. “What about my other arm?”

She paused at the door and wrapped her arms around herself. “You can get that.”

Something wasn’t right, but damn if he could figure out what was wrong. “Why are you here? Did your dad send you over for something?” Not that he wasn’t thankful, but he hadn’t been expecting her.

She shrugged. “Doesn’t matter. Not anymore.” Then she was gone. He listened to the sound of her boots go across the kitchen floor and out of the house. Moments later, the sound of a truck starting reached him, followed quickly by the spinning of tires as she tore out of the yard.

Brody rolled to his side and went to work on his other arm. It took him a few minutes but, finally, he was free. He gave a sigh of relief and rolled to the edge of the bed, lowering his face into his hands. He needed a shower and some coffee to help clear his head.

He shoved the covers out of the way and stood. Naked, he padded toward the bathroom, scratching his chest and rolling his shoulders. Ten minutes later, he emerged refreshed, a towel wrapped around his hips.

As he went toward his closet to find some clean clothes, something caught his eye. He stopped and made his way to the bed. There was something wedged near the footboard. Maybe it was a clue to the mystery woman he’d been with last night. Reaching down, he tugged out a pair of panties, if that’s what they could be called. It was more a scrap of fabric. He lifted it to his face and inhaled and got a whiff of aroused female.

His cock flexed. He glared down at it. “You got me into this fix in the first place. Just settle down.”

Brody examined the panties. They were racy red and lacy. He stilled, unable to believe the road his thoughts were headed down. "No," he breathed. Lara had been wearing a bra that matched these panties perfectly. What were the odds?

He stumbled to the kitchen and swore as he saw that a pot of coffee was already brewed and a package of eggs and bacon were sitting on the counter. She must have run out to her truck for something and he'd heard her coming back in. He raked his hands through his hair. He let go a very creative list of cuss words. As a writer and a cowboy, his vocabulary was considerable when it came to swearing.

He dropped down on a kitchen chair, clutching the lace panties in his hand. He'd slept with Lara Jacobs. More to the point, he'd had sex with her.

As if thinking the words were all his muddled mind needed to release the memories, they started coming. Tumbling one after another until a clear picture of the evening before formed in his brain.

He'd had a few too many and Lara had offered to drive him home. It was on her way. That way J.T. wouldn't have to. He'd had his hands full with Marshall, who had uncharacteristically tied one on too. The ride home had been pleasant. He had a vague memory of Lara's laughter.

She'd helped him into the house, her lithe body tucked up next to his much larger one. She'd stared up at him, her green eyes soft and inviting, and he'd been unable to resist tasting her sweet lips. One thing had led to another and before he could think, they'd been pulling off each other's clothing and tumbling onto his bed.

"Damn." He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes. No wonder she'd paled when he'd told her he had no idea how he'd gotten tied to the bed. He'd hurt her. He'd have to find her later and talk to her.

A slow smile crossed his face. He still couldn't exactly remember how he'd ended up tied to the headboard. Too bad. Must have been fun. He'd have to return the favor. And there would be a next time.

Lara intrigued him, had attracted him for years. Ever since she'd turned sixteen and he'd turned seventeen and she'd started to develop in interesting ways. Now that they'd slept together, there was no reason it couldn't happen again. They were both adults. Nothing wrong with both of them having a little fun. Obviously, she was attracted to him.

Suddenly, he was ravenous. He pushed to his feet, grabbed the package of bacon and went to work at the stove.

Lara pulled off the road as soon as she was out of sight of the old Courage homestead. She swiped at her wet eyes, refusing to cry. The jerk didn't remember sleeping with her last night. She leaned her head back against the headrest and sighed. She couldn't really blame him.

She'd known he'd had too much to drink when she took him home last night. But she'd wanted Brody Courage for years, had seen her opportunity to have him and had taken it.

Even sprawled across his bed, looking totally debauched the morning after, he managed to look sexy. He was six feet of sexy cowboy with his hard-packed, muscular body and pale blue eyes that seemed to see right through a person to their very soul.

She shivered and rubbed her hands up and down her arms. He'd certainly looked at her last night. Devoured was a better word for it. He'd made a detailed examination of every inch of her body and she'd loved every second of it.

Her nipples tightened, beading against the cups of her bra. She clenched her thighs together as her pussy contracted with need. Lara squirmed and then moaned as the seam of her jeans stimulated her clit. She wasn't wearing panties. She'd been unable to find them when she'd dressed this morning.

She'd left Brody lying in bed and gone for a quick walk around the yard to try to figure out how she was going to handle the morning after. She'd loved Brody for years, but was smart enough to know he didn't feel the same way. Sure he wanted her, he'd

made that more than clear last night. But wanting wasn't the same as loving. Sure, he cared about her, just not in the way she wanted him to.

She'd never had a one-night stand before. Her sexual relationships up until now had been with good men, men she really liked, men she'd dated for a while. A couple of them had hinted at wanting to settle down and she'd broken it off with them. It wasn't fair to them. It wasn't their fault she couldn't love them like she wanted to, like they needed her to. As much as she wanted to forget about the cowboy she'd left still tied to his bed, she couldn't.

Lara had spent most of her teenage years and her entire adult life trying to get over her infatuation with Brody Courage. So far, it hadn't happened. She loved him.

"That's over now." She scrubbed at her eyes and took a deep breath. "He didn't even remember." That's what hurt worse than anything. Their night together hadn't been memorable. *She* hadn't been memorable.

On the other hand, she would never forget last night as long as she lived. A shiver tracked down her spine and goose bumps skated over her arms. His kisses had been hot, his tongue taking its time as he tasted her lips and learned her mouth. She didn't think there was a single spot on her body that he hadn't touched with his lips, tongue or hands.

And the things he'd done to her.

She reached over and flicked the air-conditioning up on bust, angling the vent towards herself to cool her heated body. He'd feasted on her breasts, teasing her nipples with his fingers and tongue before working his way lower.

A moan escaped her as she remembered his hot breath skimming over her pussy before his mouth had tasted her. She leaned her head back against the headrest and squirmed in her seat.

His hands had been everywhere. Touching. Taking. By the time he'd slid inside her, she'd been mindlessly begging him to fuck her. His cock had filled her almost to the point of pain. But she'd been so ready for him and wanted him so badly, her body had

adjusted quickly, welcoming him. He'd been insatiable, taking her over the edge three times before he'd allowed himself to come.

They'd dozed a while and then she'd decided it was her turn to play. Her fingers curled into fists on top of her jean-clad thighs as she remembered the flex of muscles beneath his taut flesh. Problem was, he kept distracting her with kisses and touches. She'd retaliated by tying his hands to the bedpost before having her way with him.

And he didn't remember.

Sighing, she rubbed her eyes and sat up straight. There was nothing to be done about it. There was no way she was going to tell him about last night. She felt like a fool. It was time to forget Brody. Time to move on with her life.

Easier said than done, but she was determined. She was twenty-nine years old. It was time to stop mooning over Brody and hoping one day he'd see her as more than the girl next door, a friend, a buddy.

She put the truck in gear and pulled back on the road, heading toward home.

Chapter Two

Two weeks later, Brody was frustrated beyond belief. It was a hard blow for a man to realize that the woman he'd thought of as a pest most of his teenage years and as a good friend her entire adult life was the woman he'd been unconsciously searching for his whole life. He'd finally come to that conclusion after yet another sleepless night.

She made him crazy, made him laugh and turned him on more than any other woman he'd ever met. Just thinking about her made his dick stand up at attention. With the blinders removed, he could look back over the years and see the signals he'd missed. Lara had always been there, hovering in the background his entire life.

She understood him better than most, even better than his brothers. She was easy to talk to, a friend when he'd needed it. Over the years, they'd talked about his writing, about the horses, the ranch, family. Hell, he could talk to her about anything.

He snorted as he climbed out of his pickup and headed toward the diner, his boots ringing on the pavement. He'd been a fool. Ever since J.T. had settled down with Tori, he'd been feeling restless. Coming home for good, revamping the old homestead had been part of that. He'd told himself it was because he wanted to be closer to family. In truth, he now admitted it was because he wanted what his brother had—a permanent relationship.

The perfect woman for him had been there all along. He'd just been too dense to see it. Now he was ready to take that next step.

Problem was, Lara was avoiding him. He'd chased her down several times, cornering her once in the local feed store. She'd flushed and brushed by him, muttering that she had things to do. Not once had she even alluded to their night together or given any indication that she'd like to repeat it.

Marshall was long gone, back to saving the free world and J.T. was busy working with his horses and loving Tori. Neither of his brothers had mentioned anything about that fateful night. He was glad they didn't know what had happened. He didn't want to talk about Lara to anyone. Not yet. Not when his feelings for her were so tangled up.

He wasn't sleeping. He'd had plenty of time to brood, to remember the night they'd spent together, the way her body had felt beneath his as he'd fucked her. The way she'd clung to him, her breathy sighs and moans, the way her pussy had clamped down on his cock, milking it dry.

On the up side, he was getting a hell of a lot of work done around the old place. The floors were all refinished and the walls painted. Up until now, he'd been working on structural changes, taking down a few walls to give the downstairs a more open concept, upgrading the heating and cooling systems and putting in new windows and doors.

Heck, he'd even finished his latest book well ahead of schedule and sent it off to his editor first thing this morning.

But enough was enough. He had to talk to her. He had a plan. And he had her to thank for it.

He stood in the doorway of the Trail's End Diner and took in the room at a glance. Lara was over in one of the corner booths talking to a few friends. He walked across the room, his stride filled with purpose. Tipping his hat to the other women, he turned to Lara.

"Your father sent me to get you."

She'd paled when she'd first seen him but offered him a tight smile. "Why did he send you? Why didn't he just call? I've got my cell phone."

"You need to come with me." He needed to get her in his truck and back to his place.

"Is something wrong?" She jumped up from the table and grabbed his forearm.

He hated the flash of fear he'd seen in her eyes but didn't correct her misconception. "It's not life-threatening, but it is important." He gave the other women a cursory glance. "Excuse us." Brody headed to the door with Lara in tow. He knew folks were watching them but didn't care. Let them talk.

"Brody?" She tugged at his arm, but he ignored it, pulling open the passenger door of his pickup.

"Get in."

"I've got my own truck." She shot him a glare but did as he asked.

"You can get it later." Slamming the door shut, he hurried to the driver's side and climbed in. He started the engine and headed out of town. Satisfaction filled him. He finally had her where he wanted her — next to him.

The next step in the plan was to get her in his bed, naked and willing.

"Brody." She smacked his arm, obviously out of patience. "What's going on?"

"We need to talk." His voice was rough, but sexual frustration was riding him hard.

"About what?" She crossed her arms over her chest and stared out the window. "Why did my father send you to get me?"

"He didn't." He continued driving, but waited for the explosion. It wasn't long coming.

"He didn't! What do you mean, he didn't? How could you worry me, lie to me like that? What game are you playing?" He could almost see the steam coming out of her ears. Lara had a temper when provoked. Made him hot as hell and he shifted in his seat to try to get more comfortable, but it was a losing battle. His cock was pressing against the zipper of his jeans, demanding release.

"I'm not playing. That's *your* game," he taunted. "Desperate times called for desperate measures. You've been avoiding me for weeks." Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the lacy red panties he'd carried around with him for the past two weeks and tossed them toward her.

It was reflex that made her catch them. She paled and bit her bottom lip, all the anger seeping out of her. "You remember."

"Not all of it." He still couldn't quite remember how he'd ended up tied to the bed. He was going to have to ask her about that. "Enough."

She raked her fingers through her hair. "Look. It happened. We're both adults. Nothing wrong with a one-night stand."

Her casual answer pricked his pride. "Is that all it was? A one-night stand?"

"What else could it be?" she muttered as she stuffed her panties into the back pocket of her jeans.

"What else, indeed." Brody said nothing else as he followed the dirt road to his home. He pulled in near the back door, put the truck in park and turned off the ignition. The silence was deafening.

"Look," she began. "I don't know what you want from me."

Brody climbed out of the vehicle and headed to her door. She already had it open and was out by the time he got there. Hand on her hips, she faced him. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips damp where she'd nervously chewed on them. Her green eyes were blazing, primed for a fight.

He swooped down and captured her mouth with his. She gasped, her body stiffening. He let his tongue slide past her parted lips to the moist cavern beyond. Cupping her face in his hands, he kissed her, pouring out all the sexual frustration he'd felt the past two weeks. Gradually, her body softened and her tongue twined with his. Brody groaned and deepened the kiss, wanting to eat her whole and then go back for more.

They were both panting hard when they parted. His body was primed and ready to claim his woman. "I want you in my bed. This time I want to remember all of it." He bent over, scooped her over his shoulder and started her toward the house.

"Hey."

She kicked out and he smacked her behind. "Settle down." It wasn't easy to get the door open with Lara squirming around, her fists beating at his back.

"Put me down, you bully. You kidnapper. You idiot. You crazy cowboy. You thick-muscled, mule-brained moron." She spewed off several more names that made him shake his head. She really had quite an inventive vocabulary when she started.

He carried her into the bedroom and dumped her on the bed where it had all began. Lara immediately rolled off the mattress and stood, chest heaving, fists clenched.

He couldn't help himself. He grinned.

She bared her teeth at him. "You're crazy. You know that? I'm leaving."

He shook his head. "You owe me."

"I don't owe you anything."

He might have let her go if she hadn't kissed him back, if her nipples hadn't been outlined against her snug T-shirt, if she hadn't been watching his lips and licking her own. She wanted him. There was no doubt about it.

"You owe me a night. A night I can remember all of, not just bits and pieces. Or at least an afternoon."

She flushed, but stood her ground. "Look, that night happened. Let's just forget about it."

"I don't want to forget." With that, he pounced, taking her back down on the bed. Her breath came out of her in a whoosh. By the time she recovered enough to realize what was going on, he had her hands bound to the headboard.

He hadn't used the pieces of a worn-out leather bridle that she'd used to bind him. Instead, he'd taken an old lasso, wrapped the bulk of it around the slats of the headboard and tied a noose in each end. Her hands slid easily through the loops, which he then tightened. Not enough to hurt her, but enough to keep her there. After all, turnaround was fair play.

Lara didn't know whether to laugh, cry or scream. Maybe all of the above. Quick as a snake, Brody had struck, taking her down onto the bed and tying her to it. Her head was still reeling from his kisses and from the fact that he'd lied to her to get her into his truck.

She had to get free, to get out of here. Pulling on the ropes, she tested them. They didn't hurt but there was no way she was getting free until he loosened her. "Brody, there's no need for this." Maybe she could reason with him.

He sat down beside her and planted a hand on either side of her head, lowering his face to hers. "There's every need." He kissed her then and her traitorous body responded to his touch, his nearness.

This time was different. This time, they both knew what they were doing. They couldn't blame the alcohol or the late night. It was the middle of the afternoon and they were both stone-cold sober.

She'd relived the night they'd spent together over and over until she thought she'd go mad. He'd known every sensitive spot and every way to touch it to make her body sing. She'd been restless and semi-aroused for weeks. It had been pure torture to see him around town and she'd done her best to avoid him.

Lara absently chewed on her bottom lip as she stared up at him. His hair was longer than most men wore it around here, falling to his shoulders. She knew all too well what his hair felt like against her skin. His eyes were their normal pale blue, but they were filled with determination, with heat.

A growl came from low in his throat as he brushed his thumb away from her bottom lip. "You always bite it when you're nervous."

Her eyes widened and he scowled. "What? You think I haven't paid attention over the years?" He leaned down and swiped his tongue over the abused flesh. "Believe me, I've made an intimate study of every part of you."

Heat ignited low in her belly, spearing out to her fingers and toes. His words and his roughened voice made her nipples tighten. Arousal struck her like a tidal wave.

Brody had thought about her body. That was certainly a revelation. She pressed her thighs together to try to ease the growing ache. Breathing was becoming difficult. And damn it, he knew it, the devil. She could see it in the way the corners of his sinful mouth turned up at the corners.

“Brody,” she began. She had to stop this madness. If she didn’t, they’d end up making love again. And if that happened, her heart might never recover when he was done with her. She wasn’t sophisticated enough for a casual relationship. She’d thought she could settle for that, but she was wrong. She knew that now. It was all or nothing. So it had to be nothing.

“Shhh.” He pressed his mouth against hers, not demanding, just touching. Her toes curled and she couldn’t suppress a small moan. “Don’t fight what’s between us.” He trailed a finger down the curve of her chin, over her throat, pausing at the neckline of her T-shirt. “Let me touch you. Let me have you.”

She closed her eyes and fought for breath. This was crazy. This was madness. She opened her eyes and he was still there, watching and waiting. If she said no, he’d release her and drive her home. Of that, she had no doubt.

Was that what she truly wanted? She was so confused. Her head was telling her to be sensible, while her heart was demanding she take a chance. Not to mention her body was screaming for his.

Being bound to the bed, unable to move, as he touched her was unbearably arousing. Every nerve ending in her body was tingling and goose bumps raced up and down her arms.

She licked her lips and was startled by his low moan. He might be acting calm and composed but he was just as aroused as she was. Lara could see it now. His pupils were dilated, his breathing ragged, his muscles tense.

That pushed her over the edge. How could she say no?

She opened her mouth and spoke the word that would decide her fate. “Yes.”

Lara expected him to pounce, but once again he surprised her. A slow, satisfied smile crossed his face and, even though she hadn't thought it possible, his gaze got even hotter.

"Thank you." His simple words filled her with a warmth that had nothing to do with sex.

She smiled at him and tugged on her wrists. "You can let me go now."

He slowly shook his head. "I don't think so." He rolled off the bed and walked to the end. Picking up her right foot, he tugged off her boot and tossed it aside. Then he skimmed off her sock. Her toes curled when he pressed his thumb firmly into her instep and began to massage her sole. At her moan of pleasure, he went to work with both hands, those long, strong fingers, rubbing every part.

She was practically purring with pleasure when he released her foot and went to work removing her left boot and sock. It took her a minute to remember what she'd been saying. "Why not?" she demanded, doing her best not to groan when he gave her left foot the same treatment as he'd given the other.

"You had me naked and tied to the bed." He released her foot and came around to the side of the bed, his hands reaching for the snap on her jeans. "Turnabout is fair play."

Lara didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She was painfully aroused and the only thing he'd removed was her boots. The man was diabolical. The fact that he was in control and she was helpless should have made her angry. Instead it just made her hot. She trusted Brody. He'd trusted her, even if he couldn't remember doing so. Could she do any less?

While she was trying to come to grips with the situation, Brody was pulling down the zipper of her jeans. He placed his hand over the curve of her belly. His hand was large and rough and warm against her skin. She wanted to feel those hands all over her.

"I do like your choice of lingerie, darlin'." The endearment made her heart flutter. He'd never called her that before and knew he wasn't in the habit of using it to address other women. It made her feel special.

He pushed his hands inside the denim and cupped her butt, squeezing gently. "You've got a great ass. Firm and shapely from all those years of riding." He shoved the jeans down her legs and tugged them off. "Maybe you'll give me a ride later."

She groaned at the thought of sitting on top of him, his cock buried in her pussy as she rode them both to completion. "Yes," she panted. "Untie me."

He shook his head again, sending his brown hair shimmering like a silky curtain. "Not yet. You're not ready."

If she was any more ready she'd implode. "I'm ready," she insisted, desperate now for him to release her.

Brody reached for the bottom of her T-shirt and tugged hard. The rip was loud as he tore the shirt right up to the neckline where the material held. He didn't bother to finish the job, but pushed the fabric out of his way as though he couldn't get to her fast enough.

Her heart was pounding, her chest heaving as he reached for the front closure of her bra and flicked it open. The lacy blue cups slid away, leaving her breasts exposed.

"Beautiful." Brody touched his forefinger to one of her distended nipples. It tightened further, making her moan. "So responsive." He did the same thing to her other nipple with the same result. "So perfect for me."

He lowered his head and trailed his tongue around the swollen areola, not touching it. Lara squirmed and arched her back. "Stop torturing me."

Laughing, he closed his mouth over the puckered nub and sucked. Lara practically came off the bed. Rivers of pleasure rushed from her breast to between her legs. Her sex was hot and wet, her channel throbbing.

“More,” she demanded. And he gave it. Using his fingers, he caressed and gently tugged on one nipple while using his tongue and mouth to pleasure the other. Brody was a skilled lover, knowing just how much pressure to use. Pushing her to the brink of pleasure so great it was almost painful, but never crossing that line.

Her legs shifted restlessly as she panted and moaned. It had never been like this, not even the one night they’d spent together. That was probably because Brody was totally aware now, completely focused on her. She didn’t think she’d survive this, but she really didn’t care.

Brody released her breast with a wet popping sound and pressed a kiss into her cleavage, such as it was, before licking and kissing her torso. Her ribs were ticklish and she laughed and groaned at the same time as he worked his way down to her waist.

“Ticklish are you? I’ll have to remember that.” It was both a threat and a promise. She had no doubt he’d find a way to use it to his advantage.

His tongue dipped into her bellybutton. He used his teeth on her hipbones, nipping carefully. Lara had never known that she had so many erogenous zones on her body. Or maybe it was just Brody. The way he touched her, treating her as though she was the sexiest woman in the world was a complete turn-on.

She’d never get enough of it. Doubts threatened to rear their ugly head, but she shoved them aside. She wanted this. Today they were both fully aware of what they were doing. She hadn’t realized he’d had so much to drink last time that it had affected his memory. Sure, she’d known he’d been drinking and she’d shamelessly taken advantage of that, taking what she wanted. This was totally different and so much better.

The tug of her panties over her thighs snapped her back to the present. Brody had hooked his fingers in the thin straps and was pulling them down. The scrap of blue lace looked so fragile in his big hands, reminding her once again how much larger, stronger he was.

She was totally exposed and he was still fully dressed. It made her feel vulnerable, exposed and as hot as hell.

He brought her panties to his nose and sniffed. "You're aroused. I'll bet you're all pink and hot and wet too."

Lara felt heat climbing up her throat and covering her cheeks, part embarrassment, part arousal. Brody stood at the foot of the bed watching her. She looked down at her body, wanting to see what he was seeing.

Her breasts were pushed upward, her nipples red and damp from where he'd sucked on them. They were swaying with each breath she took. A light sheen of sweat covered her. She looked and felt, ripe and ready for the taking.

A sense of womanly power speared through her and she let her legs fall open, exposing her pussy to him, letting him look his fill. His rough gasp of breath was followed by a low groan of pleasure. He dipped one finger into her core and then brought it to his lips, licking off the cream he'd gathered.

Her pussy clenched with need. "Brody?"

"Sweet and hot with a hint of spice. Just as I remembered." He grabbed the hem of his shirt and yanked it over his head, not bothering to unbutton it. Several buttons objected to the harsh treatment, pinging off the floor. The T-shirt he wore under it was next.

His chest was tanned and broad. She'd touched every square inch of it, knew how heavily muscled it was. His abs were delineated and hard. She wanted to lick a path down them.

"Untie me," she pleaded. She had to touch him. Her fingers curled inward.

"Not yet." He put one knee on the bed and crawled between her spread thighs, using his wide shoulders to shove them even further apart. "Soon," he crooned, his hot breath fanning over her slick folds. "But first I have to taste you."

Chapter Three

Brody's head was spinning with the seductive scent of Lara. After the waiting, the planning, he could hardly believe she was here with him, naked and tied to his bed. She was hot enough to singe his fingers and other parts of him. He couldn't wait to bury his cock into her slick pussy. But first he wanted to see her come. To feel her come apart under his hands. To smell her arousal and taste more of it on his tongue.

He could feel her thighs quivering as he shifted closer. He glanced up and admired the erotic picture she made, spread out on the mattress, his for the taking. The tangle of her bra and the remains of her shirt around her shoulders just served to make her appear even sexier.

Lara brought out a primitive side of himself he hadn't known existed. Sure, he'd always enjoyed women, but never had he wanted one to the point of madness. Her breasts weren't overly large but they were firm and incredibly sensitive. Someday soon he'd spend hours just sucking on them. Maybe after he'd had her a few hundred times, he wouldn't feel this sense of urgency.

He'd tied her to the bed, not only for his own enjoyment, but for protection. If she touched him, he'd go off like a rocket. As it was, his dick was hard and throbbing and he knew the tip would be wet with need.

Her essence reached his nostrils, teasing him. He trailed his tongue over the slick folds, groaning when she planted her feet on the bed and shoved her pussy closer. He pulled back and took a deep breath. Lara whimpered, pumping her hips upward. Damn, she was hot. And she was his. No way was he letting her go. No other man would ever be the recipient of her generosity.

He had to show her how good it could be between them. Determination fired him as he pressed his tongue against her swollen clit. She rewarded him with a low moan of

pleasure. Slowly, he inserted one finger into her snug channel, almost coming when it clamped down hard. She was so wet. So ready.

Every muscle in his body was tense, straining to be let loose. His cock was straining against the zipper of his jeans, his balls drawn up tight against his body. Time was running out.

Carefully, he worked another finger into her sheath, spreading them. Her breathing changed, getting quicker. He lapped and sucked at her clit, moaning as the taste of her filled his mouth. Her thighs tightened around his shoulders, her hips tilted upward. Brody knew she was close.

“Come for me,” he demanded.

Her hips arched upward as he pushed his fingers in and out of her pussy, driving her hard, pushing her past her limits.

A thin cry broke free from her parted lips and filled the air around them. He felt her hot essence coating his fingers. He gritted his teeth to keep from coming as he pulled his fingers from her. Lara was still quivering, her body shaking with her orgasm as he surged upward and tore at the bindings around her wrists. He cursed as he struggled to loosen the ropes. It didn't help that his hands were shaking.

Finally, she was free. Gently, he lowered her arms down beside her. Her eyes were closed, her lips wet and parted.

Swearing, he yanked at his zipper, hissing out a breath as the back of his hand accidentally grazed his cock. He was seconds from coming. But no way was he doing it with his boots on. Desperation was a great motivator and it didn't take him long to dispense with them or the rest of his clothes. Naked, he turned to her.

It took Lara a moment to realize she was still alive. She hadn't died after all. Her body was awash with heat and liquid pleasure. Her orgasm had been off the charts. She hadn't quite understood what was going on when Brody abruptly left her. Then her arms were free. They were stiff, but she didn't mind. The rest of her was warm and sated, her muscles pliant and totally relaxed.

She heard Brody swear and managed to push her eyelids up. No easy feat when all she wanted to do was lie there and bask in the feel of euphoria encompassing her. He was struggling with his clothing. His back was to her, allowing her to see the tanned expanse of his skin. She all but started drooling over the thick muscles on either side of his spine. The man was built like a god.

He finally dragged off his jeans and stood next to the bed, staring down at her. His chest was heaving and his skin glistened with perspiration. Naked, he seemed even larger than when he was fully dressed. Primal. Dangerous.

His cock was thick and red. The veins running up and down his hard length were pulsing. His scrotum hung heavy between his thighs. She licked her lips as arousal zinged through her. It should have been impossible for her to be so aroused just after having such a satisfying orgasm. It certainly hadn't happened to her before, but there was no denying it. She wanted Brody. She wanted his thick cock filling her.

Every muscle in his body was tense, straining as he ripped open a foil packet and dragged on a condom. "I can't wait." His words were terse, his voice harsh with need. "I'm not sure I can be gentle."

He might not be certain, but she was. She knew Brody would never hurt her. Opening her arms, she welcomed him. "Then don't wait."

He was on her before she could blink, his large body covering hers. His mouth was on hers, crushing it, his tongue demanding entry, even as his cock was forging its way into her snug channel.

His tongue tangled with hers and she could taste herself. It was a strangely arousing sensation. She drove her fingers into his hair, clutching it, holding him to her as the kiss grew wilder, both of them desperate to be as close as possible. She loved the taste of him – male, hot and spicy – the feel of his mouth against hers.

He tore his lips from hers, and buried his face against her throat. His breathing was ragged. Hers was no better. She caressed his shoulders, his back, his chest, whatever she could reach.

Brody continued to rock his hips, pushing deeper into her with each stroke. "Take all of me."

His demand was filled with desperation and a need she understood. Raising her legs, she wrapped her thighs around his waist and dug her heels into the small of his back. The change of position opened her further, allowing his erection to slip deeper.

They both moaned as he seated himself to the hilt. Her inner muscles were swollen and sensitive from her earlier orgasm and his cock was large and thick, pulsing with need. Lara felt filled to overflowing, but it wasn't enough.

She dug her fingers into his butt and began to move beneath him, needing the added friction, moaning when her clit rubbed against his groin.

Brody swore and raised himself onto his forearms. His gaze met hers as he began to pump his hips. She moved with him, but it still wasn't enough. He was holding back. "Harder." She flexed her inner muscles, tightening them around his cock.

Brody reared back and shoved his arms beneath her thighs. Holding her open for his penetration, he began to fuck her. Hard and fast. His cock pounded into her. Driving her up again. Her breasts ached, so she wrapped her hands around them and tugged on her turgid nipples.

"Oh yeah, darlin'. That's so fucking hot." Brody continued to pump into her, his rhythm increasing, his breathing getting harsher. "Pinch your nipples harder. Pretend it's me touching them."

Even though it was her hands at her breasts, his words inflamed her. She tugged harder, arching her hips up to meet the slam of his. Her entire body tightened and then exploded. She cried out as she came.

Brody pumped twice more. She heard his yell, felt the stiffening of his body, the ripple and the flood of warmth as he came. Her sheath tightened around his cock, milking it for all it was worth. He was poised over her for endless seconds before he finally collapsed face down on the bed.

She wished that he wasn't wearing a condom, that she could feel him inside her without the barrier of latex. But he was protecting her, just as he had that first night.

She closed her eyes and tried to calm her breathing. Her limbs were limp as she sprawled across the bed. Brody's body was half on and half off hers. Still, he was a large man and eventually became too heavy. She pushed at his shoulder.

He slowly raised his head and stared down at her. He lowered his lips to hers and kissed her. There was none of the heat and desperation of the previous kiss. This one was sweet. Undemanding. Yet somehow just as powerful.

A yearning started deep in Lara's soul. She loved this man. Had wanted him forever. He wanted her, but he didn't love her. She accepted that. Today was a time out of time. A day she would cherish forever. But after it was over, she had to go on with her life, just as he would.

"What's put such a look of sadness in your eyes, darlin'?"

She couldn't bear for him to know how much he meant to her. It might be misplaced pride at this point, but it was all she had. She shook her head and tried to smile. "I'm fine."

Brody didn't look as though he believed her, but he sat up and removed the condom, tossing it into the wastebasket by the bed. He lay on his back and pulled her on top of him. She went, loving the feel of his hard body beneath her.

He pushed a lock of hair off her forehead as he continued to study her. She didn't want him to see any deeper into her than he already had. Knowing she had to do something to get his mind off what she was thinking, she nipped at his chin and peppered his jawline with kisses before pulling back to look down at him.

"I seem to remember someone promising me a ride."

Brody was torn between wanting to find out what had put such a look of sadness on Lara's face and her lips roaming over his body. Her lips won out. They'd talk later. There was no way he was letting her leave until he'd laid all his cards on the table.

He'd had sex before, with a variety of women over the years, but nothing had come close to what he experienced with Lara. Loving made all the difference. Made it sweeter, more fulfilling, more intense.

"Darlin', you can ride me anytime." His dick was already stirring. He shook his head in amazement. He figured it would be a while before he'd be able to get it up again. Lara was quite the aphrodisiac.

He let his hands roam over her slender back and full ass. She groaned and snuggled her mound against his erection. He didn't know whether to grin or swear. The effect she had on him was instantaneous. His cock jerked, nudging against her pubic hair to the folds beneath.

She gave a breathy little laugh that made his balls pull up tight. "Someone is ready for a ride."

Brody gave a bark of laughter. "Yeah, he likes you."

Lara grinned and it chased the sadness away, for now anyway. She sat up, perching on his thighs. Her hands rested on his stomach. The sparkle in her eyes told him he was in for quite a ride.

She ran her hands over his chest, threading her fingers through the light dusting of hair in the center. "You're so strong. You don't look like a writer."

"What do I look like?" He cupped her hips caressing her sides, up and down, up and down. Her skin was silky and soft.

"A cowboy."

"Hmm." He lightened his touch, remembering she was ticklish. She laughed and smacked his hands away.

"Stop that."

The intensity of their earlier lovemaking had given way to lighthearted fun. Brody reached up and cupped her breasts in his hands. "I'll hold these instead."

"You're impossible," she pointed out even as she pushed her breasts deeper into his palms.

"Yes, ma'am," he agreed.

His entire body jerked when she wrapped both hands around his shaft. The sight of her slender, strong fingers holding his cock almost made him come. It felt so damn good. Unlike a lot of women, her hands weren't smooth and soft, but slightly rough from the hard, physical work she did on her daddy's ranch.

"That's it, cowboy. I've got you now."

"You certainly do."

His entire body jerked and stiffened as she pumped her hands up and down his erection. Her thumb circled the tip, spreading the thick bead of liquid that seeped from the tip.

"You're so hot. So hard, yet smooth." Lara continued to stroke him, going from light to hard and back again. His muscles were like iron as he struggled for control.

"I think it's time for that ride." He had to get inside her again.

"Almost. You're not quite ready yet." As the words he'd said to her earlier were tossed back in his face, he knew she planned to torture him some more. When she licked her lips and shimmied down his body he lost all power of thought.

Her nipples poked his thighs as her lips hovered over his cock. Her breath was warm as she blew on the tip.

Cupping the back of her head, he angled her closer to his cock head. She opened her mouth and enveloped the tip. He could feel she was smiling as her tongue flicked over the sensitive slit, lapping away another bead of pre-cum.

"So damn good," he groaned.

Lara made a humming sound in her throat that vibrated over his shaft. He'd died and gone to heaven. There was no other explanation for such pleasure.

She used her hands on his cock and the sac between his legs, caressing, teasing, driving him to the edge. Her tongue circled his cock head and her teeth teased his shaft. Mindless, he pumped his hips, needing her to take him deeper. Lara sucked hard on his shaft. Brody felt the tightening of his balls, the ripple of his cock. He jerked away. Her mouth left him with a wet pop.

“Now.” He dragged her up and over him. Her wet pussy stroked over his erection, almost shattering his control. It felt amazing. Too amazing.

“Condom,” they groaned at the same time.

“On the nightstand.”

She leaned over him, bringing her breasts close to his mouth. He leaned up and latched on to one of her nipples, drawing hard. Lara let out a whimper of need. He heard a thud. The lamp fell to the floor as she flailed around, trying to find a condom.

There was the familiar ripping sound of a condom package being opened and then she was sitting back. Reluctantly, he released her sweet, tight nipple. It was his turn to groan when she put the condom on the tip of his cock and started to roll it down.

“Fuck.” His hands were fisted at his sides as he struggled not to move.

“That’s the idea,” she retorted as she finished with the condom. Her hair was damp, several locks plastered to her forehead. Her skin was flush and rosy, her nipples swollen and red. The curls between her thighs were wet with need.

“Come here.” He grabbed her by the waist, lifting her until she was over him. “Put me inside you.”

Lara didn’t hesitate. Her fingers closed around his erection as she guided the tip to the opening of her sheath. He surged forward, filling her in one thrust. They both cried out.

Their heavy breathing was the only sound in the room. The smell of sex surrounded them. Nothing else existed but the two of them at this moment. She stared down at him,

her lips parted, her eyes filled with heat. But there was something else there. Something sweet.

Before he could figure out what it was, she started to move. It was a slow rocking motion at first, more of a leisurely circling of her hips. Brody stroked one hand between her thighs and found her swollen clit. She let out a cry of delight when he stroked over the sensitive bud.

Hands braced on his chest, she began to move in earnest. She lifted until only the head of his cock was inside her before lowering herself. Up. Down. Up. Down. The movement got quicker and harder. He lifted his hips to meet her downward thrust. Their bodies moved together as though they'd done this a thousand times. He could feel his orgasm starting all the way in the base of his balls.

Lara groaned, her body making a wet, sucking sound as she rode him, adding to the sensory overload she was already experiencing. Her breasts ached as they swayed to the rhythm of her thrusts.

Brody looked fierce and determined as he lay beneath her. It was like riding a wild stallion. You just didn't know what he'd do next. The heavy muscles in his shoulders and arms strained as his hips moved beneath her. His skin was damp with perspiration. He was a part of her. The two of them joined as one.

She could still taste him, the salty essence from where she'd taken him in her mouth. She'd loved doing that. His enjoyment was obvious, plus it was a huge turn-on for her as well. Having so much male power under her control had made her lightheaded.

She whimpered as his fingers found her clit, stroking, teasing the nub. His cock was swelling, growing larger. Time was short.

Lara didn't want it to end. She wanted to ride him forever. He was her wild stallion, proud and free. After years of wanting and waiting, she'd finally lassoed him. Caught him. But like any wild animal, she knew he wasn't hers to keep. She had to let him go.

They would always have today. This final ride of passion.

She rode him harder. Faster. Driving his cock as deep as it could go. She wanted to remember this feeling forever. The way his shaft filled her, stretched her channel with each thrust. The low grunts that escaped him as he got closer to coming. The flexing of his thigh muscles, the rippling of his abs. His full lips. The hot gleam in his blue eyes.

It hit like a summer storm, hard and fast. Like a bolt of lightning, her orgasm shot through her. Her pussy tightened around his cock as her world exploded. Her body jerked, muscles quivering as she came. He called her name, a rough, broken sound as he arched his hips one final time. His big body shuddered and his hands grabbed her hips, holding her tight.

Lara slumped over. He caught her, his large arms wrapping around her. His heart raced beneath her cheek. It matched the frantic rhythm of her own. She sucked air into her starving lungs and soaked in the wonder of being held in Brody's arms.

Eventually, she felt his shaft softening. It was time. She carefully disengaged their bodies. Brody disposed of the used condom and flopped back on the bed. Her legs felt like jelly, but she knew she had to go. Staying would only make things worse.

She gathered her strength and prayed for the courage to get through the next few minutes. Rolling to the side of the bed, she sat up and scanned around for her clothing. A thick hand manacled her wrist.

"Where do you think you're going?"

She shrugged, not looking at him. "It's time for me to go, Brody."

"No." He tugged, dragging her back.

She turned, anger warring with pain. Why was he making this more difficult than it had to be?

Gone was the sated lover of moments before. In his place was a pissed-off cowboy, his icy blue eyes freezing her in place. "Don't make me have to tie you up again." It was not a threat, but a promise.

She didn't say anything.

He drew her up, moving himself until his back was propped up against the headboard and she was in his lap. She felt vulnerable. Being naked while they were making love was a lot different. Lara tugged at the sheet until it covered most of her.

His eyes narrowed but he let it go. She let out a breath of relief until he spoke.

“Now we talk.”

Chapter Four

Lara didn't know what to say so she waited for him to speak. After all, he was the one who wanted to talk.

"Why?"

She wasn't about to try to figure out where his mind was at the moment. "Why what?"

"Why did you tie me to the bed? Not that I minded," he added, giving her an appealing masculine grin. "But I don't quite remember why you did it or what happened afterward."

She shrugged, trying to figure out how to phrase her reply. She really didn't want to talk about their sexual escapades. "I wanted to touch you but you couldn't keep your hands off me. I saw some old leather straps on the nightstand and used them to tie you to the bed so I could have my way with you." Heat crept up her cheeks but she refused to be embarrassed. She was a mature woman, damn it.

He nodded. "I figured it was something like that."

She started to pull away. "That it? We done here?"

His massive arms enfolded her, tying her to him as securely as the lasso had tied her to the bed earlier. "No, we're not done yet." His voice was hard and she couldn't quite gauge his mood.

She sighed and desperately tried to relax.

"Why did you come home with me that night?"

She sensed he honestly wanted to know but she didn't want to tell him. There was no way she was laying her heart out to let it be stomped on. "You're handsome and I

was horny." Just saying it aloud made her wince. It cheapened what had happened between them that night.

Brody shook his head and sighed. He cupped her chin with one large hand and tilted her face up until she had no choice but to look at him. "You're a terrible liar, you know that? You can never look a person in the face when you're lying and you always twist your fingers together."

She quickly released her tangled fingers and scowled at him. "I am not," she retorted. It was only when the words left her mouth she realized she'd just confirmed she had been lying.

The damn devil was grinning at her now and it made her angry. Was this all a big joke to him?

"So what? I had a thing for you and wanted to get it out of my system once and for all." That made his grin disappear fast. The hot cowboy wasn't so happy now.

It never occurred to her that she shouldn't be taunting a man when she was lying naked in his arms and he was so much larger and stronger than she. Lara struck out in anger as pain filled her. Why was he making her talk about this? She'd held her feelings inside for years.

Maybe it was because they'd finally had sex. Hormones and endorphins were making her emotional. It was as if the dam had finally broken inside her and everything she'd felt for him over the years could no longer be contained. It was the final humiliation. Maybe it was better this way. Like lancing a boil. She winced at the comparison, but it was better for her to think about it in a clinical way than to allow herself to wallow even more in her unrequited love. Getting everything out in the open once and for all so she could move on with her life.

He rolled, taking her down on the bed, his big body looming over her. "Did you get me out of your system?"

She could feel his erection digging into her belly. No way the man was aroused again. But there was no mistaking the evidence. She tried to ignore it, to ignore him, but it was a losing battle.

“Lara.” His voice was soft, coaxing as he leaned down. He was so close, their lips were almost touching. “I haven’t gotten you out of my system. I don’t think that will ever happen.”

She froze and stared up into his pale blue eyes. What was he saying?

Brody trailed his fingers over her forehead, nose and lips. “You’re so beautiful.”

She blinked but otherwise didn’t move. Her heart was racing like a jackrabbit running from a hound. She licked her dry lips, wanting to yell at him to tell her more.

A slight smile touched his lips. “Not going to make this easy on me, are you?”

She shook her head. Since she didn’t know what *this* was, she couldn’t make it easy, or hard for that matter.

“I’ve done a lot of thinking these past two weeks. Ever since I woke up tied to my own damn bed.” He leaned down and nuzzled her neck. She turned it automatically to give him better access and he tugged on her earlobe.

She shivered and squirmed beneath him. Her nipples rubbed against his chest hair, sending liquid heat coursing through her pussy.

“Do you know why I finally came home to settle down?”

“No.” She’d hated the years when Brody had traveled, living all across the country, coming home only for holidays.

“I wanted what J.T. had. A home. A woman to call my own.” He licked the whorl of her ear sending goose bumps down her spine. “That’s why I’ve been working hard to get the house finished, to get my next book done.”

“What then? You figure you’d go out and find a woman? Damn arrogant of you.” A flicker of hope caught hold inside of her as he continued to nibble her ear.

“Something like that,” he whispered. “But the damndest thing happened.”

“What?” she moaned as he dragged his teeth over the curve of her jaw. “I woke up tied to my bed. Seems like the woman found me. Had been there all along. I was just too darn stupid to see her there.”

Her eyes filled and a lone tear escaped, rolling down her temple. She sniffed.

Brody stiffened. Then he groaned and leaned down to lick the salty moisture away. “Don’t. Don’t cry, darlin’.”

“I’m not,” she told him even as another tear escaped.

“Then you ran away from me.” His tone was so aggrieved, she laughed. He gave her a mock frown. “I had to figure out how to catch you. So I lied to you and got you here so I could lasso you to my bed. Now I’m not letting you go.”

“Are you sure?” She had to find out where he saw this going. She’d spent too many years yearning for him. It was time to lay all her cards on the table. All or nothing. “I love you.” She ignored the flash of heat, of masculine satisfaction in his gaze and continued. “I’ve spent my entire life loving you. I won’t wait any longer. I want a husband and a family.” It was what she’d always wanted.

Brody cupped her face with both hands and stared down at her. “I love you, Lara Jacobs. It took me a while to figure it out, but I finally did. Finding your lace panties in my bed, remembering parts of that night we spent together, made me finally face facts. It’s always been you. You’re my friend, my lover and I hope you’ll agree to be my wife.”

She gasped, happiness exploding to life within her.

“Marry me, darlin’. Make an honest man out of me.”

“Yes.” She reached up as he leaned down. Their lips met, tongues tangled and souls entwined. Lara wrapped her arms around Brody and pulled him to her. He loved her. They were getting married. She could barely take it all in.

His shaft was pulsing hard against her stomach. Suddenly she needed him inside her. Needed to consummate the promise they'd just made to one another. She shimmied on the mattress, lifting her legs and wrapping them around his flanks.

He pulled back from the kiss and reached down to guide his cock head to the opening of her channel. "Are you sure?"

She knew what he was asking and nodded. "I want to feel you with no condom. I'm on the Pill, have been for years. We can start our family when we decide, but there's no need for there to be anything between us any longer."

He slid into her and they both groaned. Oh, it had been spectacular before, but being flesh to flesh was incredible. Brody took her hands in his, lacing their fingers together, their palms touching. Rocking slowly, he began to make love to her.

The hair on his chest was an erotic caress, stimulating her nipples and the soft mounds of her breasts. With her legs wrapped around his waist, the angle was perfect to have her clit brush against his pelvis with each thrust.

It was a slow climb this time, instead of a mad rush. Brody kissed her over and over. Soft kisses where their lips barely met and she was left yearning for more. Hard kisses where he stole her breath, his tongue claiming every inch of her mouth. And she wanted them all. Wanted all his kisses for the rest of their days.

His cock stretched her channel, filling her. It felt right. Perfect. Sweat made their skin slip and slide easily as their torsos moved over one another. It was smooth and easy and a hell of a ride.

She called his name as she convulsed. She felt his hands tighten around hers and the hot flood deep in her core as he came. Her name was a tortured whisper, torn from his lips. Her pussy clamped down hard on his shaft, squeezing it. He groaned and dropped his head to the curve of her neck, his breathing harsh, his lungs working hard.

Lara closed her eyes and captured the moment in her mind. A memory to take out and savor over the long years to come. Her racing heart finally went back to normal and

she opened her eyes. Brody raised his head and smiled down at her. A matching smile spread across her face.

“Happy?” he asked.

“More than I ever thought possible,” she answered with full honesty.

“Good.” Their bodies made a sticky sound as he pulled away, her snug channel slowly releasing his softening erection.

Lara laughed. “We need a shower.” She was hot and sweaty and less than fresh at the moment.

“I think that can be arranged.” He rolled out of bed, reached down and lifted her into his arms. “Maybe you’ll wash my back.”

“Maybe I will.”

He paused outside the bathroom door. “I don’t want a long engagement.”

“Neither do I.” She’d waited too many years for this man and didn’t want to waste another minute.

He pressed a hard kiss on her lips. “That’s settled then.”

She just smiled. Their life would be interesting for sure, but with love they’d make it just fine.

About the Author

N.J. Walters worked at a bookstore for several years and one day had the idea that she would like to quit her job, sell everything she owned, leave her hometown and write romance novels in a place where no one knew her. And she did. Two years later, she went back to the same bookstore and settled in for another seven years.

Although she was still fairly young, that was when the mid-life crisis set in. Happily married to the love of her life, with his encouragement (more like, "For God's sake, quit the job and just write!") she gave notice at her job on a Friday morning. On Sunday afternoon, she received a tentative acceptance for her first erotic romance novel, *Annabelle Lee*, and life would never be the same.

N.J. has always been a voracious reader of romance novels, and now she spends her days writing novels of her own. Vampires, dragons, time-travelers, seductive handymen and next-door neighbors with smoldering good looks all vie for her attention. And she doesn't mind a bit. It's a tough life, but someone's got to live it.

N.J. welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

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