

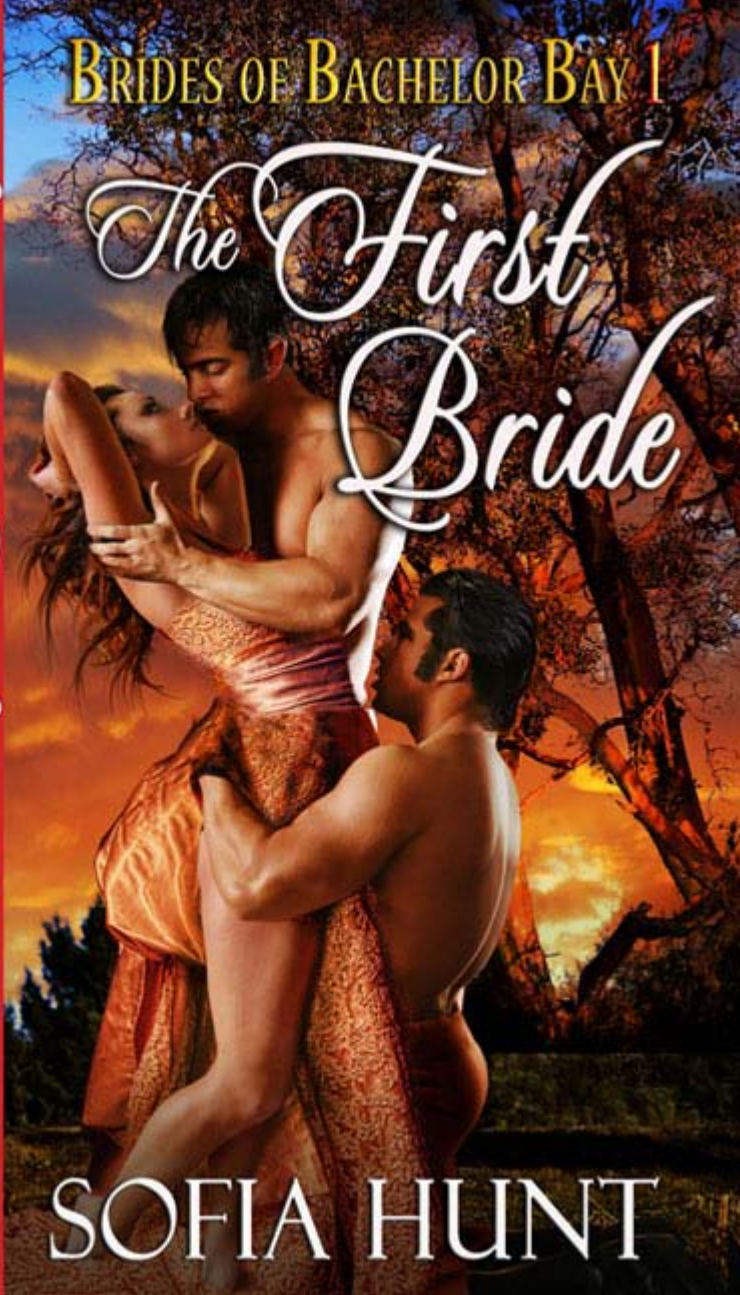
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*Ménage Everlasting*

BRIDES OF BACHELOR BAY I

# *The First Bride*

SOFIA HUNT



## Brides of Bachelor Bay 1

### The First Bride

Determined to protect her sisters from a murderous uncle, Lizzie Prescott answers a "brides wanted" ad. She and her sisters journey to 1860s Washington Territory, a wild land of towering cedar trees and brawny lumberjacks.

Logan Gallagher brought the brides out west for his crew, not for himself, but he can't get the red-haired beauty out of his mind. His brother, Gage, harbors his own desires for the opinionated redhead.

Can all three of them find love together in this untamed land?

**Genre:** Historical, Ménage a Trois/Quatre

**Length:** 35,530 words

# **THE FIRST BRIDE**

*Brides of Bachelor Bay 1*

**Sofia Hunt**

**MENAGE EVERLASTING**



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# **Letter from Sofia Hunt**

## ***Regarding E-book Piracy***

Dear Readers,

Writing a book is hard work. Before the first word is typed, an author has already spent hours plotting, developing characters, outlining conflict, and outlining content. Then the real work begins: the first and subsequent drafts, the content edits, the line edits, and proofreading. One book takes hundreds of hours of an author's time.

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Everyone wants to be fairly compensated for their work. Please refrain from pirating my books so I can continue to afford to provide you with enjoyable reads for years to come.

With deep gratitude,

Sofia Hunt

# DEDICATION

Over a year ago I approached Bella Grace and Eve Adams with an idea for a series based on a piece of Seattle history. We spent countless hours on the phone going over details, historic facts, characters, and plots. I poured over historical books on logging and early life in Washington Territory.

As a result, we set our story in a fictional bay across Puget Sound from Seattle, in an area near what is now Bremerton. This was a land of enormous fir and cedar trees, plentiful salmon, and even more plentiful rain. It's a land of unparalleled beauty, rugged lumberjacks, and hardy pioneers.

When I mentioned my idea to Siren's publisher, she was as enthusiastic about the idea as we were, and *The Brides of Bachelor Bay* series was born.

I'd like to dedicate this first book in the *Brides of Bachelor Bay* series to Diana Debalko, Siren's publisher, for supporting us every step of the way throughout the birth of this series. I'd also like to thank my cover artist, Les Byerley, for one of the best covers I've ever seen.

# THE FIRST BRIDE

*Brides of Bachelor Bay 1*

**SOFIA HUNT**  
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## Prologue

*1864, Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Ladies,*

*Gallagher Logging and the Gallagher brothers welcome you to Port Steele on beautiful Bachelor Bay in Washington Territory.*

*You have chosen to embark on a journey rife with excitement to an untamed land of incomparable beauty where the trees are as tall as mountains, the water as blue as any sapphire, and the men outnumber the women fifty to one. To leave the comfort of civilization and the support of your families to journey west takes great courage, but you are all courageous women. Together we will write the history of Washington Territory and develop the foundation of future generations.*

*Thank you for joining us in our quest to settle this land. May you love well, live long, make your fortunes, and attain your desires.*

*Logan, Gage, Andrew, and Noah Gallagher*



## Chapter 1

*Lizzie's Journal, Saturday, May 28, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*We arrived in Bachelor Bay this afternoon. The relentless rain had obscured the shoreline ever since our ship entered the Strait of Juan de Fuca. But when we entered the bay, the sun peeked through the clouds, and the profound splendor of this place had us hugging the railing in awe.*

*Our ship docked at Port Steele, the small town perched on the edge of Bachelor Bay. We were greeted by a large contingent of townspeople. An overwhelming majority of them are men. And, oh, what men they are. I blush as I write this, but I have never seen such impressive men. Evidently, this land grows them as big and strong as the towering fir and cedar trees that dominate the landscape.*

*Despite the unfortunate circumstances that brought my sisters and me to this untamed land, I am looking forward to the challenge offered by this place of rugged beauty.*

\* \* \* \*

For the first time in her life, Elizabeth Mary Prescott was sorely tempted to abandon her vow to remain single. But entertaining such foolish notions as marrying again didn't negate the truth of her situation. She'd signed on to this journey under false pretenses. No man would want her if he knew the truth. Nor would she trap an unsuspecting suitor into a marriage built on lies. Yet, there were other

ways, though scandalous, to be with a man, ways which didn't involve marriage.

Lizzie had never been the scandalous type. As the oldest of three children, all girls, she'd been the responsible, dependable daughter, despite her penchant for disregarding propriety at times. This land appealed to her sense of adventure and her disdain for the restrictions men placed on women. In an uncivilized land like this, a woman should be able to live by her own rules. Or so she hoped.

Lizzie hung back while the remaining female passengers, twenty-three young women, leaned over the ship's railing. They gawked at the sea of men crowding the dock below. Potential husbands, every one of them, and plenty to pick from. These big, raw-boned men were dressed in their Sunday best. Their hair slicked back, their jaws freshly shaved. Big men for a big country. Hopefully, big hearts, too.

She shuddered as her wayward mind imagined the inappropriate and unacceptable things such men could do to a woman. It was not for her to find out. This trip was not about her. She would remain strong for her sisters and see that they secured marriages to suitable men of high moral standing and reputation, men with secure finances.

Once she completed her task, she'd fade into obscurity as a teacher in a rural school.

The sun peeked through the clouds, certainly a good omen. She could use some good luck.

The Civil War had decimated the male population back East. The few available men in her hometown paid her no mind. She stood too tall, lacked the fine-boned features men favored, and was a mite sharp-tongued and opinionated. Only one man had showed interest, but that nightmare was over.

Besides, she craved adventure. Yet, travelling from the East Coast to Puget Sound in Washington Territory proved to be more adventure than she'd bargained for, with the storms and whatnot.

But they'd made it. Every one of them. She glanced at each of her two sisters standing in front of her on the railing. Olivia, the shy

middle sister who'd rather be reading a book, shrank back at the sight of all that masculinity and gazed up at Lizzie, obviously overwhelmed.

"I just want to sleep on a bed that doesn't pitch and roll all night long." Olivia pushed her glasses up with the tip of her finger and squinted at the crowd.

"As do I." Lizzie patted her sister's arm.

"I'll never set foot on a boat again."

"It doesn't hold much interest to me, either. But we're here, and look at the reception we're getting."

"It is disconcerting."

Lizzie couldn't agree more, but for once, held her tongue.

"It's impressive. All these men. I could swoon." Amelia, the youngest and prettiest sister, assessed the crowd. Her sharp eyes missed nothing. "I see several possibilities."

"With your fair appearance, you'll have your pick." Lizzie smoothed her wrinkled dress and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, aware of what a fright she must appear. Not that it mattered. She wasn't here to marry, only to find mates for her sisters, good, kind husbands.

"Yes, you will. They won't even notice us." Olivia let out a deep breath.

Amelia smiled and squeezed Olivia's hand. "You, Olivia, will also have no shortage of suitors."

Olivia turned to Lizzie. "And you, too."

"I'm twenty-five, way past marrying age." Her age was the least of her problems.

"I suspect if you're a female and still breathing, you're marrying age around here," Amelia quipped and waved her handkerchief at one particularly enthusiastic man who'd climbed a tall pole to see over the crowd.

"She's right, you know." Olivia peered at the men over the rims of her reading glasses.

"I have no desire to be subservient to any man." She didn't add why. They all knew why.

"Yet you would wish that fate on us?"

"The both of you wouldn't consider it fate, but a pleasant task."

"Very pleasant." Amelia leaned further over the railing. Her cleavage caught the men's attention as she waved at the group with her lace handkerchief. Lizzie prayed she'd marry Amelia off before she soiled her reputation as a lady. Her bold approach to men and her inherent recklessness worried both older sisters. Amelia barely avoided scandal back in Boston.

Lizzie looked into the crowd. One man stood back from the group, leaning negligently against a tree. With a big, muscled body, dark wavy hair, and a ruggedly handsome face, he'd attract attention wherever he went. He oozed authority in the way of a stallion in a herd of mares. His gaze slammed into her with an intensity which almost sent her reeling backward. He trapped her with a look and held her captive. With a knowing smirk, he tipped his stained hat at her. Lizzie's body heated, and her breath sat heavy in her lungs, making it hard to draw a breath. Moistness grew between her legs.

Lizzie forced her attention elsewhere, but she could still feel his eyes on her, almost as if he'd physically caressed her. Shaken, she busied herself by grabbing her bag and rummaging through it. When she stole a glance in the man's direction, he'd disappeared into the crowd.

\* \* \* \*

Logan Gallagher stood in the background, allowing his more gregarious younger brother, Andrew, to offer the first toast. Andrew didn't mind one bit. He craved the attention. His ready smile and striking good looks charmed every lady in the room. Four years Logan's junior, Andrew played the role of the family peacemaker.

Logan's remaining two brothers, Gage and Noah, stood behind

Andrew with hands clasped behind their backs and pleased expressions on their faces. Together they owned Bachelor Bay's biggest logging operation and sawmill, not to mention thousands of acres of prime timber on the west shores of Puget Sound.

"Ladies," Andrew stood on a box and addressed the two tables full of proper young ladies. Behind them, every single man from Bachelor Bay to Port Gamble had crowded into the room. "Welcome to Port Steele on beautiful Bachelor Bay, made even more so by your presence today. Perhaps we'll soon be changing the name to Husband Bay."

The men in the room cheered, and the ladies blushed, at least, most of them. One in particular didn't flinch or look down or even react, the very same woman who'd caught his eye earlier on the deck of the ship. She stared straight ahead at Andrew with a directness not common in East Coast women.

Logan searched his memory for her name. Ah, yes, Lizzie Prescott. How could he forget? With her flame red hair, freckles, and tall, slender body, she couldn't be considered a classic beauty. Yet, he kept staring at her. He liked her proud carriage and honest green eyes. Not a shy flower, that one, but obviously a woman with deeply repressed passions a man like him would enjoy releasing. Once released from her repression, he'd wager his best axe that she'd reward her liberator quite handsomely.

A tremor of desire vibrated through Logan's body, taking him by surprise. He'd felt nothing similar when looking upon the other women. Gazing on her full, red lips, he imagined her mouth on his cock. Her tongue would lick the tip, while her fingers gripped the base. She'd open her mouth wide and take him inside. He'd thrust in and out, deeper each time, until his cock tickled the back of her throat, until her nose pressed against his pubic hair, until his balls slapped her chin. He'd hold her there until the last moment then release his seed on her tongue, watch his thick cum coat her lips and dribble down her chin.

Logan moaned and shifted his weight. His trousers must have shrunk in the last wash. In all his thirty-one years, he'd never experienced such an immediate reaction to a woman.

Gage, the second oldest brother and one year younger than Logan, glanced at his crotch and raised one knowing eyebrow. Logan glared at him. Gage stepped closer.

"So which one has you just about bursting out of your pants, brother?" Gage whispered.

Logan cleared his throat, shifted his weight. "No one in particular. It's been a long time since we've entertained true ladies in these parts."

Gage accepted his response, but Logan caught him scanning the crowd, his brow furrowed as if he were attempting to guess the focus of his brother's interest. Logan tried to avoid looking at Lizzie, but like a magnet, his eyes kept going back to her. By all appearances, Lizzie was the unofficial spokeswoman for the Bachelor Brides, the name they'd been dubbed by the local residents. Which meant he'd most likely spend a bit of time with her, as the man who'd address their needs.

Noah, the youngest Gallagher brother at twenty six years of age, elbowed him. "I can't believe they had the gall to show up here."

Logan glanced in the direction Noah indicated. Their cousin, Miles Petty, stood near the door, flanked by his younger brother, Hayden. Logan stiffened. Both men sported their Sunday best. Over Logan's dead body would either of his disreputable cousins court any of these women. The Gallagher brothers paid dearly to bring the ladies here, and each woman signed an agreement to be betrothed to one of his men within a year or forfeit the cost of their passage and expenses.

Drawing his attention back to Andrew, Logan allowed himself a smug smile. He'd managed to bring women to Bachelor bay, something his nemesis, Miles, had failed at twice.

All around him, eager bachelors strained for a glimpse of the

females.

As his brother enthralled the ladies with wild tales of the rugged Northwest, Logan's gaze slid back to Miss Lizzie. She'd be a tough one to match with a man, as her tall carriage and rumored direct, outspoken manner would deter most of his lumberjacks and workers. Yet, she didn't deter him. In fact, she attracted him.

She lacked her youngest sister's beauty and delicate refinement, or the middle sister's quiet, demure nature. Regardless, there was something about her that tightened his groin and hardened his cock.

Almost as if feeling the heat of his gaze on her, Lizzie turned her head. Their eyes met. Lizzie didn't turn away and blush like most ladies. Her determined green eyes sparkled like morning dew on the meadow flanking Bachelor Bay. Her gaze flicked down his long, lean body, as if assessing his strength of body and character.

He lifted one corner of his mouth in a half smile and nodded, acknowledging her perusal. His boldness seemed to startle her. Her eyes grew bigger, and her directness gave way to a red blush, which colored her neck and freckled face. She snapped her head back to focus on Andrew. Logan suppressed a chuckle. The lady wasn't as impervious to men as she pretended.

Shaking off his own desires, Logan chastised himself. His men came first, including his brothers. He could not take a bride from this group of women.

They were off-limits to him, but his fantasies weren't.

\* \* \* \*

Something was amiss. An odd tingle danced through Lizzie's body, not altogether unpleasant, but certainly unwelcome. Perhaps she'd caught a malady on the long trip to Port Steele. Even as she denied these foreign sensations, she conceded Logan Gallagher might be the cause. She'd heard of men eliciting shameless emotions from a woman, though she'd never experienced such wanton feelings herself.

She'd be wise to guard against these wanton sensations.

Andrew finished speaking. She'd heard nary a word. Some of the men cleared a space for a dance floor, while a few men with various musical instruments began to play out-of-tune music. The mood turned festive, and one by one, the burly, but shy, lumberjacks asked the ladies to dance. Soon the dance floor was packed, the room filled with laughter and conversation.

At first, the men avoided her, and Lizzie stood alone for several dances. As usual, her height and her haughty manner intimidated them. She'd carefully practiced to do just that. She didn't want a man, and they picked up on her disinterest. Eventually, a few brave souls ventured forth and asked her to dance. She turned down each one. Any woman would do in this godforsaken wilderness, and she didn't intend to give them false hope.

Constance Kendall sidled up to her during a break, fanning herself. Her face was flushed, and her eyes glittered. "Lizzie, you're not dancing."

Beautiful and petite with curly black hair, Constance rivaled Amelia for dance partners. Constance grated on Lizzie, and Lizzie avoided the selfish, manipulative woman who attempted to undermine Lizzie's leadership of the brides.

With a syrupy smile, Constance placed a hand on Lizzie's arm. "Why are you turning them down? I don't mean to be cruel, but a girl like you can't afford to be particular."

Lizzie ground her teeth together and stared straight ahead. Too bad she was lady, or she'd have wiped the superior smirk from the insufferable woman's face. Constance exploited every opportunity to get under Lizzie's skin. Her manipulations and lies caused great consternation and discomfort on the long cruise from San Francisco. Her effort to undermine Lizzie divided the brides into two camps, those who sided with Lizzie and those who chose Constance.

"Oh, dear, you don't know how to dance?" Constance held her hands to her heart in a dramatic display of false sympathy.



Lizzie considered a right hook to the woman's jaw, but she was, after all, a lady. "Quite the contrary." Lizzie didn't elaborate. She'd attended all the best schools and been tutored in all the proper activities for a well-bred young lady. At least, she had been until her parents were murdered and her uncle took control of the money. The greedy ass had cut off his nieces' expenditures and coerced Lizzie into marrying his good friend, a vulgar, old brute. Her stomach clenched at the memories of the lecherous old man groping her body and rutting like an old pig. Beads of sweat moistened her brow. She swiped a hand across her forehead and banished the nightmare back into hiding.

Constance shot Lizzie a snide look, obviously assuming Lizzie didn't know how to dance. In an instance, Constance's sour expression turned sweet as she suddenly focused her attention elsewhere.

Oh, here he comes," she breathed into her palm. Constance's nasty smirk transformed into a welcoming smile.

Following Constance's gaze, Lizzie noted Logan Gallagher weaving his way through the crowd, heading straight for them. Assuming he intended to dance with Constance, Lizzie pasted a content smile on her face and moved away a few steps. Inside, her stomach pitched and rolled, while her heart beat quickened. The darn man unsettled her with his dark, brooding eyes and big body.

Lizzie sipped her punch and attempted to fade into the background as she'd done all night.

Constance rushed to greet the tall, handsome lumberman. "Oh, Mr. Gallagher, I've been meaning to thank you for your hospitality." The woman gushed and batted her eyes. Lizzie stifled a groan and held her sharp tongue.

Logan nodded at the woman and brushed her off like a pesky housefly. He looked directly at Lizzie. Lizzie's heart caught in her throat. Displeasure was etched on the rugged planes of his tanned face.

“My men are disappointed. You’ve not danced with a one.” He stopped in front of her. She hadn’t realized how tall he really was until now, as she looked up at him.

Lizzie steeled herself. “I truly doubt that, Mr. Gallagher. There are more comely women available, and I am quite plain.”

He blinked, as if her words surprised him. “Any lady of gentle breeding is a welcome sight in these parts.”

“I choose not to dance.” She set her jaw and feigned interest in the other dancers.

“Lizzie, you’ll dance with me.” His voice held a fragment of a warning. This man didn’t take no for an answer.

“Thank you, but I don’t need the charity.”

He moved closer as if to intimidate. She stood her ground. “I insist.” His irritated tone belied the polite words. He held out a hand.

She ignored it. “No, thank you.” No man ordered her to do anything. She’d banished those days from her life.

“I’m not asking your permission. I’m telling you.” His brown eyes hardened with determination.

As if on cue, the band broke into a shaky rendition of a waltz. “It’s a waltz, Mr. Gallagher. I’m sure you’d be more comfortable sitting out such a sophisticated dance.” The devil in her couldn’t help pushing his buttons.

His eyes narrowed. A muscle worked in his jaw as he sought to control his temper. Obviously, the insult wasn’t lost on him. “You’d be surprised what I know.”

Constance gasped at his frank statement, but Logan ignored her. His uncompromising expression cooled several degrees. Lizzie backed up a step and stared upward. Rarely did she meet a man so much taller than her. She usually towered over all of them.

Logan had slicked back his unruly, longish, dark hair, which curled at the back of the collar on his white shirt, which was open at the throat and revealed fine chest hairs. The fabric stretched across broad shoulders and a powerful chest. She forced her eyes to remain

north of his belt. Despite her dislike of him, she couldn't refute the magnetism of his very male body. He was a rugged man in a rugged land and a man to be reckoned with, a match for her own strong will.

As if he were tired of waiting for her answer, Logan grabbed her hand. Lizzie held back, but his strong fingers tightened with silent insistence. Obviously, Logan was accustomed to getting what he wanted. Unwilling to make a worse scene, she acquiesced.

Once in the middle of the floor, he turned to her. The dance floor was only half-full, as most of the men didn't waltz. The few brave ones shuffled woodenly around the dance floor. Logan placed his arm around her back and grasped her hand. Lizzie kept a distance between their bodies as any proper lady would do. Muscles bulged and flexed in his large arms as he whisked her in wide circles.

"You should be dancing with my men." Logan stared down at her. His eyes darkened as his bold gaze travelled past her face and neck and settled on her bodice. Her nipples hardened in a most alarming manner. She squeezed her legs together in an unsuccessful attempt to stop the tingling.

Vexed by his rude inspection of her body and her own body's traitorous response, Lizzie pinched his arm.

His gaze jerked back to her face. "What the hell?"

"A gentleman doesn't ogle a lady in such an uncouth manner."

"I am not a gentleman. Soft men don't survive in this country."

"You're as primitive as this land." She didn't mean it as a compliment, yet he didn't seem to pick up on her insult.

"So I am." He studied her for moment, as if dissecting her every thought. "Why did you come here?" His eyes narrowed as he waited for her answer.

"To find a husband." She'd never been accomplished at deception. He raised a cynical eyebrow, proving she'd not fooled him for a minute.

"Every woman in this room is on the market and sizing up the offerings." His gaze swept around the room, settling on her. "But

you.”

“I take a while to warm-up.”

“Now that I believe. You signed an agreement to be engaged within the year. I paid your passage, and I’m paying your expenses. I expect you to honor your end of the contract.”

“I didn’t sign into servitude.” She stiffened in his arms and stumbled, stomping her heel down hard on his toes.

He grunted. His mouth turned down. “So you consider marriage to a man servitude?”

“Perhaps.” She lifted a shoulder.

“We have a bargain, and I’m holding you to it.”

Lizzie didn’t respond. She stared at his mouth rather than his eyes. Big mistake. The man’s mouth brought unbidden, inappropriate thoughts. He gazed down at her, his expression amused and somewhat smug. He guided her around the floor with ease and a certain male grace, much to her surprise. She followed his strong lead without a misstep.

“You can dance.” She looked over her shoulder, and avoided his gaze. Those brown eyes of his unnerved her.

“My mother taught all of us to dance. She tried to instill social niceties in her sons.” His wry humor caught her attention.

“Tried?” She chanced a glance at his face.

“Yes, tried. And failed. Quite a bit. But the initial groundwork is still there.”

“I pity your mother.”

“I’m sure you do.”

Lizzie fell silent, as did he. Guilt nagged at her. She wasn’t here for a man. She was soiled, damaged goods. Once any man knew the truth about her, he’d never ask her to marry.

The dance ended, and Logan bowed low and escorted her back to the perimeter of the dance floor.

“You’ll dance with any of my men who ask, or I’ll put you on the next ship.”

Lizzie bristled, but he had her where he wanted her. She wouldn't desert her sisters. Without another word, he sauntered off, and she stared at his fine backside. An uncharacteristic moisture between her legs shamed her.

"Lizzie, are you okay?" Olivia stood beside her.

"I'm fine." She gave a guilty start, fearing she'd been caught doing her own ogling.

"Logan Gallagher dances like a dream. Constance was incensed. She's laid claim on him, but you're the only woman he danced with."

"She can have him. They deserve each other. He's the rudest, most insufferable man."

Olivia giggled. "Remember my words—you'll be the first of the brides to marry. Not the last."

Lizzie endured the remainder of the evening with one inept dancer after another. One man stomped on her feet with his heavy boots several times. Another, shorter man behaved as if her eyes were on her chest. Another belched in her ear and didn't have the decency to apologize. Through it all, Logan Gallagher stood nearby, hands on hips, a satisfied curl to his lips. He caught Lizzie's eye and winked as yet another man lurched around the dance floor with her.

She glared back at him and imagined satisfying ways to wipe the smirk from his arrogant face.

## Chapter 2

*Lizzie's Journal, Saturday, June 4, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*The rain has been incessant since we landed in this godforsaken land. The beauty I noted on arrival washed away in the first night's torrential downpours. The streets are knee-deep in mud. The slugs are of monstrous proportions. Our accommodations are less than adequate and bordering uncivilized.*

*We attempt to keep our spirits up, but doing so is difficult while surrounded by such oppressive gloom. Everything is gray. I've never seen a place so devoid of color.*

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie Prescott stepped onto the front porch and squinted into the sheet of rain.

The two elder Gallagher brothers slogged through the deep mud toward her. She wrapped her shawl tighter around her body and waited. Even from a distance, the sight of Logan Gallagher caused a scandalous wetness between her legs and a weakness in her knees. She grasped the porch railing and gathered her wits about her.

A week had passed since the ship carrying the brides had docked at Port Steele. After her disturbing dance with Logan Gallagher, she'd avoided him and his brothers. An easy feat, considering the men worked in the woods or at their sawmill from morning until night.

Last evening, the brides met and discussed their concerns and

disappointments. The group voted for a spokeswoman, quickly narrowing the choice to Lizzie and Constance. Tied eleven votes to eleven, Lizzie broke the tie and voted for herself, which infuriated Constance. After a dramatic tantrum, the biddy stalked from the room, not pleased with the selection. But then, nothing pleased Constance.

Lizzie summoned the Gallagher brothers to the dormitory the very next day to discuss the ladies' situation in Port Steele.

So far, things weren't as advertised. Their first clue should have been the rag-tag batch of buckboards and carriages that carried their female cargo to a two-story building at one end of Main Street. Known as Cedar Plank Inn, the dubious structure would serve as a home for the brides until they married. A worn red carpet covered the ever-present mud and led to the inn door. The innkeeper, Hattie Red, scandalized the fair maidens from the East Coast with her indecent dresses and even more outrageous mannerisms. Whispers abounded regarding Hattie's previous position as a madam in a San Francisco brothel.

From there it got worse.

Since their arrival, the brides had heard plenty of promises but seen very little action.

Lizzie had compiled a list of their complaints and demands for improved accommodations to present to the Gallagher brothers. She was beginning to suspect the brothers had exhausted their finances after funding the brides' passage and room and board. Most likely, nothing was left for improvements. Regardless, their finances weren't her concern. The comfort and well-being of the brides were.

The two oldest Gallagher brothers reached the protection of the porch. The ever-disagreeable Logan Gallagher took off his hat and inclined his head. He swatted the hat against his coat to shake off the drops of rain. Two sizable puddles grew underneath both men's feet.

"Ah, Miss Prescott. We meet again. This is my brother, Gage."

Gage removed his dripping hat, bowed, and smiled. "At your service, ma'am." Good, she hoped he meant it. The Gallagher

brothers may not be so agreeable after they read the brides' grievances against Gallagher Logging, starting with misrepresentation.

Gage was about Logan's size but not as bulky. He had the same wavy dark hair, but his eyes were a friendly, deep blue. Obviously shy, when his eyes locked with hers, he glanced away, and his face flushed. He shifted his stance and clutched his hat in his hands, his expression respectful.

Logan removed his mud-caked boots and dripping oilskin coat. One large toe poked out from a hole in his wool socks, she noted with wry amusement. His brother removed his boots and coat as well. His socks were equally in need of darning. The two men followed her into the warmth of the parlor. They placed their boots near the blazing fire and laid their coats and hats over a chair. Another puddle formed instantly on the cedar-planked floor.

Lizzie grimaced at the mess but held her tongue. She added one more item to her mental why-I'll-never-marry-again list.

"I trust you had a safe and memorable trip." Gage spoke, quietly and respectfully.

She gave a very unladylike snort. "You may call it safe, since I am here, and memorable would be one way to describe it."

He didn't pursue that line of questioning any further but folded his hands in his lap and waited for Logan to speak.

"Well, then, what can we do for you?" Logan's voice seemed polite enough, yet she sensed impatience in his underlying tone.

"It's about this." She took out a faded newspaper article, opened it up, and spread it out on the battered fir table.

*Come to a verdant paradise, where good men are plentiful and good women are few. We seek young, healthy women of strong moral character to hold honorable positions in our growing city, and most importantly, as wives to the men of their choosing.*



Logan glanced at the article, obviously recognizing it.

“What about it?” Logan poured himself a cup of tea from the teapot on the parlor table. He brought it to his mouth and sipped. His large hand was an odd contrast with the delicate bone china cup.

“You misrepresented this—” Lizzie searched for the words. “This place.”

“Is it not a growing city? Are there not plentiful men?”

“Yes, but—”

“Good. We’re agreed.” Logan stood to leave.

“The accommodations are unacceptable.”

Logan made a show of looking around the room then back at her. “They’re the best Port Steele has to offer.

“They’re the only ones Port Steele has to offer.” She bristled at his curt tone.

“Well, then, that settles that.” He made a move to grab his coat.

Lizzie glared at him. *Irritating, overbearing man.* “It settles nothing.”

“They’re clean and free. What more do you want?” Logan stared out the window, as if driving home the fact that he considered this meeting unnecessary and a waste of his precious time.

“The inn is crowded and in need of refurbishing. The rooms are primitive and lack even the most basic necessities.” Lizzie stiffened her spine.

Logan threw back his head and laughed. Lizzie didn’t join in, nor did his brother, who’d remained silent up to this point.

“Logan, we should hear Miss Prescott out.”

Lizzie smiled gratefully at Gage. He smiled back, a pleasant smile, which sent her stomach fluttering in response and further moistening that forbidden area between her legs. Her reactions dismayed her, a lady did not partake in such shameless responses to one man, let alone two.

“I don’t have time for this.” Logan stood, crammed his hat on his head, snatched his wet coat and strode to the door. “Take care of her,

Gage. You're the money man. Just don't make any promises we can't keep or afford."

Logan strode from the room. The front door slammed and rattled the windowpanes.

Lizzie sat back and smiled at Gage, a much more amenable character than his insufferable brother. Gage smiled back but quickly looked away.

"Now, Mr. Gallagher. Let's go over my list."

\* \* \* \*

Gage sat close to Miss Prescott on the worn settee in the parlor of the Cedar Plank Inn. He didn't have much experience with women. His talents lay in finances. He'd developed quite an aptitude for managing the brothers' many holdings. Although the brothers were land-rich, their meager expendable income challenged his abilities. They'd taken their available cash down to nothing to finance the brides' passages. Very little remained until they received their next lumber payments from various sources.

The brides' lengthy list of complaints swam before his eyes as he breathed in Miss Prescott's lavender scent. While the other men remarked about Miss Prescott's sisters and Constance Kendall, to name a few, he preferred Miss Prescott, though he couldn't articulate why. Perhaps her intelligence and ability to stand up to his formidable older brother attracted him. Not too many men had the guts to cross Logan, let alone a woman. Only his brothers and he knew the real Logan under that tough timberman. A loyal friend and selfless brother, Logan sacrificed his own needs for those of his siblings and his business.

Miss Prescott cleared her throat and drew him back to the matter at hand. Sitting up straight, Gage turned slightly and his knee bumped hers. His face heated up, and he scooted away from her enticing body. Gathering his composure, he prayed she didn't notice his discomfort

or the damning bulge in his trousers.

“Miss Prescott, I’d like to take this list and examine it more closely. I’ll give you a response within a day or two. Some of these items are easily rectified, but others are not possible at this time. It’s our express intent to do everything within our means.”

“And exactly what are your means?” She regarded him with knowing eyes. He squirmed under her direct stare.

“Excuse me?” He didn’t understand or want to understand her question.

“We believed your family to be wealthy. The state of your operations says otherwise.”

“We are not wealthy, nor have we misled the brides.”

She snorted again, a very unladylike snort. He grinned at her. He couldn’t help it. Her eyes widened then her mouth quirked with amusement. His groin tightened almost painfully. Damn, but he wanted her. A most unexpected reaction. One he usually managed to suppress.

Her scent floated in the air and made his cock harder than an axe handle. He shifted in his chair and placed his hands in his lap to hide his erection. She leaned forward to point out a few items on the list. Her arm brushed his arm. He almost jumped out of his skin. The contact reverberated from his head to his toes, leaving him almost light-headed with lust. And something else.

Always practical and unflappable, Gage was behaving like a man falling in love.

\* \* \* \*

Gage Gallagher was exactly the type of man Lizzie would marry were she ever daft enough in the head to consider marriage again. Gage’s kind, blue eyes complemented his quiet, calm temperament. He didn’t exude raw male power like Logan, yet underneath his shy exterior she sensed steel, the kind that would bend but not break. The

kind a woman could bet her knickers on. He'd be there to defend his woman's honor and soothe her aches.

Yes, Gage would suit her well if she were on the market and if she were the type of woman who attracted a man like him.

Of course, she wasn't. Couldn't be. Ever.

Lizzie raised her head at the shuffle of feet near the parlor door. Hattie, the inn owner, moved across the room with a sensuality Lizzie found unusual in one so large. Her brassy red hair clashed with her purple dress. Her large breasts spilled over the top of the dress. She settled her ample hips into a chair and poured a cup of tea.

"A very attractive man in a quiet, bookish way, but then, you know what they say about quiet men." Hattie winked at Lizzie.

Lizzie didn't have a clue what they said about quiet men but held her tongue. Hattie didn't mince words when discussing even the most inappropriate events or acts.

"He's attracted to you."

"I am sure you're mistaken." Men were not attracted to her.

Hattie laughed. "Honey, I'm never mistaken about animal attraction. I used to make a profession of it."

Lizzie gasped and drew back, shocked at the forthrightness of this woman.

Hattie took no offense and laughed all the more. "Relax. I'm a respectable businesswoman now. My dealings are entirely legal."

"We shouldn't be discussing such matters." Lizzie swallowed, uncertain what might be considered legal in this rugged, lawless land.

"Propriety doesn't carry any weight here like it does on the East Coast."

From what she'd seen of Hattie's behavior, propriety definitely didn't carry any weight with the rotund innkeeper. The woman played poker with the men in the saloon down the street. She invited men's advances and entertained them in the parlor in the most scandalous manner. Rumors abounded that she even took a few men to her private rooms.

The other women avoided her as if Hattie's reputation might sully their own. While she often shocked Lizzie with her language and words, Lizzie admired Hattie's ability to do as she pleased and disregard petty gossip.

Changing the subject, Hattie reached over and fingered Lizzie's hair. Lizzie held her breath.

"You have beautiful hair. If only I could get my hair that color. You should wear it down more often or in a more flattering manner. I'll style it for the next dance."

"Oh, no, please, don't go to the bother."

"No bother. It's settled, and I won't take no for an answer."

Lizzie nodded. There was no arguing with Hattie. Perhaps, she'd fake an illness or headache.

She'd rather spend an evening with the disagreeable Logan Gallagher than allow Hattie to touch her hair.

\* \* \* \*

Logan said grace and passed around the roast. Each brother filled his plate and dug in, every one of them grateful for a rare Sunday off. A couple weeks had passed since he and Gage met with Lizzie. Since then the four brothers and several of their lumberjacks spent every spare moment working on the improvement list from the brides. At times, Logan considered sending the whole batch of them back to Boston and civilization as he found some of their demands to be ridiculous luxuries. Regardless, he indulged the women because happy women made for happy lumberjacks. The gigantic proportions of the native timber required a rare breed of man to fall the mighty trees. The Gallaghers' loggers were some of the best in the Pacific Northwest and the envy of all the other logging companies. Logan did everything within his power to satisfy his men, including importing the brides from Boston.

With his cousins breathing down his neck, waiting for any

opportunity to steal his best men and ruin his business, he couldn't afford to send the ladies packing. Even though he fantasized at times about a simpler life before they'd set foot on the Port Steele docks.

"I might wish to court Miss Prescott," Gage announced. His three brothers stopped in mid-chew and regarded him with curious eyes. Logan put down his fork and waited.

"Which Miss Prescott? I've set my sights on Amelia," Andrew, the charmer, staked his claim.

"Amelia is mine," argued Noah, the youngest and most irresponsible brother.

"I'm speaking of Lizzie." Gage looked down at his plate, his ears suspiciously red.

Logan stared at his brother. Not Lizzie? She was so—he swallowed—so Gage's type. A thin thread of discomfort wrapped around his gut. He shifted in his chair and concentrated on cutting another bite of beef.

"Lizzie?" The younger brothers' voices rang out in unison and disbelief.

Intending to stay out of it for reasons he couldn't define, Logan's mouth opened of its own accord. "Olivia is more your type. She's quite intellectual." Three pairs of eyes turned to study him. Logan gulped down his whiskey and grabbed the bottle to pour another. Inside, he seethed with uncharacteristic jealousy.

Shoulders tense and jaw rigid, Gage scrutinized his brother. "Lizzie interests me. She is intelligent, genuine, and I find her attractive."

"Connie says she's a shrew," Noah chuckled.

"Watch your mouth." Logan rose to his feet, his voice louder than planned. The startled expressions on his brothers' faces sat him right back down. "That's no way to speak about a lady."

"Yes besides, Connie's the shrew." Andrew grinned and filled his plate with a second helping.

"Enough. Both of you." Logan slammed his fist on the table.

Andrew and Noah laughed, not the least bit intimidated. Gage continued to watch him, as if dissecting his words and expression.

"I'm going to ask Lizzie for permission to escort her to the dance next weekend." Again, Gage's eyes didn't stray from Logan's face.

"I'm sure she'll be delighted." Logan wasn't delighted, not in the least, and he feared it showed on his face. Damned if he knew why it mattered to him. Obviously, he'd developed a distant interest in the woman himself. Not a surprise, since it'd been months since he'd been with a woman, and he preferred his women tall and substantial as opposed to inconsequential pieces of fluff. On the other hand, he preferred his women gentle and agreeable with no opinions of their own. Lizzie didn't possess these characteristics.

A slow, knowing smile crept across Noah's face. He elbowed Gage in the ribs and pointed at Logan. "Gage, you might have competition." Noah and Andrew wallowed laughter.

"I am hardly in the market for any of the ladies." Logan denied any interest in Lizzie. "I'll be the last to marry, if I ever marry."

"Good. Then there's no problem with me courting her."

"None in the least." Logan forced a smile he didn't feel and focused his frustration on the steak on his plate. The steak didn't stand a chance.

\* \* \* \*

Miles Petty sat in the small parlor on the settee across from Lizzie. Next to him, local businessman and Port Steele's namesake, Adam Steele, sipped his coffee. Miles was of medium build with cold, gray eyes and dirty blond hair. He was soft around the middle, a testament to his lack of physical activity. Unlike the Gallaghers, it appeared he didn't work in the woods anymore.

Adam Steele presented a different picture, dressed in his expensive suit. His hands appeared as soft as a baby's bottom, no calluses. He portrayed an air of refined elegance, but Lizzie sensed his

cultured exterior concealed a rough interior. She didn't trust either man.

According to Lucy Riley, the biggest gossip of the brides, Adam played both sides against each other to get the best deal for his own businesses, a shipping company on the wharf, a loggers supply company, and various smaller businesses. He obviously didn't care about anyone but himself. He had that in common with Miles Petty.

"Constance is interested in our offer." Adam's smooth voice attempted to pacify. Instead it ruffled her feathers.

"Constance doesn't speak for all the brides, nor does she have the right to make decisions for the rest of us."

Miles tensed and glared at her. Adam hurried to calm them both down. "We understand, Miss Prescott, which is why we're here."

"I'd rather you not be here."

"Your opinion is of the utmost importance to us," Adam insisted.

"Always the politician," Lizzie pointed out.

"I am the mayor, after all."

Despite Adam's friendly manner, Lizzie felt like she'd been slimed. She almost liked dealing with Miles better. At least she knew where she stood with him. She didn't have a clue with Adam. "We're obligated to the Gallaghers. Every one of us signed contracts with them."

"Contracts which will be null and void if they don't live up to their side of the bargain," Adam pointed out. As always, his Sioux manservant, Raven, hovered in the background, never saying a word. Lizzie was certain the Raven's ever-watchful eyes never missed a thing.

Miles smirked and crossed his arms over his chest. "You can't prevent us from talking to the brides."

"And *you* can't barge in like the cock of the walk and lure away the brides. We have a commitment to the Gallaghers. Their money brought us here, not yours."

"If I can provide superior accommodations, I certainly can," Miles



shot back.

“I’ve seen no proof of these superior accommodations.”

“We’re working on them.”

Adam, who’d been sitting back watching their exchange, stood and nodded to both of them. “I believe it’s time we move on, Miles. Let Miss Prescott consider our offer.”

Miles stood. His malevolent gaze sent shivers down her spine.

“You’ll be hearing from me.”

“I won’t be looking forward to it,” Lizzie muttered.

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie shot awake and stared around the dark room. Breathing heavily, she squirmed and pressed her legs together. She attempted to clear her head and shut out the images from a most disturbing, yet erotic, dream, yet she couldn’t.

Unbidden, her hand crept between her legs and touched the crotch of her under garments, wet from her arousing dream. She rested her palm on her mound and closed her eyes. The images came flooding back. Her thoughts brought her great shame, yet she couldn’t and wouldn’t control them. Her fantasies were likely going to be all she had to keep her warm at night. Surely, she could be excused for her over-active imagination.

Her mind drifted back to the dream. Two men’s hands roamed her naked body, touching her in the most indecent places. One man yanked down her bodice and fondled one breast while kissing the other. She moaned and touched her own nipples, stroked them, pinched them. The other man slid his large, calloused hand down her thigh and pushed her legs apart.

Lizzie slipped her hand under her underwear, across her belly, and between her legs. She hesitated at the slick opening for only a moment. Parting her pussy lips, she plunged a finger deep into her channel. Parting her legs wider, she adjusted the angle of her hips and

pressed her finger yet deeper. Removing it, she added a second finger and thrust both of them inside the heat of her body. Her thumb sought her little nub of pleasure, and she worked her fingers in and out of her tight little hole. Her rhythm increased to a fever pitch, harder, faster, harder, faster, in a frenzy of movement until her hips lifted off the bed, and her body shuddered. She shoved her hand deep into her pussy and held it there, soaked in her juices. Her body begged for release. Rubbing the nub, she flew to the heavens, soared among the clouds, then crashed back to Earth.

She was a bad girl, a very bad girl, who had an insatiable hunger she couldn't satisfy. It was bad enough for a single girl to lust after one man, but two?

## Chapter 3

*Lizzie's Journal, Wednesday, June 15, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*The days have turned into weeks. Amelia, true to form, entertains one gentleman after another, afternoon and evenings. Many suitors vie for her attentions. They lavish her with gifts and compliments, and she blooms like the spring flowers in the meadow near Port Steele. Olivia is more reserved. She prefers her books and her painting. Logan procured a few boxes of books and has given Liv an area in the sawmill offices for a library of sorts. She is in heaven and spends her days sorting books and painting landscapes. Her paintings already adorn several businesses in this small town. I'm overseeing the needed renovations to the inn and surrounding areas. I see no sign of the accommodations Miles Petty promised. The other brides are busy with various pursuits, such as teaching, darning socks, and stitching rips in clothes for the lumberjacks. We are settling into our life here. I still live in dread our uncle will track us down and force us to return to Boston. I'll protect my sisters at all costs.*

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie stood on the porch and watched Patti Weber work in the garden adjoining the inn. Not part of the original group of brides, the reclusive woman joined them just as the ship set sail from Boston.

Patti and Amelia became fast friends, a strange friendship at that, but Lizzie appreciated Patti's loyalty to the youngest Prescott sister.

Across the main street, a stranger leaned up against the mercantile porch railing. Lizzie recalled him disembarking from the last ship that came into port. He disconcerted her, as he seemed to be wherever she was, ever watchful of her and her sisters. Her skin prickled with little bumps whenever she caught sight of him, which was too often for her comfort.

Surely, her paranoia regarding her uncle had caught up with her. She turned to Lucy, who made it her business to know everyone else's business. Usually Lizzie avoided Lucy because of her close association with Constance and her loose tongue. Port Steele didn't need a newspaper with Lucy around, though most of her information contained little facts and much fiction.

"Do you know who that is?" Lizzie gestured to the man across the street.

Lucy looked up from the socks she was darning and doing a poor job at that, unless the owner of that particular pair of socks was missing his big toe. Lucy's eagle eyes focused on the stranger. The man ducked into the mercantile store, as if he'd known he'd drawn their attention.

"That's Mr. Farrier. He's a timber buyer from San Francisco." Lucy reveled in possessing information others didn't.

"I see. Do you know anything else about him?"

Lucy leaned toward Lizzie and lowered her voice to a loud whisper. "A little, but you must keep my secret as I haven't told anyone this."

"Of course." Lizzie resisted the urge to roll her eyes. Lucy wasn't capable of keeping a secret.

"He's negotiating with both the Pettys' and the Gallaghers' for the lowest price. I hear it's a very lucrative contract. He's originally from back East."

Lizzie went cold inside. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I overheard him tell Hayden Petty."

"Do you recall where?"

“I believe it was Boston.”

Lizzie’s uncle resided in Boston, but then so did a lot of people. Surely it was a coincidence, along with the fact that the man appeared in the same places Lizzie and her sisters appeared. After all, it was a small town.

But was it that small?

\* \* \* \*

A few days later, Gage shored up his nerve and paid Lizzie a formal visit. Waiting for her to appear, he clasped his hands together in an effort to stop fidgeting. He stared around the garish parlor only Hattie could love. Though he doubted the clashing colors in the room could be held responsible for the butterflies battering his rib cage.

He breathed in through his nose, breathed out, several times, but the calming technique he’d used in the past deserted him. Regretting the rash decision that brought him here, he considered escape routes and fought the urge to sneak out the side door before Lizzie entered the room.

A chair scraped across the floor in another room. He jumped at the sound. Heels tapped on the wood floors, growing closer with every footstep. His heart beat in his chest, and his throat constricted.

Was any woman worth this agony?

Lizzie was. He knew it in his heart.

Much to his disappointment, Lucy entered the room. Gage sighed, resigned to his fate. The sturdily-built Lucy had made an immediate impact among the lumberjacks. Despite being desperate for female companionship, every man in town ran like hell when Lucy appeared. She chattered non-stop and quickly earned the reputation of the town’s most prolific gossipmonger. In addition, her singing voice, which she exercised at every available occasion, likened to a crow caught in a rain barrel.

“Gage, what brings you here?” Lucy’s eyes lit up, obviously

anticipating an opportunity for fresh gossip.

“I have business to discuss with Miss Prescott.” The less information given to Lucy the better.

“Really? Which Miss Prescott?”

“Lizzie.”

“And what business would you have with Lizzie?” Lucy sat down and poured herself some tea. Ever the gentleman, Gage sat, too.

He wanted to tell her to mind her own business, but his mama had taught him too well to respect a lady, not that the description fit this annoying woman. “I need to discuss the refurbishing of the inn.”

Lucy’s sharp gaze narrowed as she focused her entire attention on him. “You should include Constance in such conversations. She’s as much the voice of the brides as Lizzie.”

“I’ll take that into consideration.” Gage shifted in his seat, uncomfortable with Lucy’s interrogations. Hearing a swish of skirts, Gage stared at the doorway.

Lizzie walked into the room wearing a matronly dress that would have looked dowdy on most women. On Lizzie, it hugged her slender body and aroused every fiber of his body.

He stood quickly. His feet wrapped around each other, and he stumbled. Lizzie ran the last few steps and put out a hand to steady him.

“Are you well?” A tendril of her auburn hair brushed her cheek. He imagined tucking it behind her ear, how silky the strands would feel in his fingers, how she’d tremble at his touch.

“I’m fine, ma’am.” Heat spread from north to south, not all of it caused by embarrassment. He cursed his lack of confidence around women. Put him in a room full of ledgers, lawyers, or bankers, and he’d whip them into shape. Yet he shivered in his boots from one slight woman.

Across the room, Lucy watched his performance with extreme interest, most likely taking mental notes to repeat to any bride who’d listen.

Lizzie noticed Lucy for the first time. "If you'd excuse us."

Lucy hesitated, not wanting to miss any choice gossip. "I'll just sit over here and work on darning these socks. I'll be quiet as a mouse. You won't even know I'm here."

Lizzie shook her head. "I believe Hattie needs help in the kitchen."

Frowning with disappointment, Lucy rose and left the room.

With an exasperated sigh, Lizzie sat across from Gage and waited for him to speak. He sank back down into the chair. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and refused to get out of the way so he could form words.

"Gage, are you sure you're fine?" Her concern almost undid him. No one had looked at him with such concern since his mother died.

He leaned forward, sitting on the edge of his seat. "I'd like to escort you to the dance on Saturday," he blurted and held his breath, strung tight and aching with fear she'd turn him down flat.

Lizzie's eyes grew big and her mouth dropped open. "You want to escort me?"

He nodded. "I'd be honored." She didn't seem upset, just surprised. Hope swelled inside him.

"But there are so many other women to choose from."

"But I choose you. Will you attend with me?" He wiped his sweaty palms on his trousers.

A myriad of conflicting emotions crossed her strong features. She met his gaze and nodded. "I'd love to."

## Chapter 4

*Lizzie's Journal, Saturday, June 18, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Today is the day of the dance. I have attended my share of dances both in Boston and now here at Port Steele, but never accompanied by a young man who makes my heart flutter and my knees like jelly. I am certain he extended his invitation out of pity for my plain appearance and lack of interested suitors. Regardless, I am determined to enjoy myself.*

*Mr. Farrier, the timber buyer, skulks in the shadows, always seeming to be a few steps behind me. When I go the mercantile store, he peeks through the shelving. I chastise myself that I am merely imagining his scrutiny.*

\* \* \* \*

By Saturday, Lizzie had worked herself into a dither.

She pondered what craziness had come over her to accept Gage's invitation. He'd caught her off guard. She'd expected them to discuss the current status of the brides' complaints. Instead he'd offered to escort her to the next dance. After she'd accepted, she'd noticed movement near the doorway. Within a few hours, blabbermouth Lucy would spread the news throughout the inn.

But she had bigger issues than Lucy's nattering to any bride who'd listen.

Surely Gage didn't have an interest in her. Perhaps pity motivated



him. The possibility didn't sit well. She hated to be pitied.

She didn't want a man, couldn't have a man. She'd misrepresented herself in countless ways and lived in daily fear of being exposed. All the brides signed statements attesting to their exemplary moral character. Lizzie falsified her statement. She wasn't an innocent young miss, not anymore.

If Connie found out, she'd be ruined and shipped back to the East Coast, back to her abusive uncle and her dead husband Herbert Stein's repulsive brother. Her stomach rolled at the thought of another lecherous old man touching her with rough, bony fingers.

Gage deserved better than her. He deserved a woman devoted to him, not a woman with baggage from her past. Yet, she chastised herself, it was a dance, not a marriage proposal.

Despite her misgivings, she succumbed to Hattie's ministrations. She actually didn't look half bad. Amelia announced her sister's appearance to be understated elegance. While Olivia beamed at her like a proud sister. Even Lucy had been at a loss for words, hopefully a good sign. Constance stared at her with undisguised animosity and stomped from the room, Lucy on her heels.

Hattie had piled Lizzie's auburn hair on top of her head, leaving a few tendrils framing her face. Amelia, the most endowed of the sisters, loaned Lizzie one of her favorite dresses. While Lizzie didn't quite fill it out, the emerald green dress accentuated the green in her eyes and gave a slightly immodest view of cleavage.

So now she sat in the parlor and waited for Gage. He was late. She shooed her sisters on their way, tired of their giggling and teasing.

Gage showed up a few minutes later and stood on the front porch, seemingly flabbergasted. She smiled what she hoped was her best demur smile. Grabbing her cloak, she hid her shaking hands under the thick wool fabric.

Gage took her elbow and led her the short distance to the dance. Lizzie smiled up at him, feeling less self-conscious than with most men. His shyness brought out a protective instinct in her. She worked

to draw him out. Someone must have broken his heart once. She saw the sadness reflected in his kind, blue eyes. She understood heartbreak. She'd suffered enough of that affliction in her not-so-long-ago past.

Dancing in Gage's arms proved to be surprisingly enjoyable. He danced as well as his brother. Stifling a grin, she imagined the two large men practicing dancing in the privacy of their parlor, arguing over which brother got to lead. Heaven knew in this remote area, they'd have had little, if any, women to dance with.

Gage looked down at her and smiled a lopsided smile she found very endearing. "What's so amusing?"

She met his gaze. "Amusing?"

"Yes, amusing. Is it my dancing?"

She decided to come clean. "Actually, both Logan and you are accomplished dancers. I wondered if you'd practiced with each other, given the absence of women in the area."

He grew red from his neck to his ears. "If I told you the truth, Logan would never forgive me."

"Now that doesn't surprise me. He's upholding an image."

"Yes, and an uncompromising one that doesn't allow for any weaknesses."

His broad smile and sparkling eyes sucked her in, like a leaf sucked into a whirlpool. His body's nearness shot little prickles of pleasure through her. She shivered as she imagined pulling him closer, feeling the solid wall of his body against hers. She longed for his fingers to roam over her naked skin to unmentionable places of hidden pleasure. Such disgraceful thoughts solidified her belief she'd become a soiled woman, the type no decent man would want to bed.

Her future consisted of two opposing directions: become a school marm and never experience a man's touch or become a tainted woman like Hattie. Of course, she'd already been tainted by a decrepit, yet lecherous, husband.

Lizzie glanced at Logan standing against the wall in a deceptively

casual pose while nursing a drink. The tight line of his mouth and narrowed eyes pulsed with irritation. For a split second, their eyes met. Her body tingled as if he'd touched her. She jerked her head back to concentrate on Gage, yet the heat of Logan's gaze scorched her backside.

Her attraction to both men appalled her. A decent woman did not desire two men, yet she did. Always priding herself on her control, her reactions disturbed her. Yet she could no more control the wicked thoughts running through her head than she could control the weather. Shaking off her disgust with herself, she vowed to enjoy the evening.

Lizzie danced several more dances with Gage. Once she drew him out, he proved to be as witty and charming as his gregarious younger brother, Andrew. She couldn't recall ever meeting a nicer man.

While Lizzie spoke with Andrew, Gage whirled Hattie around the floor and made the older woman's evening.

"You're smiling."

Lizzie jumped as warm fingers grasped her arm. Her eyes locked with Logan's intense dark ones. "Mr. Gallagher, you frightened me."

Logan's half smile softened the hard lines of his handsome face, though he still appeared formidable. "The name is Logan. I believe this is my dance."

"Really. Well, Logan, enjoy it." She turned away from him and clasped her shaking hands in front of her.

"With you, Lizzie. I'm dancing with you. My brother monopolized your time all night. Now it's my turn."

"To dance with me or monopolize me?" My lord, she was flirting with him. She didn't flirt. Didn't even know how. It must have been the thimbleful of sherry she drank earlier for nerve-building.

He chuckled, a warm, welcome sound from a cold, determined man. Without waiting for an answer, he steered her to the dance floor.

"Do you always behave like this?"

He regarded her with wary eyes. "Like what?"

"Accosting women to dance with you, regardless of whether or

not they accept the invitation?”

“If it serves my purpose.” He pulled her body shamefully close to his hard, muscled chest, but then, the man had no shame. He demonstrated such on numerous occasions, just the type of man an unchaste woman like her deserved. After a man like him ravaged a woman’s body, he’d walk away without a second thought.

“About the list of improvements. We’re still waiting for...”

“Shhh.” He held one long finger up to her lips to silence her. The intimate gesture froze the words in her throat. “No talking business. This is pleasure.”

She shuddered at the way he drew out the word pleasure. His hand splayed across her back, branding her with his heat. Strong fingers played with the fastenings on her dress. She stared at the worn fabric of his jacket, probably the only one he owned.

“You like me to touch you, don’t you?” His low, husky voice whispered in her ear.

She met his question with silence. A gentleman never asked such questions of a lady. But then, he was no gentleman, and she’d already established she was no lady.

Something caught his eye behind her. He stared over her shoulder. His entire body tensed, like a fighter ready for the fight to start. His eyes narrowed to slits.

“Logan, what is it?” She strained to look over her shoulder.

“Don’t,” he growled. “Don’t draw attention to yourself.”

“But, what?” Confused, she gazed up at him. He didn’t so much as glance down but continued to shoot daggers at an unseen object behind her.

“You’re one nosy, pushy woman.”

“So I am. Tell me what’s angered you, as I won’t let it go until I know.”

“The Pettys.”

“The Pettys?”

“My cousins.”

“You don’t sound as if you like them.”

“Let’s just say there’s a family feud. I have something they want, and they won’t get it as long as I still draw a breath.”

“So your relationship with them is contentious?”

“Very much so. You can’t pick your relatives.”

She knew that story all too well. The arrival of the Pettys darkened Logan’s uncharacteristically light mood. He deposited her at his brother’s side and stalked toward the intruders with malice on his face.

“Oh, no.” Gage shook his head as he watched Logan approach their cousins. “I’ll be right back.” He nodded at Lizzie and hurried after Logan. Their two younger brothers brought up the rear.

Four against two seemed like good odds to Lizzie, not to mention the Gallagher men easily outweighed their smaller cousins. Logan towered over the Petty cousins. She couldn’t hear his words, but she didn’t need to. Tension radiated off his body. He jammed his fists into his hips and stood tall and proud with his legs braced apart.

Regardless of the situation, the Petty cousins didn’t flinch. In fact, their superior smirks and surly expressions seemed to infuriate Logan even more. Lucy, ever the gossip, crept close to the men, the only woman with the guts—or stupidity—to linger close enough to hear. Constance smirked from her vantage point in the corner, most likely waiting for a report from the ever-accommodating Lucy.

Next to the Pettys, holding a snifter of brandy, stood Winston Farrier, the timber buyer. While every eye in the room focused on the Pettys and Gallaghers, his gaze focused on Lizzie. Their eyes met. He acknowledged her with an imperceptible nod of recognition. But how could he possibly be acquainted with her? An unexplainable fear crawled through her. She averted her eyes for a moment. When she glanced up again, he’d turned away.

Lizzie moved back a few steps, disturbed by the stranger with the knowing gaze. Her imagination surely had seized control of her common sense. She’d never met this man before and had no reason to

fear him.

Across the room the conversation grew more heated between Logan and Miles Petty. Toe to toe, like two roosters fighting over control of the henhouse, they sized each other up, mentally and physically.

Assuming the peacemaking role, Gage stepped between Logan and Miles. Gage spoke a few words to his brother. Logan's eyes flashed with annoyance, but he clamped his mouth shut. Ignoring his cousins, he barked a few terse orders to his two youngest brothers, spun around, and stomped off with Gage on his heels. They disappeared out the door. Miles and Hayden helped themselves to some whiskey, while Andrew and Noah stood sentry duty nearby as if they feared their cousins might steal the good china, or worse, the ladies from Boston.

Lizzie poured herself some punch and sat down to wait. Patience happened to be one of her virtues. If her escort didn't return in a reasonable amount of time, she'd sneak back to the inn and quiz Lucy later on the details. The said gossip currently whispered in Constance's ear, while Constance's eyes gleamed with a calculation expectation.

"Well, hello, pretty lady, and why aren't you out on the dance floor?"

Startled, Lizzie looked up into the gray eyes of Miles Petty, surprised to see he was actually addressing her. The men in this remote area obviously weren't picky about their women if he thought she was anything but plain.

Though Attractive in a classical sense, Miles didn't look anything like the bigger, rougher Gallaghers. Miles's curly blond hair and fair skin resembled one of those Roman statues she'd seen in books. Without waiting for an invitation, Miles took the seat next to her, dressed in an unusually nice suit for this area. Her grandmother would've called him a dandy. Irritated at being left alone by Gage without any explanation, Lizzie extracted a bit of revenge by smiling

at the man. "Hello." Her note of dismissal did nothing to deter him.

"You came to the dance with Gage, but you were dancing with Logan." Miles' conversational tone didn't fool her one bit.

"I danced with both. I don't see where it's any of your business."

"I make it my business to know everything about my cousins. Rumor has it Gage and Logan stamped their brand on you."

Lizzie sat up straighter. "No man stamps anything on me."

Miles laughed. "I love a woman with spunk. I see why they're attracted to you."

Attracted to her? Gage and Logan? Miles needed spectacles. Men did not find her the least bit attractive. Even Herbert, her geriatric husband, found her undesirable.

She'd even run through several scenarios in her mind as to why they'd been showing interest in her and developed a few theories. As the plainest bride, they hoped their interest would attract other men's interest. It'd worked with Miles. They felt sorry for her. Or they figured no one else would want her so they might as well get a bride for their investment.

Lizzie glanced at Miles, who stared at her as if he were removing her garments one at a time. She pretended interest in the dancers. Not entirely comfortable with the way Miles eyed her, she regretted her rash decision to converse with him. Though ignoring him would have most likely goaded him into harassing her even more.

Miles held out a hand. "Shall we dance?"

"I'm afraid I'm quite tired and—"

"Nonsense." Miles grabbed her hand with amazing strength and squeezed it hard. He pulled her to her feet, not interested in her protests. She suppressed a shiver. A dangerous glitter shone in his cold eyes.

He yanked her to him, holding her closer than was considered decent. She tried to put space between them, but he was too strong.

Their gazes level, Miles smiled at her, but his smile didn't reach his calculating eyes. She avoided his gaze and stared at a point in the

distance, unseeing. His body brushed against hers.

"I understand you're the self-proclaimed spokeswoman for the brides."

"They elected me"

"Constance told me all about that election." The vehemence in his sneer sat her back on her heels

"I don't see how that's any of your concern." Lizzie didn't like the man, so she saw no reason to be more than distantly cordial.

"My brother and I have approached Constance regarding a much more sophisticated celebration for the women."

"I appreciate your offer, but our dance cards are full." Now she understood his purely selfish interest. Lizzie possessed something he wanted, the brides.

"Never too full for adoring men with a more cultured and civilized air in this wild land." His hand tightened on her back, almost in warning.

"We've gone over this. I have yet to see the inn you claim to be building. We have an agreement with the Gallaghers, and we'll honor it. If you wanted to participate, perhaps you should have invested the needed funds rather than attempting to steal from your cousins."

"I am no thief." Miles glared at Lizzie. His lips curled into a threatening snarl. The intensity of his anger stunned her into silence. She'd pushed him too far and made a formidable foe in the process. He leaned closer, and she could smell his breath, a combination of whiskey and cigars. Repulsed, she attempted to pull back, but he held her steady.

"You think the Gallaghers are so wonderful. Let me warn you, Lizzie. Their carnal desires are warped. A lady like you would best stay away for fear of being debauched by their depravity. Sharing dance partners isn't all they share."

She shivered at the menace in his eyes. Herbert had preferred depraved activities, though with other women., but at times he'd attempted to elicit her participation in his cruel perversions. She'd



resisted, but her defiance earned his retaliation in other ways. Had he lived, she feared what might have happened, not just to her, but her sisters as well.

Miles Petty reminded her of a younger version of her husband, a realization that alarmed her. She'd best tread lightly around the man. His claims regarding the Gallaghers unsettled her, though she didn't believe a word from his mouth.

"I'll be by for tea tomorrow at one in the afternoon." Miles didn't ask, he told.

She bristled, ready to give him the dressing down he deserved. *Tread lightly be damned.*

"She won't be meeting you for tea tomorrow or any other day." Gage smoothly cut in on Miles.

Miles's eyes flicked to the Gallagher crew standing nearby, every one of them with fists clenched at his sides, legs braced apart, jaws rigid, and chests puffed out. Knowing he was seriously out-numbered, Miles acquiesced to Gage's demand. Lizzie suspected the Pettys preferred to do their fighting under the cover of night rather than through up-front confrontations.

Miles bowed low to Lizzie. "It was a pleasure, Lizzie. I'll be calling on you."

"Like hell you will." Gage's hand splayed across her back. He blocked her from Miles's view and whisked her away.

Lizzie regarded Gage through lowered lashes. She'd not seen this protective side of him. He might be quiet and shy, but the same strength ran through him that ran through his older brother, just not as obviously.

"Stay away from him," Gage ground out through gritted teeth.

Borrowing a page from Amelia's book, Lizzie smiled sweetly at him and batted her eyelashes. "I'm not your property or your brothers' property, regardless of the agreement we signed."

Gage's next words came out more cajoling. "Lizzie, Miles is a dangerous man with few scruples. You'd be wise to keep your

distance.”

“Miles said the same thing about Logan and you.”

Gage’s eyes lit with an angry fire. So the man had a temper. He wasn’t all composed and unflappable. He held Lizzie in an iron grip as they danced woodenly around the room. She stared at his shirt, afraid to look into those unfathomably blue eyes of his.

“I think it’s time I escort you back to the Cedar Plank. Are you ready?” He refused to look at her.

“Yes, I’m ready.” She followed him into the night. The earlier clouds had given way to a spectacular full moon and star-filled evening. An owl hooted in the distance, while frogs croaked nearby. Water lapped on the shores of the bay.

Lizzie paused and took in the beauty. Gage stood beside her, hands in his pockets, and seemed to relax a little.

“It’s so beautiful here when it’s not raining.” Lizzie breathed deeply.

Gage nodded. “I never get tired of this. It makes all the gray, wet days worth it.” He reached for her hand and entwined his big fingers with hers. He steered her down to the shoreline instead of to the inn. They strolled in silence along the sandy beach. The stately cedars stood sentinel along the water’s edge. The calm water reflected the light of the moon.

“I can see why you’d think that.” She took it all in. This place so different from Boston had started to feel like home. Despite the relentless rain, monstrous slugs, and lack of civilization, Lizzie had developed an affinity for Bachelor Bay. Days like this one made her forget all the gray ones.

Gage stopped under a crooked Madrona tree with iridescent red bark. He turned to her, his handsome face earnest with concern. “I’m sorry, Lizzie. I’m furious at Miles, but I took it out on you.”

“Your two families aren’t particularly fond of each other.”

Gage laughed. “That’s an understatement. The Pettys cheated my parents out of a large amount of money and land. We don’t forgive

too easily. They can't be trusted. Miles figures if he can drive us out of business, he'll cheat us out of the remainder."

"He's a ruthless man."

"That he is." Gage smiled wryly. "Even worse, he's underhanded and shift."

He tilted his face downward. The moon cast shadows on his angular features. His blue eyes searched hers, as if he expected to find the answer written on her face. Her heart thumped in her chest as his face moved to within inches of hers. She held her breath and waited in anticipation. She wanted him to kiss her, to feel his lips on hers. She wanted to know what it felt like to be kissed by a man who attracted her instead of repulsed her. He smelled of soap and fir needles. So appropriate for a man who made his living from timber.

He hesitated, his shyness returning. "Do you mind if I kiss you?"

"I don't mind." Her voice came out in a raspy whisper.

Logan's lips brushed across hers and came to rest against her neck. She shuddered at the feel of his warm breath on her skin. His arms tightened around her waist, pulling her closer to his body. The muscles in his chest flexed against her breasts. His hips pressed against hers. The hardness between his legs gave evidence of his arousal. Obviously the scarcity of women in Port Steele made any woman desirable. God knew under normal circumstances, she'd never attract the attention of two such virile and attractive men.

At one time, Lizzie would have melted from embarrassment and shame. This Lizzie was no longer an innocent young girl. Her virtue was tarnished and no longer intact, but he did not know that. No one did but her sisters, and no one would know.

Feeling like a tart yet unable to control her body, she rubbed her hips against his. He groaned in her ear. His mouth rained kisses on her neck. His strong hands molded her to him. Unbidden feelings surged through her, strange, new feelings. She'd gone from frigid—according to her departed husband—to brazen with one touch of this man's lips.

He turned his head to study her mouth. His clear blue eyes glowed with desire. She'd seen desire in its more deviant form, seen its abhorrent effects and demands. She'd observed forbidden acts when Herbert forced her to watch his dalliances with other women and shuddered to realize the only thing that had spared her had been her undesirability. Gage's desire didn't repel her. Instead, his kisses, his touch, swept her along like a Port Steele rainstorm. Her good sense deserted her. Her inhibitions battled with her yearning to satisfy her cravings. She wasn't a pure woman. The normal barricades for a lady didn't exist for her as she'd been with a man before. She'd suffer little repercussions by dallying with Gage, other than her own self-respect and possibly his.

Her analysis ground to an abrupt halt when Gage's heavenly mouth settled on hers. He exerted a soft, insistent pressure against her lips, warm and moist. One hand weaved through the strands of her hair and loosened it from Hattie's intricate hairstyle. Holding the back of her head, he held her in place while his mouth moved against hers.

"Open your mouth," he whispered, his breath hot against her lips.

Lizzie didn't understand. Herbert had hated kissing. But then once he'd determined he could not get an erection when in her presence, he'd confined his interest in her to cruel words and forcing her to watch how other women excited him. She did not understand why she could arouse a man like Gage, when she couldn't a lecherous older man. But then, her experience with such things was limited. A lady never discussed fornication—didn't even say the word out loud—and her mother had been a lady descended from a gentile family in England.

"Lizzie, open your mouth," Gage repeated.

Lizzie opened her mouth. To her surprise, Gage's tongue slipped past her teeth and touched her tongue. She froze, not certain how to react, what to do.

"Relax." His muffled voice spoke into her mouth. He ran his tongue over her teeth, across her tongue, inside her mouth.

Lizzie closed her eyes and lost herself in the feel of this strong man performing this intimate gesture. She imitated his movements, tentatively touching her tongue to his. He gripped her tighter and moaned. Encouraged, she slipped her tongue into his mouth.

“Liz, what you do to me.” Pulling back, he stared into her eyes. She looked away, fearing he read too much, saw too much. Guilt assaulted her, surprising her with its intensity. He didn’t know. He believed her to be an innocent.

She was anything but innocent.

His mouth came back down on hers, stronger this time, more demanding. The rugged edge of desire bombarded her senses and swept away her misgivings. If he threw her over his shoulder and carted her off to the woods, she wouldn’t protest.

Except...

Then he’d know. He’d know what a fraud she was. A liar.

“Gage, stop.” She pushed at his chest and separated their bodies. He shook his head, attempting to focus. Shame spread across his face.

“Lizzie, I’m sorry. I got carried away. I don’t know what came over me.”

She did. The same thing that had come over her.

And it could not happen again.

## Chapter 5

*Lizzie's Journal, July 1, 1864*

*Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Preparations for a festive Fourth of July are in the works. While the unpredictable weather puts a damper on our enthusiasm at times, when the sun comes out, it's all worth it. Never have I seen a more beautiful place, even in paintings of foreign places.*

*Miles Petty surprised Olivia with a box of the latest books from back east. She rewarded his efforts with a peck on the cheek and a painting of his mountain. The Gallaghers and Pettys each own their own mountains and log large tracts of land. Regarding the tension between the cousins, I understand if either group fails to maintain a successful lumber business, the other gains the assets. Competition is stiff, and the brides are stuck in the middle of the tug of war. I've avoided contact with the Pettys. They disturb me, and I can't help but worry I may regret having angered Miles.*

*Mr. Farrier continues to be a disturbing presence, and his apparent friendship with Constance and Miles worries me. Attempting to elicit information from Lucy proved futile for once.*

\* \* \* \*

For the next few weeks, Lizzie's inclination to avoid contact with men clashed with her attraction to the two oldest Gallagher brothers.

Gage stepped up his efforts to court her, bringing her wild flowers, escorting her to church services, and community socials.

Logan kept his interest more subtle, but she'd be a fool to miss the hot looks he cast her way as he and his men worked on improvements to the old inn.

How she'd gotten in this position, she hadn't a clue. Men had never paid her any mind before. Even her late husband had preferred her younger sisters until Lizzie intervened and offered herself, rather than sacrifice Olivia and Amelia. She'd caught the lecherous gleam in the old man's eye, witnessed his disregard for others, and knew as the strongest of the sisters, she'd be best equipped to deal with the man. Her uncle didn't care which one he married off first and was glad to rid himself of the old maid. He wanted the three girls out from underfoot so he'd be free to exploit their inheritance in the form of the family business and assets.

The two Gallagher brothers interest perplexed her.

In an attempt to avoid Gage and Logan, not to mention the bothersome Mr. Farrier, Lizzie toiled in the garden with Patience and in the kitchen with Hattie. Constance looked down her nose at the sad state of Lizzie's hands. Lizzie preferred rough hands to Constance's rougher tongue.

As Lizzie knelt over a particularly stubborn weed, the hairs prickled on the back of her neck. She sensed someone behind her. Rising to her feet, she turned to address the gawker. Every muscle in her body stiffened at the sight of Mr. Farrier.

"Miss Prescott." Mr. Farrier spoke with the smooth Boston accent of a well-educated man. His fine suit hung on his tall, lean frame. Sharp brown eyes assessed her, as if dissecting her every weakness. Lizzie fought the urge to squirm under his astute gaze.

"I'm afraid we haven't been introduced." The man opened the gate in the picket fence and stepped to within a few feet of Lizzie. Not caring if she appeared rude, Lizzie turned away. The man gripped her arm and spun her back around.

"I'm Winston Farrier at your service, ma'am." Winston bowed low.

"It's rude to stare at a lady, Mr. Farrier." Lizzie lifted her chin in defiance.

"But then we both know you're no lady, now are you, Mrs. Stein?"

Lizzie attempted to yank away from his tight hold on her arm, but he squeezed harder. Turmoil erupted inside her.

"You're hurting me," she whimpered as tears rose unbidden in her eyes.

"Am I? What a pity." His cruel smile reminded her of her uncle. "Do the Gallaghers know one of their virgin brides is a widow? A widow who may very well have murdered her own loving husband."

Murdered her own husband? Her uncle must be spreading such a story to force her to return to Boston, possibly in chains. Lizzie's stomach lurched from a mixture of fear and revulsion. She'd underestimated Uncle Robert, a huge mistake on her part.

"You have me confused with someone else, sir. Please unhand me. You're hurting me." Lizzie's shaky voice betrayed her.

"No, I know exactly who you are. You don't remember me, do you?" The man's eyes glittered like those of a wolf preying upon an injured animal.

Lizzie shook her head violently. "I have never met you."

"Perhaps not, but I know you. I did bookkeeping for your parents at one time when I was much younger."

Lizzie pulled away and ran around the corner of the inn. Once out of sight, she wretched in the bushes, emptying her stomach of its lunch and breakfast.

When she straightened, Patience stood behind her, wringing her hands. "Are you well?"

"No, I am not. Something has unsettled my stomach."

"Or someone. Mr. Farrier perhaps?" Patience's tone indicated concern, not nosiness.

Lizzie glanced around the area but didn't see anyone else.

"If you're concerned about Constance and Lucy, they're



picnicking with the Petty's."

"Thank goodness."

"What did he say to upset you?"

"It's a private matter."

Patience nodded. "I understand. We all have our private matters."

Lizzie sighed. "Some more than others."

\* \* \* \*

Avoiding another confrontation with Mr. Farrier, Lizzie holed up inside the inn and tidied up the parlor. Hattie joined her and watched with knowing eyes. Disturbing as she found the timber buyer, her growing attraction to Gage and Logan was just as worrisome. She pleased herself every night, imagining one or both men touching her in private places, doing unspeakable things to her. Her need for them built to a fevered pitch until she feared she'd bed either one or both at a crook of their fingers. Her disgraceful thoughts shamed her, yet she could not control her lustful imagination. Perhaps, her days with Herbert eroded her sense of decency.

Hattie entered the parlor and poured a glass of whiskey. She downed it with one gulp and licked her lips. If Lizzie continued her current direction, her future may well be as a fallen woman like Hattie. Perhaps even worse if her uncle achieved his goals, she'd be rotting in a prison for a crime she didn't commit.

"Which one are you favoring, Lizzie?" Hattie asked with her typical frank character.

Shaking her head, Lizzie turned her attention to Hattie and faked ignorance. "I'm not certain what you mean." Lizzie plumped the cushions on the settee and brushed some lint from the arm of a chair.

"Oh, but you do. Both Logan and Gage are vying for your attention." Hattie followed her around the room, her skirts swished with each step.

"We are acquaintances, nothing more." Except for Gage's

incredible kisses on one moonlit night and the hungry looks cast by Logan.

Hattie threw back her head and laughed. "Honey, I've been around the block. I know the story. Now if it were me, I wouldn't bother choosing. I'd have them both."

Lizzie's hand shot over her mouth, and she gasped. Hattie couldn't know the disgraceful thoughts Lizzie had been entertaining.

"Scandalous, isn't it?" Hattie snorted, not the least bit phased by the inappropriate content of their conversation.

"It's what I've come to expect from you, Hattie."

"You mean I can't shock you anymore?" Hattie poked Lizzie's side, as if they shared a private joke.

"You still shock me, but I do expect it."

"Well, propriety is overrated. Around here, you can indulge in a few fantasies, and no one will be the wiser."

"Do you indulge?"

Hattie's secretive smile gave nothing away. "We're talking about you with Gage." Hattie raised both eyebrows. "And with Logan."

"I can't have either of them, let alone both of them." Lizzie sighed in misery.

Hattie's red lips turned down into a frown, and she grew serious. "Walk with me. It's rare for it to be so warm early in the summer. Let's get out of here and talk."

Lizzie agreed, eager to escape the confines of the inn and all the prying eyes, including her nosy sisters.

A few minutes later, the two women strolled down a wooded path covered with moss and flanked by huge cedar trees and native ferns. The sun peeked through the limbs of the trees, warming the cold, damp earth.

"Tell me your problems, child. You can trust old Hattie. Nothing surprises me, and I will keep your confidence, unlike our loose-lipped Lucy. Some day that girl will regret her gossiping." Hattie linked her arm in Lizzie's and waited with her characteristic patience. "Tell me

what has you so troubled with two luscious men in your life.

“It’s all so complicated.” Lizzie sighed, a tendril of sadness and longing entwined her heart.

“It doesn’t have to be. This is a rugged, lawless land. We make our own laws, based on what’s fair and kind.”

Lizzie needed a sympathetic ear. No one knew the hell she’d been through at the hands of Herbert Stein and Uncle Robert. Not even her sisters, who’d be riddled with guilt. “I’ve misrepresented myself, and I’m afraid they’ll ship me back to Boston if they find out.”

“In what manner?”

“I’ve been married before, and I am not an innocent.”

Hattie considered Lizzie’s words and cast no judgment. “I fail to see the problem unless your husband is still your husband.”

“He is dead.” Lizzie spoke matter-of-factly, as she harbored no good feelings toward Herbert.

“I’m sorry.”

“No need to be. He was an unkind old man.”

“Ah, an old man. But you are a widow and available to remarry, so I’m not understanding your issue.”

“The Gallaghers insisted the brides be pure and unsullied ladies.”

Hattie snorted. “I considered their requirements to be ludicrous at the time, but Logan is a stubborn man. He didn’t want baggage or issues accompanying the women he’d funded to come here. Ridiculous. There isn’t a person alive without baggage.”

“But it was their money and their right to establish the requirements.”

Hattie nodded. “I reckon you are correct.”

“So you see, I have a problem. I have baggage.”

“Your husband, what happened to him?”

“He’s dead.” Lizzie launched into the entire sordid story, starting with her most recent concerns regarding Mr. Farrier and whether or not he might have been sent by her uncle and ending with her marriage to Herbert.

Certainly, she'd only lain with the man a few times, yet none of his attempts to consummate the marriage succeeded. He could not achieve an erection because her appearance was not comely enough. Besides, her husband had preferred his women more submissive and pliable, another quality she lacked. Instead, he treated her with cruelty. Herbert capitalized on every opportunity to demonstrate to her how women were merely possessions and had no voice in a man's world. In the last months of his life, he forced her watch his vulgar acts with other women. During the last of those acts, he'd died while being pleased by two harlots.

"So you see," Lizzie spoke quietly, "if Herbert had lived, he would have bent or broken my spirit. I will not be controlled by another man, nor be a party to a deviant lifestyle."

Hattie poured another drink and considered Lizzie's words. "Logan is an understanding man if you're honest with him."

"He doesn't seem the least bit understanding to me."

"You don't know him like I do, but you need to tell him the truth and soon, or he may not be so forgiving."

"He'll ship me back, and I can't go back there."

"No, he won't, but he does expect you to uphold your end of the agreement. You're here to find a man."

"I don't want a man, any man. And no man will want me."

"Honey, all women want a man or two." Hattie winked at her and laughed a deep, throaty laugh. And as far as you're concerned, it appears both Logan and Gage have set their sights on you."

"They won't want me. I—I—am soiled, and I am not desirable. They only want a woman, a willing woman, and they've instinctually perceived my indecent thoughts." Lizzie swiped at a tear, which fell unbidden down one cheek.

Hattie frowned. For once, she seemed at a loss for words. She stood and paced the room, her ample bosom bobbing up and down.

Lizzie watched, helpless and frustrated. "So you see my dilemma. If I married, the man I married would discover I am impure, most

likely on our wedding night. He'd be furious. To make matters worse, he will tire of my dull looks and strong personality. I am incapable of satisfying a man."

Shaking her head, Hattie stopped, pursed her lips, and bent to pluck a red wildflower. "Honey, it doesn't take much to satisfy a man. Being a woman in most cases is enough."

"Not for me." Despair overwhelmed Lizzie.

Hattie looked at her as if she must be daft in the head. "Regardless, Mr. Farrier must be dealt with. Logan must be told. He'll protect you." She tucked the flower behind her ear.

"Protect me? He'll ship me back or worse, throw me out onto the streets to fend for myself."

"Logan has more compassion than he's given credit for." Hattie dabbed at the corners of her painted mouth with a handkerchief.

"I don't have your faith in him or any man." Lizzie hugged herself.

"Honey, he's one of the few men I'd ever place my trust in. That's saying a lot. Would you be more comfortable if I spoke with Gage?"

Lizzie nodded, though neither man presented the best option, they appeared to be her only options.

## Chapter 6

*Lizzie's Journal, Afternoon of July 1, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*I do not regret telling Hattie about my past and my concerns with Mr. Farrier. I do regret we were not more vigilant about being overheard. After returning from our walk, Hattie requested I stay in my room while she handled the situation. I have come to value her wise counsel despite her outward appearances.*

*I am certain Mr. Farrier is somehow working with my uncle to obtain the deed to my parent's land and business, which I have in my possession. He will not get it, as my parents' bloodshed will not have been in vain. Nor will I endanger my sisters in the process. I am not surprised Uncle Robert has accused me of being a murderer when he most certainly murdered my parents for their holdings.*

*I hope Hattie is back soon for I am sick with worry.*

\* \* \* \*

Gage walked into the room, followed by Logan. Hattie had requested his presence, not Logan's. Yet, one look at the stubborn set of Logan's jaw, and Gage knew Logan wasn't going anywhere.

As if uncertain she should have this discussion in front of both men, Hattie's gaze flicked from one to the other.

"It's about Lizzie."

"What about her?" Concern slid through Gage.

Logan frowned and settled his big frame into a chair. Gage sat

next to Hattie.

“She’s in a bit of trouble.”

“I knew she was hiding something. I could just feel it. Is she escaping from the law?” Logan propped his feet on the short table in front of him and crossed his arms over his broad chest. Hattie patted his shoulder. “Ah, Logan, if only I was twenty-five years younger. But shame on me for thinking such thoughts. This isn’t about me, it’s about dear, sweet, tormented Lizzie.”

“What kind of trouble?” Gage leaned forward in his seat. The depth of his feelings surprised him.

“She’s afraid you’ll ship her back to the East Coast if you find out.”

Logan opened his mouth, appearing ready to dress Hattie down. She silenced him with a withering look. “If I tell you, you must promise she can stay here.”

“I’ll make no such promise. She signed a legally binding agreement. If she falsified it, I’m within my rights to send her packing.”

Gage glared at Logan and ignored his brother’s words. “We agree to let her stay.”

“We do not agree.”

“We do,” Gage insisted. The brothers exchanged a look. For a moment, Gage feared bloodshed. Then Logan softened, slightly.

“If she means that much to you, brother, I’ll concede.”

“She does.” Gage admitted the truth to himself and them. He addressed Hattie. “Out with it, woman.”

“She’s a widow.”

Gage’s face fell. “She’s not a virgin?” He’d fantasized about initiating her into the rites of sex. He wanted to be her first. He wondered if it changed things between them. He wasn’t certain. She’d been dishonest. He’d had his heart broken once before by a woman who pretended to be something she wasn’t. He’d believed her to be an innocent schoolmarm. In truth, she’d been with every man in town for

money. She'd almost trapped him in what would have been a nightmarish marriage. Because of his naivety with women, he'd never seen her for what she really was. Could that be the case with Lizzie?

Logan's gaze met his. His brother's frown deepened, but he held his tongue.

"She needed to get away from Boston. Her uncle married her off to his dear friend, a revolting old leech. Once the man died, the uncle threatened to give her to the husband's brother. He also planned to marry Lizzie's sisters off to the highest bidder. Coming here was their escape, as the uncle cut off their money. Lizzie feared what would happen to them if they stayed. The uncle and his friends have dark desires."

"Darker than ours?" Logan mused.

Hattie smiled. "In a different way. You two are not cruel. This man and his cronies are. Winston Farrier has been watching her."

"The timber buyer. I knew there was something about that man I didn't like, other than him jerking our chain regarding who'll get his timber contract." Gage's fingers itched to be wrapped around the man's throat.

Logan's eyes darkened. "Why would Farrier take an interest in her?"

"He approached her today, admitted he knew her uncle and insinuated she'd killed her husband. Lizzie believes her uncle wants the deed to her parents' property and business, which she has in her possession. He may be willing to go as far as falsely accusing her to get it."

"She's never going back there. Why doesn't she just give him the deed and wash her hands of him?" Gage fisted his hands. Emotions churned inside him, surprising in their depth and intensity. Perhaps this was love at first sight, a concept he'd previously considered preposterous.

"Her parents were murdered. She suspects the uncle did it to get their assets, but she fled with the one thing he wanted. She'll never



give it to him, not when he caused her parents' death."

Logan nodded. "The bastard doesn't deserve it. He deserves a prison cell."

Typical Logan. He saw the world in black and white. Gage saw it in shades of gray, which he knew was a little unusual, considering his analytical mind. He understood Logan's reaction. He also understood how much safer the three women would be if they conceded the property to the uncle. "What do you propose we do about it, Hattie?" Logan stood and paced the room.

"One of you needs to marry her to keep her safe."

Logan stopped and both brothers' eyes met.

"How would that keep her safe?" Gage frowned, not certain about making such a leap.

"Both Mr. Farrier and the uncle are cowards. It's one thing to terrorize an unmarried woman with no man to protect her. Taking on the Gallaghers in their own domain is an entirely different matter."

"You do make sense." Logan leaned against the fireplace and stared at the hearth, deep in thought.

"I need to be the one." Gage said the words before he thought twice, despite how she'd lied to him. He understood her lies somewhat. Even good people lied depending on their circumstances. Desperation did that to a person.

"No need to be gallant, Gage. I'll marry the woman. I have better defenses against a manipulative woman than you."

"Are you implying I'm weak?"

"Not in the least. I'm implying you are more susceptible to a woman's charms, and I'm much more jaded about such matters."

"No, I insist. It must be me." Even as he spoke the words, doubts assailed him. His brother knew him well. Gage was vulnerable in matters of the heart.

Logan picked up a fireplace poker and tapped it on the stone hearth. "I just hope you know what you're doing. If she lied to us about one thing, she won't hesitate to lie about others."

"I'm marrying her." Gage didn't hesitate, didn't allow himself room to recant his rash decision. He never made rash decisions. He examined every angle, overturned every stone. Yet, sometimes a man needed to make a decision based on his instincts. This appeared to be one of those times.

He'd save Lizzie from her uncle. Together with his brothers, they'd protect her and her sisters.

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie's mouth fell open. She stared at Gage, beyond shocked, more like dumbfounded. This was Hattie's solution to her problem? She wanted the Gallaghers' assistance, not their name attached to her name. "You want to marry me?"

"Yes, Hattie told us about your dilemma. I know the whole story. I'm willing to offer you my protection."

"But I was dishonest with you."

He shrugged, and she could tell her dishonesty bothered him. "I'll get over it."

"Will you? Really?" She didn't want to trap him into a marriage out of duty.

"I'll try. That's all I can promise." Gage stared at his hands fisted in his lap.

Tears welled up in Lizzie's eyes. She was not a crier. Not one bit, yet this kind, sensitive man had broken down her defenses, blown up the walls, and walked right in like he owned the place. "I can't let you do this."

"Of course you can."

"I'm not pure."

He sighed. "I guess I'll deal with it."

"I'm incapable of satisfying a man."

He looked up and laughed which softened the lines of stress around his eyes. "Who told you that?"

“My husband. I didn’t please him in that way.” Or in any way for that matter.

“He was a fool. From the moment I laid eyes on you, I wanted you, Lizzie. Do you feel the same about me?” He grasped her hands and squeezed them gently.

This was a good man. She knew it as deeply as she knew her uncle and dead husband had been bad men. Yet, there was Logan. Always Logan, hovering in the background on the edge of her thoughts. Her dreams rotated between Logan and Gage, confusing her as to which man she preferred. They were so different, yet so much alike. She feared she’d fallen in love with both of them. Not only was this disturbing, it was downright unacceptable.

“I really like you, Gage, which is exactly why I can’t do this to you.” Her heart ripped open, the pieces scattering so that it could never be made whole again.

“We’ll make a good life together.”

She didn’t doubt his words, but she feared he’d regret his decision. She couldn’t live with the eventualities of his dissatisfaction with her desirability, his scorn at her plain appearance, or his anger with her inability to satisfy him in the bedroom. No, she could not imprison a good man like him.

“I’m sorry. I can’t.” She ran from the room as sobs racked her body.

\* \* \* \*

“She turned you down?” Logan almost laughed. In fact, he would’ve, except his brother’s stricken expression stopped him.

“She said no. ” Gage poured himself a drink and sat in the old, worn chair.

Logan sighed and ran a hand through his wavy dark hair. “You need to work on your female persuasion techniques.”

“I don’t have any techniques. That’s the problem. There’s one

other thing.”

“And what would that thing be?”

“She thinks she can’t please a man. She doesn’t want to trap any man into a passionless marriage.” Gage leaned forward, hands wrapped around the glass and swirled the liquid around.

“What makes her believe she’s frigid?” Logan sat in the chair next to his brother.

“Her husband told her. She also thinks I’ll never be able to forgive her dishonesty.”

“And can you?”

“I don’t know. God knows I have trust issues where women are concerned. We know nothing about her. What if the uncle has good reason to accuse her of murder? What if she’s not what she pretends to be?”

Logan sighed. “We won’t know, will we?”

“No, we won’t. I’ve been a fool in love before. I don’t choose the right women.” Gage sipped the drink, his mouth turned down and his brow furrowed in thought. Logan didn’t have a response to that.

His brother fell in love hard and fast, gave his all to a woman without seeing her faults. Logan, on the other hand, didn’t fall at all. In fact, he believed he was unable to love a woman in the truest sense of the word. He loved their bodies, their softness, their silky hair caressing his naked chest, but he’d never met a woman he wanted in his life outside of a bedroom.

A knock on the door roused both of them from their separate thoughts. A few seconds later, Andrew escorted Marshal Caleb Brock into the room then left without a word.

“Logan. Gage.” Caleb nodded at each man. Logan liked the marshal. He found the man to be honest and fair but also hard-nosed and impossible to intimidate.

“What can we do for you, Caleb?”

“I’ve heard it through the grapevine that one of you might be interested in Lizzie Prescott.”

Logan exchanged a look with his brother. “Would that grapevine happen to be called Lucy Riley?”

“Could be.” Caleb gave away nothing. “Then again I might have gotten my information from a more reliable source.”

“Since when are our dalliances of interest to the local law?” Logan offered the marshal a drink, which the man gladly accepted.

Caleb downed the whiskey and savored it for a moment. “Ah, good whiskey.” He helped himself to another glass. “I’m here off the record.”

“Go ahead.” Gage sat back in the old leather chair and waited.

“Winston Farrier approached me this afternoon. He suggested I might want to investigate Lizzie for the possible murder of her husband in Boston. After I recovered from the shock of one of the brides having been married, I told him that was out of my jurisdiction.

“Mr. Farrier insisted I notify Boston authorities as to her location and lock her up until I hear from them, which could be months. I have no intention of doing such, but I’m concerned as to his next move.” Pausing, the marshal studied both brothers. “Neither of you seem shocked about this news.”

“We’re not.” Logan rose to his feet. He’d never been one to sit on his ass when action was required. Pacing assuaged his frustration somewhat and had become quite the habit. Meanwhile, Gage sat quietly with his head in his hands, folding in on himself like he often did under stress.

“Why don’t you enlighten me?” Caleb poured himself a liberal glassful of whiskey, then he sat on the arm of a chair.

“Off the record?” Logan trusted Caleb in most matters.

“Absolutely. I’m here as a friend tonight, not a marshal. You do both realize I’m taking a risk coming to you with this issue. I may be compromising my impartiality, but I’m willing to take that risk when I see an injustice being done.”

Logan and Gage reiterated the story they’d been told by Hattie complete with Lizzie’s refusal of Gage’s proposal. Caleb considered

their words carefully as he swirled the whiskey around in his glass.

“My concern, gentlemen, begins with the brides and their welfare. Such a story may ruin the integrity of all the women, not to mention endanger the Prescott girls’ lives. I’d hate to see that happen.”

“It could ruin us if the brides returned to Boston unmarried.” Gage seemed to be calculating the loss in his head. “Not only would we be out the money we’ve spent on passage and room and board, but we’d most likely lose several good lumberjacks to the Pettys. We can ill afford to lose one good man and keep up the production schedule to meet our contract commitments. If we reneged on even one of those contracts, we’d go under, and the Pettys would gain the other half of our parents’ land and the sawmill.” Gage’s grim expression said more than his words.

A calculating expression crossed the marshal’s face. “Perhaps it might be revealed Lizzie’s sisters would only make the journey if their widow sister joined them, and you agreed to the terms. Because Lizzie is not an untouched miss, it was understood she would marry a Gallagher, saving the untainted brides for your men.”

Logan stopped pacing and rubbed his chin. “That might work. Why mention the marriage part? We can just say we paid her passage because of her sisters.”

“No one would believe you’d go to that expense for any reason other than the original reason.” Caleb stood to leave. “Think about it, Logan. Once married to the oldest Gallagher and one of the most powerful men in town, the long arm of the Boston law will not attempt to reach her in Washington Territory. Nor do I believe Mr. Farrier will cause any more trouble. He needs your lumber for the expanding market in California and elsewhere.”

Logan almost smiled. “How do you suggest we spread this information?”

“How else? Lucy Riley. Have a conversation within her earshot. That’s all it’ll take.” Caleb shoved his hat on his head. “Good day, gentlemen. I can see myself out.”

The front door clicked shut a few moments later.

“What do you want to do?” Logan studied his brother, not sure where Gage was coming from regarding Lizzie.

Gage crossed the room and stared outside into the dark night. He didn’t speak for a long time. Finally, he turned to his brother. “It’s no secret we both desire her.”

Logan almost smiled. “But it is a secret we don’t mind sharing. In fact, prefer it.” Their appetite for sharing began with a particularly experienced lady they met during a month spent in San Francisco when they were quite young men. Later in this land where women were scarce, sharing became practical and preferable.

Gage shrugged. “It’s worked well for us in the past. But none of those women were Lizzie.”

“Not even close. They were women of vast experience, and our motives for those relationships were purely gratification.” Logan watched his brother, trying to assess where he stood in all this.

“Lizzie would be gratifying.”

“Yes, she would. And much more.” *Try irritating, exasperating, stubborn*—all things that excited Logan. He loved a woman with backbone, one who didn’t acquiesce to his every command. A challenge. Lizzie would be a definite challenge. “But you’re holding back. Do you fear she won’t accept our lifestyle?”

“That’s part of it. I don’t know how I feel about a permanent situation.” Gage’s internal struggle was written across his face.

“Does me marrying her on paper cause you concern?” Logan kept his voice neutral, while inside, his stomach churned in a maelstrom of emotions.

Gage groaned and threw his head against the back of the couch. “Regardless of whether or not it does or doesn’t, she did turn me down.”

“Beyond her personal dilemma with her uncle, from a business standpoint, we can’t afford for her and her sisters, perhaps all the brides, to return to Boston.” Logan’s mind ran through several

scenarios, and he didn't like any of them. Logan dreaded what would happen if she was taken away from them. Their tenuous agreement with the somewhat disgruntled brides could very well disintegrate.

Gage nodded his agreement. "She's a natural leader. Many of the brides look up to her." He stared at Logan as if something had just occurred to him. "Somewhat like you."

Logan frowned and considered his brother's statement. Lizzie and he would be a formidable pair, just what Gallagher Lumber needed to weather all the storms on the horizon.

"If she was sent back to Boston, the remaining brides would be under Constance's control."

"Constance plays us against Steele and the Pettys. She can't be trusted." Gage stared at the ceiling. "At least we can trust Lizzie to keep her word and be a voice of reason with the brides."

"Gage, what if I talk sense into her?" He couldn't let her go. Not to an uncertain future, one where she may very well be railroaded into a prison sentence. She was his perfect match in many ways, and the bane of his existence in others. Yet, losing her was unthinkable.

Gage frowned, obviously considering his brother's words. He leaned forward and rested his arms on his thighs. "In what way?"

"Since we're hoping to introduce her to the pleasures of multiple partners, I don't see that it matters whose name is on the piece of paper." Though, to Logan it did matter.

"You think she'll accept your offer any more than she accepted mine?"

Logan had seen the hungry looks Lizzie had thrown his way when she thought he wasn't looking. He knew she lusted after him, and he was a very persuasive man. "I think the stakes are high enough that I'm the lesser evil. She truly likes you. Me, she tolerates, but she's sexually attracted to me. And—" Logan smiled, "She doesn't want to lock you in a passionless marriage."

Gage snorted. "We'll show her differently. Teach her to embrace her desires."



Logan rolled his shoulders, attempting to ease the tension. “I believe her situation will change her mind about marriage.”

“If you think you’ll get further than me, you have my blessing.”

“Are you sure? Because if Lizzie is the one woman you imagine being alone with, I won’t pursue her.”

Gage’s jaw worked as he struggled for the words. “I’ve imagined taking her a hundred different ways by myself. Yet, I also imagined watching you pound into her fine ass while I fuck her mouth. I can see our cum on her body, sliding over her nipples, pooling in her belly button. I want to introduce her to all those things we’ve done together with experienced women. I want her to crave the feel of multiple hands and mouths on her body. Hearing her beg for multiple cocks in multiple holes boils my blood and hardens my cock to iron. I want to share her with you. If this is the only way to keep her here and love her together, then I’m okay with your plan.”

“And the possibility she might be hiding more secrets or that she might be a murderess?”

“I think I’ll cross that river when we come to it.” Gage grinned at him. “How the hell do you plan on convincing the opinionated little hellcat?”

“I’ll toss her over my shoulder and hunt down a preacher.”

“Now there’s a persuasive technique.” Gage’s crooked smile sealed the deal.

“It works for me.”

## Chapter 7

*Lizzie's Journal, July 5, 1864*

*Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*The townsfolk put on a large Fourth of July celebration. Whiskey and food abounded. The brides danced all night. I avoided most of the festivities, preferring to help Hattie in the kitchen and avoiding Mr. Farrier, along with Gage and Logan Gallagher.*

*Despite my intention of keeping my distance, I stole glances at Gage and Logan all night. I couldn't stop myself. Turning down Gage's proposal fills me with regret, but I take small comfort in knowing I did the right thing. A good man needs a good woman. He can do so much better than me. Someday when the right woman comes along, he will thank me.*

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie walked through the woods into a sun-drenched clearing surrounded by towering cedars and firs. She paused to pick the wild mountain blackberries growing in abundance near the edge of the forest. The bright sun warmed the earth, but not her heart for it was too heavy with grief and dread. Grief over losing Gage and dread wondering about Mr. Farrier's next move.

A twig snapped behind her, and she stopped and froze. Resisting the urge to run, she turned and stood her ground to face her stalker. Her mind raced through the possibilities. Perhaps her uncle had sent someone to drag her back to Boston. Or Mr. Farrier himself might be

that man. She braced herself as she glimpsed a tall figure in the woods. The man's feet crunched on the forest floor and the brush rustled. She held her breath, while her heart hammered in her chest.

Logan walked from the thick trees. "Lizzie, I've been looking for you."

Lizzie's breath came out in a rush as relief flooded her body. "You have?"

"You sound surprised." His mouth tilted up in a slight smile, but his eyes remained dark and intense. His voice sent tingles through her spine. He moved closer.

"I'm guessing you're not happy with me." Lizzie raised her chin, a subtle message to him that he didn't intimidate her.

"Should I be? You turned down my brother's proposal." His brown eyes stripped her defenses bare.

"He deserves better. I've been married before. I'm damaged goods." She gripped the handle of the basket tighter. Logan did strange things to her. While Gage made her feel safe and protected, Logan did the opposite. He was dangerous in a dark, unnerving manner. He excited her, kindled flames inside her, forbidden flames. Her damned adventurous streak craved to know the forbidden secrets his eyes promised.

"You're not damaged to us, Lizzie." Logan's voice dropped low and gentle.

"I'm not a virgin." She fidgeted with the basket handle.

"That doesn't matter. You might have turned down my brother's proposal, but you won't turn down mine."

Lizzie balked, not believing what she heard. "You call that a proposal, Mr. Gallagher?"

"Yes, I guess I do."

"You're a hopeless romantic." Sarcasm crept into her voice, but she tempered it with a small smile. The corner of Logan's mouth twitched in response.

"The answer is this same as the one I gave your brother."

“Well, circumstances have changed.”

Lizzie stiffened. Her fingers tightened around the basket. “In what way?”

“Mr. Farrier’s taken quite an interest in you to the point of paying a visit to the marshal.”

Lizzie’s throat constricted, making it difficult to talk, but she forced the words out anyway. “Why?”

“He believes you might be a suspect in your husband’s murder and should be detained until the marshal receives word from Boston.”

“Where did you hear this?”

“From the marshal himself. He’s not obligated to arrest you based on a stranger’s recommendation, but the rumor alone may cause unforeseen issues with the brides and their status in Port Steele. You are not what you were represented to be. Once your secret is revealed, concerns regarding the other brides’ integrity will surface. You signed a contract to marry. I intend to hold you to that contract.”

“And if I don’t?”

“I may be forced to return you to Boston. What would happen to your sisters without you here?”

Lizzie backed up a step. She clutched the basket to her chest, paying no heed to the blackberries staining the front of your dress. “I never imagined these troubles would follow me to Port Steele.”

“They did, and now we must act quickly to set everything to rights.”

“How do you propose *we* do that?”

“I have a plan.”

Lizzie listened as Logan outlined his absurd plan. Her head swam with the repercussions of such a plan. “Your idea is unwise. Why don’t you send me back to Boston and be done with me?”

“You’re in danger. I protect what is mine. It’s that simple.”

“I am not yours.” Lizzie stood up straighter, her posture erect and challenging.

He smiled a feral smile, like a wild wolf on the scent of his

helpless prey. "You will be by tomorrow. The plan has already been set in place. Gage and I discussed your woes near the prying ears of Miss Riley. By now over half the town knows your story."

Despite her brave words, defeat settled into her bones. "What do you get out of this?"

His gaze swept up and down her body. "Besides the obvious?"

She swallowed, wished she had something to drink. Her throat was so dry. "Yes, besides the obvious."

"We maintain the integrity of the brides, and you and your sisters remain in Port Steele. You're the brides' liaison. They look up to you. We need your leadership."

She relaxed a little. He'd made this sound like a business deal. That she could do. "It doesn't bother you that I'm not a virgin?"

"Since I've never had a virgin, I wouldn't know what I'm missing." He chuckled, looking much younger than the hard, uncompromising man she'd come to know. "This would be entirely different. You'd be married to a young, vital man in his prime. A man with strong needs. Could you give yourself to me, wholly and completely?"

"I don't know," she whispered. "I don't think I can satisfy your needs. I am not a woman of passion."

"Oh, but you are. You just need the right men."

"Men?" Lizzie choked. Her face flushed with color. Obviously, she'd advertised her lust for both men in ways too obvious, like some harlot.

"Yes, men. I watch you, Lizzie. All the time. You're torn between Gage and me." He moved closer, his body mere inches from hers.

Lizzie kept the basket against her chest to serve as a barrier between them. The promise of a raw, pure, wild coupling charged the air between them. She desperately wanted to see the brawny body underneath his clothes, to run her fingers through his wiry chest hair, to feel something other than her own fingers inside her. What would it be like to have his cock pumping inside her, pulsing life into her body

and her soul? A moan struggled to escape her lips. She silenced it.

“You flatter yourself,” she croaked.

Logan threw back his head and laughed. Sun glinted off his glossy dark hair. She didn’t fool the man one bit. “You don’t have to settle for one man. My brother and I, we’re different.”

“How different?” Lizzie treaded on dangerous, forbidden ground with tentative, yet hopeful, feet.

“We don’t mind sharing with each other.” His dark eyes twinkled with pure devilment.

She gasped and dropped the basket of berries. She retreated several steps, but Logan followed her, staying uncomfortably close, as if testing her courage with his body.

Logan laughed. “You find it scandalous, yet I can see by the light in your eyes you also find it intriguing.”

“I could never.” Or could she? Of course she couldn’t. Such a thing would be immoral, unthinkable, out of the question.

“We wouldn’t force you. You have to want it as much as we do. It’s all your decision. Just know the offer is there. Consider it the same as having two husbands.”

“*Two husbands?*” Lizzie’s head reeled, unable to comprehend his words.

Logan moved closer. “You’re all I think about, Lizzie. I need you as sure as I need to breathe air and drink water.”

“I’m not sure what you mean.” Lizzie backed into the strong trunk of a mammoth tree. Logan advanced on her. Placing his hands on either side of her shoulders, he blocked her escape.

“You want me, too, Lizzie. Admit it.”

Lizzie drew in a shocked breath as Logan’s strong fingers brushed the underside of her breasts through the bodice of her dress. That simple caress wrenched a moan from deep in her throat. His hand crept higher, and he rubbed slow circles around her breast, spiraling in until he stroked her nipple. His mouth tickled her ear. His teeth tugged on her earlobe with a gentle pull. His other hand drifted lower

on her back.

“You like it when I touch you, don’t you?” His hoarse whisper reverberated through her charged body.

“No, I hate it.”

He chuckled. “Ahhh, another deception, Miss Prescott. Do you want me to stop?”

She opened her mouth to say yes, but the words stuck in her throat, and her tongue rebelled and refused to form an intelligible language.

Logan kissed a trail down her neck. He paused to nibble on her exposed collarbone. She should’ve worn the dress with the high neckline instead of this instrument of debauchery. And surely, she was on her way to being a debauched woman.

His mouth descended on hers, and her lips parted, ready for him. Gage kissed with expertise and control. Logan kissed like the man he was. A little rough, on the edge of control, all earthy and strong. He conquered. He took the breath from her lungs. Their tongues mated in wild abandon, demanding, taking. His large hand slid between their bodies. Deftly, his large fingers unbuttoned several buttons on her dress, revealing her one good lace camisole. She whimpered when his mouth separated from hers.

His head dipped low. His silky black hair covered his eyes. He did a most unseemly act and kissed the sensitive skin on her breasts. She groaned even louder than before, the tortured groan of a wanton woman. Still, she didn’t stop him.

Fire burned in her belly and spread between her legs. She clamped her legs together in an attempt to stop the telltale wetness she experienced whenever Logan was near.

Appalled at her inability to stop the man and aroused by his bold advances, her breath came, heavy and ragged. Her partially bared breasts rose and fell as if she’d just slogged through the mud hauling buckets of water.

He tugged at her bodice and pulled it apart, popping the last of the

buttons without a care. Her nipples pressed against the thin material of her camisole. To her astonishment, he pulled the material down and bared one nipple. His mouth followed, and he pressed his lips to her nipple in a most brazen manner and suckled like a baby suckling his mama. But this virile man was no baby and she was no mama. She had no idea men did this for pleasure—until now. His other hand slipped under her bodice, stroking and pinching the opposite nipple.

A small cry escaped her as the pleasure built to a fever pitch. Her control of the situation disappeared like a cat slinking off into the dark night.

She'd no idea a woman could enjoy this as well as a man. Surely, she was a bad woman to allow such things and to enjoy them. Sanity planted a seed in her brain, and she dredged up the strength to push his face away from her swollen nipple.

\* \* \* \*

“Mr. Gallagher, this is most inappropriate.”

Logan almost smiled. It damn sure was, but if he ruined the woman, she'd have no choice but to marry him. And, by God, he wanted to ruin her, over and over again, every last part of her. He also wanted to marry her and keep her here with him.

He smiled his best wolfish smile, the one the ladies loved and couldn't resist. Lizzie was no exception. She squirmed and attempted to put her hands over her bare breasts. He caught her small wrists behind her back in one big hand.

“No, you don't. I like gazing on your assets.”

“It's unseemly.”

“Hmmm. There are those who might agree, but out here, no one will know but you and me. Do you want me to stop?”

“I... I don't know.” The indecision flashed across her face.

Logan released her hands. She immediately covered her breasts. Not taking his eyes off her face, he undid the lacings on his shirt and



pulled it off over his head. She gasped but didn't look away. Her pupils dilated. Her chest rose and fell, as she took short, quick gasps.

"You've see a man's bare chest before."

"My husband's body looked nothing like yours."

He appreciated her honesty. It was one of the things that attracted him. "And how do I look to you?"

He looked down at her and waited.

"Magnificent."

"Why don't you touch me?"

Hesitantly, she removed a hand from her breast and touched the crinkly hair on his chest. He sucked in a breath. She ran her fingers downward, pausing at his nipples to stroke them, imitating what he'd done to her. She stared up at him in wonder. Her hand traced the path of dark hair downward, past his navel to where it disappeared in his trousers.

"Touch me." His strangled voice surprised him. He guided her hand lower, let her feel his arousal. She tried to pull her hand away. He held it steady. "This is what you do to me."

"You—you are hard." She stared up at him, wonder in her eyes.

"That's what happens when a woman arouses a man. How could you not know that?"

"This conversation is most inappropriate." She looked away, embarrassed and pulled her hand away from his crotch.

"So is our state of undress." Claspng her smaller hand in his large one, he helped her stroke his cock. She attempted to pull away, but he didn't allow it.

"Herbert never—He was always limp. He did not desire me."

"Well, obviously I do. Did you never consummate the marriage?"

"He could not. But I am not a virgin."

Logan furrowed his brows. "Explain yourself, madam." Had she slept with other men? Were these more secrets she harbored?

Lizzie tried to get away, but she could not fight his superior strength. He held her easily in place.

Logan placed a finger under her chin and tilted her face upward. "Answer me. As your future husband I must know all your secrets."

"I pleasure myself." Her eyes watered, and a big tear rolled down her cheek.

"What?"

"I put my fingers inside my private area and do forbidden things to myself, so I am not a virgin."

"That's it?" Logan stifled his laughter. He must take her admission seriously, though he found it amusing and endearing.

She nodded, her face crimson with shame.

Logan cradled her face in his hands. She'd become even more precious to him in these past few minutes. She was an innocent in many ways and a virgin. "Lizzie, you are still a virgin. Using your fingers does not take away your virginity."

"It doesn't?"

"No. It does not." His lowered his voice. His heart flooded with unfamiliar emotions for this naïve woman.

Logan placed her hand back on the bulge in his pants.

"I didn't know it could get so large."

"When a man wants a woman, his cock grows in size and hardness."

"But this large?" Her eyes met his in wonder.

"Yes. I'm not an old man, Lizzie."

"Is it painful?"

He chuckled. "It can be if I don't get relief."

Logan rubbed her hand up and down on his cock, but he needed more. Lots more. Maybe a lifetime more. She squirmed one more time and made a feeble attempt to pull her hand away. He held it steady. Her creamy white breasts rose and fell. He released her hand and chuckled when she yanked it away from his crotch.

"Remove your dress," he ordered through gritted teeth as he wrestled for a semblance of control, temporary at best.

Lizzie raised her eyes to his face. With shaking hands, she pulled

off the dress.

“The petticoats, too. Everything must go. You should only be wearing what god gave you to wear when you came into this world.”

He watched as she removed the remainder of her clothes. He followed suit. He heard her sharp breath as she looked upon his cock, standing tall and proud and ready to do his bidding. It'd been a long time since he'd had a woman as innocent as her. Plus, his cock was larger than most, so large it initially caused discomfort to some women. He needed to take it slow. His penis twitched in anticipation. Everything within him wanted to throw her onto a bed of leaves and ram deep inside her, but he couldn't. Not this time. Maybe later. Maybe when he and Gage took her together. For now, he'd take her alone. What he had in mind required time and patience. Eventually, she'd beg for what she denied herself now.

\* \* \* \*

Shivering, and not from the temperature, Lizzie faced Logan. Her gaze anchored on his cock. She'd never in her life seen one so large. But then, she'd only seen her husband's limp cock.

A gentle smile softened Logan's rugged features. Snatching his shirt with one hand, he backed Lizzie against a stump. Covering the stump with his shirt, he placed both hands on her waist and lifted her onto the stump. Kneeling down, he exerted pressure on her thighs. Lizzie pressed them closer together.

“Relax, Liz, open up for me.”

Tight with fear and uncertainty, Lizzie loosened her thighs slightly and closed her eyes, afraid to look. Logan spread her open. Cool air touched her privates. Logan's hot breath warmed her.

“What? What are you doing?” She attempted to scoot backward, but he held her tight. His mouth touched her in a most intimate way. His tongue slipped inside her wet slit, delving deeper and deeper. He pushed it inside her wet walls, swirled it around. His mouth sucked on

her. He ate her like a starving man ate his last meal. His teeth scraped her delicate nub, causing her to pant like an animal in heat. She tilted her hips, ground her crotch into his face. He lapped at her juices, speared her with his tongue, drove her beyond ecstasy.

Lizzie threw her head back and buried her fingers in his unruly hair. Cries of pleasure vibrated through her body. Foreign emotions took her beyond the bounds of her mortal body. She flew, she soared, she shuddered. Now she tasted true rapture, and her gluttonous body wanted more.

Logan drew back, his eyes glazed with desire.

“You’re mine, Lizzie. We’ll marry tomorrow.”

He helped her to her feet, pulled on his clothes and left her to dress in private.

Clutching her dress to her body, she watched him walk away.

Tomorrow, she would marry Logan Gallagher because the alternative would be unbearable.

## Chapter 8

*Lizzie's Journal, July 10, 1864*

*Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*I'll marry Logan Gallagher in the morning. I can't help but imagine what it'll be like to lay with a young, strong man like Logan, to be intimate with him. What will he expect of me? Will I live up to those expectations? What if he goes limp at the sight of me like Herbert did?*

*Tomorrow, I'll marry Logan, a man who makes my body feel forbidden things, yet I also have feelings for his brother. How can I marry one man and want two men?*

\* \* \* \*

The wedding lasted all of five minutes, the most life-changing five minutes of Lizzie's life.

The no-frills ceremony consisted of basic, no-nonsense vows, a deep, bent-over-the-arm kiss, and backslapping and congratulations all around.

Except from the Pettys. They sat in the back of the small church, legs sprawled carelessly in front of them and belligerent scowls carved on their faces.

Lucy and Constance had sat in the front pew, heads together, deep in whispered conversation. Olivia had stood at Lizzie's side while Gage stood at Logan's. The townspeople and lumberjacks crammed

the small church to the rafters, all intent on witnessing the marriage of the first Bachelor Bay bride.

Lizzie and Logan stayed at the party afterward long enough for a few dances and a toast. After which, Logan swung Lizzie into his strong arms and carried her to his cedar-planked house. The revelers followed behind them, hooting and banging pots and pans.

Kissing the breath from her lungs, Logan carried her over the threshold, kicked the door shut, and slid the latch home. Holding her close, he toted her up the stairs and laid her gently on his big bed.

Lizzie stared around the room, wide-eyed. Simple but masculine, an elk hide adorned the floor near a rock fireplace. A simple quilt covered the brass bed. The entire house lacked a woman's touch, a shortcoming she'd work to rectify.

"You share this house with your brothers?"

A smile tugged at the corners of Logan's generous mouth. "I do, but they're not staying here tonight." Logan kept his back to her as he lit a couple candles on the small table near the window.

"Oh." Lizzie didn't know whether to feel relief or fear. She knew the drill. She slid off the bed and quickly removed her dress but not her undergarments while his back was turned. She lay down on her back and waited for it to happen. *Just lay still and let him do it. It'll be over soon.* After that he wouldn't bother her for a while, assuming she aroused him enough for his cock to be hard.

Logan unbuttoned his white dress shirt and shrugged out of it, leaving it on the floor where it fell. Muscles rippled across his tanned back. His broad shoulders flexed as he stretched and clasped his hands over his head.

Lizzie held her breath as he unbuttoned his pants and stepped out of them. Next he pulled down his drawers. Long, muscled legs led upward to—Lizzie gasped. Wicked thoughts ran through her mind as she fixated on his bare behind. Even his butt cheeks were muscular and well-formed.

Logan turned. One dark eyebrow lifted as he noticed her position on the bed. His dark eyes crinkled in the corners as he regarded her assessing gaze. "Like what you see?"

She blushed and fanned herself, fixing her eyes on a spot near his throat, afraid to look any lower. "I didn't know a man's body could look like yours."

"Honey, you've obviously seen the wrong type of man naked."

"It's not like I have an entire army with which to compare."

"I'm glad of that." He chuckled. "Look at me. All of me."

"I am."

"No, you're not. You're avoiding looking at a certain part of me that is quite pleased to see you."

He walked to the edge of the bed, only a foot from her and took her hand in his hard, calloused one. Tugging on her hand, he placed it on his cock. Lizzie tried to pull back, but he held her. She stared at his member. "I'm still overwhelmed that it can get so big."

"This one does, especially around you."

"I really did that to you? I didn't know I was capable of exciting a man to such—such proportions."

"Well, my proportions are not the norm for most men. Wrap your fingers around my cock, honey."

Hesitant to do so, Lizzie touched the silky tip with her index finger. He drew in a sharp breath but held still. She traced a line almost to his pubic hair.

"Squeeze it, darling."

Closing her eyes for a moment, Lizzie wrapped her fingers around the base.

"That's it. Now move your hand up and down. Prime my pump."

"It doesn't look like it needs much priming."

He laughed, a deep, hearty laugh. "So true."

She slid her hand up and down his rigid shaft. He groaned and buried his fingers in her hair.

“Faster. Harder. You won’t hurt me.” His upper lip pulled back, almost in an animal snarl.

Abandoning her qualms, Lizzie took her task seriously, pushing beyond her embarrassment and inexperience. She reveled in the hardness of his huge member. Heavy balls hung beneath his cock. Curious, she touched them with her free hand. His body jerked.

“Did I hurt you?”

“Hell, no. Keep it up.” Beads of sweat stood out on his handsome face.

Lizzie cupped his balls in her hand, fascinated, she rolled them around then gently squeezed.

“Damnation, woman. You’ll send me to an early grave. Logan kneeled on the bed and pulled her closer to his body.

“Is that bad?”

“No, it’s good. Very good.” Logan applied pressure to the back of her head. She resisted, confused about his intentions.

“Kiss the tip.”

“I can’t.”

“Of course you can. There’s no shame in pleasure.”

Licking her dry lips, Lizzie yielded to the pressure of Logan’s hands on her head. Her mouth touched the tip. She tasted a unique male taste, all his.

“Lick the tip.” His spoken order was laced with tenderness.

Her heart swelled in her chest. This big, mountain of a man treated her with respect and concern. How could she resist his requests. Her tongue flicked out and licked the bead of moisture from the head of his penis.

“Oh, damn. That feels so fucking good.” Logan blew out a breath. “Let’s get you a little more comfortable.” He backed up a step, grabbed her under her arms, and lifted her off the bed.

Lizzie stared up at him with a question in her eyes, totally at a loss as to what he wanted and fearing she’d displeased him somehow.



“On your knees. There, that’s a good girl. Open your mouth. Suck on it,” Logan rasped.

Relieved she’d not committed an error, Lizzie did as she was told, fascinated to find herself aroused rather than repelled. Wrapping her long hair around his fist, he leveraged her mouth onto his cock.

“Take me as deep as you can. No pressure. Just do what you’re comfortable with.”

Lizzie gave it a gallant try, managing to take about one-third into her mouth before gagging. He seemed satisfied. He held her head steady and began to move his hips back and forth in rhythm, thrusting his erection in and out of her mouth. She held onto the base and rubbed.

Throwing back his head, Logan groaned. His cock twitched, his balls tightened. With a final guttural growl, his entire body shook. His cum emptied into her mouth. She tried to pull back, but he held her, not letting her move until he’d emptied all of his seed into her mouth.

“Swallow it, honey. You’ll learn to enjoy the experience and the taste.”

Lizzie did and found it wasn’t all that unpleasant. She marveled in the knowledge that she was able to arouse him. She was desirable after all, to the right man.

Chest heaving, sweat pouring from his body, Logan gazed down at her.

“Now it’s your turn, sweetheart. Take off your underclothes.”

With shaking hands, Lizzie undressed while Logan sat on the edge of the bed and watched. His hands dangled between his knees. He pushed his hair off his forehead. She avoided his gaze, ashamed of her wanton behavior, yet knowing she was at his mercy and unable to stop her lustful ways.

Lizzie removed her remaining clothes.

Logan studied her body like a painter studied his model. He grabbed her hands and pulled her to him. She didn’t know if her body pleased him or not.

“Straddle my lap.”

“Are you certain?”

“Honey, I’m damn certain that’s where I want you at first then we’ll improvise depending on whether or not my cock recovers quickly enough.”

The hair on his thighs tickled her bare skin. The wetness between her legs increased, appalling her. She hoped he wouldn’t notice. He seemed too busy ogling her breasts, which were mere inches from his face. She stared at a spot over his shoulder and tried to control her reaction to him, as any lady would.

He shortened those inches to nothing as his mouth covered her nipple. She jerked in surprise when one hand slid behind her back and stroked her buttocks.

Logan read her mind. “Nothing is shameful between us. Remember that, darling.”

She shifted her position on his lap.

“You don’t have a clue what you do to me, do you?” Logan growled and stood, taking her with him. In one swift movement, he whipped around and tossed her on the bed, following her down. His semi-erect cock rubbed her thigh as his hungry mouth feasted on her lips then journeyed lower. Logan rained kisses on her cheeks, nipped and sucked on her neck, surely leaving marks.

Lizzie stiffened underneath him. She squeezed her eyes shut and waited for him to do the thing so it’d be over, and he wouldn’t bother her for a while. Logan sensed the change in her.

“What’s wrong?” He lifted his head. His dark eyes regarded her face.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? Then why are you as stiff as a board of lumber?”

“I don’t want you to think I’m enjoying this.”

“What?” He stared at her incredulously.

“A lady doesn’t delight in a man’s attentions. She tolerates them as her wifely duties.”

“Not in this household. I suppose a lady doesn’t suck a man’s cock, either?”

Lizzie looked away, her face burning.

“But you did and didn’t seem to find it so distasteful.” His big hand clamped on her jaw, forcing her to look into his eyes. Arousal flamed in them. “I don’t care what they taught you where you came from, honey, but around here, I expect my wife to enjoy her wifely duties as much as I enjoy my husbandly duties.”

“And if I don’t?” She challenged him, not entirely liking his overbearing attitude.

“You will, darling, you will.” Logan laughed, low and hungry. He nibbled on her lower lip. “Open your mouth.”

“You’re certainly demanding.”

“Awww, now there’s the feisty Lizzie I’ve come to appreciate.”

Her mouth relaxed, inviting his tongue inside. His tongue glided across her teeth and swept the roof of her mouth. They touched tongues, entwined tongues, and the world exploded, as if all Lizzie’s control disappeared into the mist of a Port Steele night. His lips moved over hers as if he wanted every part of her body and couldn’t decide which piece of the cake to devour next.

Her breasts weren’t big, but Logan seemed to like them as his mouth and fingers worked her already-sensitized nipples. She shuddered when he bit down, the pain merging with pleasure until she wasn’t certain which was which.

His free hand moved between her legs. Instinctively, she clamped her legs together. His hand stilled. He lifted his head, his dark eyes burning not just with lust, but with irritation.

“Never, never, close your legs to me. Never. When we’re like this, you’ll spread your legs wide and welcome my touch. I swear to never hurt you in a manner that doesn’t give you pleasure.”

Confused by his words, and not willing to let a man order her around ever again, Lizzie stiffened. “I’ll do as I please. No man owns me.”

Logan laughed, his smile feral, like a wild wolf stalking his mate. "In this bed, I own you, and you'll love it that way."

Lizzie shook her head. In a movement so swift and strong, he flipped her over onto her stomach and laid the flat of his hand on her bare behind with a resounding smack. The breath whooshed out of Lizzie along with a startled exhalation. "That's one," he stated with firm conviction.

Pinning her to the bed with a hand on her neck, Logan spanked her again, this time a little harder. "Two," he counted.

"Damn you. What the hell are you doing?" She struggled to free herself.

Logan snorted. "Damn you? Is that anyway to talk to your loving husband?"

"Loving? There's nothing about this that has to do with love."

*Smack. Smack. Smack.* The next three came in quick succession. Lizzie's juices flowed with excitement. Her reaction ashamed her. Her ass might have burned with each strike of his hand, but her body trembled with desire and anticipation. He rubbed her sore ass, bent down, and soothed it with long laps of his tongue.

"You're one sexy woman, Lizzie Gallagher. One sexy woman. Gage and I are going to show you an erotic world you've never dreamed of in your most debauched dreams and take you places you'll never want to leave." He removed his hand from her neck. "Roll over. Unless you want another spanking."

She did. Kneeling on the bed, he looked down at her. The spanking had hardened his cock again.

"Spread your legs."

She did.

"Wider."

She did some more.

Moving between her legs, he ran his hands up her thighs. His fingers combed her pubic hair and slid to her most private place.

Meeting her gaze, his smirk told it all. “You liked my little spanking, didn’t you, Liz?”

She shook her head.

“There’s more punishment for lying. Did you know that?”

Lizzie didn’t respond. His fingers teased her wet opening, never quite giving her what she craved. She lifted her hips.

“You want something?”

Lizzie bit her lip. The pad of his thumb stroked her inner thigh.

“If you want something, you have to articulate it. How else is a man to know?”

“I’m scared, but I want to feel you inside me.” She panted in short, excited breaths.

“You never have to be scared of me, Liz. I might push your limits, but I’ll never go any further than you want me to go.”

Lizzie stared up at him. “I want this. I want to consummate our marriage.”

“It’d be my pleasure, Mrs. Gallagher. And yours. I promise.”

\* \* \* \*

Logan positioned his thighs between her legs. His now hard penis nudged her wet slit. She moaned and thrashed about underneath him like a mare in heat. Logan’s mouth captured hers.

The head of his cock pushed against her opening. She tensed.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You’re ready for me. It might hurt a bit. Once the pain is gone, the pleasure will be incredible.”

Logan’s strong hands caressed her body and his mouth explored hers. His intent was to distract her. His body rebelled against the control he placed on it. He wanted nothing more than to plunge into her hot, warm depths and lose himself. Not yet, though, it was too soon. This first time needed to be a positive experience for her, even if it killed him.

Breathing hard, he pressed his face against her shoulder for a long moment. "This is hard, but I must go slow. I don't want to hurt you."

Lizzie stroked his chest, planted little kisses on his face.

"You're not helping." He spoke through gritted teeth. The cords of his neck tautened. Every muscle in his body strained to be set free.

"I'm sorry. Tell me what to do."

"Just hang onto me. I'll be as gentle as I can." Despite his extreme state of arousal, tenderness snaked its way through his body. He'd never before felt tenderness for a woman, especially not when lust racked his body and threatened his tenuous hold.

Logan gazed down at her body, the gift she presented to him with such innocent compassion. God give him the strength to maintain control. He'd need the Almighty's help to achieve such a difficult task. Somehow he'd do it for Lizzie because somewhere between his first glimpse of her standing on the railing of the boat and saying *I do* he'd done just that and fallen in love with his spirited little minx.

Lord, he loved her. *He truly loved her.* The revelation hit him harder than a gigantic cedar being felled in the woods.

Lizzie moved underneath him. Her pointed nipples rubbed against his chest. He sank deeper into her and met resistance. Her maidenhead. She dug her fingers into his shoulders.

"I'm sorry. I don't want to hurt you." He found himself apologizing, even when he knew he would hurt her.

"Take me, Logan. Take me now." Lizzie arched her hips, wrapped her long legs around his midsection, and pressed against him.

The last thread of control snapped and unleashed the fury of his passion. He plunged into her, past the thin membrane and buried his cock deep. Lizzie cried out, not a loud scream, but more like a whimper.

He held her tight and rained kissed on her face. He tasted a tear or two on her cheeks. Damn, she felt so good and tight, sheathing his cock as if she were made for him. Perhaps she was.

“Are you okay?” He croaked the question, his voice hoarse from the raw need raging through his body.

“I’ll be fine. Make love to me, Logan. Show me how it feels.”

A man didn’t need a second invitation.

Logan withdrew about halfway and thrust deep again. His body established a rhythm, slow at first, but building like whitecaps on Puget Sound in a winter storm.

He stared at Lizzie as he fucked her. The pain reflected on her face transformed to rapture as her body adjusted to his intrusion. She arched her back and matched his rhythm. Passion swirled in her eyes, and he lost himself in those emerald depths.

He felt her walls tighten around him, and he plunged deep one last time as his seed emptied into her and he soared beyond mortal limits. He stayed inside her, spent and sated. Reaching between them, he found her nub and applied pressure. A few seconds later, she followed him to heaven.

## Chapter 9

*Lizzie's Journal, July 18, 1864*

*Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Marriage to Logan is much better than I expected. While he's a man of few words, he's actually a kind man under his gruff exterior. He's a man who shows no weakness, no vulnerabilities, until we're alone in bed at night. He's an intense man, and it carries over into our physical relationship. He's taught me so much, and for that, I'm grateful. Yet, I can't ignore the hot glances Gage sends my way and how excited he makes me feel.*

*Both Logan and Gage hint at a relationship involving the two of them. Such a forbidden relationship excites me in way I dare not articulate. I've become a woman driven by desires of the flesh with little inclination to change my wanton ways. If the opportunity presents itself I may well seize the moment.*

*Mr. Farrier still watches me, but he avoids any direct contact with me. Lucy, on the other hand, hovers around whenever I am visiting my sisters at the inn, obviously hoping for a tidbit of information. Constance has stepped up her scheming to regain control of the brides.*

\* \* \* \*

Gage found himself creating reasons to be around the house during the day. He enjoyed watching Lizzie bustle around the kitchen with her usual efficiency. Even better watching Lizzie's enticing ass



sway as she wiped away the crumbs from the day's breakfast became one of his favorite pastimes.

In the short time she'd been a part of their family, she'd whipped the house into shape in no time and the brothers, too. They no longer dropped their muddy boots and coats on the floor when they came in from work. Instead, she insisted the boots be removed on the porch and cleaned of mud. They hung their coats on pegs just inside the door.

And cooking. Damn, could the woman cook. They'd never eaten so well. Today was no different.

As soon as Gage opened the front door this afternoon, the aroma of a savory stew assailed his senses. Gage stepped into the kitchen, drawn by the scent. He frowned when he didn't find her in the kitchen. Turning, he checked the parlor and dining room then tromped up the stairs. He paused on the landing as he heard moaning from Logan's bedroom. Alarmed at first, he hurried to the closed door then hesitated. Lizzie's moans were not of a woman in pain, but a woman in ecstasy. He'd left Logan at the sawmill.

In fact, it was his brother who suggested Gage go home and warm Lizzie up to the idea of the two of them sharing her body. Logan had given him free rein to seduce Lizzie this afternoon, and Gage didn't intend on wasting the opportunity. Hell, he'd thought of nothing else for months.

Gage listened at the door. A slow smile spread across his face. Lizzie was indeed alone and pleasuring herself. Anticipation spread through him as he imagined what he'd find in the room.

He pushed open the unlatched door. The curtains were pulled tight, dimming the light in the room. He allowed his eyes a few minutes to adjust.

Lizzie lay on the bed in her undergarments. Her head was turned away from him as she pumped her fingers in and out of her tight snatch. Her hips bucked against her knuckles as her thumb stroked her clit. The bodice of her camisole was pulled down exposing the most

beautiful pair of breasts Gage had ever laid eyes on. Lizzie's free hand pinched and plucked at one nipple.

*Damn.* Gage licked his lips.

Her eyes glazed with lust, Lizzie turned her head toward him. A sensual smile graced her plump lips. Obviously expecting to see Logan, her eyes grew bigger than saucers when she recognized Gage standing in the dim light of the room.

He took advantage of her moment of pure shock and crossed the room in two steps just as she leapt from the bed. He blocked her escape with his body.

"Gage, this is most improper." Her face flushed red with lust and embarrassment.

"Honey, everything Logan and I do is improper. We're improper men, and by appearances you're an improper woman." Gage wrapped his arms around her waist.

Lizzie struggled to free herself. "I-I can explain."

Gage nodded. "Of course you can. While you were fucking yourself with your hand, were you thinking of Logan or me or both of us?"

Her face deepened to a darker red. "Unhand me."

He shook his head. Not now. Not with her half naked and fully aroused.

"I love Logan. I will not be disloyal to him."

"Logan sent me here. You know what we want." Unable to restrain himself, Gage's mouth came down hard on her. At first she resisted, then her tongue and lips responded with a fiery passion. His mouth punished hers, taking all she had to give, and demanding more. The more he demanded the more she gave as they fell into a tornado of greedy lust.

Lizzie clutched the back of his head. He pushed her down on the bed and feasted on her breasts. She moaned and squirmed beneath him. Gage sucked one ripe nipple into his mouth and pinched the other. The taste of her hard nub in his mouth almost undid him.

A door slammed and Gage froze. He cursed under his breath. Noah's voice rang from the bottom of the stairs. He stood quickly and stared down at Lizzie for a brief moment.

"Make yourself decent. I'll keep him occupied. This isn't over between us, Lizzie. It's only just begun."

Gage strode to the door and down the stairs. Lizzie would be his soon, his and Logan's.

He loved this woman, and she'd soon learn she had enough love for both men in her life.

\* \* \* \*

Logan ushered Mr. Farrier into the sawmill office. He directed the man to the only chair in the small, crowded room. Gage sat behind the worn desk, and Logan hooked a leg over the corner of the desk and sat down.

Gage held his hand on the desk and waited for Logan to speak first. Logan took his time. Mr. Farrier fidgeted in his chair. He shifted his position several times even chewed on a fingernail.

"Mr. Gallagher," Mr. Farrier addressed Logan. "I'm a busy man as are the two of you. Please state your business."

"Our business—as you put it—is personal." Logan waited for his words to sink in.

Mr. Farrier developed a nervous tick in his left cheek. "I'm not aware of any personal business between us."

"Oh, but you are. My wife."

Mr. Farrier's face lost its color. "I'm not acquainted with your wife."

Gage leaned forward, his fists balled tight. "You threatened Lizzie."

The man swallowed, and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "I wouldn't call it a threat. I'll admit I do know Mrs. Gallagher's uncle."

“She is my wife, and I will protect her at all costs. No price is too high.”

“Do you put a high price on your life, Mr. Farrier?” Gage added with a satisfied smile.

Mr. Farrier nodded vigorously.

“Then explain your part in this.” Logan stood and towered over the cowering man.

“When Mrs. Gallagher’s uncle discovered my connection with Port Steele, he requested I do a little research on Lizzie and her situation. He offered to pay me handsomely for the information.”

“What have you told him?”

“I told him she had married and refused to do any further investigating for him.”

“Just like that?” Logan didn’t buy the man’s story. Something rang false.

“I haven’t seen a penny of the money he offered. My services don’t come cheap, and they certainly don’t come free. I am a timber buyer first and foremost. I did not mind doing a favor for an old friend if I was compensated, but the situation has changed to the point I want nothing more to do with it.”

“See that you keep it that way. If you don’t, I’ll make your life a living hell. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly.” Mr. Farrier scrambled to his feet and scurried out the door like a rat caught in the cheese.

“That went well,” Gage noted.

“Almost too well.”

“Do you believe him?”

“Actually, I do. Money rules his world, and he’s not interested in a situation which isn’t financially beneficial.” Logan dropped into the chair vacated by Mr. Farrier.

“Then it’s over.”

Logan met his brother’s gaze. “No, it’s just begun. You, me, Lizzie. It’s time to take the next step.”

## Chapter 10

*Lizzie's Journal, August 1, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Life is settling into a routine. After Gage and Logan's conversation with Mr. Farrier, he no longer spies on me. In fact, when I meet him on the street, he is polite and respectful.*

*More concerning to me of late is my growing affection for Gage, even while I pledge my love to my husband, for I do love him. But I also love Gage.*

*Gage's discovery of my secret afternoon activity is a double-edged sword. The knowing looks he casts my way mortify and titillate me. My fantasies of sex with two men haunt my days and nights.*

*I am torn between what the three of us so obviously want and what is considered morally correct.*

*But then I ask myself, when have I ever been a woman who conforms?*

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie hesitated in the doorway, clad only in her pantaloons and camisole, just as Logan requested.

She swallowed and licked her lips at the sight of the two brothers sharing a cigar in their small parlor. Two pairs of eyes pinned her in place. Her feet refused to move. Logan motioned for her to come into the room.

Her incomprehensible feelings for both men confounded her. She

loved Logan with all her heart, yet Gage attracted her and brought about all sorts of naughty thoughts. Even more disturbing, she loved him, too.

“Come here, Lizzie.” Logan crooked his finger at her.

The moment of decision had come. If she entered the room, she’d most likely enter a relationship with two men. If she didn’t, she’d continue to be tormented by her attraction to Gage and Logan. Eventually, her torment would drive them apart. Her compliance would solve her dilemma but compromise her vision of decency.

On wooden legs, Lizzie walked across the room to Logan and stood in front of him.

Logan pulled her into his lap. She struggled to get free, but he held tight.

“Liz, as I’ve mentioned, Gage and I have always been close. We share everything. I’ve watched how you look at him. It’s no surprise you’re lusting after him.”

Lizzie ducked her head and buried it in Logan’s shoulder. He’d see the truth in her eyes. Her shame overwhelmed her.

“Honey, it’s okay. In fact, it’s preferred. This is the way we like it. I’m fully aware Gage has been seducing you, and you’ve been tempted. I want you to be tempted.”

She drew her head back and stared at him. “What?”

“We want to share you.”

“Why—Why, that’s shameful.” Her arguments sounded feeble to her own ears. She’d made her decision when she’d entered the room.

“To most people, it is. To us, it’s natural. A way of life, what we prefer.” He stood, taking her with him.

“You don’t consider such a thing immoral?”

“Is love immoral?”

“No, but this is immoral.”

“What is this exactly?” Gage moved forward. She backed up a step and found her body sandwiched between two men in a most unseemly manner.

From behind her, Logan pulled her hands behind her back. He held her wrists together with one big hand. She cleared her throat and met Gage's clear blue eyes. Oh, dear, she wanted this. She really wanted this.

"I want to see you naked." Gage spoke in a firm, no-nonsense voice.

"I-I don't know."

"You want this." Logan whispered in her ear. His hot breath blew on her earlobe.

"It's wrong." She squirmed in a half-hearted attempt to free herself.

"Forget right or wrong. Do you want me to gaze upon your naked body? To touch you in private places? To do private things to you?" Gage's eyes dared her to be adventurous.

"Yes, but it's wrong."

"Buts don't matter. This is about what we want. This is a wild land. We make the laws, we set the moral standards. This is our standard. There is no evil in loving with all your heart."

Watching her, Gage unbuttoned his shirt and shrugged it off to expose a chest as magnificent as Logan's, though in a leaner, not so bulky way. Gage kissed her, gently at first, until he felt her tentative response. His mouth grew more demanding. She parted her lips and tasted his unique taste. Like everything Gage did, he took his time, explored every recess of her mouth with his tongue, sampled every portion of her lips.

Her knees refused to hold her up, but Logan held her from behind.

"She likes your kisses."

Gage drew back. "I see that, brother. I see that."

Her heart hammered in her chest as Gage raised his hands to her camisole. Grasping the lacy top in both hands, he ripped the fabric, tearing it apart and baring her chest. His hands fingered her nipples. His tongue swirled around the erect nubs. She pressed her chest against his mouth, begging for more.

Gage pulled her undergarments down and nodded to Logan. Without any preamble, Logan threw her over his shoulder as if she were as light as a pillow and hauled her out the parlor door and up the stairs. Lizzie wriggled and attempted to free herself, but Logan's large hand tightened on her bare ass to hold her in place. Gage tramped up the stairs behind his brother. One look at the fire burning unchecked in his eyes, and Lizzie's pussy pleaded with her for mercy and for the touch of two very desirable men.

Once over the threshold, he deposited her on her feet near the bed. His older brother pushed her toward the bed. Lizzie backed up willingly. When she hit the bed, she fell back onto the feather mattress.

She attempted one last feeble protest even as Logan tied her hands together over her head then attached the rope to the headboard.

Gage's blue eyes drilled into hers. She dived into the tempestuous blue depths of his lustful storm, all her reservations forgotten.

Gage grasped an ankle and raised it out and over her head, leaving her splayed. He tied it to the headboard while Logan tied the other ankle to the opposite side. She squirmed and flexed her butt on the bed.

They spread her legs wide open and left her pussy exposed and weeping with desire. Both men gazed down at her.

"Honey, I've never seen you so wet, and I've seen you plenty wet."

"She loves this. I knew she would."

Stripping off their clothes, both men approached her. Gage opened her pussy lips even wider and thrust his long, talented, and oh-so-wicked tongue inside her. His tongue stroked her in intimate, forbidden places, but Lizzie didn't want him to stop. His thumb rubbed her clit. Logan stood to one side and watched.

Gage reduced her to a thoroughly debauched woman who craved even more debauchery. No going back now. She arched her back and squirmed against the face buried between her legs. Gage's greedy



mouth lipped, nipped, and sucked. He pushed a finger inside her, followed by a second finger. Sucking on her little button of pleasure, he pumped his fingers in and out.

Logan leaned down and sucked a nipple. His ragged breath revealed his barely-controlled state of arousal. Logan tweaked the other nipple, pinched it between two fingers and twisted. Hard. Painful. Incredibly erotic. Her body shook with an incredible orgasm, driving her out of her mind. The room whirled around her. She cried out both men's names. Over and over. Her body convulsed. She squeezed her eyes shut.

She was still floating back to earth when a shift of weight on the bed clued her into the fact that the two brothers weren't done with her yet. Her eyes fluttered open in time to see Gage kneeling between her tied-open legs. Gage's cock was every bit as big as his brother's, but curved upward at the end.

"Ready for this, sweetheart?"

Lizzie licked her lips.

Logan grinned and plumped a pillow under her head so she could watch. Her legs ached from the awkward position they'd been forced into. She wriggled and tried to find a more comfortable position.

"You want untied, darlin'?" Logan was already untying the ropes on her ankles. He left her hands tied.

Lizzie groaned as the men moved her cramped legs to a more spread-eagled position on the bed.

Gage stared down at her, adoration and lust on his handsome face. "You ready, honey?"

She nodded. His big cock slid inside her in one long, hard stroke. The curved tip tickled her in new places, giving her new sensations. She looked over at Logan, who'd moved to watch Gage fuck her. His nostrils flared, and his pupils dilated. Every fiber of his being focused on his brother's cock sliding in and out of her.

Gage fucked like he did most everything else. Thorough. Measured. Precise. Controlled. She wanted to shred his control, see

who really lurked underneath.

Lizzie wrapped her legs around Gage's back. Tightening her legs, she urged him onward and jerked against her restraints.

"You want it harder, honey?" Gage rasped.

"Yes, please, yes."

Gage obliged and slammed into her, over and over again. Her pussy screamed for more. Lizzie held tight. As Gage let out a triumphant cry and emptied himself inside her, Lizzie's completion hit her like waves slamming against the shore during a winter storm.

Gage collapsed on top of her then rolled to the side. Lizzie lay on the bed, limp with satisfaction, her limbs unable to move.

\* \* \* \*

Watching his brother fuck Lizzie so thoroughly and Lizzie loving every second of raunchy sex with Gage shattered Logan's paper-thin control.

Not even allowing her a second to recover, Logan hastily untied her hands and flipped her over onto her stomach.

"On your hands and knees," he growled into her ear. She tried to comply, but her limbs wouldn't cooperate. Lizzie sprawled on the bed and buried her head in the pillow. The little vixen was still recovering from her second orgasm of the night, but they weren't done with her yet. Not even close.

"She's not cooperating, is she, brother?" Gage grinned. He loved this part. Knowing the routine, Gage opened the drawer in the nightstand and removed a leather strap. He tossed it to his brother and waited.

"Lizzie, this is the last time I'm going to ask you nice. On all fours, now."

"Please, not yet."

Logan raised the strap and brought it down hard on her bare ass, leaving a nice red stripe across one rounded butt cheek.

Lizzie's head shot up, and she screamed in surprise and pain.

"No screaming, woman. That's one of the rules, remember?"

Lizzie nodded and struggled to her hands and knees, but she'd been disobedient and Logan liked obedience in his bed. He raised the strap three more times, leaving nice little crisscross marks on her ass, not hitting her hard enough to raise welts.

He nodded to Gage. "Give her something to do with that mouth of hers."

Gage grinned. He knew what came next. Kneeling in front of her, Gage offered Lizzie his half-erect cock. "Clean my cock, hon, and don't leave any of your juices on it."

Lizzie bent her head to the task. Logan spread her knees wider and exposed her beautiful pink pussy. Raising the strap, he aimed and snapped it down between her legs, hitting his target perfectly. Lizzie threw her head back and let out an enraged scream.

"What the hell was that for?"

She tried to turn around, obviously pissed as hell. Gage held her shoulders, keeping her in place. That bit of attitude really turned Logan on. He'd tame this little wench or have a damn good time attempting to do so.

Tossing the strap aside, for he'd proven his point, Logan plunged his cock into her cum-drenched hole. He ground his crotch into hers, pulling out and leaving only the tip inside, he slammed into her again. She moaned and tilted her hips to take him deeper. That was his little Lizzie. In a few short weeks, she'd learned to love his cock as much as he loved her pussy. Withdrawing, he thrust harder, pushing her head into Gage's stomach.

Gage guided her mouth onto his half-hard cock, and she sucked greedily on it. When it disappeared deep into her mouth, Logan buried his cock deep in her cunt. Damn, one of the most beautiful sights was watching his cock slide in and out of his wife's cunt while she sucked on his brother's cock.

Logan knew he wouldn't last much longer. He also knew Lizzie

liked her pleasure served with a little pain. Reaching underneath her, he pinched both nipples and twisted while he fucked her hard from behind. Gage muffled her cries by holding her cock-filled mouth.

Logan threw back his head and shouted his release. He pulled out and emptied his load on her striped butt cheeks. The thick substance splattered on her ass and ran down her legs. Logan rolled onto the bed and collapsed, as boneless as a jellyfish. He lay still for a moment, savoring the tempestuous emotions bombarding him. The sounds of Gage fucking her mouth drifted to him, sweet music to his ears, and brought him back to the present. Rolling over, he watched as Gage thrust his cock in and out of her mouth.

“Keep her occupied,” Logan gave Gage a brother-to-brother look, and Gage nodded. Time to start the next phase of his wife’s training.

Withdrawing completely, Gage grinned at Lizzie’s whimpered protest. “You want more, baby?”

Lizzie nodded. Saliva ran down her chin, one of the most erotic sights he’d ever witnessed. She grabbed his cock and sucked on it with delicious abandon, going deep on him again.

Logan plunged two fingers into her sopping hole and swirled them around. He removed them and slid his cock back into her. He placed his hands on her hips to hold her in place as he established a rhythm. When she started squirming underneath him and sucked noisily on his brother’s cock, he knew she was as ready as she’d ever be.

He circled her asshole with his wet index finger. Bending down, he licked the tight little hole and violated it with his tongue. She wiggled her ass in his face. Her cries were muffled by the cock buried in her mouth. She adjusted to his invasion of her ass so he dared to take the next step. He pushed the tip of his finger in her tight ass and used it in concert with his soothing tongue. She froze and attempted to squirm away from him. He held her firm and pushed his finger in a little further.

Lizzie reared back and Gage’s cock fell from her mouth. “No, please, no.”

The panicked tone in her voice caused Logan to remove his finger. "Sorry, hon, I didn't know you felt so strongly about this. You've been such a good sport about everything else."

"I need more time to soak it all in." She stared back at Logan, her face covered with sweat and saliva. Damn, she looked sexy as hell. He felt bad, in fact, like crap. He'd gone too far, too fast. He owed her an apology.

Gage kissed her and cradled her head in his hands. "It's okay, baby, we'd never do anything to you that you don't want. Why don't you use your pretty little mouth to suck me off while Logan enjoys your pussy, and we'll all take a rest."

Lizzie smiled up at Gage, her expression grateful. Logan tensed, feeling even more like an insensitive ass than before. Logan, hard again, didn't wait for an invitation. He slid his cock inside her wet channel. He started moving inside her, taking it slow and easy, gentle and tender. She made slurping sounds as she sucked Gage to another release. Logan let loose at the same time. Buried deep inside her, his cock twitched then spasmed until he'd emptied everything he had inside her.

Gage pulled back and squirted his cum on her face. Lizzie held her mouth open and stuck out her tongue, taking all she could get.

"Now if that ain't the damn prettiest site in the world, I don't know what is." Gage grinned.

Logan couldn't agree more.

## Chapter 11

*Lizzie's Journal, August 14, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*I did the unthinkable, the forbidden, the most sinful thing last night, but I plan to do it again, and again, and again. I've never been one for propriety, even though I've tried, so I have come to the right place. Being stroked, touched, loved by two men arouses me beyond explanation. I've no willpower where Logan and Gage are concerned. I've always been the oldest, the sister who looked after her younger sisters. I've always had to be the strong one. I don't need to fill that role with these two men. Oddly enough, I found it comforting to have two men watching over me, devoted to me.*

\* \* \* \*

Gage walked up behind Lizzie and held his hands over her eyes. She almost dropped the basket of eggs clutched in her hand.

"Guess who?" Gage faked a deep voice.

"Gage."

"That transparent, huh?" He spun her around and planted a wet kiss on her plump, red lips.

"You're not a very good actor." She reached up and brushed his hair from his eyes. "You also need a haircut."

He took the basket from her hands and placed it on the table. "You take good care of us, Liz. We need a woman around the house."

"I try. None of you make it simple."

Gage pulled her against him. Arms around her, he linked his fingers behind her back. "Were you okay with last night?"

"I'm still coming to terms with it. All aspects of it." She tilted her head and looked up at him. Her clear green eyes stripped away his protective layers until his soul lay bare to her.

"You'll get used to it."

"I know I will because the alternative is not having you. Do you think Logan is okay with it?"

Gage laughed. "Of course he is because it's me. We're brothers. We've shared all the good things in our lives since childhood. Maybe because there were so few good things."

"You had a tough childhood."

He shrugged. "Well-meaning parents, but too much work and a very tough land to tame. You think it's primitive now. You should've seen it when we were younger."

"You've lived here all your life?"

"No, but it seems like it. I'd never want to live anywhere else."

"And the Pettys? Where do they fit in with all this?"

"Several years ago, our parents and our aunt and uncle—"

"The Pettys?"

"Yes. Even now it hurts to tell the story." Gage cleared his throat and staggered on. "They crossed Puget Sound to Seattle in a small boat for a combination business-pleasure trip. I remember how excited my mom and aunt were to go shopping, as Seattle was a little more civilized than Bachelor Bay. It was a nice fall afternoon, but a storm came in expectantly an hour or two after they left. We never saw them again, though the boat washed ashore a few days later. Logan was only eighteen. Miles was twenty-four, I think."

"Oh, Gage, I'm so sorry." She touched his face with her hand and her compassion almost undid him. He turned away and stared out of the kitchen window at Puget Sound in the distance, beyond the safety of the well-protected bay.

"It's still tough. I still miss them. Hattie mentioned your parents were dead." He avoided the word murder, preferring to let her tell the story in her own way.

"They're dead. They'd been shot to death."

Gage turned back to her. "Murdered."

"Yes." Lizzie choked on the words.

"Did they catch who did it?"

"No, never found them. They believed it was a robbery gone bad." She snorted her disbelief.

"What do you believe?"

"My uncle did it. He won't rest until the three of us are returned to his control, and he has the deed in his hand."

"The deed to your parents' property and business." Gage pulled her back into his arms. She rested her face on his shoulder. He held her close, reveling in the feel of her soft body against his hard one. He smoothed a wayward strand of auburn hair from her forehead.

"I'm not sure even Bachelor Bay is far enough to avoid him."

"Don't you worry none, honey. You're a married woman now, under our protection. As are your sisters. There's nothing he can do. Nothing."

Gage wanted her bad. He felt like the worst kind of heel for wanting a woman at her most vulnerable. He'd never been good with emotions, just numbers. The only way he could show her he cared and she'd be safe was with sex. Almost as if she read his mind, her gaze focused on his lips. He cupped her face in his hands and lowered his head. His mouth touched hers. They mated mouth to mouth, tongues entwined. Lizzie gave as good as she got, soft and sweet, Yet he found her underlying steel combined with her vulnerability even more appealing.

He loved everything about this woman who was as married to him as she was his brother. She'd soon see the truth of the situation. Lifting his head, he smiled slightly. "Do you think we could—maybe—just you and me?"



“Yes.” The one word floated to him on a breathy sigh.

He lifted her onto the table and rained kisses on her lips, her face, her neck. More demanding, more insistent than he’d been before. He unfastened her dress and pulled it down to her waist, baring her beautiful breasts. What they lacked in size, they made up for in perfection. The rosy nipples, the wonderful mounds of soft flesh. He lowered his head.

Lizzie stiffened as if she remembered something. Panting, she shook her head. “What about Logan?”

With a patient sigh, Gage straightened. “He’s fine with it, honey. He sent me home early to have a little alone time with you.”

“I’m not sure if I’ll ever get used to the two of you and your strange ways with women.”

“No, strange ways with one woman. There are no women in our lives now but you.”

Lizzie nodded.

“Don’t question it. It just is. We like it this way.” He took her nipple in his mouth, flicked it with his tongue, savoring the taste of it, the taste of her. He wanted her so badly, needed her like he’d never needed another woman, lusted after her with a shocking frequency.

He pushed her skirts up to her waist and pulled down her undergarment, baring her for his eyes. Her slit glistened with her arousal.

“You are so responsive.” Gage unfastened his pants and kicked them off. Naked and crazed with need, he moved between the comfort of her thighs. His penis head rested against her pussy lips. He sucked in a breath and held it as she wrapped her fingers around his cock and rubbed her slit with it.

Gage’s breathing labored, his cock twitched. “Steer my boy home, honey.” He was begging, but he didn’t care. Didn’t care at all.

Lizzie guided the head of his penis past her lips into a hot, wet heaven. Gage did the rest. In one hard, powerful stroke, he buried himself inside her. Lizzie’s legs wrapped around his butt and held him

there. He pushed upward harder, knowing his curved cock touched different places than his brother's. She lay on the table and gripped the sides. He stroked her insides with his cock. Withdrawing at a snail's pace and advancing at the same slow, torturous pace. Her pussy clenched as if attempting to hold him in place. She was so tight, so exquisitely lubricated, he bit down on the inside of his cheek, hoping to distract himself with the pain. Nothing worked. He wanted to slam into her. Give her what she needed and what he needed.

He didn't. He mustered some unknown iron strength and continued his slow journey in and out, in and out, in and out. His cock jerked and screamed for relief. Sweat beaded on his forehead, drenched his chest.

Liz squeezed her eyes shut. All around them, the heady smell of sex invaded the air. Raising up, the little vixen cupped his heavy balls, rolled them around in her hand, squeezed them.

She broke his control, sent it tumbling to the ground like a big old tree in the woods. He snapped and slammed into her, fucking her like a crazy man. Her ass bounced up and down on the table, as he took her with power and heat. His cock jerked several times, spilling his desire inside her. Her pussy spasmed, and she came with screams of passion, only outdone by his own hoarse roars.

So much for control. With this woman, he had little, if any.

## Chapter 12

*Lizzie's Journal, October 5, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*I have spent the last few months being married to two men in every way except on paper. While it might be shameful in the eyes of many, I can't fathom how something so beautiful could truly be wrong.*

*Mr. Farrier has been true to his word. The threat posed by my uncle is no more. My life is mine to live as I wish without fear from the evil man.*

*I am truly blessed.*

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie lay naked between Gage and Logan. Sometimes she slept with one or the other, sometimes with both. Tonight she had both. It was their little secret, one others wouldn't understand. Heck, Lizzie barely understood it herself. For an entire glorious summer, she basked in both men's attentions.

Would she want such a life for her sisters? She didn't think so, yet in this wild, untamed land where men outnumbered women ten to one, good men seemed as plentiful as the evergreens on the surrounding hills and mountains. Somehow the prospect of two lovers in her bed didn't seem nearly so forbidden as it would have on the civilized East Coast.

Still, she didn't think her sisters would understand. She wouldn't have understood if she'd been in their shoes. A woman had to experience the love of two men to fully grasp the reality of multiple men in her bed.

Logan and Gage liked different things. Logan liked it hard, rough, and wild, just like the untamed scenery surrounding them on all sides. His dark side frightened and aroused her. Gage liked to build the excitement with slow, controlled movements, curbing his animal needs until the very last minute, when his restraint finally snapped and the world dropped out underneath them in a swirling hurricane. She'd glimpsed a dark side of Gage, too. Both men initiated her into sex play she'd never imagined in the past.

That she'd been able to get beyond her past and accept them was a testament to their never-ending patience with her. Yet, despite that patience, both men challenged her limits each passing night. She'd already reached the point of no return. She'd never be satisfied with missionary style sex again, and she'd never settle for less than both men warming her bed through the cold Northwest falls and winters.

With each obstacle placed in her way, she overcame her inhibitions. Except one. And she vowed to break down that barrier, too, before the days grew shorter and nights longer.

Perhaps tonight would be the night.

She rolled into Gage's arms when he stirred and stroked her thighs. Logan snored softly next to them, though he rarely missed an opportunity to participate in his favorite pastime.

"Gage, I want to give you and Logan your fantasy. I want you to be able to—well, you know what I'm saying."

He grinned at her. She could see his white teeth in the moonlight streaming in the window. "I absolutely know what you're saying, honey. You'll make Logan a happy man. It's his favorite hole."

"Can you help me?"

"I sure as hell can. I warn you, it's going to hurt."

“I’m okay with that. You’ve both taught me how arousing pain can be. I want to do this for him.”

“Roll over on your back and spread those long legs of yours. Let’s get you warmed up.”

Lizzie did as she was ordered.

Gage stroked her pussy with his fingers, thrusting with two then three and rubbing her nub until she exploded in his hand. Her whimpers and cries of satisfaction stirred Logan, a man who could sleep through a thunderstorm. He rolled onto his side and regarded them with sleepy eyes.

“What? You didn’t wake me for the fun?”

“The fun is just beginning, brother. Liz wanted a little warm-up before the main event.” Gage’s fingers remained deep in her wet pussy. She squirmed against his hand.

Logan slid a palm over her sweat-slicked body. Moving to the side of the bed, Gage rolled her over to her stomach and pulled her legs off the edge of the bed.

“Hold her open for me, Logan. Liz wants a new experience. Your fingers are too big and thick. We’ll try mine first.”

Logan grunted his approval and used his big hands to pull apart her butt cheeks, baring her puckered buttocks. Gage dipped his fingers in her dripping cunt again, using her natural lubrication.

He circled the round hole with his index finger. Lizzie tensed and held her breath, bracing herself for the invasion into her most private, forbidden hole. Gage rubbed her clit with his free hand, as if that would distract her. Lizzie clutched the pillow, burying her face in it.

The tip of Gage’s finger pushed into the opening. Her body tightened around his finger, attempting to reject the invasion. Gage stopped.

“Relax, Liz. Try to let your body go limp. Try not to fight it. The more you fight, the more it’ll hurt. I’ll take it slow. Let your body adjust little by little.” Gage kept up steady streams of muttered endearments and encouragement.

She heard Logan let out a long, deep breath. “Ah, Liz, I wish you could see this. It’s a beautiful sight. Almost as beautiful as the sight of my cock pushing into your tight little ass will be.”

Gage’s finger pressed deeper. Pain overrode the other strange sensations. Lizzie whimpered, hating her weakness.

“Do you want us to stop, honey?” Logan asked.

Lizzie shook her head and gripped the pillow tighter. “Please, keep going. It’s the only way I’ll get beyond it.”

“You’re a brave girl, Liz Gallagher.” The pride in Logan’s voice made every bit of pain worth it.

Her muscles clenched around Gage’s finger. Lizzie emitted a muffled cry as his finger pushed deeper, past a tight little ring of muscle. With a final thrust, he buried his finger in her ass. Pausing for a few moments, he waited until she relaxed somewhat. Lizzie dragged in several ragged breaths. Gage moved his finger around inside her, carving out a larger area, opening her up for a second finger, which soon followed the first. The burning brought tears to her eyes. She tried to move away, but Gage and Logan held her firmly.

“It burns. Really burns.”

“That’s normal, honey.” Gage’s patient claiming of her darkest hole consumed her with thrills of pain-invoked pleasure.

“It’s time for your cock.”

Logan grunted. “Let’s give her something else to think about.”

Lizzie watched as Logan pulled a wooden box with Chinese characters out from under the bed. He opened it and rummaged around. He pulled out a gold chain with small clips on both ends.

“What is that?”

Logan grinned. “Trust me. You’ll like them because you like it on the edge, don’t you?”

Lizzie nodded, acknowledging her dark desires. Gage removed his fingers from her ass, and she felt depressingly empty. She pushed back against him, a signal she’d gotten used to having something up her ass and was ready for more.

“Please, I need something.” Lizzie begged. She looked back at him in time to see Gage nod to Logan. Without warning Gage held her hips still and drove his cock into her pussy. Lizzie screamed out in ecstasy and urged him to fuck her. He didn’t. She whimpered as he withdrew.

A second later, she felt his cock at the entrance to her ass. She stiffened.

“I’m not sure about this.”

Logan reached under her and pinched her nipples, drawing her attention away from Gage. He opened the small clip and attached it to her nipple. She yelped in pain and surprise as the cold metal clamped down on her sensitive nipple. Before she could muster a protest, Logan clamped the other nipple and gave the chain a sharp tug.

“What—what are those?” She gasped.

“Nipple clamps from the Orient.”

“They hurt. Bad. Take them off.” Lizzie’s nipples throbbed. She felt the juices from her pussy flow down her thighs. Gage pushed his cock into her ass. She struggled to hold still. Each time Gage inched deeper, Logan tweaked the nipple clamps. Pain pierced her body, sending pricks of desire vibrating through her nipples, her clit, her ass.

Gage had sunk his cock the rest of the way in her ass. Breathing hard, his sweat mingled with hers. She smelled sex and her men’s unique scents in the air. Pressing deep into her ass, Gage held himself there, moving his cock around inside her. It filled her. Every spare inch inside her was dominated by his hard penis.

Withdrawing, he shoved back in with one slow, strong stroke. The burning didn’t subside, but the ache mingled with delight, with a feeling of completeness, an ethereal giving of trust to these two men which far exceeded her other experiences with them.

Gage began to move in and out of her ass, fucking her tight hole. She leaned back, begging for more. Loving the conflicting sensations, the dark pleasure, the taking of her virgin ass. Logan stepped back

and watched. The chain hanging between her nipples swayed under her body.

Gage's hands gripped her hips harder, and his cock banged into her ass, each stroke harder, rougher, faster than the last. Pure animal lust. A pure carnal act. Lizzie felt the buildup inside her. The beginning of an explosion. Her body thrashed underneath him, ferocious with need, ravenous with longing. He grunted. Their bodies slammed together as his balls slapped against her pussy.

Reaching underneath, Gage grabbed the gold chain, wrapped his fingers around it, and yanked it off her nipples. A shock of pain slammed into her. Her body exploded, shattered, and warm, sticky fluid flooded her asshole as Gage came inside her. She ruptured into millions of pieces, her soul merging with theirs.

She'd become a part of them, something bigger than she'd ever been separate from her two lovers.



## Chapter 13

*Lizzie's Journal, November 19, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Life has settled into an unorthodox routine. By all outward appearances, I'm a normal, staid married woman, taking care of the Gallagher household of four men. Underneath it all, I'm a woman who's embraced her sensual nature, reveling in the exploration and discovery of sexual freedom. The average person would be shocked at what has become normal for me and how thoroughly I've embraced my new role as wife and lover to two brothers. I love Gage and Logan with all my heart. And they've come to love me. Today is my birthday, and they've promised me a special surprise.*

\* \* \* \*

Logan secured the blindfold over Lizzie's eyes. A thrill of excitement zipped through her and settled between her legs. Logan's calloused hands grasped hers and bound them together in front of her with a length of soft rope. He raised them over her head. He secured the rope on the hook in the ceiling. Pulling it tight stretched her body so she stood almost on tiptoes.

She knew this game. They'd played it before. Each time, she'd delighted in the passionate torment her two men inflicted upon her. Each time, her orgasm had rivaled those before it.

"Can you see?" Gage tugged her blindfold down to make sure she couldn't see underneath it.

“Not a thing.” Lizzie squirmed and writhed, begging them with her body to touch her.

Logan’s deep chuckle reached her ears. “Not so fast, honey. We have a surprise in store for you tonight.”

“You always have surprises for me.”

“This one is special.” Logan’s large hands wrapped a rope around her ankle and pulled it wide, tying it to a ring in the floor. He did the same with the other leg, leaving her spread open, naked, and completely vulnerable.

“You need to guess who’s touching you correctly, and you’ll be rewarded.”

“If I don’t?” Lizzie held her breath. Their punishments were often more arousing than their rewards.

“You’ll be punished.”

A shiver travelled down her body. Her pussy tingled. She knew she’d be waiting a long time tonight to get satisfaction, but when she did, it’d be beyond anything she’d experienced thus far.

A hand cupped her chin, and lips brushed her mouth. She parted her lips, and a tongue swept into her mouth. She moaned as the man kissed her thoroughly. Her nipples ached for someone’s touch. Anyone’s.

The mouth broke away from hers, and she whimpered.

“Who?”

“Gage.”

Logan chuckled. “Correct.”

“Where’s my reward?”

“Impatient wench.” Gage’s voice sounded near her ear. She turned her head toward the sound, but he evaded her easily.

A mouth closed on her nipple, sucking hard, biting down with sharp teeth, causing her to emit a silent shriek.

“Logan.” She blurted out the answer.

“Very good.”

“We’ll have to make this harder.”

Logan kissed her again, long and hard, taking the breath from her lungs. Her pussy pulsed with need, consumed by fire. Logan continued to kiss her while rough hands kneaded her ass, squeezing and rubbing. Her ass cheeks were parted and a tongue teased the ring at the entrance to her ass.

“Who’s kissing your ass?”

“That’s easy. Logan was kissing my mouth. Gage is behind me.”

“Very good.” Logan’s voice vibrated with arousal.

A mouth covered her nipple, then the second nipple had mouth on it. Two mouths sucked, licked, and kissed her nipples. The mouths withdrew, and she whimpered her complaint. “Please, don’t stop.”

“Who sucked on your right nipple?” Logan’s voice seemed to come from her right side.

“You did. Logan.”

A soft chuckle reached her ears. “Wrong, sweetheart. Do you know what happens when you’re wrong?”

“I’m punished.” Her pussy juices flowed in anticipation of her punishment. She pulled against her bonds. Her body pleaded to be touched.

An open hand struck her ass with a stinging blow. “Oh. Oh, it hurts.”

“But you love it.”

Lizzie didn’t deny the obvious. Her pussy lips were parted. She heard slurping as an aggressive mouth plundered her pussy with tongue, lips, and fingers.

“Whose mouth is on your pussy, darlin’?” She could hear the smirk in Logan’s voice, and it infuriated her. Since the mouth continued to suck on greedily on her pussy, and Logan was the one speaking, it didn’t take a genius to guess correctly. She decided to guess incorrectly in hopes of another *punishment*.

“Logan, you’re sucking on my pussy.”

“Now, honey, you know that’s not true. Do you want to be punished?”

“Yes, please.”

Both men stopped touching her. She heard rustling in the room. Something tinkled, and she tensed in anticipation. Logan pinched her swollen nipple, made sensitive by marauding mouths, teeth, and fingers. He pulled it, stretching it tight. Pain shot through her as the clamp closed on the pink bud. A second later, another clamp squeezed the other nipple. His fingers toyed with each clamp, and when he let go, a bell tinkled, leading her to surmise some kind of bell hung from each clamp. The bells tugged on her nipples and tinkled as her chest rose and fell.

Fingers grasped one of the bells and pulled, stretching her nipple, taking the pain to the brink of her limit but never going beyond it.

“Who was that?”

“Logan.”

“Lucky woman. No punishment for you. In fact, we’re going to let you come.”

“Oh, please, yes. Please.”

A hand ground into her cunt, fingers twisting and plunging. A tongue swirled on her clit, pushing her beyond the limits of human control. A mouth tugged on the clamp, swirling it around its tongue, causing exquisite agony. But nothing compared to the urgent agony pulsating through her eager pussy.

Working in concert, the two brothers catapulted her into the sky to the stars beyond.

\* \* \* \*

Lizzie collapsed, limp and spent. Hands removed her bonds and held her up.

“You enjoying this?” Gage whispered in her ear.

Lizzie nodded. The time for being embarrassed or modest around her men had long passed.

“It’s your birthday. We have a present for you. Do you know what

double penetration is?” Logan asked her.

“I think so.” Lizzie’s heart pounded in her chest.

“What is it?” Gage moved his mouth close to her ear.

“Where one of you is in my pussy and one of you is in my ass.” She rubbed her wrists where the ropes had bound her.

“Good girl.” Logan smacked her ass, and she yelped in surprise. Laughing, he pulled off her blindfold.

Lizzie blinked and stared at the two male faces gazing back at her. Both so similar in features, yet so different. Gage, earnest and concerned, yet with a fire burning deep inside those blue eyes. Logan, dark and intense, needing her soul, not just her body.

Her gaze moved downward. Two cocks, both large and hard with arousal, filled her line of vision.

“I want you. Both of you at the same time.” Lizzie breathed hard. A fine sheen of sweat coated her naked skin. Little bumps rose on her arms even though she was hotter than boiling water.

“Upstairs.” Logan motioned to the stairs and grabbed her around the waist.

A few seconds later, they stood in Logan’s large bedroom. Lizzie fidgeted, dreading what was to come. Yet, she wouldn’t stop them. She wanted this birthday present, despite her misgivings.

The clamps weighed her nipples. Pain spiked each time she moved even slightly.

“Could you take these off, please?”

“When we’re done.” Logan addressed his brother, barking directions. “Gage, on the bed. Lizzie’s pussy is yours.”

“What about you, brother?” Gage asked, already heading to the bed.

“Her ass is mine.”

A delicious chill shot up Lizzie’s spine at his spoken promise.

Gage lay on his back on the bed and held out his arms. “Come here, baby. Decorate my cock with your sweet pussy.”

Lizzie moved to the bed and straddled Gage. He lay sprawled on

the bed, his ass near the edge and his feet anchored on the floor. He grabbed her around the waist and lifted her to his mid-section. He lowered her onto his rigid cock until she was fully impaled there.

In a moment of sanity, she gazed behind her at Logan standing near the bed, eyes glazed with lust, cock locked and loaded, legs braced. Shock rumbled through her as she watched Logan massage some kind of lotion on his large cock, preparing it for entrance into her ass.

“Oh, dear,” she moaned, wondering for a brief second of regret how she’d come to be in this position, literally.

“You okay, hon?” Gage massaged her back.

“I’m fine.” She gulped back the fear and stumbled on. She wanted this. She was way past denying her carnal needs. Tonight they’d be damned. She’d have her way with these two delectable men.

“Lean on my chest. Open your ass to Logan.”

Lizzie did so, tense and waiting.

Logan stroked her butt, slid his hands over it, around it, soft and soothing. He kissed her neck, her shoulder, the sides of her breasts while Gage massaged her back, all in an attempt to relax her.

Logan sank to his knees and ran his tongue up her thigh to her dripping cunt. He kissed her ass, ran his tongue around her opening, then thrust a finger inside her. It hurt a little, not as much as the first time since she’d had practice since then. Yet, she’d not had practice with a cock already stuffed in her cunt.

Logan’s finger probed and twisted, opening her wider. Soon, two more fingers joined it, plunging deep in her asshole, pressing down hard. She felt the fingers on the thin skin between her two channels as they pushed on the cock buried inside her.

Underneath her, Gage stirred and moved his cock in her pussy.

“You’re ready for me, Lizzie.” The tip of Logan’s penis pressed against her asshole. He forced past the ring of muscle. Pain pierced her, a burning sting that throbbed and smarted. She cried out, and Gage quickly muffled her cries with his soul-deep kisses.

Logan continued his penetration, slow but insistent. Oh, god, it hurt. The burning, the raw ache, the feeling of being filled by two cocks. The fear they might rip her apart before she could stretch to accommodate them. But her body didn't tear, it did stretch, and the biting pain mutated into a stinging pleasure.

With one last thrust, Logan's cock drove home. Her body convulsed with the painful pleasure. Sweat streamed off her body. Gage's wiry chest hair abraded her clamped nipples, shooting little sparks of delicious agony through every cell.

The two cocks in her cunt and ass began to move, nice and civilized at first. They rubbed against each other, the friction causing a sweet tremor insider her. Together, as if they'd done this before, the brothers began to work in rhythm. The faster and harder Logan thrust, the sharper the pain. Tears ran down her cheeks. She writhed and thrashed about from the onslaught of two cocks invading her body. Her two virile young men barraged her senses with their bodies.

Logan bent down and found her clit, toyed with it, made her focus on the pleasure while embracing the pain.

The men grunted, their breathing rough, their sweat-slicked bodies sliding over hers easily. Skin slapped against skin. Cocks thrust harder, faster, until they were banging into her with a zealous frenzy. Lizzie arched her back and thrust back against Logan, begging for more. Her own body erupted into a mass of sizzling nerves and insatiable lust.

"I love you, Lizzie. I love you!" Gage shouted as he came first, sending a shower of cum into her already-drenched pussy.

"I love you, too, Gage. With all my heart. And you, Logan, I love you."

"And I love you, Mrs. Gallagher" Logan pulled out then plunged his cock into her ass with a possessive ferocity. Lizzie's body, already adjusted to the feel of a large penis in her dark channel, convulsed with waves of pleasure. Logan grasped her nipples and tugged while his hips beat a harsh tempo against her ass. In a manner of seconds,

his cum filled her, warming her from the inside.

A wave of emotions swept Lizzie away like a small boat in a hurricane. She bobbed and fought for air, but the currents dragged her under until she drowned in a delicious sea of pain-induced pleasure.

She'd never forget this birthday.



## **Chapter 14**

*Lizzie's Journal, December 1, 1864  
Port Steele, Washington Territory*

*Fall has given way to winter. Snow fell today and covered the surrounding trees and mountains in a pristine white blanket. My life is fuller than I could've ever imagined.*

*My sisters are doing well, but do not yet have a special man in their lives.*

*Mr. Farrier has returned to San Francisco, but not before awarding Gallagher Timber with a huge contract. The Pettys have retreated in defeat and are barely hanging on to their inheritance. Even Constance seems to have tired of causing trouble. Lucy, of course, still gossips, so some things stay the same.*

*I'll never forget my birthday present, given by my strong husbands and the loves of my life. The one final thing to make my life complete is children, which will come in time.*

# **THE END**

**[HTTP://WWW.SOFIAHUNT.COM](http://www.sofiahunt.com)**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sofia loves to write hot romances with even hotter heroes. She prefers warm sun, warm sand, and views of bronzed, buff bodies on the beach. She lives on the west coast with assorted animals, including the human male variety. When she's not writing, she's shopping or socializing. She writes traditional romances under another pen name and divides her time between the two personas.

### *Also by Sofia Hunt*

Ménage Amour: Delectable Bad Boys 1: *Winner Takes All*  
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