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RANGE WAR

Bride

Lara Santiago

TASTY
TREATS



Tasty Treats 11

Range War Bride

In a world where female infertility is the norm, two related men are legally allowed to marry one woman to produce an heir for their family property.

Brianna escapes a vile arranged marriage but is rescued by two brothers, Alex and Rafe Drakestone, on their own bride hunt for a woman to carry their child. Brianna agrees to marry Alex and Rafe, if she proves fertile. However, her stubborn and not-so-nice ex-fiancés won't let her go without a fight and bring the local law into the mix.

And then all hell breaks loose.

Brianna harbors a horrible secret that threatens her freedom if found out. Will Alex and Rafe start a range war to keep her as their bride? And will they discard her once they learn what she's done in the name of self-preservation? Can four men fight over one woman and settle their private war?

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DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this book to an American Airlines ticket counter employee in New York (JFK) named Angie. Without her amazing hard work in getting me and my family on our way after a delayed flight threatened a long awaited trip, my recent vacation overseas would not have been nearly as fabulous. Thank you so much, Angie, for getting us on our way. Your extra effort is greatly appreciated.

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LARA SANTIAGO

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Chapter One

Wyoming - 2098

“The new female breeders will be here tomorrow. I expect you to come and help me look them over.”

Alex Drakestone tightened his grip on the reins looped between his gloved fingers, straightened in his saddle as his horse Desperado cantered across the grassy northernmost edge of their vast Wyoming property, and answered his brother absently, “Tell me. Are they slated for our prize bull or for us?”

“Very funny,” his brother Rafe said, but he didn’t laugh. “Since you brought it up, are we ever going to select a bride?”

Alex sent his gaze right to the stern profile of his only brother. “Are you ready?”

“Yes. I’m very ready. Tell me again why you aren’t.” Rafe turned his head a fraction and glanced his way before his gaze focused on the pommel.

“My dick is certainly geared up for recurring activity, but having a permanent sex partner available isn’t a good enough reason to get married, just yet. Is it my imagination, or does every review seem to contain only giggly teenagers?”

“It’s just you. The youngest woman we’ve seen is twenty. And they don’t giggle, they assess our family fortune with glee.”

“That’s not very encouraging.” Alex huffed.

“That’s life. Get used to it. Besides, the younger the woman, the better chance they have of being fertile. So as to provide children for our future.”

Alex knew Rafe was right, but it didn’t alleviate his anxiety. Sixty years ago, a nasty virus reduced the world’s population of women by a third. The eventual cure for those other two-thirds caused sterility in a significant portion of the survivors and their children. Three generations later, women able to conceive and bear children were still in very short supply.

Alex shrugged. “Well, now that I’m over thirty, I’d prefer a wife not more than a decade younger at least.”

“That may not be possible. Choices are limited, and our options are running out. We need to make a selection. One that will yield children.”

“Please.” He gave Rafe an exaggerated eye roll. “All we have to do is flash our credit account balance and we can have any single female in the tri-state area that we want. Even if they’ve already negotiated for a husband.”

“So find someone you want, for Christ’s sake!” The terse tone wasn’t like his happy-go-lucky brother. Alex slowed his horse’s gait until they stopped and sent a questioning gaze to his brother, silently demanding an answer for his outburst.

Rafe ducked his head. “I want a family, Alex. I’m ready.”

“So you said. And you want to just settle for any female available?”

“No, I want to stop waiting for some perfect girl who may never appear. Grow up.”

“I *am* grown up, and seeing as how the woman we choose will be with us forever, I don’t want to make any hasty decisions.”

“Hasty? If I left it up to you, we’d be octogenarians before we got

married.”

Alex couldn't hide his amusement at the remark and felt the smile shape his lips before he could stop it.

“It's not funny, Alex. I want kids to bounce on my knee before brittle bone injuries make it too dangerous.”

“Jesus, Rafe, we're in our mid thirties. I think we have a few more years before adult diapers and drool cloths are necessary.”

“What do I have to do to convince you that I just want to have a wife and kids? Tell me the words to say, and I'll say them.”

Given the expression in Rafe's eyes and the stern cut of his jaw line, Alex figured he was facing a fistfight if he didn't agree to consider marriage. And very soon.

“Fair enough. I didn't realize you'd become so anxious.”

“Well, now you know.”

Alex nodded. He clicked his tongue to get Desperado moving again. They rode along in companionable silence for a few more yards.

“All right. Call the lawyers. We'll organize a traditional official viewing for the coming weekend.” All of the viewings they had participated in to date were casual and only intended to introduce females into a certain family for the first time. Once lawyers were involved, it became a much more serious matter with permanent circumstances.

“Lawyers? Really? Statewide, Tri-state, or western district?” Tri-state would include not only their home state of Wyoming, but also included Idaho and Montana. The western district added on Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico.

Alex shrugged. “Tri-state or western district will give us a larger pool of choices, but whatever. Statewide will likely yield the most willing women. Especially if they've heard of us.”

“We have the largest spread of privately owned land in Wyoming. I'm sure lots of women in the surrounding states have heard of us.”

In order to keep their vast land, they had to get married and

produce a future generation to work it. If he and Rafe died without a child to inherit, the state would take custody of the land, offer it up for sale to the surrounding land owners, and sell it to the highest bidder.

Alex frowned. He truly did not want to get married to a giggly, immature, gold-digging female just to provide an heir to keep their land.

“Cheer up. We may find the perfect bride this time.”

“Or we’ll settle for a near-perfect one and I’ll suck it up.”

“Just because we both marry her doesn’t mean we have to share her right at first.”

Alex cut a sharp look to his brother. “Yes it does. Otherwise it’s harder on her. You know that.” His brother’s beaming, joyful expression wouldn’t be subdued with reason, and Alex inwardly sighed. Choosing a bride in the world today was a chore. Something he didn’t look forward to and his brother knew it.

“We can select anyone you want, Alex. Just fucking make a choice.”

“Fine. I’ll make a fucking decision, but I won’t be rushed.” However, the thought of selecting anyone made his heart go cold. Alex hadn’t met a woman yet that he wanted to spend an entire day with, let alone forever. Not even close.

“No rush, but by month end would be fine by me.”

Alex rolled his eyes and remained silent.

The casual viewings over the past few years consistently produced possibly fertile girls from the age of twenty to twenty-three, but none of them had ever displayed enough spark to entice him.

Over the past several decades, since the Richter virus decimated the population, females had been raised with one goal in mind: marriage for the purposes of procreation. Land ownership legacies would likely always be continued in this manner.

Marriage for love became second to securing property rights through inheritance. He knew this was how the world worked, and yet Alex wanted to experience love at first sight for the woman he and his

brother would spend eternity with. Or at least the bite of lust at first sight. What was wrong with that?

He wanted to be intrigued. He wanted a zap of desire to hit his cock along with the unfathomable need to discover every facet of the mesmerizing woman who would share their bed and lives. Forever. And ever.

Alex hadn't met a woman in any past viewings who generated any intrigue. Many knew they were rare and acted accordingly. Most had been brought up to be princesses and were invariably spoiled rotten due to their dwindling numbers.

While he'd certainly gotten a rise from several of the attractive debutants presented for his inspection, he'd never had his cock snap to lusty attention for a lingering second look. Given the world they lived in, love was a luxury they couldn't afford. Tolerable was the goal for any marriage these days. A long sigh escaped before he could stop it. If Rafe heard, he didn't remark.

They'd reached the outer marker of the northwestern border to their ranch before Alex realized it. Serious discussions of marriage certainly made the long ride go by much faster.

Rafe pulled hard on his reins and halted his horse fifty feet from the twelve foot high blue-tinted electrified fence separating their property from their neighbor, Cody Welter.

Alex drew alongside his brother and stopped, as well. The vast holdings their family had accumulated in the past seventy-five years were envied by many and closely guarded, which was why the fence line was checked each day. They didn't often "ride the line" on their own property. Usually, they had a pair of stable hands do it, but today, Rafe had wanted to talk.

If Alex had known he was about to be prodded into selecting a bride, he might have declined and found something more agreeable to do. Like falling off his horse and being dragged through a mountain of bristle bushes by his heels.

"If things go well, I'll have a baby snuggled in the crook of my

arm before the new century arrives.”

“That’s ambitious. Guess we better ensure our bride’s fertile.”

“How?”

Alex sighed. “The usual way. We’ll opt for a short term guarantee. Once the pre-wedding paperwork is signed, we’ll take turns fucking her twice a day until she’s pregnant, and if after three months she isn’t, then we can renegotiate and move on.”

“I won’t do that.”

“Okay, then I’ll step up to the chore—”

“No! We aren’t going that route.”

“If our intended bride can’t bear children, it defeats the purpose of getting married. The very purpose you convinced me of only minutes ago.”

His brother pegged him with an unreadable stare. “Aren’t you lonely, Alex?”

“No.”

“Well, I am. The truth is, I’d settle for a female to share my life with regardless of children. I miss having a woman in our lives.”

Alex turned in his saddle. “Here’s where *you* have to grow up. The whole purpose of the viewings and bride selection process etcetera is to ensure we get an heir. I won’t risk infertility. There is a reason it’s included as an authorized and viable custom when choosing a wife.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to like it or that we have to do it.”

“Yes. It does. There’s too much at stake.”

Rafe looked away, and several interesting curse words rumbled out from under his breath.

Alex prodded him. “Do you want Cody Welter to add our property to his and stick his hell-spawned progeny all over our land? Land that has been in our family for generations?”

“No. I just don’t want instant discord over announcing to the prospective brides’ families that we want to try out *fucking* their precious daughters for a few months before we offer a permanent

home for them.”

“It’s either that or we waste a decade in a childless marriage and then go through the laborious process of dissolution on the grounds of infertility. Only to start the process all over again ten years from now. Would you rather do that?”

Rafe shook his head and refused to look at him. They both stopped talking altogether as they continued their morning ride. Neither choice was going to be perfect. Alex traveled along, oblivious to his surroundings and pondered the possibility of a young, boring wife in as soon as the next week, until Rafe punched him in the arm.

“You see that?” He pointed at a group of riders galloping hell bent for leather toward them on Welter’s property.

Alex squinted. A single rider, with long flame-colored hair streaming behind her, was bent over the saddle’s pommel. She streaked across the flat ground on a trajectory straight toward them. A hundred yards behind her was a pack of Welter’s men in hot pursuit. She was about to cross into their land or smack into the barrier separating it from Welter’s property.

“Do you think she knows the fence is electrified?” Rafe asked. He pulled the barrier control from the pocket of his jacket.

“She’s about to find out.” Alex watched her turn her head around ostensibly to judge the distance of her pursuers. “Let her in. Just her.”

Rafe pushed a button on the remote control and allowed a hole to appear wide enough for a single rider to pass through.

Alex urged his horse closer to the fence at a saunter, and Rafe trailed along with him. They watched as she straightened in her saddle the minute the hole appeared. He thought he saw a relieved smile but was really too far away to be sure. She leaned over her pommel again and urged her horse faster toward salvation. If that was what she sought.

“Want me to shut it once she’s through?”

“No. Cody’s men know better than to start a range war by crossing into our land, no matter what the reason. We’ll wait here a

minute and see what her story is. Maybe she's a horse thief."

Rafe grinned. "Even from here I can see she's an attractive horse thief."

"Whatever. I'm curious to see why she was about to throw herself against our fence. If she hadn't killed herself and the horse, she'd have been hurt pretty badly."

"That would have been a shame because her cinnamon-colored hair already makes my dick throb. Let's find out what her name is and if she's attached."

Alex shook his head, but he had to admit to a similar feeling in his loins. Likely because she didn't look too giggly perched atop a thousand pounds of thundering horse flesh.

The lovely rider slipped through the hole of the fence and headed straight for them. The closer she got, the better Alex could see her and the more his cock came to attention.

She drew her reins short and slowed as she came to rest between their horses.

"Thank you very much for opening the fence. I thought they were going to catch me." She leaned over and stroked the neck of the palomino horse she rode with affection.

Alex caught a whiff of jasmine scent in the air from her direction, and the fabric across the lap of his jeans tightened even further. "Why were you being chased?"

Her attention shifted from her horse to focus directly on his face. Her eyes, a vivid azure blue shade, beckoned him like a sea siren. "I didn't want to get married."

"They chase you for that now?" Rafe grinned and sent her an unspoken look of approval.

Alex could tell Rafe was already mentally putting a ring on her finger and a baby in her belly. Given the conversation they'd just had, Alex assumed this girl's name was about to be added to their short list of marriage contenders. Hell, she'd probably garner the top spot. He wouldn't say it out loud because she was a stranger, but so far he

heartily approved of this new choice.

“They do if you’re promised to one of the most powerful landowners in the state.”

Rafe grinned and winked at her. “And I thought that title was exclusive to Rafe Drakestone or his brother Alex.”

Her eyes lit up, and her gaze intensified. “This *is* Drakestone land, correct?”

“Yes. It is.” She turned her gaze from Rafe to him. The only other close contender for most powerful landowner in the state was Cody Welter, and since his land was directly on the other side of the electrified fence, it stood to reason this beautiful woman was his bride-to-be. A crime of nature if there ever was one. Cody Welter was as popular as a wet dog in a dance hall.

“Please, I beg you. I’m asking for free passage across this land and asylum. Will you take me to your land owners to plead my case?”

Alex and Rafe exchanged a glance. “Perhaps. What’s your name, and what are you offering?” Asylum was commonly asked for by brides not wanting to marry the men their parents had selected. Especially if the contract had been set up when the bride was a child.

“My name is Brianna Lancaster. If you’ll allow me to accompany you to your ranch, I’ll offer myself in dual marriage to the land owners and grant them the right to test my fertility for ninety days before the final marriage papers are signed.”

The riders in pursuit slowed down as they approached the fence. It didn’t look like they would cross over the border. Smart.

“Stay here,” Alex commanded. He kneed his horse into a canter and headed over to the hole in the fence.

He counted nine riders. Each and every one of them had an impressive arsenal attached to their horses. Pulse rifles, laser pistols, and even sonic grenades were attached to each man’s saddlebag. Overkill for one little girl, he thought. Or she was more dangerous than she let on, which made her even more intriguing.

“Drakestone,” the rider in the lead called out, “thanks for stopping

Brianna for us. Send her back on over the border, and we'll take care that she gets back home safely."

"Why would I do that?" Alex placed both hands on his pommel. A glance over his shoulder assured him the woman and his brother were too far away to hear their conversation.

"She's the bride-to-be of Mr. Welter. She knows she's gotta marry him. Running away won't stop it."

"She's asked for asylum on my property. I'm granting it."

"She can't do that. The contracts have already been signed. It's done."

Alex shrugged. "She says otherwise. In a case like this, with conflicting statements, the authorities will have to decide."

The lead rider sat forward in his saddle and narrowed his eyes. "Send her through the fence, Drakestone, or there will be consequences."

"Don't threaten me, cowboy, or you'll find yourself on the wrong side of a range war you won't win. Tell your boss the lady will only be escorted from my private home with a warrant issued by the law. And he better bring the state sheriff himself or she stays here." He pushed a button on his wrist control panel and closed the fence. The blue semi-translucent border lit up again. He turned his horse to leave the perimeter.

"You're making a big mistake, Drakestone!" the leader shouted.

"Won't be the first time," he murmured under his breath.

Ignoring the colorful obscenities now flying over the fence, Alex returned to where Rafe waited with the girl. He felt sorry for the man who'd have to tell Cody his bride-to-be got away on Drakestone land. Well, he *almost* felt sorry for him.

"Thank you," she said the second he got within earshot. "Honestly, I'll never be able to thank you two enough."

"Guess we'll find out pretty soon."

Her eyes narrowed. "I don't understand."

"We own this property, and coincidentally, we're looking for a

bride.”

“You aren’t just range workers?” Her gaze fastened on his mouth for a few beats before she turned to stare at Rafe.

“Nope. I’m Alex Drakestone, and this is my brother Rafe. We’re the land owners you sought to make a deal with. Still interested in us?” She stared at him without speaking until he said in a low tone, “Want me to open the fence back up?”

She sent her gaze to the right and eyed the semi-transparent blue electric wall where Welter’s men still waited. She shook her head. “No. I’d be pleased to marry the Drakestone brothers. And no...I didn’t know you were looking for a bride.”

“Uh huh. Well, you must not be from around here then. Everyone knows we’re bachelors still searching for a wife.”

Her gaze strayed to his mouth again, and Alex’s intrigue level shot up as her gaze lifted to his eyes. “I’m not from around here. I’ve lived back east for my whole life. The truth is, I didn’t want to live out in the west.”

“But if you marry us, you will certainly live out here now.” Alex noticed she had freckles on her nose and was even more captivated by her beauty.

“Unless you decide against my proposal.” Her head tilted slightly as if to break his fixation on her face.

“Why on earth would I ever do that?”

Brianna’s slim shoulders raised a fraction of an inch. “Maybe you already have someone picked out that you’d rather marry. I’m not an eighteen-year-old debutant. And well, we *are* complete strangers.” She left out the part where she’d have to prove fertile. She also failed to mention the means by which they’d establish that knowledge. Sex.

Alex took it upon himself to answer for them both. “Coincidentally, we don’t have anyone picked out. And I don’t want a giggly teenager as my mate for life. Besides, lots of married couples today start out as virtual strangers. Trust me, that won’t stop us.”

She expelled a long sigh. “I don’t really want to get married right

now.”

“That’s unfortunate because I do. Given your generous offer of letting us try you out for fertility before we commit to the marriage for three months, I can’t wait to get you back home.” Alex stared into wide-open eyes so blue he wondered if the sky was jealous. This feisty woman touched his very soul. He watched as the meaning of his words sunk in to her brain. He wanted to fuck her as soon as possible, and now she knew it, too.

Rafe cleared his throat and gave him a “what the hell” look.

For the first time in his life, Alex was smitten with a woman. The color of her hair, the scent of her perfume, and the very tone of her voice conspired to light his world on fire. If she truly didn’t want to marry Cody Welter, and given her kind ninety day offer *that* seemed very certain, Alex planned to seduce her as quickly as possible before she changed her mind.

She found her voice after giving him a generous appraisal from head to chest. “I only said that because I thought you were workers. I wanted to ensure you’d take me to your land owners.”

“So if we’d been stable hands, you would have told a different story to our boss?”

She released a deep sigh. “Let’s just say I would have presented my case differently. Besides, I figured most of the landowners here were already married and shooting out progeny like bullets at a firing range. I didn’t expect to find two bachelors on the make.”

“I wouldn’t say we were *on the make*, I’d just say you present a great opportunity. Most of the naive marriageable girls we meet don’t like the idea of a ‘try me before you buy me’ sort of arrangement. Their fathers and mothers like it even less.”

“So I’m just a spontaneous opportunity? Great. I’ve always wanted to spread my legs for the chance at being a permanent wife. Night after night in my bed I wished for two handsome cowboys on horseback, of course, to sweep me off my feet by offering me a three month get-pregnant-or-get-lost deal. My dream life is unfolding

before my very eyes.” She ended her mock tirade with a long, soulful sigh.

Alex laughed out loud. “Well, when you put it that way, it makes me like you even more. You’re funny.”

She didn’t respond, but a faint smile surfaced on her lips. He wanted to kiss her with every fiber of his being. Would she respond? Would she give as good as she got?

“Just for the record, if you don’t get pregnant in the determined time frame, we won’t just kick you out into the world with the clothes on your back. We’ll arrange things for you.”

“What things? An allowance? A big pay off? Men are all the same. They think money solves everything. Husbands are worse. Even if we are only married temporarily, I’d bet my last dollar that you’ll spend the rest of my life trying to control me. And the reason I’d rather stay single.” She pushed out a long sigh as if in resignation and focused her attention on her saddle horn.

“Wow, Alex, she has the same views of marriage that you do. She should be perfect for us.”

She eyed the fence over one shoulder as if she were pondering her rock or hard place choices.

“It would likely have killed you if you’d run into it,” Alex said. He hoped that she didn’t change her mind about returning to their ranch house.

Over his shoulder he noted that the group of Welter’s men hadn’t vacated the fence line. Perhaps they wished for a miracle. Alex didn’t want to give them one, but it would be entirely up to the blue-eyed beauty before them.

“Well, the truth is, that would have been my preferred choice rather than marrying Cody and his deplorable cousin.”

Alex crossed his forearms and rested them on his pommel, his reins rested in one gloved palm. “The leader of the pack of Welter’s men following you said that you’d already signed the papers to finalize your marriage to Welter.”

Her head whipped around to stare deeply into his eyes. “That’s a big, fat lie!” Her gaze dipped to his mouth for a third time in as many minutes. “I’ve been here for the past week for the initial pre-signing phase.”

Alex wanted to taste her in the worst way, not just her lips but her face, her neck, her collarbone. Given the chance he’d lick every inch of her skin. And truth be told, he wanted to unbutton her blouse and savor each nipple as she panted and moaned as his first foray into the exploration of her body.

Doing so in front of an audience like Welter’s men was inappropriate and might invite retribution from the group across the fence. Besides, Alex wanted to get her alone to explore a future. He knew the right woman would strike him like a bolt of lightning. Brianna Lancaster was that woman. The woman he’d worried didn’t exist. But she did. Alex would do everything in his power to have her.

“Just to be clear and before we gallop away, you’re willing to sign a bride contract with us as soon as we get back to our ranch, right? And you’ll give us ninety days to fulfill the stipulated aspects of the bride contract?” *With lots of sex.*

Her gaze fell to the pommel of her saddle again. “Yes,” she said quietly.

“And then we can commence a three-month trial period of fertility to see if you get pregnant before signing the final marriage papers?”

Her gaze caressed his mouth before she once again nodded her assent. “I trust you’ll be less frightening than my expectations of life with Cody and his second, Simon.”

Truthfully, Alex didn’t want to even think about Cody Welter in the same room with Brianna, let alone picturing what the man had said or done to scare Brianna so badly. “Let’s head to our homestead. We can discuss detailed expectations when we get there.” Rafe sent a stern look his way.

Alex wasn’t in the mood to be chastised. “Actions speak louder than words though, right, Rafe?”

“Settle down. I figure we can let her relax a moment and offer her respite before we pounce on her.”

“I thought you were in a hurry to have kids. No time like this afternoon to get started.”

“Kids?” Her head whipped up so fast Alex blinked in surprise. She glanced at the fence again and the fierce riders still waiting there. “This afternoon?”

Rafe forced a laugh. “He’s only joking. Come on. The sooner we get going, the faster we get home.”

Alex didn’t want her to make another escape attempt, but wasn’t truly joking about getting her naked in as short a time as possible. His mouth watered at the prospect of their first kiss. Their first skin-on-skin embrace. In his mind, she *did* too have something to fear from them. Unmitigated lust. He hoped she wasn’t fearful of shedding all her clothing when they made love to her the first time. He wanted to gaze upon every inch of her body before sinking his cock deeply into her slick, hot pussy.

Brianna looked over at Rafe and nodded. Her gaze then traveled to him, and her eyes narrowed briefly. She didn’t stare at his mouth this time, but instead glanced from his head to his legs and back.

Alex wanted her to keep staring, but after a few seconds she looked away.

“Let’s go then. I’m anxious to get off this horse.”

Rafe and Alex exchanged a glance behind her head as they rode back home. Alex didn’t know what was on his brother’s mind, but he wanted Brianna to ride a different sort of animal.

The one currently swelling the front part of his pants.

Chapter Two

With a wary eye on each of her two new riding companions, Brianna Lancaster suspected she had ridden out of the frying pan and straight into hell.

After being pressured by bodyguards sent to her home in New York with only a forty-eight hour notice and brought out to Wyoming at the behest of her odious former fiancé, Cody Welter, her lack of trust for men in general was riding very high.

“Why didn’t you break the contract with Cody Welter if you never intended to marry him?” Alex asked.

“The original bride contract was with his cousin, Dylan. Turned out he wasn’t as anxious to take over for his family in the ranching business. That suited me just fine. We struck a deal a long time ago to put off our permanent marriage agreement as long as possible.”

“But Dylan Turner was killed a couple of weeks ago and his cousin Cody is now set to inherit.” Rafe shook his head as if saddened that Dylan was dead. She agreed. It was a huge tragedy. And not just because she cared for him. His death left her in a bad place with regard to the marriage contract. Dylan would never have allowed this if he’d know what an ass hat Cody was.

“Right. And then Cody asserted his rights for the marriage much more quickly than I was prepared for. I don’t think Dylan was cold yet when he signed the paperwork for me to be sent out to Wyoming. Plus, Dylan was my friend. I’ll miss him very much. I certainly wasn’t ready to get down to business with Cody and his new selection so quickly.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thanks.” She had to turn her head away and blink hard a few times to keep from breaking down into sobbing tears. It wouldn’t do any good. Dylan was gone, and Cody was his heir and now about to be in charge of all Dylan held.

She hadn’t signed any new agreement and didn’t wait around at Cody’s ranch to be persuaded. Not after she’d found that video disc hidden in his desk.

Instead, she took the first opportunity and ran like the devil himself chased her from a bride negotiation from long ago that she’d had no part in. She knew her rights. Unless they could prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was fertile, she didn’t have to marry at all.

Cody Welter had the coldest eyes she’d ever seen. If he wasn’t already at the right hand of Satan, then he held a job as disciple of evil over the limited world he controlled. The very thought of his lingering gaze upon her after her arrival last week was enough to make her blood freeze. If it hadn’t been for some unexpected business meeting which took him away from the ranch, Brianna was certain her fate would be already irreparably decided.

Worse, today’s run would have been a waste of time. Cody had wanted her to come to Wyoming six months ago to spend time with him and Dylan. She had put him off.

The new law requiring each woman marry two men, under the guise of protecting the country’s shrinking population, had changed everything for her. She’d held out as long as possible. She had never wanted Cody, but his cousin Dylan made him palatable as a secondary husband. She knew Dylan would protect her.

After Dylan had been killed, Brianna had flown out for his funeral. During her short stay, Cody made a new choice as second in the bride contract. He pulled her aside directly after Dylan’s service to introduce her to Simon. The bastard. Brianna decided death was preferable to the man he’d chosen as secondary.

If Cody was Satan, then Simon was surely spawned from hell’s dark side. The hidden video discs she’d found proved her instincts

accurate. The two of them should be arrested for the perverse way they enjoyed sex with women.

With that deplorable discovery fresh in her mind, she would have gladly hit the electrified fence to escape if Alex and Rafe hadn't opened it. But thankfully, she had new options.

Back to the present, Alex and Rafe Drakestone were nothing like she had expected. Her notion of them colored by Cody's vehement dislike and continual venom-filled attacks for the short time she had spent with them before they left on their sudden business trip. Cody and Simon hadn't wasted any time talking down the neighbors. She'd expected the Drakestone brothers to be at the very least barbarians of the west rather than two of the most attractive cowboys she'd ever laid eyes on.

Rethinking her original escape plan, Brianna decided to wait until an opportune time and slip away from this sanctuary. Hopefully, the Drakestone brothers wouldn't hinder her strategy. It wasn't that she wasn't intrigued by the possibility of marrying them, but she had so many secrets, and they ultimately wouldn't want her as their bride. Not after they found out what she'd done. Heaven help her if it was ever discovered she'd broken the federal law regarding full disclosure of her ability to bear children.

The ride to the Drakestone homestead was quiet and uneventful. They crested a small plateau, and displayed before them in the valley between several other hills were the many outbuildings dotting an obviously thriving cattle business. Drakestone beef was said to be the finest dining in the west. And the east, too.

A multi-colored dog of mixed origins raced up to their horses dancing and barking as if his masters had been gone far too long.

"It looks like your dog is happy to see you. That's telling."

"All dogs are happy to see pretty much anyone return." Alex sent her a puzzled gaze.

She turned to stare deeply into his vivid emerald eyes. "Not all of them."

Cody's dogs slinked around with their tails perpetually tucked between their hind legs as if waiting for a beating. So did his servants. She'd heard whispered rumors the moment she arrived. Cody equated being as mean as an angry snake with ultimate power. And apparently, Simon was worse.

The three of them dismounted in front of an antiquated-looking barn. Upon closer inspection, it was a modern structure but designed to look as if it was two centuries old.

Brianna found it as quaint and charming as the two men with her. She relaxed a notch with the notion that this change was for the better. Because frankly, anything was better than Cody Welter and his cousin, Simon.

Alex called a ranch hand over to take their mounts. "Feed the Palomino, brush her down, re-saddle her, and drive her back to the Welter ranch in our plushest trailer."

Brianna didn't know if being stranded without a horse was a good thing. Alex turned and gave her a reassuring look. "If you need a horse, we'll provide one. I don't want a horse thieving charge launched against you."

"Supposedly, it's my engagement present, but with the broken pledge, perhaps the gift is no longer mine."

"Well, it should be yours, but just in case. We don't want to lose you to a technicality or a felony charge of horse thievin'," Rafe said. His hand graced the lower part of her back, sending a friction of sensation up her spine. Alex joined them and grabbed her hand. Together, they led her to the front door of a charming, oversized log cabin.

Brianna wasn't certain she wanted to escape from these two interesting men, but if given the opportunity, she'd be gone faster than a speeding-pulse laser shot.

After having her sign a standard temporary marriage agreement in their den, which had beautiful timber-lined walls, Alex and Rafe led her quickly to their private quarters.

“We inherited the rooms when our folks died ten years ago,” Rafe explained, “but we didn’t move in until recently.”

“I see.” Brianna walked along with them quietly, but was very aware of them. Her apprehension had doubled since entering the house.

“It was hard to modify everything, but we wanted to do extensive remodeling to modernize it.”

“And to shape it to the current lifestyle changes?” she asked.

He grinned. “Right. There are two large master bedroom suites on either side of an equally large center guest suite intended for our bride. All three rooms exit into an octagonal-shaped parlor area. That’s the room we’ll see first.”

They walked down a short hallway. Through the ornate door at the end was the octagonal room he’d described.

“It’s lovely,” she murmured the moment they stepped into the parlor area. Warm wood tones dominated the space. The outer walls to her left were made of rough hewn logs, but the touches of color in the paintings and furniture were inviting. Through the skylights above her head, Brianna could see clear blue sky. There were three doors straight ahead and one to her left. She knew what these room were.

“The center door is our bride’s room.” Rafe pointed to the center of the three in front of her.

She didn’t smile. “And each of the other doors leads to your individual rooms, correct?”

Rafe nodded.

“And each of your individual rooms has an entrance into my room, right?”

“It’s fairly standard. Although, I like to believe it has a certain country charm you don’t find just anywhere.” Rafe grinned. He was fast becoming hard to resist. She glanced at Alex’s seductive mouth when he spoke.

“And all the bedrooms face the western sky so as to take advantage of the singular unobstructed beauty of the Rocky

Mountains. You'll be able to see the white caps of leftover winter snow on the peaks even though it's already early May." Alex's soft tone didn't fool her into believing he had anything other than sex on his mind, but since she was having similar lust, she couldn't really blame him. But it didn't alter her plans for what she had to do next.

"I'm sure it's lovely." Truthfully, in her mad dash this morning, she hadn't even noticed the mountains.

Rafe squeezed her hand.

Brianna's heartbeat kicked up a notch with the gentle pressure applied to her fingers. Alex's hand moved to rest on her shoulder. Every place he touched her skin warmed to scorching levels. It was a wonder she hadn't self-combusted each time they'd offered a small caress.

"Would you like to freshen up?" Alex squeezed her shoulder, and her heart rate doubled again. He turned into her, putting their bodies very close. "Then we can discuss what happens next." The tone of his voice lowered with the last three words, and her body responded with a gush of moisture between her legs, the likes of which she'd never felt before. These two men were like walking aphrodisiacs to her libido. Dangerous.

She nodded, unable to trust her voice.

Alex leaned closer as if to whisper in her ear, but instead he kissed her cheek with a gentleness she hadn't expected.

The whisper came next. "We'll meet back in this room in, say, ten minutes to discuss our future together."

His chest brushed the side of her breast. It was all she could do not to leap on to his body to satisfy the craving she'd just discovered she had for him.

Rafe kissed her other cheek, only his lips lingered and nibbled along her jaw line. Her nipples hardened, and the rush of desire took her off guard. She almost invited them to help her freshen up but shook off her lust. She needed to get away from these two men before she did something she couldn't take back.

Marriage wasn't in her immediate plans nor was providing an heir. In theory, she was fertile and able to produce children. She hadn't ever put this to the test. Cody somehow knew this. He had relished the idea of taking her virginity. She was grateful Cody never got the opportunity. He'd even made mention of it in the horrid video she'd discovered. Escaping him was a huge victory. Before, just knowing he wouldn't be able to impregnate her was tantamount to winning.

However, now that she was off and ready to marry Alex and Rafe, her deception weighed on her heart. They didn't deserve what was about to happen. They'd do their level best to get her pregnant, of that she had no doubt. But it wouldn't happen. She had ensured this fact herself. This was the first time she'd experienced regret over her scandalous actions.

She hadn't ever wanted to take husbands. She would have been plenty content to be single. Although, if she had to choose two men to marry, these were definitely the two she wanted. However, providing an heir for them would not only be difficult just now, it would be impossible.

Brianna disengaged from them and walked on rubbery legs to the door they'd indicated. Hand on the shiny brass doorknob, she cast a glance over her shoulder at the two amazing men. Correction. Very dangerous.

She didn't plan to stay long enough to discuss anything. In ten minutes and with a little luck, she could be halfway off this property and headed back home. Her brother would be desperate by now wondering where she'd gone so abruptly. She wondered how long these two cowboys would wait before coming after her. Hopefully long enough for her to steal a horse and be out of sight of the ranch.

Maybe they'd write her off within seconds of finding her gone. That made her a little sad as she walked through the door and left her rescuers behind.

Chapter Three

The moment the door to the bride suite closed behind Brianna, a call came on Alex's cell phone. It was their ranch foreman, Henry.

"Hey boss, can you come out to the barn? There's something you need to see."

"Be right there." *Fuck*. He'd rather wait for Brianna to emerge and spend the afternoon convincing her to be his wife. And then they'd celebrate with sex. Lots of sweaty, satisfying sex.

Rafe's eyebrows rose in question.

"Henry wants me to see something. I'll be right back. Don't start anything good without me."

Rafe's bark of laughter preceded his statement. "No promises."

Alex exited the house by way of a side door because it was closer to the barn. He rounded the back corner of the house in time to see Brianna's long, shapely legs and lovely ass protruding from the bay window in her room.

Leaning a shoulder against the exterior, he paused to watch her wiggle backwards out of the frame. The window she chose was half a story above the ground. She was about to drop down onto the basement window well grate below.

If she was lucky and had good balance, she'd be okay. If not, she'd break a bone in her ankle the minute she hit because the window she shimmied out of was a six-foot drop. Not the best way to fall to the ground. Plus, she wore impractical boots.

He watched the spike-heeled and narrow, slick toes protruding from the window. Yep, she'd break both ankles if she didn't have any sense of balance. He approached silently, ready to catch her if she lost

control.

Alex waited until she hit the grate with the balls of both feet. She bent at the knees and stood momentarily before falling backwards toward his extended hands. Before she could get caught in the grate or fall on her ass, he grabbed her around the waist from behind.

She screamed the moment he touched her. He hung on tight until she was stable on her feet.

“What do you think you’re doing?” She twisted in his loose embrace until she faced him.

Alex tightened his hold again once she turned. “I could ask you the same thing. Do you have a death wish or something?”

“No. I just...I wanted to...why are you...” she stopped stuttering and pressed her lush lips together until a straight line formed. She promptly shook her head as if trying to clear the cobwebs from her mind.

“You could have gotten hurt.”

“Like you give a shit,” she muttered. Her gaze lowered from his face to his chest.

“I *do* give a shit. Liability insurance is astronomical, in case you didn’t know. I’d hate for you to sue me.”

Her gaze shot to his mouth and then rose to his eyes. He loved that she couldn’t seem to keep from staring at his mouth.

The vibrant blue color of her eyes sparkled in the mid-morning sun. He wanted her with a singular lust he’d never experienced before in his jaded life. His cock thickened, and he pressed his hips against her lower belly, unable to stop the bold come-on.

A slim thread of rational thought entered briefly into his lust-soaked mind. He had her wrapped in his arms in broad daylight, and Henry was waiting to “show” him something in the barn. He should back away, but found he lacked the willpower to do so. It was difficult not to touch her. He wanted to mold his body to hers. He wanted to bury himself into her. He wanted to learn every detail of her life in between bouts of sexual intercourse.

Before he got hold of his libido, her hands bunched his shirt at the collar, and she pulled him closer. When her lips brushed across his mouth, Alex was so surprised he lost all rational thought. He pressed forward, tightening his arms around her. He didn't care who saw them.

The soft texture of her tongue as it entered between his lips pretty much disconnected his brain and any idea of stopping.

He slanted his mouth across hers to get a deeper taste and pushed his cock into her soft belly again. She tasted like sex, and he wanted more. Her hands discarded his shirt and fastened to his face. She pulled his head closer, dueling with his tongue in a frenzied kiss. Alex slid his hands to her ass, lifted her up, and then pulled her legs apart. He pushed her against the outer wall of the house and pressed his cock into the heat between her thighs.

God help him, he couldn't stop kissing her. Next step would be their clothes flying off into the breezy morning. Alex reached up to cup her breast and brushed a thumb across her nipple. She moaned into his mouth, and he thought he might die if he didn't take her to bed in the next few seconds.

"What in the blazes are you two doing down there?"

Rafe's amused voice from the window above his head didn't even slow him at first. But Brianna startled the moment Rafe spoke and slid her lips off of his. The pink in her cheeks emphasized her freckled, pert nose.

Alex had never seen a more beautiful sight. He cleared his throat, looked up at his brother's slightly perturbed face. Rafe's gaze went to Brianna, and a hungry look his brother rarely exhibited came out for a few seconds. Not jealousy at what Alex was doing, but a desire to do the exact same thing.

He separated his body from Brianna's with regret and helped her find her footing. "I'm headed to the barn to see what Henry wants to show me. Brianna's coming with me. Please join us, if you'd like." Alex took a deep breath to control the raging lust that made his jeans

tight across his lap. He grabbed her hand and pulled her along behind him on a trajectory to the barn. She followed without speaking a single syllable.

The scent of fresh hay assaulted him the second he stepped inside the large structure. "Hey, boss," Henry said the moment they entered the barn. "I figured you'd want to take a look at your favorite horse's latest issue."

Henry turned and walked over to the birthing stall. He and Brianna trailed behind him.

They peered into the stall at the wobbly-legged foal still slick in a few places across his flanks from being born. His face had very similar markings to that of his horse, Desperado, as if his eyes had been swiped with a wide, white paint brush. "Looks just like his sire. Even at a couple hours old."

"We should call him Bandit." Alex's heart softened a little at the miracle of life displayed before him. Baby animals were very hard to resist. Rafe's urge to procreate became easier to understand as he watched the foal lurching carefully in the hay near his mother.

"Will do, boss. Bandit it is." Henry pushed his cowboy hat back on his head and grinned. Rafe entered the barn and peered into the birthing stall. "He's adorable. Looks just like Desperado."

"Who is Desperado?" Brianna asked quietly. Her steady gaze hadn't shifted from the foal since they arrived.

"My horse."

She turned her head to him and laughed. "Wow. Hard to believe such a cute little foal came from the beast you were riding today."

"He may look like a beast, but he's a pussycat." Alex turned his focus from Bandit to Brianna whose smile faded when he added, "Much like his owner."

Her lips quirked into an unreadable expression, and she turned her attention back to Bandit.

Rafe clapped his hands together and rubbed his palms back and forth, stealing their attention from the foal. "Now that we're all

refreshed with the spirit of new life, let's go back and discuss our future."

"I agree." Alex reached for Brianna and slid his arm around her shoulders. She didn't resist, but he didn't let her go.

She crossed in front of the latest technological advances in animal husbandry with regard to cow impregnation. It was called the Impregnator Plus. The large square machine, which looked more like a scale to weigh their cattle, was actually a machine designed to determine whether a cow was ready to be inseminated with a bull's seed for impregnation. It was guaranteed to be a hundred percent accurate.

Many crude names had already been attached to it. Alex's favorite thus far was the "time to put it to 'em" machine, but he pretended not to engage in such foolish cowboy antics with his workers.

Brianna walked past the machine and stepped one foot on the base as they walked past. Rafe was hot on her heels, and Alex saw him glance at the read out as Brianna passed by it. His laugh made Brianna stop. She turned back to him, and Alex also paused.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"Nothing."

She lifted an eyebrow. He wasn't being very convincing.

"You just stepped on the insemination machine. And you registered."

She looked at the Impregnator Plus and paled. She jumped back as if it might reach out and knock her up.

Alex put a hand on her lower back as if he intended to push her toward the machine and said, "Maybe we should test her. It would save us time."

Brianna stumbled backwards into Alex's body and looked positively horrified.

"Don't worry," Rafe said quickly. "It's not reliable on humans."

"Very funny." But she gave the machine a caustic look and backed away two more steps and out of Alex's arms as if to ensure it

couldn't get her.

Alex grabbed her elbow and guided her out of the barn as Rafe followed close behind with an amused smile on his face. Reliable or not, he'd heard rumors that it sometimes worked on other animals besides cows, including humans. He'd have to ask his brother later if the machine registered her as "ripe" for impregnation or not. He'd love to get her pregnant this first week.

Once they were back where they started in the parlor outside the bedrooms, Alex moved in close, pinning her with his most serious gaze. "Where were you headed once you'd gone backwards through your bedroom window?"

Her chin hitched up a notch. "Out."

He remained quiet for a slow count of ten as if expecting her to launch into a long explanation of why she was leaving. She obviously wasn't going to oblige him.

Alex kept his stare fixed on her face. "Next time use the door."

Her arms crossed in front of her as if to ward him away. "Maybe I didn't want you to see me go." She looked him in the eye, but the defiance was all gone. She seemed a little scared and not at all like the sultry siren who'd practically kissed his lips off earlier.

Alex was deflated. She'd been so responsive when he caught her outside the window. He wanted to go back to that moment before they'd been interrupted. He wanted to kiss her again.

He leaned forward, ignoring the barrier of her crossed arms. "Do me a favor and just tell me to my face you don't want me rather than risk breaking your neck shimmying out a window backwards. We haven't done anything we can't take back yet." But his heart hurt at the mere thought of losing her.

Her eyes widened slightly. If anything, she looked more sexy than ever.

She whispered, "But that would be a big fat lie."

A slim hope rose in his heart. "Why?"

"I definitely want you. I just have other things I need to be doing."

* * * *

Rafe watched his brother and Brianna with interest. “What about me? Do you want me? Or am I the real reason you tried to escape?”

Her gaze shifted to him. She sighed as if resigned. “No. I want you, too. But I still don’t want to get married right now.”

“Why not?”

Her gaze lifted to the ceiling for a moment. “Do you even understand what it’s like for a woman in today’s society? I feel like a brood mare. You only want me if I can produce a child anyway. You don’t care what I like or don’t like or anything as long as my pussy is serviceable and my womb will carry your next heir.”

Rafe stepped closer. “That is not true. At least give us a chance to show you what being with us would entail before jumping to conclusions.”

“Will there be whips and chains available for our sexual adventures?”

Rafe exchanged a puzzled glance with his brother and said, “Not unless you want them.”

“Well, I don’t. And I don’t want my only vocation in life to be impregnation. As a matter of fact, I wanted to be different. I wanted an education. I wanted to do something besides spread my legs for two men and their ultimate landholding legacy ambitions.”

“You can do all of those things. But given our experience, we’ll ask that you obtain your education once a baby is on the way and the keeping ceremony is complete.”

Rafe moved closer. Alex stepped away to allow him full access. “We have a very progressive attitude toward women. You are welcome to participate in the running of this ranch if you’re interested. All we ask is that you provide heirs so that our land is protected. These two tasks are not mutually exclusive.”

She expelled a long sigh and shook her head. “Why me? I’m

almost twenty-nine years old. Ancient by 'review' standards these days."

Rafe grinned. "Well, Alex and I prefer a more seasoned woman. Besides, you don't look that old." He moved closer yet. He wanted to taste her lips. Wanted to lick his way inside her mouth and not stop his seduction until they were both spent, satisfied and breathing hard. Then he wanted to do it again.

The kiss was unavoidable. And he'd wanted to do it since he'd seen Alex kissing her before they went to the barn. She didn't put up any protest when he pushed his mouth to her soft lips and nibbled the bottom one. He twisted his face to allow a deeper access. She didn't hesitate. Instead, she slid her arms around his neck and pulled her breasts into his chest.

The delectable feel of her soft curvaceous body willingly pressed to his put him in a different frame of mind. His cock pulsed to attention, ready to go. He slipped his hands to her lower back and massaged the muscles on either side of her spine. She moaned into his mouth and pushed her hips forward. Rafe thought he might die of happiness right there in her arms.

He caught Alex's movement out of the corner of his eye. His brother moved in behind Brianna and kissed the back of her neck. She moaned again, and Rafe didn't know if he could last much longer. His desire raged out of control for this woman. She was perfect, and he intended to show her how they would love her.

He wrenched his lips from her mouth. No small feat. "Let's move into the bedroom. We can show you an example what your new life with us would entail." Then he latched his lips to hers again, unwilling to stop kissing just for conversation.

She kissed him back for several long moments, before pulling away slightly. Her glazed-over expression softened his soul. A timid smile shaped her lips. "Okay. Show me what life would be like with the two of you."

Before she changed her mind, Rafe grabbed her hand and led her

into the large space. They both started pulling clothes off as they made their way across the room to the bed. First his shirt hit the floor, then Alex's followed. Rafe pulled off his cowboy boots and finally they both helped her slowly remove both her shirt and jeans.

Rafe eyed her perfect body as Alex unhooked her bra. Her breasts spilled out in lush invitation. Alex cupped them each and pinched her nipples as Rafe leaned forward and kissed her mouth again.

She paused, and her uncertain expression made him ask, "What?"

"Are you both staying for this round?"

Alex kissed her neck and answered at the same time Rafe did with, "Of course."

Chapter Four

Brianna trembled in the arms of these two delicious cowboys, wondering if she was about to wake up and find out this had all been a fear-induced dream. Had she really run from Cody and his lecherous cousin, Simon?

Would she have crashed her horse into the fence separating the two properties if they hadn't let her in? She couldn't honestly answer. Finding out from a house maid that the northern perimeter fence bordering Cody's land was patrolled each and every day at a certain time by Drakestone ranch hands had been valuable information. She assumed rightly that they'd have the means to open the fence. What she hadn't anticipated was that the Drakestone brothers would patrol their own land on occasion.

Fate had thrown her a wicked surprise.

Rafe kissed a tingling path from her lips to her throat. Alex pressed up against her from behind. His cock dug into her ass, and she honestly hadn't ever felt so sexy in all her life. She wanted him. She wanted Rafe. She wanted to have sex with both of them. And hadn't ever been tempted by even one man before now.

There had been attractive men in and out of her life certainly, but none that made her blood pound in her veins. None that had ever gotten her to disrobe and none that had ever made her want to share her body with two men, especially at the same time.

Rafe lowered his head and kissed her throat as Alex continued his languorously decadent kisses across the back of her neck. He stopped pinching her nipples, and she didn't know why until Rafe kissed a path to one and sucked the tip into his mouth. The suction pushed an

electric pulse of desire to her pussy.

If their intent was to get her in the mood, she was already there. Rafe released one nipple and sucked the other between his lips. The sensation sent a desperate longing to the center of her body. Her pussy was wetter than she'd ever felt it and threatened to spill juice down her legs.

Rafe released her nipple and kissed his way to her belly. He slid to his knees, and when his face pushed into the curls at her apex, she sagged against Alex. She didn't think her legs would support her if Rafe put his tongue on her clit.

Alex slipped an arm around her waist to steady her on her feet. Rafe pulled her legs apart and licked her clit, and a groan escaped her throat before she could stop it. She glanced down at his dark head buried between her thighs and a shudder ran down her body.

The sensation of his tongue on her clit was vibrantly thrilling. He was very good.

From behind her, Alex shifted to her side and whispered, "Turn your head. Kiss me."

Alex made love to her lips with tender attention as Rafe brought her to the brink of orgasm with his tongue. Her legs wobbled with longing as a spiral of desire coiled deep in her womb.

Rafe's fingers dug into her ass as he pushed his face deeper into her curls, licking her clit with a steady rhythm. Her pussy clenched as if searching for a cock, and more juice was released. He moaned, and the sensation of vibration between her legs almost made her release.

Was she supposed to come? Weren't they supposed to stop before she ever hinted at climaxing to stick a cock inside of her and propagate the planet? Apparently not, because neither of them seemed in a hurry to fuck her. She relaxed a notch as she remembered that they were showing her what life would be like with them. They were on their best behavior.

Alex's tongue tangled with hers in a frenzied kiss. He pinched her nipple which sent another spiral of pleasure to her core. She wasn't

going to last much longer.

Rafe's fingers shifted below. While his tongue never stopped the enticing, indescribably delicious torture of licking her clit, he slid two of his fingers deeply into her pussy. And that was all it took for her to come. A bolt of pleasure rocked her core and spread her warm and tingling release outward. She broke the kiss with Alex to shriek as waves of delight rippled across her body with a force that had her writhing against Alex. His steady hold on her kept her from slithering to the floor in a sated heap.

"Whatever you just did to me should be bottled and sold. You'd make millions."

Alex laughed and kissed her cheek. "It's called an orgasm. Do you like it? Because we can do it again and again if you like it."

"I love it. But what about you two?" Brianna's eyes popped open. She stared at Alex. She kept waiting for them to throw her to the bed, whip out their mighty cocks, and take turns fucking her, but they didn't seem in any hurry for their own gratification.

"We have plenty of time for us."

Rafe's fingers slid from her pussy. He stood and licked them clean. "Tasty."

"I'd think you at least want to attempt to get me pregnant." The words came out of her mouth before the futility of it registered. She closed her eyes for a moment, hating herself for what she'd done.

"If you're anxious, I'll certainly oblige you." Rafe proceeded to remove his jeans. A lock of silky dark hair fell onto his forehead as he bent to his task. The well-worn jeans slid down his long, muscular legs, and when he straightened, his wide, stiff cock stood at proud attention. Her gaze followed upward to his six-pack abs sculpted as if from marble and then to his perfect chest. She then looked up at his dimpled grin and light blue eyes. He was perfect.

She wanted his cock pushed deeply inside her body. As soon as possible.

Alex released her and also shucked his jeans off quickly after

pulling first one boot off and then the other kicking the pile of clothing aside.

“So do we continue?” Alex asked as he approached.

“Why wouldn’t we?”

“The choice is yours. We will finalize the arrangement with you when we verify we can get you pregnant. We’ll be able to tell within a few days if you are. At that time we can continue with the keeping ceremony.”

“What if I can’t get pregnant? Or what if it takes me a long time?”

“There are tests that can determine your overall fertility.”

“I’ve had those tests.”

“And?”

“And as far as any doctor has told me, I’m good to go.”

“That you are, honey.” Rafe licked his lips. “The very best I’ve ever tasted.”

Brianna’s head was swimming in post-orgasmic bliss. She desperately wanted to know what it felt like to have sex. A part of her heart knew these men were damn near perfect, and she couldn’t seem to form the words, “I shouldn’t do this.” So she nodded.

“I *do* want to continue. What happens next?”

Alex took her into his arms and kissed her hard on the mouth. His cock dug into her belly. Just as quickly, he released her and spun her to face Rafe. Alex’s hands bracketed her waist, and he buried his face into the back of her neck.

Rafe smiled. “Will you kiss me?” Knowing his mouth had just been licking her pussy made the idea of kissing him that much naughtier. She nodded again and added a smile.

He took her face into his hands with gentle care and brushed the barest of kisses across her lips. One of Alex’s hands dropped between her legs and his fingers grazed her sensitive clit just as Rafe slid his tongue into her mouth. The musky flavor of her own juices assaulted her taste buds and revved up her libido in seconds at the same time her clit sparked with pleasure. She grabbed Rafe’s cock in one hand

and squeezed. He growled when her thumb slid across the head of his cock, spreading the drop of pre-cum over the head of his dick.

Brianna had a wicked thought enter her mind, courtesy of a sex video disc she'd watched long ago. She pushed Rafe back, breaking their carnal kiss. His eyebrows furrowed. "I'd like to reciprocate." She turned her head and caught Alex's gaze. "And you can fuck me from behind as I suck on his cock, if that gets you off."

Never in her life had she said such bold words. She'd seen her fair share of sex in movies over the years. At least enough to bluff her way through this first time. They were both so big, they likely wouldn't notice her lack of experience anyway. She certainly didn't intend to say the words, "I'm a virgin, so take care."

Rafe stumbled backwards and sat on the edge of the large bed. Brianna placed her hands on his thighs and dipped her head into his lap, taking his wide cock into her mouth. Rafe's hand speared through the strands of her hair, guiding her gently as she sucked his dick all the way to the back of her throat. Rafe's groaning encouragement from above came out as a murmur as she sucked his cock in and out of her mouth. She grasped the base and squeezed as she found a steady rhythm.

Behind her, Alex moved in close. His thighs brushed against her legs, and his cock slid easily between her parted legs. Her pussy gushed as he found and fingered her clit. The head of his cock soon edged between her pussy lips, sliding easily inside with all the creamy moisture available to ease the way. He didn't move any deeper, but instead stroked her clit with his finger.

The sensation of his cock widening the entrance of her pussy as he pleased her combined with the huge cock in her mouth made for a seductive experience. Brianna was so turned on, it only took a few strokes of Alex's fingertips against her clit before she climaxed again.

The moment she screamed in bliss, she pulled her mouth from Rafe's cock. Meanwhile, Alex shoved his cock the rest of the way inside her body. Spasms still rocked her pussy with such orgasmic

delight that she didn't notice any pain from his entry. He stretched her, filled her, and the very feel of his cock wedged in her pussy made her womb tighten in pleasure. This experience was exactly what she'd always wished for and never expected.

Brianna took Rafe's cock back into her mouth as Alex pulled out half way and slammed inside her pussy again. The feeling was indescribably pleasurable. The walls of her pussy pulsed from the second climax.

Rafe groaned and pulled her head off his lap. "Don't want to come in your mouth," he whispered. His eyes slammed shut as if he were trying to get hold of himself.

"Why not?" Brianna put her mouth back on Rafe's cock. He started to protest, but she did her best to swallow him whole. The hiss of pleasure from his lips galvanized her to suck even harder. She wanted him to come. Wanted to make him happy. Wanted to be a part of this threesome more than anything she'd ever wanted in her life. And this was a huge surprise. She had never wanted to so much as share her body with another man until now.

Alex stroked into her pussy from behind harder and deeper with each thrust. He grasped her hips and pierced her deeply before a guttural sound erupted from his throat.

Rafe tried once more to remove her head from his lap, but she wanted him to be satisfied. She tightened her grip at the base of his cock and sucked just a little harder. Her tongue wrapped around the end of his dick, and after a second or two, Rafe groaned in what sounded like pleasure as a salty blast of cum gushed down her throat.

Waves of satisfaction burned down Brianna's body. She never expected her first experience to be this good. She'd never expected to enjoy sex with one man let alone two men. She never wanted to leave this bed, but reality intruded. There was someplace she needed to be.

Once she satisfied them and gained their trust, she'd be gone. Perhaps they wouldn't hate her when they found out why.

Chapter Five

Alex grabbed Brianna around the waist and lifted her off of Rafe's very satisfied body. The fact that she'd swallowed after being given the option not to raised her even further in his mind. Her pussy was so tight, Alex wanted to ask her if she used to be a virgin, but didn't want to find out the truth of that just yet.

Cody Welter was a bastard in many respects, but he didn't think Brianna had slept with him willingly or not. Perhaps that was why she'd run. She didn't want to learn the facts firsthand regarding Cody's bedroom thrills.

There were rumors of his ill treatment of women over the last several years. His cousin Simon was said to be even more sadistic in the sack.

Alex and Rafe had obviously slept with barren women on occasion, but not recently and never abusively. Those women without the ability to bear children, and who could afford it, went to school and on to careers they enjoyed. The less fortunate found work in upscale brothels. Lots of those had sprung up after the cure to the virus made most women infertile.

He didn't like many aspects of the way the world worked, but finding Brianna after nearly giving up on any such soft notions reinvigorated his spirit.

After seeing Desperado's foal wobbling around the barn stall, he'd been stunned at the sudden thought he suddenly wanted a child of his own, too. Girl or boy didn't matter. He'd train them to love the ranch or love the business of ranching or, hell, he'd let them do anything their little hearts desired. As long as their mother was

Brianna. Now to convince her to stay permanently and not guard the windows for her perpetual escape each and every day. And most pertinent for the near future was keeping her as far away from Cody Welter as humanly possible.

“Ready to take a shower?” Alex pulled her into his arms and kissed her lips.

“Maybe.”

“I’ll make it worth your while, I promise.”

The sound of her low, sultry laughter filled the room. “Of that I have absolutely no doubt.”

“Is this an exclusive shower experience or can anyone join in?” Rafe asked from his reclined position on the bed.

Alex pretended to resist. He rolled his eyes but said, “I suppose everyone is invited.”

“Good, I was going to crash the party if you said no.”

“I figured.” Alex led a naked and lovely Brianna into the large bathroom attached to her bedroom. The majority of the room was whitewashed, but the floors were tiled in varying warm earth tones and accents of rose, gray and black made up the rest of the colors in the room.

“This bathroom is beautiful.” Brianna sent her gaze all around the generous space. “I’ve never lived in such a nice place before.”

“We hope you’ll think of it as your home.”

Her expression became slightly wistful before she turned her back and Alex could no longer see her face. “I hope so, too,” she whispered from across the room.

Alex wanted to question her and discover why she’d tried to escape, but he didn’t want to pressure her unduly. He started to follow Rafe and Brianna into the large shower stall, but thought of something he wanted to check out. “Hey, I just remembered a phone call I need to make. Someone distracted me from it earlier.” He sent a pointed gaze to Brianna the moment she turned around. Her shy smile nearly undid him.

“You two go ahead and get started and I’ll be right back.” He slid only his jeans and boxers back on, walked barefoot and shirtless through the house to his office hoping not to see anyone. Once safely ensconced in his private space, he picked up the earpiece for his personal phone line and dialed a familiar number.

“Hey, Matt, it’s Alex. Could you do me a favor? I need to have you run a thorough personal background check on someone. And I need it as soon as possible.”

Alex heard paper shuffling through the line. His lawyer said, “No problem. Who am I checking out and how detailed do you need the report to be?”

“Her name is Brianna Lancaster. I want to know absolutely everything about her from the moment she was born to what she ate for breakfast this morning. No detail is too small.”

* * * *

Rafe rubbed a bar of rose scented between his fingers to lather suds all over Brianna’s perfect body. His hands skimmed from her collarbone to her lush breasts and down to her thighs. Then he worked his way back up again. She didn’t say a word, but her expression was blissful.

“Turn around, let me scrub your back,” he murmured.

She spun slowly and braced her forearms against the shower’s tiled wall. He moved closer and pressed his hips into her lower half. His cock, already granite hard again, rested along one cheek of her perfect ass. The visual of taking her from behind, as hot water blasted his shoulders, skated across his conscience.

The moment he pressed his fingers into the muscles along her spine, she moaned. Nudging her with his dick, he asked, “Care if I massage the inside of your body with my cock as I as I rub your back?”

Her laughter echoed across the small enclosed space. “Go right

ahead.”

Rafe buried his face against her neck and nibbled the cord of muscle along her shoulder to the top of her arm and back again. He brushed her sodden hair away from one side of her face and kissed her cheek. “Turn around,” he whispered.

A smile caressed her lips as she twisted in his arms. Once facing him she rested her arms on his shoulders and lifted one knee to wrap around his hip and opening herself to his not-so-subtle intentions.

Rafe leaned in and kissed her damp lips. Her tongue graced his lower lip as his cock throbbed in delight. He slid his hands around her lower back at the waist and pushed his fingertips into the muscles along her spine. A small moan escaped her throat. She pushed her hips forward. At the same time he centered his cock between her pussy lips seeking to bury himself to the hilt within the heat of her body. The tandem move put his cock an inch inside her pussy.

He broke the kiss and pushed out a reverent sigh. “You’re intensely tight, honey.”

“All the better to grip your hard cock as you move inside me.”

A laugh bubbled up from his chest. He’d never been this comfortable so quickly with a woman before. She was truly exceptional.

Rafe kissed her again. He thrust his cock all the way inside and listened to her quick intake of breath. Lord almighty, she had a vice-like grip on his dick. He pulled out halfway and stroked inside once more. Seriously fucking tight nirvana awaited him within her depths.

His fingers danced up and down the length of her back as he found a comfortable rhythm pushing his cock in and out of her delightfully unyielding pussy.

After the amazing blow job Brianna had gifted him with earlier, Rafe didn’t expect to be on the edge of losing control of his passion quite so fast. Each stroke inside her body was taut, slick, pure delicious sensation. He trailed kisses along her jaw on a path to her ear and nibbled her lobe. She moved her hips so that each thrust was

more vividly felt and tightened her arms around his neck. Her breasts were smashed against his chest in a most delectable way. His cock pulsed a warning that he was about to come. He slid his hands to her hips. He gripped her tight, thrusting deeper and deeper into her divine heat. His balls tightened with the need to release, but before he did, she tensed in his arms and cried out.

Her unexpected climax took him completely off guard. The sudden grip of her already tight pussy clenching his cock pulled the amazing orgasm from him as if he were tethered to her with a rope.

“Jesus,” he cried out, and climaxed like he’d gone without sexual relief for a year.

“I can’t believe I came again,” she whispered. He barely heard her over the roaring in his ears and the tremors vibrating his thighs. Steamy water still beat down on his back and shoulders as he endeavored to stay on his feet after the best sex he’d ever had. As his still semi-rigid cock slid from her body, the door to the shower opened and Alex peeked a head inside. “You really didn’t wait for me at all, did you?”

“Nope. Not even a little bit.”

Alex’s grin said he didn’t care one whit.

“Everything okay with your call?” Rafe asked trying to get his brain working again.

“Yep. Just fine.” Alex moved behind Brianna until they had her sandwiched between them. She leaned her head back on Alex’s shoulder as Rafe pulled away still attempting to keep his legs from collapsing beneath him. He turned toward the shower’s invigorating spray and rinsed his body off as Alex and Brianna started kissing.

Before the three of them exited the shower, Rafe watched his brother reenact a seductively sexy repeat performance of the exact thing he’d just done. He smiled when he saw Alex’s thighs tremble soon after he growled his climax.

* * * *

“Brianna is where?” Cody Welter, enraged beyond reason, stared at the palomino he’d given Brianna last week as it exited from a pricey Drakestone horse trailer.

“Um...well as near as I can figure, she’s somewhere at the Drakestone ranch.” His lead guard, Dusty, shuffled his feet back and forth. The red hue in his cheeks matched that of his bandana. Cody only barely resisted the urge to tighten the cloth around Dusty’s neck until he choked.

One of his stable hands led Brianna’s horse into the barn and its assigned stall. Cody ground his molars in fury. As soon as that bitch was back in his custody, she’d be punished. Brianna would find out very quickly that she shouldn’t have run from him.

In a supreme effort not to show his rage, he asked, “How did you manage to lose her?”

“Well, boss, she took off on the palomino, and we couldn’t catch her. That’s one fast piece of horseflesh. Anyhow, she was headed straight for Drakestone’s electrified fence. Looked like she was about to crash headlong into the barrier. Kind of foolish if you ask me—”

“Why is she gone?” he shouted. He stepped toe to toe with Brianna’s lead guard. “And how in the fucking hell did she end up with Drakestone?”

Dusty flushed nearly purple and started talking faster. “Turns out, Alex Drakestone was patrolling his northern property, and he opened the fence and let her through so she wouldn’t crash. Anyhow, I didn’t want to start a range war by going across the fence line, and Drakestone wouldn’t send her back across, even though I threatened him. He said she asked for asylum and that you’d have to bring the law to get her back.”

The idiots Cody had guarding her while he and Simon went to take care of some very lucrative business were about to find out his views on failure, the hard way.

“I’m going with you to fetch her back here.” Simon approached

from the house to stand behind him as the ranch hands from Drakestone drove away.

“Whatever. We’ll have to contact the authorities.”

“Why?”

“That bitch declared asylum once she crossed onto their land, can you believe it?”

Simon shrugged. “We knew enforcing her bride contract wouldn’t be easy.”

“True. But I didn’t expect to have to wrestle her off of Drakestone’s property first. She’s going to pay dearly for this little stunt.”

“Shouldn’t be difficult to get her back. We just need to speak to her privately for two minutes. Once she understands the significance of the tape we have, she’ll beg us to take her back.”

“Now that she’s involved them, I want the Drakestone brothers arrested. They’re currently harboring property that doesn’t belong to them. It would serve them right.”

“It’s a nice thought, but unlikely to happen just ‘cause you want it to.”

Cody ignored Simon’s reasoning. “I want them in jail while we make Brianna our wife, in the flesh, repeatedly. And I want them to know we’re fucking her as they wait to be released.” He clenched his fists and again wondered what was going on between the Drakestone brothers and Brianna this very minute. They’d better not even look at her, let alone touch her.

“Don’t need to have them arrested for that.” A cruel glint came into Simon’s eyes. “We’ll just send them a honeymoon video that automatically self-destructs after they watch it for the first time. Then they can’t send the law after us, but they’ll know exactly how we ushered her into our chamber of delights.”

Cody pondered the vision of Brianna stretched out on their bed with each limb tied securely to the four bed posts as they whipped her into submission. But it was soon crowded out by thoughts of

Drakestone and his brother taking turns fucking her unyielding virgin cunt. He shook off the disturbing mental picture. "Not good enough. I want them to pay for letting her have asylum. They should have just sent her back across the line."

"Get that burr out of your ass. If you go over there angry, they'll have the upper hand. We'll get the law on our side and then demand her return."

"That will take days. I want that conniving bitch back right now!"

"Calm down. Even if they fuck her, we know that we can lure her back to us with a simple conversation." Simon was as cold and calculating as they came. "Think of the bigger picture here."

Cody released a long breath. Simon was right, but it galled him to think of Drakestone touching their intended bride. Then again, the punishment they'd inflict after she returned would be all the sweeter.

"All right. We'll call the law and wait, but not for long."

Simon laced his hands together and snapped all of his knuckles. It was a familiar move. He always did it right before he took a whip in hand to *instruct* their bed partners. "You have pull with powerful people in the surrounding area. Use them."

Cody nodded and pushed a small button on the lapel of his outer coat. It connected immediately to his phone. He'd get the sheriff to meet them at the Drakestone ranch as soon as possible before confronting the brothers. He knew Alex and Rafe likely wouldn't hurt Brianna physically, the pussies. He just wasn't sure they wouldn't try and lure her into bed. She had better make an effort to keep herself pure for her *rightful* future husbands. He'd waited very patiently to make Brianna his in the flesh.

Cody had wanted Brianna since the day he'd met her. She was feisty and independent, beautiful and smart, and he couldn't wait to break her spirit in the bedroom. Simon was a great asset in the *breaking of feisty women* department. Brianna would learn obedience or bleed until their demands were clearly understood.

A call to the sheriff confirmed that three days hence was the

soonest he could issue any type of warrant to get Brianna back. Cody hoped the Drakestone brothers enjoyed the next few days because very soon there would be hell to pay.

After the call to the sheriff, Cody made one additional call to Texas. There was more than one way to bend Brianna to his will. Wouldn't she be surprised to learn he knew quite a few of her closely-held secrets?

"Hello, Laredo? This is Welter. I have a job for you. I need you to find Kyle Lancaster and bring him to me. Whatever it takes. Whatever it costs. Got it?"

* * * *

Brianna woke tangled up in the satiny bed sheets and panicked for only a second until she remembered she was at the Drakestone ranch and not in Cody Welter's house of horrors or bedroom lair of torture. She'd slept well last night after several rounds of sexual congress with Alex and Rafe.

It felt damn good for a change to be free of Cody's pervasive control. At least until he came after her. She expected him to show up full of bluster and fury any time now. If he guessed she'd slept with his "arch rivals", as he'd called the Drakestone brothers more than once, perhaps he wouldn't want her anymore. Fat chance.

Cody would fight tooth and nail to get her back and ensure she was punished for straying off of his land. Brianna pushed out a long sigh and wished for a miracle.

The rumble of her stomach signaled it had been too long since her last meal. Searching the room with half-open eyes, she deduced she was alone for the time being. It would be the perfect time to slip out the window again, unless Alex had posted a guard there. The morning sun cast a long stream of light into her room from a skylight centered in her room.

Truthfully, she was tired of running. And very tired of worrying

about the important things in her life she had little control over. Brianna buried her face in the pillow and inhaled the sweet scent of lavender. She stroked her palm along the silky stitched flower design on her pillowcase and let a long sigh escape. Life was unfair.

Until meeting Alex and Rafe, Brianna hadn't ever wanted to settle down or get married or have a family. As a member of the narrow population of females still likely able to bear children, she had known long ago that her dreams and wishes wouldn't be taken into consideration regarding her future. Her job became trading any dreams like "falling in love" or a "happily ever after" with the perfect man for an arranged marriage so she could help repopulate the earth with the progeny of rich ranchers in the West.

If she had her way, and she knew in her heart that she wouldn't, she'd take care of the one large task looming on her horizon and then high tail it back to this ranch. Alex and Rafe were a dream she didn't dare allow herself to ponder. She'd only be disappointed.

Right now she needed to find a way to leave. While she wanted to stay with Alex and Rafe more than anything, duty called. She had an obligation to fulfill. A big, huge commitment that she couldn't dismiss or ignore, no matter how much she was falling for these two amazing men. She wasn't even sure how much time she had left. Kyle needed her. She needed to get to him. Likely it wouldn't be today that she could try again to leave. She'd keep an eye out for another opportunity.

There was a quick knock at the door before it opened. Rafe stepped inside, balancing a tray one handed as he closed the door behind him.

"Want something to eat?"

She nodded and stretched like a cat napping in an afternoon ray of sunshine. "Thank you. I was starting to get hungry." She had no idea what time it was by now. Ten in the morning, maybe? She hadn't known what time it was during any part of yesterday. She'd lost track easily in the rambunctious arms of Rafe and Alex Drakestone.

“Lucky for you we have a chef at our ranch, so you won’t have to suffer through any of my cooking. I’d likely burn water, given the opportunity.”

She smiled and sat up in bed. “So is this the part where you convince me to stay by bringing me breakfast in bed?”

Rafe shook his head. “Nope. This is an early afternoon lunch in bed. It’s an hour past noon. For breakfast you’d have to go to the kitchen and get nourishment like everyone else.”

“It’s after twelve o’clock noon?” *Holy crap*. Sex was not only addictive, apparently it also lulled you into unconsciousness once you finally took the opportunity and slept.

He grinned and nodded. “You’ve already slept the morning away, honey. Not that you missed much. Just me and Alex trying to stay awake as we looked at female breeder stock for our cattle. I sincerely hope we made good selections since neither of us got much sleep last night.”

“Glad to know I’m not the only one suffering.”

“Oh, now I didn’t say I was suffering. Not at all.” He sat down on the edge of the bed and placed the tray between them. “My singular goal is to make you happy.”

“And are you going to convince me to stay?”

“I’d say the convincing will be if you provide an heir, but yes. We’d both like for you to stay. My brother is already smitten.”

She shook her head. “He is not.”

“Is too! I’ve never seen him look at a woman the way he studies you intensely. And it’s been that way since you crossed over onto our property.”

Brianna looked over Rafe’s shoulder at the door to the bedroom. “Where is your brother, anyway?”

“He had to take care of some ranch business.”

“Is that a code for something else?”

Rafe laughed. “No. He had a phone call and took it in his office. He may be smitten, but he’ll still do what needs to be done on the

ranch. Our new duties call for us to manage cattle by day, and ensure our future with you by night.”

Until I get a chance to leave.

Time to change the subject. “And what about you? Are you smitten with me?”

He grinned. “Maybe. Mostly I just want a wife and kids. You’re the first candidate I’ve been able to interest Alex in. And now that we seem so compatible in bed, I figure the rest will all work itself out as time goes along.”

“Very practical.”

“Yes. But the truth is, you are very pretty.” His steady gaze traveled along her body from eyes to chest to knees and back again. “Okay. Maybe I am a little smitten with you.”

Brianna decided to broach what would likely be an uncomfortable subject. “Now that I’ve held up my end of the bargain regarding our future together, how long before I can go?”

“Go? Where do you want to go?”

“I was summoned to fulfill an obligation to Cody Welter and his cousin Simon regarding the bride contract. I need to go back home. There were things I left unfinished in New York.”

He sent his gaze to the ceiling, and the expression on his face signaled he was likely trying to find a way to tell her bad news. “Your end of the bargain, as far as we are concerned, is fulfilled when your pregnancy is confirmed. And we need to establish the child is one of ours.”

“Of course it will be one of yours. I was a virgin before I came here.”

“What! A virgin?” His brows slanted inward. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

She shrugged and looked away, suddenly embarrassed to reveal a previously unknown and very intimate fact. Alex had taken her virginity, but if he noticed, he hadn’t commented on it. Rafe wouldn’t have known since the deed was done by the time his cock filled her

slick pussy during their lovely time in the shower.

Rafe reached out and stroked his hand across her shoulder tenderly. “Once it is established that you are carrying our child, one of us, if not both, will escort you back home to take care of any unfinished business.”

Brianna released a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding. “Thank you.” Although, given her circumstances, she would have to find her own way home. She wasn’t going to be able to get pregnant quickly. Not in a few days. And God help her if anyone found out what she’d done. She needed to find a way to get home sooner rather than later.

“The only concern at this stage is how fast you get pregnant or not.”

Not was the accurate answer. So she’d have to find a way to leave on her own. Their arrangement was only for three months, and that’s about how long her temporary infertility would last.

“So Cody didn’t touch you inappropriately or against your will?”

“No. But only because he also had some sort of *business* he had to attend to the day after I arrived. I’m not sure what it was. I was very surprised they didn’t stick around. While they were gone I found a very graphic video of what they’d labeled an amazing sexual experience.”

Rafe crossed his arms and stared into her eyes. “I gather the material was unacceptable.”

“The fact that they filmed their sexcapades turned me off completely, and I knew my initial decision not to marry them was the right one. The way they whipped the poor woman in the video ensured I needed to be safely gone before they returned.”

“So you ran.”

She nodded. “When I learned what they had in store for me, I was out of there like my hair was on fire. There’s a clause in the original bridal contract that details my rights. I get to have the final say in any marriage agreement if one or both of male parties change due to

unplanned for circumstances or death. Cody can't hold me to that bargain made by my family all those years ago. But I suspect he'll try anyway."

"You understand that you revoked any *final say* when you agreed to be with us though, right?" Rafe and his beautiful eyes gave her a gaze that normally would have set her passion afire, but she was suddenly feeling too guilty about her deception.

"Yes. I get it. But in *this* arrangement, I have to be able to get pregnant. Let's hope I can." *But not for three or four more months.*

"For our part, Alex and I will do our level best to accomplish this task." His grin, while predatory and very highly sexual, was also pretty cute.

"I have no doubt about that." Too bad their robust sexual prowess wouldn't overcome the illegal birth control injection she'd received before leaving New York.

With that drug coursing through her system, she wouldn't be able to bear a child. If it was discovered, she'd be arrested. These days being caught with a kilo of cocaine yielded less time in prison than reproductive crimes. Especially the prevention of conception.

Chapter Six

Alex had called his lawyer more times in the past twenty-four hours than he had all year. He wished Matt had better news.

“Just because you’ve entered into a private oral negotiation with this woman, doesn’t mean you get to keep her. You may still have to give her up.”

Alex felt his eyes go wider and wider with each word spoken. Matt had already told him a plethora of information over the phone and not a single syllable of what he shared had been expected.

“I won’t give her up. And how do you know anything about this beyond the little I told you?”

“I got a call from a friend of mine over at the justice center in town. Cody Welter was there stirring up trouble earlier this morning and trying to get a warrant issued. The complaint is rumored to have your name on it somewhere.”

“He’s bluffing.”

“Regardless, they won’t be able to serve it for a few days, but you should still be prepared. Do you want to explain to me, your lawyer, why any warrant is possibly pending with your name on it?”

“Not really.”

“If Cody Welter has a binding bride contract including her name, then he’s probably got the law on his side. Are you willing to go to jail?”

“For her? Yes, I am.”

Matt’s long-suffering sigh over the static-filled line was the only thing familiar and expected about the current conversation. “No, you aren’t. Don’t be stupid. Let me see what I can do first before you go

and do anything crazy.”

“She makes me crazy. In a good way.”

“That’s fairly obvious. Keep in mind I likely won’t be able to get a copy of the contract Cody Welter has with her family, but even a standard contract wouldn’t help you.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t a standard agreement. And besides, it changed two weeks ago when Dylan died. Any woman in any bride covenant has the final say over the marriage, right? We aren’t animals or fucking cavemen, after all.”

Matt chuckled mirthlessly. “I’m not so sure about that. I’ve heard a few rumors about Cody Welter and his sexual perversions.”

“Which is why I’m so adamant that Brianna not have to suffer their inappropriate attentions or worry over a long-ago contract she never had any real say in.”

“The thing is, I’m operating blind here until I see either the warrant Cody’s trying to obtain or a copy of the private contract he’s trying to enforce. Unfortunately, Cody has more than a few powerful friends lining his pockets. You need to be prepared for possible unfairness on your horizon.”

“What are my options at this point?”

“You don’t have any. If Cody comes with law enforcement and a warrant for her apprehension, you’ll have to hand her over, at least temporarily.”

“Not going to fucking happen. Not even for a minute. “

“Well, then I can be there when they arrest you for failure to comply with a court-ordered warrant on a runaway bride.”

“Not helpful, Matt. The warrant is bogus.”

“I wish you had a copy of the agreement to prove it. Seriously, I don’t know what else I can do, Alex. If she’s legally his bride as stated in the phantom contract I haven’t read yet, you’ll have to turn her over or face a possible jail sentence for obstruction.”

“We’ve...had sex with her, Matt. More than once. If she’s pregnant, Cody won’t be able to intervene, will he? Isn’t there a

statute on possession being nine-tenths of the law or something?”

“That’s an old wives’ tale. Her being pregnant might actually be the only thing that will help your cause, but it all depends on Cody and the contract they have in hand.”

“How so?” Alex was desperate to ensure her safety. Whatever it took.

“If he wants her badly enough, he can still bring her into his custody and keep her at his private residence until any child is born, test for DNA, and simply turn the child over to you if the test is in your favor, or Rafe’s, for fatherhood. He and Simon would still be her legal husbands. And they don’t ever have to turn *her* over to you once she’s in their custody. Not for any reason.”

“Not the answer I wanted.”

“I can start lying to you if you want, but it won’t change anything. If he shuns her for having sex with you and releases her from the contract, that would be the only way for you to prevail. Knowing Cody as I do, I wouldn’t hold your breath for that eventuality. I’m only guessing at this point. By not having firsthand knowledge of the contract, I’m operating on blind assumption. I wish I had better news for you.”

“Me too. Any way to get a copy of the contract so we know what we’re up against?”

“Not legally.”

“What illegal methods do you recommend?”

“None. I don’t want to get disbarred.” There was silence on the line for several seconds before Matt released a long sigh. “Let me check a few places. No promises. But if I find anything, I’ll contact you.”

“Actually, Matt, I’d like for you to be here when Cody arrives. How fast can you get out to the ranch once the warrant is served?” Alex stood from his desk with a sudden need to find Brianna and hide her away from the likes of Cody Welter and his equally perverted cousin Simon. If they sent her away with a trusted friend or ranch

hand and didn't know exactly where she was, they couldn't be compelled to hand her over or reveal her whereabouts. Since they wouldn't truly know.

"I can leave at the same time as the sheriff once the warrant is served, whenever that is. I'll free up my schedule as much as possible for the next several days in anticipation."

"Thanks, Matt."

"Sure. That's what you pay me the big bucks for," he said with a chuckle. "And try not to get too attached."

Alex shook his head at the folly of that statement. "Too late," Alex whispered to the empty line after Matt hung up.

I already love her.

* * * *

"Are you going to kill him or are you just making a point regarding your displeasure?" Simon's amused voice cut through Cody's rage enough to distract him. Cody eased his grip on the throat of the man who, in his mind, had allowed Brianna to escape.

The man's coughing and gurgling hadn't swayed him to stop until he took out his frustration completely. But he didn't truly want to kill Dusty. He just wanted him to understand that failure wouldn't be tolerated.

It was a good thing Simon was here to temper his bad mood or he might have choked his best ranch hand to death. He pulled his hand away and allowed Dusty a chance to get some air in his lungs.

He turned to Simon. "I'm just making a point. Now Dusty knows the wrath he faces if he ever disappoints me again."

Dusty, still red-faced and bent over gasping, didn't respond.

"Get out of here," Cody said. "I don't want to see your ugly face for awhile." The ranch hand ambled out of the barn on unsteady feet and disappeared from sight.

"Wasted effort. Dusty didn't know why she ran. Useless."

Everyone here is useless.”

Simon smiled serenely. He never let his emotions get the better of him. He reserved his passionate expression for the bedroom. “With a little bit of persuasion on my part, I got a tip from one of the house maids about someone Brianna spent extra time with while we were out of town these past few days.”

“Who?”

“Our own Dr. Nicholson. Seems they were seen together more than once. And I know he spoke to her before Dylan’s funeral two weeks ago. I wonder what they had so much to talk about?”

“Maybe he was working for us and carrying out the job we gave him. He *did* do us a big favor.”

“Or maybe he has switched sides and is now working for her. We should find out one way or another, don’t you think?”

Cody saw red. “Let’s go have a friendly talk with the good doctor, then. Perhaps he has information to share on Brianna’s thoughts and why she’d run from us.”

“You aren’t going to choke him to death, are you?” Simon asked.

“Of course not. I can be reasonable.” Cody clenched his fists. “To a point.”

Damn Brianna for running before he could get her to sign the new bridal contract. In order for him to continue in the lifestyle he’d become accustomed to, Cody he needed two things to happen.

First, he needed to talk to Brianna in person and all alone without the Drakestone brothers butting into his affairs. Second, he needed for her to sign the new bridal contract.

The existing one could be enforced under certain circumstances, but there was a small provision in Dylan’s will that was also mentioned in the old bridal contract. And that small paragraph needed to be excised from the bridal contract or Cody might lose everything.

If she didn’t sign the new contract, Dylan’s will would change Cody’s current lifestyle into one he didn’t want to contemplate. He wouldn’t let that happen. Not for any reason.

“Nicholson is over in his room.”

“Let’s go.”

Cody would have to wait for the sheriff to speak to Brianna. Each minute that ticked away made him nervous.

He wasn’t without a plan though, and if she wouldn’t come to them willingly, he’d have no problem using her brother, Kyle, to help her see reason.

* * * *

Alex answered his ringing personal phone and hoped for good news. Matt didn’t even say hello, instead he started with, “I’ve got bad news, really bad news and worse news. Which would you like to have first?”

Shit. “Can my answer be none of the above?”

“Sorry, but no. The bad news is that Cody and Simon have just had warrants initiated and could on the way to your property with the sheriff as early as tomorrow morning.”

“Already? I thought we had a couple more days.” Now there was no chance to get her off the property and hidden away out of their reach. At least not easily.

“Cody has more influence in certain circles than I realized. Word is that he’s calling in lots of favors.”

“Is that the really bad news?”

“No. The really bad news is that you’re named in a second warrant he was able to obtain. He’s trying to have you and Rafe arrested and put in jail for luring Brianna across your property line. “

“Bastard.”

“Yes, he is. It’s usually a nuisance complaint and isn’t often enforced. We’ll see what happens when the sheriff gets to your place.”

“Anything you can do to stop it in advance?”

“I’m not making any promises. I didn’t think they’d be able to

have a nuisance warrant sworn out against you, let alone expect to enforce it, but it seems Cody is making up the rules and others in law enforcement are following along. I'm working on a speedy false-arrest form to issue for our own ammunition, but I don't have the specifics of the warrant just yet. I'll make a stop by the hall of records and see what I can find out before tomorrow."

"Wait a minute. What was the worse news?"

"Oh right, the worst news. There was a body discovered on your side of the Drakestone-Welter property line thirty minutes ago by Cody's border patrol. Apparently, the poor guy was beaten almost past recognition. They called it in while the sheriff was conveniently at Cody's place bringing him the warrant he'd set up for Brianna and you. So now the sheriff has questions for you regarding a dead guy along with a nuisance complaint."

"That's bullshit."

"Of course, it is. They are trying to rile you up. Don't let them."

"The border patrol probably catapulted the guy over my fence right after *they* beat on him."

Matt huffed. "Please. There are certainly illegal ways to alter an electrical fence line current. You just have to be willing to pay the elevated price. I suspect Cody is working overtime to fuck you over."

"You're right." Alex stood and paced in front of his desk.

Things were spiraling into the "what the fuck" realm. "Who is it? Anyone we know?"

"They haven't identified him as of yet."

"Which is also bullshit. They can run anyone's identity on the slick and expensive palm devices every law enforcement officer carries attached to their service belt as standard issue."

"True. *The sheriff* certainly knows. But the name hasn't been released pending the investigation. They have questions for the land owners of the location where the body was discovered, or in other words, you and Rafe. Which will also complicate things for you once they serve the nuisance complaint."

“Where is the location that the dead body was found?”

“I don’t know.” Alex heard Matt ruffle some papers in the background. “Says here, somewhere on the northwestern border of your land.”

Alex suspected the body was found exactly in the same spot where Brianna had crossed over into their land. Poetic justice where his bastard neighbor was concerned. Cody and Simon were more conniving than he realized.

“I know it’s the least of my worries probably, but I still want to ensure Brianna doesn’t have to concern herself about the old bride contract she has with Cody. Any good news in that arena?”

“There’s no news, actually, but *that* doesn’t translate to good news just yet.”

“Do I need to head for my northern property line and hide out?”

“I don’t advise it. Running makes everyone look guilty.”

“Should I send Brianna with a group of my stable hands as bodyguards to hide out?”

“No. The warrant is open ended. It can be served whenever she pops up. If Cody was smart he cloaked that deal in a shroud of privacy, but if, as you say, he inherited the negotiated bride contract from long ago, perhaps there is a loophole to give her a final opportunity to decline it. If by any remote chance she can be free from him and put into your custody, I’ll bring the necessary papers for her to sign.”

“All right.” Alex glanced out his large office window at the dusty road to the east. He couldn’t see the end of it, but it was the only road leading from the ranch house to the edge of their property and on to the public access road. It would be a busy place once the sheriff came calling.

“Do what you can, and call me if you get any useful information before tomorrow. I’ll see if I can stall for as long as possible once the sheriff shows up.” Alex mashed his eyes shut for a moment.

“What about the other matter from yesterday? I assume it takes

second priority to all this new scandalous information we're juggling."

Alex popped his eyes open and shook his head even though Matt couldn't see him. "No. I still want details. Is there anyone else in your practice that can handle it?" He always wanted Matt for any and every task, but this was an emergency.

Brianna was the only bride he'd ever wanted. Although he hadn't known her long, he knew to the marrow of his bones that she was the one for them. The only one he'd consider permanently. He'd move heaven and earth to ensure she stayed here on his ranch because she was already in his heart. But he also wanted to know what she was so afraid of that she had to run. Or attempt to run. What did she have to take care of so desperately back home?

"I'll see what I can do. You sure do make me work hard. Good thing I charge you so much for my services."

He laughed for the first time since calling Matt yesterday. He hoped the sincerity came through in his next comment. "Thanks, Matt. I truly owe you big."

"Yes, you do. I'll be expecting a big Christmas bonus this year."

"I'll see what I can do." He knew Matt liked a particularly expensive brandy and made a mental note to procure a case.

"Don't do anything stupid until I can get there to put a good spin on it once they show up. No talking to the police or arguing with Cody until I get there."

"No promises. Above all else, I want Brianna kept safe and out of Cody's hands."

"Christ, Alex, I've never heard you so much as mention any woman, and we've known each other since before we could talk. I can't wait to meet Brianna."

Alex smiled. "She's a spitfire, but I can't think of anyone else I'd rather spend my life with. And Rafe is totally in love with her already."

"I'm happy for you, Alex. Both you and Rafe. I'll do what I can

so this all works out. See you soon.” The line went dead, and Alex replaced the phone in the cradle on his desk. He ran his hands over his head, ruffling his unruly hair, and tried to think of what productive thing he could do to ensure Brianna stayed right here on his property forever.

Perhaps it was time for a heart to heart. A brilliant idea occurred in his mind as if conjured by magic. If Brianna had access to a copy of her bride contract, half of his battle would be won. At least he’d know what he faced and so would his lawyer.

And with another day at his disposal, perhaps Brianna could be well and repeatedly satisfied before they had to face the law and Cody’s stupidity.

Alex strode out of his office with a sense of purpose for the first time since waking this morning.

* * * *

Brianna fell back against the silk sheets of her bed. Rafe kissed a path from just above her belly heading south in a leisurely fashion. The sensation of his whiskers abrading her skin as he moved made her pussy clench. She felt her own arousal in the form of a gush between her lower lips. She couldn’t wait until his whiskered face was buried between her thighs.

She wanted to squirm and beg for him to move faster, but knew the anticipation was worth the wait. Rafe had a very talented mouth. And while it was amazing to let him pleasure her, she suddenly wanted something else. She wanted to grab her own pleasure. Would it be bad form to ask for a position change so she could feel better about her situation?

“You make me absolutely crazy with desire. You know that, right?”

She felt his laugh against her pubic bone. “Ditto, my darling.” His tongue stroked long and hard along the opening to her wet pussy.

“You know what I really want, though?”

“What?”

“I’d like to get on top and ride you until you howl.”

“Hmm. That sounds great.” He sucked her clit between his lips for a few seconds. “Sure you don’t want me to finish this first?”

“Well, it feels amazing, but I really want a sense of control. Is that crazy?”

“Nope. I understand completely.” He shifted again and pressed his body onto hers. Then he hugged her tight and rolled the two of them over until she was on top.

“Take me, I’m yours.” He put his hands behind his head and relaxed against the pillows, but never took his eyes off of her.

Brianna kissed his chest and got up on all fours over his body. Rafe’s gaze trailed from her breasts, swinging slightly, all the way up to her face. “You’re so beautiful.”

She grinned and straddled his hips. His wide cock awaited her pleasure. She reached a hand down to stroke him before positioning her pussy directly over him. His gaze remained on her face, but his jaw clenched a time or two as if he were doing his best not to lose control.

“Does that feel good?” she asked and squeezed his cock one-handed.

He nodded and smiled up at her, but didn’t speak. The amusement in his expression encouraged her to do whatever she wanted. Without warning, she impaled herself on his rigid cock, burying him in her body to the hilt. His balls rested against the skin of her ass. His eyes nearly rolled back in his head once she had taken him fully.

“Jesus, you really make me crazy.” His hands came from behind his head to lightly grip her arms. “Are you okay? Don’t hurt yourself.”

“I’m great.” She pushed out a long, blissful sigh, but didn’t move. She wanted to get used to the invasion. He was big. Very big. Huge. The first plunge felt like his cock went all the way into her ribcage.

Brianna remained that way for a full minute before she started moving up and down. For as big as Rafe was, Alex was slightly bigger in girth. If she were allowed to stay, she'd be well satisfied for the remainder of her life.

Rafe played with her breasts as she stroked up and down on his cock. He reached down between them, slid his fingers between her thighs and fingered her clit as she set the pace.

He filled her to capacity. She threw her head back and rode him faster and faster until the friction brought her to the edge of a vibrant release. Rafe leaned up and sucked the tip of her breast into his warm mouth, and she came in a rush of pleasure so acute, she felt immediately light headed. She continued to ride him harder as her pussy pulsed and tightened on his cock. His hands went to her hips as if to help keep up the fast thrusts.

Waves of pleasure radiated from her pussy to everywhere in her body. The harder she rode him, the more electric the satisfaction as if she couldn't come hard enough, fast enough, or enough times.

Rafe suddenly sucked in a big breath and groaned. His hips pushed upwards as she came down on him in the deepest penetration thus far. He practically growled and promptly hugged her to him tight. He stopped her movement, slid his hands to her face and kissed her so tenderly, she thought she might cry. His lips pressed soft kiss after kiss to her mouth in between bouts of both of them panting.

Rafe was so perfect. She adored him.

The door to her room opened suddenly. Brianna sucked in a deep breath and covered her breasts. Trapped beneath her, Rafe didn't even flinch as Alex strode into her room like he owned the place. It took Brianna a second to realize that he *did* own the place, and now she was a part of it. At least until she could escape.

Given what Rafe had just done, getting away was truly the last thing on her mind. Now that Alex was here as well, it would be doubly difficult to think of anything but satisfaction.

Alex approached the bed as he peeled his shirt off. "Mind if I join

the two of you?”

Rafe turned his head to look at Alex. “Not at all. We were just occupying our time until you returned, anyway. What took you so long?”

“Just ironing out the details of our agreement with Matt.” Alex turned his attention on her, and Brianna was captivated by his lusty stare. “I have a question for you.”

Brianna simply stared at his chest before eventually gazing up into his eyes. “A question? For me?” His amused smile greeted her when she was finally able to focus on his face. She was straddling Rafe’s body, his cock still semi-stiff within the slick walls of her pussy, and she had just experienced an ecstasy she wouldn’t soon forget. And yet, the moment Alex came in to the room, it was as if she hadn’t climaxed in a month. She wanted him, too. Couldn’t keep her eyes off of him. Rafe leaned in and kissed her throat and neck.

“Do you have a copy of your original bride agreement?”

“Bride agreement?” Was he talking about the one Cody and Simon claimed they held? Rafe stopped kissing the space below her collarbone, lifted his head, and turned to Alex. “This is not the way to get her in the mood.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “While I also want her satisfied each and every moment she spends with us, right now I need to ensure she gets to stay here permanently. Do you mind?”

Brianna stilled as his words made it through the sensual haze of Rafe’s ardent attentions. She shook off her lust to contemplate why Alex needed a copy of her bride agreement. This being an integral part of why she needed to escape. She had to get to her copy of the bride agreement so she could get out of the binding document and save her brother from the clutches of her step-father.

If Alex and Rafe could help her, she wouldn’t need to escape. She lifted off of Rafe and sat up on the side of bed. “I don’t have it with me, but someone is holding a copy for me. I shimmied out your window to go get it.”

Alex's expression softened. "We would have helped you."

"I believe you." She paused and gave him a smile. "Well, now I do." She did trust them to a certain degree. Which made it all the more difficult to lie to them about her fertility. She tucked that information into the back of her mind to deal with later on. If they could help her expedite her plan to get her brother Kyle into her custody, she'd do anything.

Alex continued, "Have you read the document? Do you know what the agreement dictates?"

She shrugged. "I've read through it, but it was a long time ago. There's lots of legalese in it that I didn't understand, but I know I have the final right to choose my husbands. And I believe there is a codicil that states if one of the participants of the agreement dies before the permanent marriage is filed, a new contract must be created and signed. Cody and Simon only had rights on the initial bride if I'd offered them what I offered you and they'd consummated the marriage."

"Won't happen." Alex and Rafe spoke the same words at the same time with the same level of stern insistence.

Brianna smiled and, not for the first time, gloried in the fact she'd met these two amazing men. If things were different, she'd love to stay and be a part of this life. If they didn't find out about what she'd done, she might still have a chance.

"When I ran, I eliminated that possibility. Now that I've been with the two of you, that should negate the original contract, but I don't have my personal copy. I don't trust Cody and Simon not to have altered the original document." The other problem being that once she couldn't have children with Alex and Rafe, *that* contract would also be negated.

And worse, she'd be up for grabs again, and Cody and Simon got first crack at her. Her only chance now was to retrieve her brother, Kyle, and the copy of the bride agreement and allow the birth control shot to dissipate from her body in time to get pregnant before Alex

and Rafe were tired of waiting.

She sucked in a deep breath and released it slowly. Why did she ever agree to that stupid birth control shot? If only she'd waited, she wouldn't be in this mess.

The doctor had been persuasive, but she should have gone with her instincts. He'd wanted to give her options against her vehement dislike of Cody. There was a stipulation in the original contract that if she couldn't become pregnant quickly, they could replace her with another. At the time it seemed a good idea to possibly get out of a permanent arrangement with Cody.

"Trust me, honey, even if you'd already been with two other men, it wouldn't keep me from wanting you," Rafe whispered against the sensitive place beneath her ear. "I can't imagine Cody will just let you go so easily. I suspect we'll have a big fight on our hands over you."

"I don't want anyone to fight over me."

"But you're worth it." Rafe stroked her thigh. His earnest expression and willingness to fight for her touched her deeply. No one in her memory had ever gone to any trouble to keep her safe or worry over her personally.

Alex sat down on the bed next to them and took her hand between his large, warm fingers. "He's right. You're worth a full-blown battle. In fact, I'll personally instigate a range war to keep you as my bride. Nothing will stop me from wanting you."

Rafe brushed his fingertips across her cheek. "For Cody it will be his pride. He doesn't want you because he loves you, he simply wants to win. This may not be easy, but rest assured, we don't intend to let you leave our property in his custody. I'll *help* you run away before that happens."

If she hadn't already fallen in love with these two men, Alex and Rafe's passionately uttered statements would have pushed her over the edge. It felt so right to be here with them. She'd never been so at home any place in her life. Certainly not with her step-father after her mother died. The thought of her brother being in his odious custody

made her heart clench. She worried about him.

She squeezed Alex's fingers. "I truly want to stay here with you. I hope it's possible."

"It *is* possible. If you want to be here, then we'll move heaven and earth to make it happen, won't we Rafe?"

Rafe nodded then dipped his head to kiss her collarbone again.

Brianna pulled her hand from Alex's protective grasp. "Join us, why don't you?"

Alex nodded and quickly pulled the rest of his clothes off. He was beside her in the large bed before she knew it and pressed naked on top of her seconds later.

Rafe brushed his fingers along her jaw and kissed her lips as Alex kissed her breasts and touched her everywhere. Alex took her in his arms and buried his face between her breasts as she parted her thighs to allow his cock entrance. She wanted to feel him penetrate her. Rafe pushed his mouth over her lips and kissed her hard as Alex's cock pushed deeply and quickly inside her pussy.

The sensation took her by surprise. His fingers brushed over her clit as he withdrew and thrust deeply into her body. Brianna's back arched, and a long, low moan escaped. Alex wrapped his lips around the tip of one breast and sucked as Rafe drove her crazy licking inside of her mouth in a demanding kiss.

Alex found a steady rhythm. His huge cock lunged forward again and again. Brianna pushed back so that the pleasure was explosive. Each thrust of his cock filled her to the brink and sent a pulsating blast of pleasure from her core to her limbs. Rafe kissed a path from her mouth to one breast and captured a nipple in his warm mouth. Alex stroked her clit to new heights of bliss as he thrust his cock deeper and deeper.

Brianna writhed and screamed as she fell over an abyss in to the yawning depths of gratification. Her nipples tingled, her pussy tightened around Alex's cock as ripples of orgasmic delight pounded through her body. Alex then pushed his cock deeply into her pussy,

stiffened, and groaned in what surely was a grand release of his own.

Panting and unable to catch her breath, Brianna reached out and put a hand on each of them, the connection was her silent vow to do everything possible to make things right with them.

Chapter Seven

Alex woke suddenly, wondering where he was. A glance at the ceiling told him immediately he was in Brianna's room. They'd spent another very gratifying night together and the day before had been pretty amazing, too. With the blush of dawn's light coming through the windows, he knew he'd have to get up and face his day very soon. But not quite yet. He relaxed for a couple of hours more until an annoying noise disrupted his calm.

His phone buzzed on the nightstand where he'd discarded it while shucking his clothes off to get naked with Brianna yesterday. The insistent and intrusive sound had a dim impact on his overall relaxed state. Time spent with Brianna filled moments he'd cherish from this day forth regardless of their future together.

He picked up his cell phone and answered, "Yes."

"I've got news," Matt said in a low voice.

"Bad news?"

"Most of it."

Alex pushed out a long sigh. *Shit.*

Beside him, Brianna stirred. He didn't want her to hear any part of this conversation if it was going to be all bad news.

"I'll call you right back," he whispered.

"I'll be here." He hung up.

Alex carefully extracted himself from bed. Rafe had left them almost an hour ago to tend to something on the ranch. Save the trip out the window and the visit to the barn, Brianna hadn't seen much besides the ceiling and bedspread in her new room. Alex hoped beyond hope that she'd get to stay without inciting an all out war, but

he was prepared to do just that.

Beams of sunshine sneaked in around the blinds on the west wall window, making him smile at yesterday's unexpectedly delightful day in bed. Not to mention that being in bed at this hour of the day was a rare occurrence for him. He liked it.

He pulled his clothes on quietly, exited to his den on the other side of the house, and called Matt.

"Tell me the good news," he said before Matt could even say hello.

"I didn't say there was any."

"Make something up. I don't want my good mood ruined yet."

"Who are you, and what have you done with Alex Drakestone, the hardass in rancher's clothing?"

"I'm happy. Get over it."

"The only moderately decent news is that the contract for her nuptials hasn't been filed yet. They must need her to sign a new agreement."

Alex released a long breath. "Good. That means she has a choice."

"Not necessarily. I still haven't seen a copy of it yet. Maybe they haven't filed it because she's missing."

"I doubt it. They must need her to sign a new one, like you said."

"Will she sign it?"

"No. She won't."

Alex heard another phone ring in Matt's office. "Hold on, I've been waiting all night for this call."

There were some rustling sounds before Matt said, "Yes. Uh huh. Really? The bench warrant? Already? For what, specifically?" There was a very long silence. Then Matt whispered, "Shit." More silence. And then, "Right. Yep. Thanks, Beau. I'll meet you out there."

"Who's the bench warrant for?" Alex asked before Matt offered the information.

There was a long sigh, as if in resignation to more bad news. "Brianna Lancaster."

Alex mashed his eyes shut and asked, "What's the charge?"

"Breach of contract for alienation of affection. And they're serving it today."

"Today?" His eyes popped open wide. "He's crazy."

"As a shit-house rat." Matt finished.

"Can she be arrested for that?"

"No. But it gives him the right to converse with her to straighten their dispute out, even if the argument is only one-sided. He names your ranch in the warrant because that's her probable location, so you'll be involved. The only good news is that along with the warrant, we'll get to view the contract in question."

"How long do I have?"

"They're already on their way. I'd say anywhere between ten minutes and half an hour. No more. I'm leaving now. Tell them you're waiting for council. They have to let you. I'll be there within the hour."

"Thanks, Matt."

"Yep. See you in a few."

Alex hung up, pocketed his phone, and went to Brianna's room. It was empty. He shouldn't be surprised. The first colors of dawn had long past lit her room up. Where would she go? He checked the window she'd exited from the day before, but it was still shut tight and locked from the inside. The bathroom was empty, too. He swiveled back the way he came and started searching the house. He found her a few minutes later in the kitchen.

"There you are."

She turned and smiled. "Did you think I escaped through the window again?"

"It was the first place I looked, as a matter of fact. Are you hungry? I could make you a snack."

"You could make me a snack, or I'd *be* the snack?" Her dimpled grin told him she was in a playful mood.

"Either works for me, but I wanted to let you know we're about to

have some unwanted company.”

She stiffened and came half out of her chair. Alex closed the short distance between them. “Hold up. I promise I’ll do whatever you want, but please tell me you plan to stay with Rafe and me for the time being.”

Her furtive glance went to the window beside them before resting on his face. “Yes. My current plan is to stay with you.”

“And have you signed any document with Cody or Simon?”

She frowned. “No. Of course not, but I was never offered one, either.”

“Good. Then the warrant they have for you is bogus.”

“Warrant? What warrant?”

“They’re claiming breach of contract and alienation of affection. They’re on the way here with the sheriff.”

Brianna huffed indignantly. “Those monsters! Can they do that? Make me leave with them?”

“I won’t let you leave with them.” And he meant it, too.

Alex put his hands lightly on her shoulders. “They are allowed time to speak with you, but if you want, my attorney, Matt, can join you as your council. Or I can.”

She stared over his shoulder as if pondering her options and future.

“Would your lawyer then tell *you* what I said?”

Alex paused a half a second before answering. “No. He could be your lawyer in confidence. But I’d like to think we don’t have secrets between us.”

“But we do. The truth is, you don’t know me very well at all.”

Alex slid his hands down her arms, grabbed her around the waist and leaned in close. Just short of kissing her, he whispered, “I know you in all the important ways. Don’t doubt it. You can trust me. And Rafe.”

“You’re very sweet, Alex, but I’ve got a few confidential things going on in my life that I’m not prepared to share with you or your

brother right now.” He didn’t tell her that he already suspected he knew exactly what her secrets were. He was prepared to wait for her to trust him with the information.

“That’s fine. I have no problem if you keep all your secrets forever. Just stay with us. Please don’t leave.”

He gently touched his lips to hers. Just a soft kiss of affection. To his surprise, a single tear surfaced in one lower lid and spilled over and slid down one cheek.

“I wish you’d always want me to stay.” Another tear escaped and fell. She swiped it away and sniffed.

“Already true.” He pressed his body closer to hers wanting to reassure her.

“But if you knew my secret, you’d probably kick me out or help me to Cody’s car.”

He squeezed her tighter. “Not true, Brianna. Never will be true.”

She stepped away and shook her head. Before he could comfort her further, Rafe burst into the room.

“The sheriff’s here with Cody and Simon. Says they’ve got a warrant for Brianna Lancaster and want to speak with her before it’s served.”

“Too fucking bad. Go out and tell them we’re waiting for her lawyer to show up.”

Rafe’s brows furrowed. “Who’s her lawyer?”

“Matt.”

The sudden grin on Rafe’s face made Alex feel better. “Excellent. I’ll tell ‘em to cool their heels outside until he arrives.”

“Perfect.”

Rafe started to leave, but twisted back, crossed the room, and planted a firm kiss on Brianna’s lips. “Relax. All of this will work out fine. Just wait and see.”

“I hope so.” But she didn’t look at all convinced. Alex thought he knew her secrets, but given her apprehension, perhaps he’d be surprised. Regardless, Cody and Simon weren’t leaving with her.

Not now, not ever.

* * * *

Brianna knew the reckoning had finally come. The next hour would decide her ultimate fate and the course of her future. Now more than ever before, she wanted to reside right here on this ranch. Once the matter of the contract was settled, she'd beg them to help her find her brother. And she prayed she wasn't too late.

Forty minutes after Rafe had come in, he returned with the news that Matt, the lawyer, had arrived.

As she walked to the front door hand in hand with Alex, Brianna felt the knots in her stomach tighten. She had a very bad feeling in the pit of her soul. Cody wasn't going to be easy to beat, and she dreaded Alex and Rafe finding out what she'd done.

They walked across the wide porch and down the planked wooden stairs to the bricked walkway. It led them to the assembled vehicles in the front yard. The sheriff had two vehicles at the ready. Cody and Simon stepped out of the back of a large black SUV parked behind the second patrol car.

At the end of the procession was a blue jeep. A tall, attractive man in a nice business suit stepped out carrying a briefcase in one hand and a sheaf of paper in the other. He marched past Cody and Simon and went directly to the sheriff. They began speaking in low tones that Brianna couldn't hear. The man in the suit nodded and turned away abruptly before heading in their direction.

He walked straight to her, stopped, and handed his briefcase to Rafe before sticking his hand out to her. "Hi, I'm Matt Drakestone. I'm assuming, since you're the only female in the vicinity, that you're Brianna."

"Yes." She shook his hand "Are you another brother?" They didn't look alike at all.

"No. We're distant cousins, but don't let that worry you. I may

have the name, but I'm not in line to inherit any of this land even if they never have any kids. I promise, there's no conflict of interest at all."

But still, he was family, and Brianna wasn't sure she wanted to divulge her secret to anyone with even a distant relationship to Rafe and Alex.

"Don't worry. You can trust him." This from Rafe.

"Let's go inside and chat, shall we?"

Brianna allowed Matt to lead her back inside to the foyer. They left Rafe and Alex outside guarding the door.

"The warrant is based on the assumption that you've signed a contract with Cody and Simon already. Is that true?"

"No. I never signed anything with them."

"Okay." He started to go back outside.

"However, I signed a document with his predecessor, Dylan."

Matt turned to her. "Did you sign a new one adding Simon when you arrived here?"

"No. I was only here a day before they left on a business trip. I think I was supposed to do so upon their return, but I ran instead."

His brows furrowed. "Where did they go? Do you know?"

She shrugged. "To some big important land deal. I think they went to Texas."

"Funny that they had you rush out here only to leave you alone for several days."

"I thought so too. They summoned me in New York right after Dylan's funeral and had me on the first flight out here practically in the middle of the night, but then they departed a day after I arrived. Left to my own devices, I explored the house and I found a disgusting film of them having sex with and whipping a woman."

"Really." Matt looked concerned. "And you exited their property after watching it?"

She nodded. "Yes, but I didn't watch very much of it."

"Where is it?"

“Back in my room there. Why?”

He pondered that for a while then shook his head as if he had too much more important information to consider. “Never mind.”

Matt rummaged in his briefcase for awhile and handed her a stapled set of paper. “This is the official agreement Alex and Rafe would like you to sign.”

“I signed a temporary agreement with them the first day I got here.”

Matt held up a familiar sheet of paper. “Right. I have that, but this is the formal typed up, official one that I’ll scan to be filed in court.”

“And it says the same thing?”

“Pretty much. It’s a standard contract stating that you are free and willing to be their bride. Further, you agree and stipulate that the contract is null and void if after three years you are unable to produce an heir for their land legacy.”

“Three years? I thought the temporary contract was for ninety days.”

Matt’s eyes widened a bit. “They had me change it. If you were to marry without this condition, you’d have to prove fertility in ten years. It *is* a much shorter time span.”

“Still very generous though.” Her heart pounded in a hopeful rhythm for the first time in weeks. She had longer than three or four months to get pregnant. She could stay with Alex and Rafe. A weight lifted off of her soul.

“They like you a lot. I can tell. Truthfully, I’d be surprised if they let you go even after three years. The terms can certainly be renegotiated.”

“Can I sign this adjusted agreement right now?” With three years to get pregnant, Brianna wanted the contract validated as soon as possible.

“We have to go out and deal with the warrant and Cody’s bogus contract, then I’ll have you sign it.”

“Okay. Then what happens?”

“When we go back outside, Cody and Simon have the right to speak to you semi-privately, regarding the warrant they’ve filed. However, as your lawyer, I’m allowed to be present, if you wish.”

“I do.”

“Great. They will likely try to threaten you or in some way coerce you to sign their document and leave with them.”

“I don’t want to leave with them.” She wanted Alex and Rafe and this life with them. Her perfect life was so close within her reach.

“Well, I’ve been duly informed that Alex and Rafe won’t allow it anyway,” he said with a grin. “Whatever they’ve got planned to convince you to leave with them, don’t believe it. I’ll be available to advise you accordingly.”

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

They walked outside again along the same path she and Alex had traversed minutes ago. She was cautiously optimistic. She’d never had a lawyer before and found the sudden acquisition gave her a huge sense of relief. After all this business, she planned to ask him about getting custody of her brother transferred into her care.

She smiled at Alex and Rafe on the way by to stand before Cody, Simon, and the Sheriff.

“I’ve been worried about you, Brianna,” Cody said.

“So worried you swore out a warrant for my arrest? Your concern is touching.”

An evil smile appeared. The expression on his face was one she’d seen before. When Dylan was still alive and he’d been added to the contract, he’d had the same look. Like he’d won something. The first tendrils of apprehension dissolved her good mood. Why was he so sure of himself?

“We need to speak in private, Brianna. Dismiss your lawyer.”

“No.”

“Very well.” Cody cocked his head to one side. “Do you remember a mutual friend of ours named Dr. Nicholson? He’s the

doctor we have on hand at our ranch property. I believe you met him at our home before you left for New York after Dylan's funeral. Also I understand you spent quite a bit of time in his company while we were gone on business this past week."

Bastard. How did he know that? She thought she'd been so careful not to be seen with the doctor.

Matt watched her carefully. "Who is Dr. Nicholson?"

Cody continued as if Matt hadn't spoken. "He told me the most extraordinary thing about your health, Brianna. He had to treat you while we were gone. I hope you're feeling better." His gaze darted to Matt.

"Are you sick, Brianna?" Matt asked. *Shit.* She sent an evil glare to Cody, trying to silently compel him to keep his mouth shut. Her urgent message said, "Don't you dare tell him what you know."

"Do you want me to share this private medical information with your lawyer?" Her insides liquefied in terror. *No, I don't want you to share, you sick fucking bastard.*

Brianna turned to Matt, amazed she was able to stay on her feet without collapsing. "I need to speak to Cody alone, after all. Thanks for staying with me up to now."

"I'm not leaving you alone with him." His expression was dead serious. He turned to Cody. "Cancel the warrant and produce the contract she supposedly signed, or get off this property."

"Fine. I'll leave, but I have one more thing to say." Cody smiled wider. "I wanted to tell Brianna that I contacted Kyle and his father recently. As a matter of fact, they are back at my ranch." The fake smile faded to a sinister frown. "Waiting for you."

"What? How is that possible? He's with my step-father back in New York." She almost added the word "hidden" but decided against it.

"I have more good news," Cody said with confident zeal. "Your step-father and I have come to an agreement regarding Kyle's future. I've named him as successor to my ranch and entire estate in case you

aren't able to produce any legal offspring for me and Simon."

"Who's Kyle?" Matt grabbed her arm gently and held on as if he was afraid he was losing her before his eyes. That wasn't far from the truth.

Cody turned to Matt and answered before she even took a breath. "Kyle Lancaster is Brianna's half-brother. Even though they had different biological fathers, I understand they're very close. If you want, I'll leave you here, Brianna. Kyle probably won't be upset. Although, thirteen is such an awkward age, but not to worry, Simon and I will raise him up right regardless of your decision."

"If I sign your contract, what happens to Kyle?" She imagined any number of tortures they'd hold over her head in order to get her to comply. But she wasn't ever leaving Kyle with Cody and Simon. She'd have to leave to protect him and demand that they let him go back to New York with her odious step-father.

"Brianna, don't let him talk you into anything." Matt pulled at her arm, but this conversation was headed to an obvious conclusion.

If Cody knew about her association with Dr. Nicholson, she was in way over her head. If Dr. Nicholson even hinted at what he'd done for her, they wouldn't need a warrant. Cody could request her blood be tested on the spot. And she could be arrested immediately, too.

The sheriff probably had a medi-scanner attached to his belt next to his service weapon. Blood alcohol levels or illegal birth control were equally testable using a standard device.

If Alex and Rafe had to watch her hauled off for illegal birth control infraction, it would break her. She knew it. Cody knew it, too, and enjoyed her discomfort. *Bastard.*

"Will you leave with us peacefully, Brianna, and allow Kyle to return to your step-father's care in New York? Or do we need to make another more serious complaint to the sheriff?"

Matt squeezed her arm more firmly in his grasp. "Do not even think about leaving with him. Talk to me."

She turned to him. "I don't have a choice." And she didn't. Kyle's

safety was more important than saving herself. Besides, Brianna refused to allow Alex and Rafe to find out she'd willingly allowed a birth control injection.

All the sex they'd had these past few days, with the intent to get her pregnant as soon as possible, had been a lie. Those amazing experiences had been purely for the enjoyment and not because she'd be able to conceive a child for them. Her big, hateful lie would be out in the open.

A tear escaped, and she quickly wiped it away, breaking Matt's hold on her arm. "I'm sorry. I've got to go. Tell Alex and Rafe I'm so very sorry."

Chapter Eight

Alex paced restlessly as Brianna and Matt spoke to Cody. After several long, tense moments of conversation, where he did his best not to fetch a rifle and use Cody's head for target practice, Alex kept his eye on them very closely.

He didn't like not being a part of the conversation. Not that he wanted to hear any specifics of the contract, he just didn't trust Cody and didn't like not being within target range.

His phone rang and distracted him a moment. "Hello."

"Mr. Drakestone, I was directed to call you by my boss, Matt Drakestone. You wanted detailed information on Brianna Lancaster?"

"Yes. Tell me everything you know."

Alex listened carefully as Matt's able associate gave him a very meticulous and concise two-minute synopsis of Brianna's life to date. Plus, he had other bits of interesting details as side notes. Alex suspected he knew exactly what motivated her to shimmy out the bedroom window. Her teenaged half brother, Kyle, had a grasping degenerate for a father. That was something he could maybe fix.

"Excellent report, thanks." Alex hung up as a plan to help her get what she wanted circulated in his head. Optimism coated his attitude for the first time all day.

"Good news?" Rafe asked.

He shrugged, "Definitely interesting." His attention went back to Brianna, Matt and Cody across the front yard. The rhythm of their group dynamic had changed very quickly.

Matt suddenly grabbed Brianna's arm, and this worried Alex like a knife through his chest. When she broke the grasp and moved a step

closer to Cody, Alex didn't hesitate. He moved in their direction at a very fast clip as his hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. Rafe caught on and followed.

Matt turned and saw him moving. He motioned him as if to tell him to hurry.

"What's going on?" He barged in between Brianna and Cody to keep her from touching him.

Matt's phone rang in that moment, and while he answered, Alex turned and gave Cody a positively demonic glare. Brianna's hand grabbed his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Alex. I have to go."

"You aren't going anywhere with him."

"Shall I tell him what Dr. Nicholson told me about your illegal activities? I'm sure he'd love to know he's been harboring a criminal."

Alex fisted one hand and lifted it. "She's not a criminal."

"Oh, but she is. And I have video proof of her vile acts. If you hadn't run, Brianna, you would have seen that we had a tape of you committing your crime."

"What? Oh no. You have to let me go, Alex. I don't want you to get into trouble."

He turned to her with all the love he could express. "I love you. I won't let you leave us."

"But..." she started crying. "I've done something I shouldn't have."

"Did you murder anyone?"

She stiffened and a frown shaped her lips. She looked affronted when she blurted out, "No. Of course not."

"Then I don't care what you did."

Matt's phone conversation came to an end, and his overall mood was much lighter when he slipped the phone in his pocket. Across the driveway, they heard the squawk of the sheriff's radio.

"A new arrest warrant's been issued, Mr. Welter." Matt smiled as he talked.

“What warrant?”

The sheriff didn't speak very long before he put on a stern face and approached their assembled group.

The sheriff called out. “Mr. Welter. I need to have a word with you, sir. Right now.”

Matt's grin widened. “A warrant for your arrest in connection with a Dr. Nicholson's murder.”

“They are only calling me because I was the one who reported Dr. Nicholson missing. He works on my ranch. I believe they found his body on Drakestone land, am I correct?”

Brianna, who'd previously been looking completely forlorn, perked up at that news. “Dr. Nicholson was murdered?”

“Yes. And apparently the police are in possession of their own video of the crime. Apparently, they have a witness who taped a secret video of his murder. As a result, they've issued a warrant for Cody Welter and his cousin, Simon.”

“What witness?” Cody backed away from them another step.

“His name is Dusty something or other.” Matt shrugged.

Alex took a step closer to Cody. “Isn't that one of your ranch hands?”

Cody backed up several more steps, but the sheriff pulled his weapon. Matt, Rafe and Alex led Brianna over to the porch. Behind them, Cody and Simon began shouting and cursing about false arrest.

“What's going on?” Rafe asked.

Matt answered. “Cody and Simon committed a murder. Allegedly.”

Brianna grabbed Alex's hand. “But he's got my brother!”

“No he doesn't. He lied. We know where your brother is.” Alex put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed. “Forgive me, but I knew you were worried about something. I deduced that Cody was holding something over your head. I just now found out about Kyle and the problems he has with your step-father.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s in town at the sheriff’s station.”

“Where is my step-father?” Matt and Alex exchanged wary glances. “He’s in jail for criminal activity involving the custody of your brother. Apparently, he tried to make a side deal with Cody and agreed to falsify the original document of your marriage contract as the vehicle for personal gain.”

“What about the warrant for me?” Her gaze rested on the altercation with Cody and Simon and the local sheriff and his deputy.

“It was bogus. You didn’t sign the contract Cody said you did to procure the warrant. Besides, I think the sheriff has his hands full for now.”

“I’ll tell what you did, Brianna!” Cody screamed from across the expanse of grass and the gravel of the circular drive in front of her new home.

She shook her head back and forth but didn’t speak. Her eyes welled up with more unshed tears. It was as if she were watching a car wreck, unable to turn away.

From across the small yard, Cody broke free from his partial captivity. With one handcuff fastened to his wrist and the other dangling as he ran, he shouted, “You’re a slutty bitch, Brianna. Ask them if they’ll still want you when I show them the video of you getting the birth control shot the day after we left you alone. The one you begged for so you wouldn’t be able to get pregnant to fulfill your contract with us. You’re going to jail for reproductive crimes, you conniving cunt. Ask them how they like you now!”

Brianna’s head bowed, and tears fell to the flagstone patio below as Cody’s arrogant accusation rang out against the evening sky.

* * * *

Rafe took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The echo of Brianna’s sobbing was the only sound drifting in the wind. Cody’s wretched words hung in the air like black smog. And Brianna’s

wounded expression said it all. She believed it. She was ashamed by his words as if they were true.

Can't be.

Rafe knew something that even Alex likely didn't know. In the barn she'd walked past the fertility machine, but Alex had been ahead of her and wasn't in a position to see the read out like Rafe had seen. At the time, she'd been alarmed it might work on her. Alex had told her the machine wasn't accurate on humans.

That was true.

But if a fertile woman stepped in front of the machine and it registered, then she *was* fertile. The rule of thumb, in certain circles was, if the machine registered even a little bit, the woman was primed to be impregnated.

Brianna had skirted past the machine on the way out, but he'd seen the needle spike anyway, showing a positive result. And he'd doubled his efforts to ensure if this was the time, she'd get caught.

If she wasn't pregnant right now, he'd be very surprised. Rafe knew she couldn't have had a birth control shot. Perhaps she was being set up.

Alex's expression bordered on rage. Not at Brianna, but at Cody.

"That's a despicable thing to say."

Cody laughed out loud until the sheriff clapped handcuffs on one of his thin wrists. "What the fuck are you doing, sheriff? I told you I'd go quietly."

"Well, you've been screaming so I changed my mind. The FBI is waiting in town for you. I've been asked to secure you and bring you in."

Cody snarled, "The charges are bogus."

"FBI doesn't think so. Murder in the first is a serious charge." The sheriff didn't look surprised by the turn of events. Maybe he didn't like Cody, either.

"That's ludicrous. I didn't murder anyone." Cody crossed his arms as if pouting would get him out of trouble.

“A man by the name of Dr. Nicholson was killed.” The sheriff shrugged, “The FBI says it’s an open and shut case. All I know is that both you and Simon are in big trouble, and I’m taking you to them right now.”

“What about my warrant and breach of contract?”

“Apparently, Brianna Lancaster never signed the contract you hold which makes it invalid.”

“Says who?”

The sheriff pushed him toward the backseat of his cruiser. “The district attorney for our county under the declaration of the local registrar. I just got a call and a lecture from him about jumping the gun.”

“Brianna. Goddamn it, sign the paper.”

“No.”

Cody stopped in his tracks halfway to the cruiser. “Sheriff, I want her put under arrest for fertility crimes. She got a birth control shot, and I’ve a video tape that proves it.”

Rafe smiled. “I think you should test her with your medi-scanner, Sheriff. Wouldn’t that be the easiest way to prove his claim?”

“No!” Brianna wailed.

The deputy pulled the device off his belt and approached Brianna. “I can check her real quick for you, sheriff.”

Brianna backed away in fear. But Rafe held her in place so she could be scanned.

The deputy moved the small hand-held device down her body once and looked at the read out. The glimmer of a smile touched his lips.

“She doesn’t have any illegal birth control substances in her body, sheriff.”

Brianna’s mouth dropped open. “I don’t?”

“No, ma’am.” The deputy put the device back on his belt and moved away. He turned back, “You might think about getting a pregnancy test real soon though.”

Brianna twisted in his arms to face him. "I can't be pregnant," she whispered. "I believe you can." Rafe squeezed her tight, buried his face against the side of her head and kissed her hair. "I've certainly given it my best effort." And he planned to continue his best effort until they were absolutely sure she carried a child.

The sheriff nodded at his deputy and turned to Cody and Simon. "If she's pregnant then she couldn't have gotten a birth control shot. But don't worry, the FBI said Dr. Nicholson had very good notes on what you asked him to do. Apparently he kept a video log as well. But he didn't give her any shot."

Cody smirked, "That's because I told him to pretend—"

"Shut up, you idiot," Simon spoke for the first time since they'd arrived.

Brianna looked like she was about to say something but clammed up tight. Eyes burning a hole in Cody, she marched over and slapped him across the face. "You set me up, didn't you?"

Cody didn't deny it. At first his expression was smug, but then he seemed to realize they weren't alone and he was in big trouble. His face turned as red as an overripe summer tomato.

He boasted, "I wanted you to beg me for your life, you grasping whore. Your odious step-father found proof that your brother has a claim to my land. My Land! I wasn't going to allow your sniveling family access to my property. At least not unless I could fuck you and get you pregnant with my heir."

"Too bad I ended up outsmarting you, by running away, you monstrous bastard."

"Kyle isn't safe," Cody spat. "You should hear what your step-father wants to do."

"That's not true. He is safe." Matt intervened before Brianna could assault him again. "The FBI has him in protective custody in town. Unfortunately, your step-father is involved in this mess with Cody somehow and is also in custody pending a hearing for his actions and involvement."

Brianna sent a worried look to Matt. “What about me? Am I going to be in protective custody soon pending my involvement in attempting to get a birth control shot? What he said was true. I thought I’d gotten a real shot.”

Matt shrugged. “Let’s see what happens. Regardless, I’ll represent you. The tape that proves you tried also shows them in collusion with a murder victim. If charges are brought, I’ll sue for entrapment. He came to you. You didn’t seek him out, right?”

“No. I really didn’t. I thought he was my friend against Cody.”

“Don’t worry, honey, we’ll figure it out one way or another,” Rafe said in his most reassuring tone. “Push comes to shove, we’ll demand conjugal rights.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “I don’t think it will come to that. At worst, you’ll have to pay a fine.”

She turned and stared at Alex first and then at him. Her sorrowful expression said it all. “I’m sorry. I guess you don’t want me anymore as your bride and I understand completely—”

Alex took a long step into her personal space, leaned in and kissed her hard on the mouth. Rafe tapped him on the shoulder, but he wasn’t swayed to stop.

Matt walked away, an amused expression encompassing his face. Rafe went behind Brianna and buried his face in her neck. He put his hands on her waist and kissed beneath her ear. The three of them might have stayed that way for a long while, but the sheriff interrupted.

“Sorry to butt in, but the FBI wants you to send a vehicle for her brother. They’ve got their hands full with this murder.”

Alex pulled away from Brianna with reluctance and followed the sheriff over to his vehicle. Rafe slid his arms around her waist to keep her in his loose embrace. Her back was pressed against his front, and he hugged her tight.

“Will you tell me what happened? Why you tried to get the shot?”

“I don’t know if I should.” Her gaze followed the sheriff’s vehicle

to the road.

“There’s nothing you can’t tell us, honey.” Rafe squeezed her again.

She let a long sigh escape. “While I was here for Dylan’s funeral, Dr. Nicholson approached me as a friend not only Dylan, but also of my step-father’s and wondered if I needed any help.

“Specifically, he wondered if I needed any medicine to help me get through the pain of my loss. I didn’t take him up on his offer, but he was nice to me and I trusted him. I thought he was my friend.”

“You didn’t know he worked at Dylan’s ranch?”

“No. Not then. When I arrived here last week, Dr. Nicholson sought me out and told me he was worried. He asked me if I knew anything personal about Cody.

“At one point I told him my thoughts on being one of the few fertile women left and the constraints associated with it. He was very understanding and mentioned a possible solution in a temporary birth control shot. He swore the drug would take effect immediately and no one would ever know.”

“And you didn’t want to get married to Cody and Simon. But you had planned to sacrifice yourself so that your brother could have a better life than he led with your step-father, right? The best solution was to marry them, ensure your brother’s safety, and make damn sure that you wouldn’t get pregnant with the spawn of Satan, I mean Cody’s heir.”

Her musical laughter warmed Rafe’s heart and soul. “Yes. You’re reading my mind.”

“I balked at first, I knew it was illegal, but when Cody and Simon left on their business trip, I thought it was my best chance. I went to him. The shot was supposed to keep me infertile for three to four months. I hoped that if I couldn’t get pregnant right away, Cody would let me go. I knew Dylan had provided a little something for me in his will to survive on in the short term.”

A fat tear slipped down one cheek and she sniffled once. “Don’t

cry, honey. It breaks my heart.”

“You’re so sweet. When I came across the border onto your land, I was certain I couldn’t get pregnant. But I only wanted to keep from having Cody and Simon’s offspring. I want you to know that I wouldn’t have gotten the shot if I’d known I’d end up with you and Alex. And I’m so very sorry I deceived you.”

“I understand.” Rafe hugged her tight and kissed her. “No more tears.”

“I hope Alex is as forgiving.”

“If that kiss he gave you before leaving your presence didn’t convince you of how he feels, I’m wondering what on this earth will?” He squeezed her once more.

“So all those times in your bed the past few days trying to get me pregnant worked. If the deputy’s scanner is correct, I’m pregnant right now.”

“I’d bet on it.”

“Why?”

“Two reasons. First off, the fertility machine in the barn said you were ripe for implantation. And second I made an extra effort for the past few days in light of that knowledge.”

“I thought you said it didn’t work on humans.”

“I said it wasn’t reliable. Most women don’t register.”

“But I did.”

“Yep. How do you feel?”

She grinned and pushed out a sigh. “I feel grateful to know it isn’t Cody or Simon’s hell-spawned progeny.”

“Now that we’ve established that you’re carrying our child, will you marry us?”

“Yes.”

“Will you stop trying to leap out of windows and run away?”

“Now that I don’t have to go protect my brother, yes.”

“Will you be happy here?”

She pushed out of his embrace, turned, and flung her arms around

his neck. She kissed him hard and quick. “Yes. I’ll be happy here. Thank you for opening up the electrified fence line.”

“Trust me, it was my pleasure.”

Alex joined them. “I’ve sent my guys to fetch your brother. He’ll be here before you know it.” He kissed her cheek. “Is it true that he might be in line to inherit Cody’s ranch?”

She shrugged. “I know my mother’s family lived somewhere around in this area. I guess it’s possible. My step-father is Kyle’s father, or at least I always thought he was.”

“A local lawyer who is the executor of Dylan’s will mentioned a codicil attached naming Kyle as a direct descendant of Dylan’s late father. With Kyle’s father in jail, they’re giving temporary custody of Kyle to you. They’re sending a copy of the document for our perusal. If Cody and Simon are convicted, and it seems clear they will be, their land is forfeit to the next family member in line. Maybe it’s your brother.”

Brianna’s eye narrowed as if calling a distant memory. “I know my mother spent some time here after my father died. She was very distraught. I remember stayed in New York with my best friend for that whole summer while she *recuperated* here. My mother came back to New York, but then she married my step-father right before Christmas. That was fourteen years ago.”

“When was the document drawn up for your marriage to Dylan?”

She thought about it a moment. “Actually, it was right before the wedding. And my mom had Kyle in July. A seven-month pregnancy.” Brianna released a long sigh.

“Are you upset about that?”

Brianna shook her head. “No.” She laughed. “Trust me, there are so many other things to be upset about, that won’t even make the top 100 on my list. What if Cody and Simon are found innocent? They’ll come after my brother.”

“They won’t be. And we’ll protect him.”

“How can you be so sure?” Brianna’s expression said that she

wanted to believe but had obvious doubts as to the validity of the charges. He couldn't blame her.

"There are some whispers going around that Dr. Nicholson was possibly an FBI informant. If Cody and Simon are on any kind of video showing that they killed him, trust me, they aren't going to be found innocent."

Later that day, Brianna was reunited with her brother. He looked very much like her with the red hair and bright blue eyes. Rafe surmised they each resembled their mother. However, Kyle had a distinct cleft in his chin.

Brianna's former fiancé Dylan also had one, and so did his father, Drake. Rafe knew it was a genetic trait because Drake used to brag about not being able to deny Dylan was his son. It wasn't a stretch to believe that Brianna's mother had been intimate with Dylan's father. Just as it was plausible Dylan's old man set it up so that his son would marry the daughter of the woman he cared for. But Cody had other ideas.

Later in the day a rumor came out that there was possible circumstantial evidence that suggested Cody and Simon had eliminated Dylan and made it look like an accident so as to inherit his land. Rafe was just glad they were finally out of Brianna's life for good.

And he was elated further that she was likely carrying their child.

The memory of his conversation with Alex, right before a flame-haired vixen galloped into their lives and changed everything, crossed his mind. His most fervent wish was about to come true.

He *would* have a baby nestled in his arms before the turn of the century. Extraordinary.

* * * *

"Where are Kyle and Rafe?" Brianna asked as Alex came through the front door of the house all alone carrying a shopping bag of some

sort. It had been three weeks since she'd charged on to Drakestone property and changed her fate forever. Her life was nearly perfect.

"They went to town." His gaze swept up and down her body with measured care.

"Why? What are they doing?"

Alex removed his cowboy hat one handed and hung it on a wooden peg by the door. "Gambling or drinking. Not sure. I just know we're alone for the next few hours."

She laughed. "You both realize he's barely fourteen, right?"

"Of course, I was at his birthday party last week." Alex sat on a bench seat at started to remove one of his boots. "But the sooner he learns about all the really fun things in life, the better cowboy he'll be."

"Really?" She didn't believe for a second they were gambling or drinking, but they did love to tease her. Kyle was the happiest she'd ever seen him, so she let them have their fun.

"So whatever will we do here all alone by ourselves?" She moved closer as he removed his other cowboy boot and left the pair by the door.

Alex stood and lifted the shopping bag. "I have something for you." His sly grin made a girlish giggle escape. She loved this man so very much.

Brianna moved closer. Just as she grabbed for the bag, he pulled it slightly out of her reach. "Patience is a virtue."

"It's a virtue you know for a fact that I don't possess, so what's in there?" She lunged for the plastic bag, but he kept it just out of her reach."

"Fine." Brianna pretended to back up then suddenly leapt forward, shot one arm around his neck and hooked the handle of the bag with a finger.

"Woman," he said in mock anger.

"Man," she replied in the next second.

Brianna pulled the bag closer and saw a scrap of what looked like

blue lace inside.

“Is is a nightgown?”

He pushed out a long-suffering sigh. “No, a corset. I’m trying to teach you a woman’s place on this ranch.”

“Very funny.”

“Not that it will do any good. The second either one of us displeases you, you’ll shimmy out the nearest window.”

“I only did that one time. You can’t use that against me anymore.”

“Sure I can.” But he let her take the bag and watched as she opened it. She pulled out the garment and laughed. “It *is* a corset.”

“I told you it was. Will you try it on?”

“Is this some sexual fantasy of yours?”

“Maybe.” His grin said it was.

“Okay. I’ll try it.” She turned and headed for the bedroom. Over one shoulder she called, “Meet me in bed in ten minutes.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And you’d better be naked.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he repeated. The sound of his steps sped up.

Brianna walked into her bathroom and stripped down to nothing. She extracted the corset and a matching lace thong from the bag and put the garments on. Her breasts sat on top of the molded half cup at the top of the silk-lined corset where her nipples were barely covered by two strategically placed lace fans.

Surprisingly, it was much more comfortable than expected. The silk lining felt good on her skin and it wasn’t too tight at all, but then again, she didn’t expect to have it on very long anyway.

“Are you ready for me?” she called out.

“I’m naked and waiting in your bed as you demanded.”

She opened the door and stepped out into her large bedroom. Even though they each had their own rooms adjoining hers, usually they all slept in her large suite.

Alex was on the bed completely naked. His head rested on the arm folded behind his head. His gaze immediately scanned her body up

and down. Down and up and back down again. The smile tugging the corner of his mouth led Brianna to believe he liked what he saw.

He lifted his torso and balanced on an elbow. "You look amazing."

"I'm glad you think so."

"The blue matches your eye color exactly. I knew it would." He paused a moment and added, "So how hard is it to remove?"

Brianna laughed out loud. "I don't know, but I'm sure you'll figure it out."

"Come here and let me take a closer look." He motioned her with an outstretched hand.

She sauntered slowly to the side of the bed.

"For as much time as it took me to put this on, I think you should consider leaving it in place for a while."

"How long is awhile?" His hand suddenly shot forward and slipped between her legs. One finger glanced across her clit and made her jump in delighted surprise. "Ooh. I like how the panties are easy access."

She brushed his face with one hand. "I knew you'd love that feature."

Alex rose to his knees, pulled her onto the bed, and hugged her to his chest. "Maybe we could leave it on during the activities I have planned."

"Fine by me."

"Turn around and face the headboard."

The moment her back was turned and her hands rested against the flat surface of her wooded four-poster bed, she felt Alex press his body against her back.

"Thanks for trying on what I bought for you." His hands rested at the stiff confined sides of her waist. He rubbed his fingers along every inch of the garment.

"Of course, I have to admit it makes me feel a little sexy."

He pressed a kiss to one shoulder. "You are a lot sexy."

“You’re just saying that because I’m wearing a corset.”

“No. You’re always a lot sexy, I just enjoy this color and seeing you dressed in it.”

“Are any activities ever going to take place?”

“Patience is a virtue.”

“We’ve already had this discussion,” she joked. “Nothing has changed.”

“Oh yes it has. Last time you weren’t dressed in a sexy blue corset.”

Brianna laughed until he pressed his cock between her legs and immediately buried his shaft deeply into her pussy. His groan of appreciation as he withdrew and stroked inside again brought a smile to her lips.

No matter how many times they made love she always wanted more. “You can push harder, I won’t break.”

He pushed a little bit harder with his next thrust. His hands slid up her sides to her barely covered breasts lingering only for a moment. He dipped his fingers between her legs and caressed her clit with tender care until she was writhing and ready to explode in climax.

Three strokes of his talented fingers later and she cried out in overwhelming release.

“I love you, Brianna.” Alex’s whispered endearment came seconds before he pierced her one final time, stiffened his body against hers and growled in what sounded like utter fulfillment.

“I love you too, Alex.”

Epilogue

Brianna put a hand on her swelling stomach and smiled as her baby pushed against her fingers. This was going to be one rowdy little child if the activity in her belly was any indication.

She'd likely gotten pregnant the day she'd run across the border onto Drakestone land. Alex and Rafe were very confident of this. She couldn't really argue.

Once Kyle had been delivered safely to their ranch by Matt, Rafe had taken him under his wing immediately and showed him the cowboy life. These days the two of them were nearly inseparable.

Last week she'd caught them playing another game of poker with some stable hands. It wasn't the first time. She didn't approve of gambling for teenagers as a rule, but given Kyle's previous sheltered life with his father, he deserved a little happiness.

Poker with Rafe made him happy, and they only played for old fashioned wooden matchsticks anyway.

The FBI, in association with the county registrar, confirmed that her brother Kyle was indeed Drake's son only two days after Cody was arrested. Illegitimate or not, DNA won out over everything, and her brother, at the advance age of thirteen, became a land owner a week before his fourteenth birthday. His new land was determined to be second in size only to that of her new husbands.

"How is my baby doing?" Alex asked from the doorway of their bedroom.

She rubbed her belly. "He's kicking up a storm."

Alex's eyes narrowed in mock disagreement. "It might be a girl, you know."

“I think it’s a boy, no question in my mind.”

“The doctor is on his way out to check on you.” He crossed the room to sit next to her.

“Another house call from our doctor? You must be rich and powerful.”

“I am and don’t you forget it.” He kissed her smiling mouth before adding, “Before too much time gets away, I’d like to discuss education.”

She rubbed her belly again as the baby moved restlessly beneath. “I think we have some time before we need to talk about kindergarten through college plans.”

“I meant for you.”

“Me?” Her heart sped up. “What do you mean?”

“You wanted to go to school before coming here, right?”

She nodded.

“Rafe and I wanted to tell you that once the baby is born, we fully support your going back to get your education, if you still want to.”

Brianna sent him a startled gaze of pure joy. “I know what I said, and I appreciate the offer, but I think I’ll hang out and spend time with our little boy.”

Alex crossed the room. “Our daughter will be very happy to have you around the ranch.”

“Rafe will be delighted when it’s a boy, too. He adores Kyle.”

“He wants a baby to bounce on his knee. He doesn’t care about the gender. And the truth is, neither do I, but I do like to spar with you.”

“Thank you.”

His brows furrowed in puzzlement. “For sparring with you?”

“No, silly. For offering to let me go to school. I appreciate it. And I’ll likely take you up on it eventually, but not quite yet.” Her focus was on her child.

“Whenever you want. Whenever you’re ready.” Alex put his hand over hers as the baby kicked his hand.

“She’s anxious to get out there and start shopping, don’t you think?”

“No. He’s anxious to play football and ride galloping horses across your land.”

He pressed his mouth to her cheek. It was a soft, sweet kiss filled with the promise of a future she’d never want to run away from ever again.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lara Santiago is the bestselling author of over eighteen books. She's a 2009 WisRWA Write Touch Readers' award winner for *Menagerie*, a 2007 Passionate Plume finalist for *The Lawman's Wife*, an Ecataromance award winner for *The Miner's Wife*, and has garnered a coveted four and half stars from Romantic Times Book Reviews for her novel, *The Blonde Bomb Tech*.

From her futuristic novels to her contemporary romantic suspense, she's known for her independent heroines and those compelling alpha males we all adore.

After turning in her twelfth manuscript, she came to the realization that this writing gig might just work out after all. She continues to dream up stories, keeping no less than ten story ideas circulating at any given time.

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