

Roping
her won't
be easy.

LASSOING

The Virgin Mail-Order Bride 

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ALEXA RILEY

LASSOING

THE VIRGIN MAIL-ORDER BRIDE

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Lassoing the Virgin Mail-Order Bride

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Also by Alexa Riley

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LASSOING

The Virgin Mail Order Bride

When Clare Stevens walked onto the McCallister ranch, she expected her life to be a certain way. She was the mail-order bride of the owner, and she was to fulfill her duties. Clean the house, cook for his men, and warm his bed at night. What she didn't expect was the beefy cowboy who walked in and literally swept her off her feet.

Cash McCallister didn't have time to date and find a wife. So a mail-order bride seemed the easiest way to find a partner. He thought he'd made a mistake until he laid eyes on the little piece of sunshine that lit up his life. He never imagined a true love like this. He never knew an obsession could take hold so tightly.

When drama hits the farm and their fast love is threatened, can Clare and Cash hold it together?

Warning: This is literally as cliché as it sounds...and just as awesome. It's country living with high-calorie foods and easy sunsets. Come sit on the porch and stay a while. You'll like what you see.

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Edited by [Aquila Editing](#)

This book is for those of us lucky enough to have a night under the stars while sipping Boone's Farm. Here's to the backs of trucks, cowboy hats, and tight jeans. Yeehaw!



CHAPTER 1

CLARE

“Miss Clare Stevens?” I turn my head to look at the man who said my name. The sun blocks my view until he takes another step forward, his cowboy boots tapping on the concrete of the train station’s entryway. His movement gives me a clear view of him now, and I’m taken aback by the sight of him.

He looks like he could be my father’s age. Not that I knew my father, but if I had to guess how old he was, he’d be around this old. Instantly, the little bit of the fear I’d been feeling slides away. The man looks nice. The laugh lines around his mouth are evident, even with all the wrinkles. His grey hair is cut short, his skin is deeply browned by the sun, probably from years of working out on the land.

“Yes, that’s me.” I rise from the bench I’d been sitting on for over an hour. I was starting to wonder if my soon-to-be husband was coming or if maybe he’d changed his mind. The worry had grown worse with each ticking minute that had gone by. I didn’t even have enough money to catch a train back out of Lobo, Texas. I would have been stranded in a town in the middle of Nowheresville.

“Sorry about that, ma’am. One of the fences broke this morning and we had hogs all over the place. Had to round the bastards up.” He cringes slight at his own curse. “Excuse my language, ma’am.”

I smile, letting him know it doesn’t bother me “Don’t hold back on my account. I grew up on a farm with ten ranch hands. I’ve heard it all.”

“That so?”

I nod. “Yeah, until my mama got sick and we had to move to the city.” I can still hear the pain in my own voice. It’s still fresh. I can’t hide it, even if I wanted to. She left me all alone a little over a month ago, and I don’t have anyone now. The ranch I’d grown up on was gone. It wasn’t our ranch, but it felt like it after all the years we poured into working there. The ranch hands there were the only family I’d ever really known, but the Blackwells upped and sold the ranch last year and there wasn’t the option of going back to work there now.

I’d found myself up the creek with no paddle.

“Sorry about your loss.”

I just shrug my shoulder because I really don’t want to talk about it.

“That all you got?” He nods at the one bag I have sitting next to the bench. *That all you got?* The words burn.

“Yeah, that’s all I got.”

He studies me for a second, his eyes going soft.

“He’s never going to see you coming.” He laughs, and the lines around his mouth are more prominent now. I know he’s talking about my future husband, Cash McCallister.

“Pretty sure he knows I’m on my way.” I go to grab my bag, but the man beats me to it.

“Name’s Earl,” he says, picking up my bag and giving me a wink. “And no, I’m not sure he knows *you’re* coming.”

With that, he turns, bag in hand, and starts heading out of the train station. I follow him as we make our way towards a black truck. He throws my bag into the back before opening the passenger door for me.

He actually has to give me a little boost to get inside. This thing needs a freaking stepladder or something.

Closing the door behind me, I slip on the seatbelt while he climbs in the driver’s side. He buckles his own belt before he turns the key and the truck comes to life.

“It’s about an hour’s drive out to the ranch. It’s nothing but farmland once we pull out of this town. You need anything before we go?”

“Where is he?” I don’t know why that’s my response, but I’m hurt that the man I’m supposed to be marrying isn’t here to pick me up. I actually thought we’d be tying the knot before heading out to his ranch. That’s what the email had said.

“Got held up,” is his only reply as he pulls out of the train station, getting right on the road out of town.

I bite my lip as I look over at Earl, who shoots me another wink. I debate whether I should try to grill him for information about Cash or let it be. He’d probably tell him everything I’d said. Besides, Cash told me how this marriage was going to work and why he needed a wife.

A marriage of convenience. Someone to warm his bed and cook his meals. He hadn’t said it in such blunt terms, but I could read between the lines. Though I didn’t know why a man as handsome as Cash needed a mail-order bride.

Handsome was putting it mildly. He’d given me one picture of himself and said it was the only one he had. It looked like it was taken without him knowing. He was on top of a horse, a stern expression on his face.

I couldn’t make out his hair with the Stetson on his head or his eye color, but there was no hiding he was attractive and massive. *Intimidating* was the best word I could use to describe him in the picture. I couldn’t imagine a man like him needed to get a mail-order bride, but here I am. Something about not needing the tangles of love. This wasn’t going to be hearts and flowers. We would each do our part.

His words were cold, and at that, I’d pushed the idea of finding my Prince Charming out the window. When I’d first found out about the Cowboy Mail-Order Bride Program, I’d let those little romantic ideas dance around in my head, but it was clear from the emails and the fact that he couldn’t even bring himself to pick me up today that he hadn’t been lying. This is all for convenience.

He didn't even ask for a picture of me. All he wanted to know was if I could cook, clean, and work a computer. That had pretty much been the gist of it. The agency did a background check, and I'm not sure what-all they'd given Cash of it.

I close my eyes, and soon the hum of the truck puts me to sleep. I don't know how long I drift, but the touch of a hand to mine wakes me from my sleep.

"We're here," Earl says. I look out at a large ranch-style home made completely out of wood. A deck wraps around the whole thing and I see white swings on the porch. The double front door is a dark blue, giving the home a welcoming feeling.

I open the truck door, wanting to see more, but Earl grabs me by the wrist.

"Wait for me." He exits the truck, coming around to my side to help me down.

There's land as far as I can see, with barns speckled here and there.

"It's beautiful here."

Earl just nods in agreement before going back to the truck and getting my bag. A few men step out of the white barn closest to the house. Both raise their hats, saying hi. I nod back at them.

One thing I'd always loved about growing up on a ranch was that there were always people around. And I love to cook. Mama and I could cook for hours for the men, and it was worth it to see their faces light up when they came in after a hard day of work. It made me feel needed, a part of something. I want that feeling again.

"Let me show you inside." I follow Earl up the porch stairs. He opens the doors to the house, leading right into the living room. Everything is minimal. It looks like a woman has never even stepped foot in here. The walls are bare, and the only furniture consists of three sofas facing a giant television

screen. The living room is open and connected to the dining room and kitchen.

The dining room has a wooden table that could probably seat fifteen people at it, but the kitchen steals the show. I find myself standing in it, not even realizing I'd moved. The countertops are all granite. The island has a sink of its own. One wall has four ovens built into it. The stainless steel appliances practically sparkle. I think I'd marry Cash just for this kitchen alone.

"Brand new," Earl says, breaking through my kitchen high.

I turn to look at him still standing in the living room as he watches me.

"How many hands are here?"

"Total is eighteen people if you count yourself, ma'am."

I could definitely handle eighteen people in a kitchen like this. I glance over at the clock. It's already one in the afternoon.

"Dinner time?" I ask as I start to pull open drawers, looking to see where everything is.

"Six," I hear him say from behind me as I find an apron and pull it on, tying it behind my neck and making sure not to catch any of the blonde spirals that have come loose from my ponytail.

"Well, I better hop to then if I want to have dinner done by then. I'm guessing that my adoring soon-to-be husband has no plans to marry me today since he couldn't even be bothered to pick me up." I turn, putting my hands on my hips.

Earl just smiles. Again.

"No, I don't think he has plans to marry today."

I give a curt nod before getting back to the task at hand. Not even married and I'm already mad at the man. But I think this is how our marriage will be. I'll see him at meals and when he comes to bed. A bed I'm sure I'm supposed to be in. That was never outright said, but that is what married people do.

I'd made plans for that as well, making sure I'd gotten myself on the pill before I'd come out here. I might have landed myself in this situation, but I wouldn't bring a child into it with me. This was about surviving, and Cash had never said anything about children.

I go to the pantry and look to see what I have that could feed almost twenty people. After looking over the shelves in here and in the kitchen, I decide on burgers with baked fries and a pasta salad. I'll need to go to the store soon, but I have enough for tonight and breakfast tomorrow. But I need to start with the pies to get them into the oven.

When I come out of the pantry, I scream. Caught off guard by a young man who looks to be about my age or maybe in his early twenties. I'm still a few days shy of my twentieth.

He holds his hands up at my shriek.

"Sorry, ma'am. I was just coming in for the first-aid kit." He wiggles the kit he has in his hand. "Barbed wire got his calf."

"Sorry, you just scared me. I didn't expect anyone."

He gives me a crooked smile. "So the boss went through with it. Got himself a wife."

"That's me," I confirm, though we aren't married yet. I go over to the sink and pull out a dish towel I saw in the drawer, wetting it with warm water.

"You might need this." I hand him the towel.

"You're mighty small." His eyes run over me like I'm hiding size somewhere. I am small. I'm barely five foot two, and I used to have a little more meat on my bones, but when money runs tight so does food.

"I think I can handle my chores while still being small." I reply, not sure where he's going with this.

"Oh, I'm sure you can. I just meant..." He looks back at the front door like he suddenly wants to leave and not finish what he was saying.

"Well?" I push, wanting to know.

“I should really go.” He backs up out of the kitchen, first-aid kit in one hand and towel in the other, before he darts out the front door. And I stand there, wondering what he meant.

Sitting up, I take off my hat and pull the bandana out of my back pocket. I wipe the sweat off my brow and around my neck, feeling the heat of the day on my back. I love being outside and working with my hands. There's no greater pleasure in life for me than working on my land and running my farm. This kind of life isn't for everyone, but it's in my bones. I can't stand going into the city and being around all those people and that noise. I've got enough noise out here with the livestock and the men who work for me. They're like family, so being around them isn't a problem.

I grew up on this land, and though I've been other places in the world, this is still the most beautiful place I've ever seen. As much as I hate the city, and being out here is great, it does get lonely a lot. These guys who work with me every day are the backbone of this ranch, but it's not the same as having a family of my own.

That's the reason I wanted to do the mail-order bride thing in the first place. I thought that I could use someone to make this more of a home. Bring the ranch together and make it into something I couldn't. Sure, I could run this farm blindfolded with my hands tied behind my back. But it doesn't give it the soul of a real home. That is something only a woman could do, and I thought marrying someone who was in it for the same reasons would make things easier. More straight-cut. No lines to blur, and everything in black and white. Hell, I even had the kitchen redone so that it would be perfect for my new bride.

But last night I tossed and turned thinking about what I was going to do with a wife, and I decided to just cancel the whole damn thing. I got up just before dawn and was going to

talk to Earl about it, but one of the fences had broken and we had to get straight to work. It got late before I had a second to think and by then I just told him to go tell her to get back on the train and go back home. I just said to tell her that I'd changed my mind. I didn't want to admit to Earl or to myself that deep down I was just afraid. Afraid of what it would mean to have a wife. What if she didn't like me? What if she resented me for working on the land so much and not giving her enough of my time? I don't want to disappoint anyone, and I had a feeling I'd be doing that a lot. I have no clue what to do with a wife.

As I put my Stetson back on and climb down off the fence, I see Earl riding up on his horse. When he gets close, he climbs off and walks over.

"Did you take care of it?" I ask, waiting to see if he sent back the bride.

"Yes. It's taken care of," he says, walking past me over to where some of the guys are still working on the last of the fencing.

I feel a pang of disappointment hit my chest as I think about her going back home. We didn't talk much beforehand, just a few short emails, but Clare sounded like a nice lady, and I'm surprised at how sad I feel at not getting to meet her. It would have been for convenience and she would have just been like another hired hand on the farm, but something inside me feels regret at the decision.

Shaking it off, I try not to think about it. It was the right decision, and I'm sure I'll be over it soon enough. There are far too many chores that need to be done for me to sit and think about my choice and how wrong it might have been.

It's the heat of the afternoon, and this is when we do the work in the barn and try to keep out of the sun as much as we can. This ranch was handed down in my family and after my mom and dad passed, it went to me. I've been helping run it since I was old enough to walk, so I know every inch of this place. My parents had been young when they took over from my grandparents. I think they had plans to have a mess of kids

to help out, but after my mom had me they weren't able to have any more. I'd had dreams of having a big family, too, but I never got around to finding time to get a wife. Somewhere inside me I'd always wanted what my parents had, but I thought what they had was rare. People don't find that kind of love every day, but I dreamed that if I ever did, I'd want as many kids as possible to love and play with and teach them all about our land.

We go into one of the barns, and I check on the chickens as the guys give them grain and gather eggs. We've got another barn for the cows and pigs, and then we've got horses and cattle, too. There's not much we don't grow or raise on our own out here, and I like it that way. We make money off the big cattle. Raising them and then selling them for their beef. It's good money, and even though it's a lot of work, it's worth it.

We use a section of the farm for growing crops, but that's just for us. It's not for making money. I like knowing we are self-sustaining out here for the most part, and we don't have to run into town for every little thing we need.

There are about fifteen guys who work for me full time out here, and they all live on the farm as well. The big house is for eating meals and holding meetings, but I'm the only one who lives in it. There are two other big buildings on the farm where the men stay. They're fixed up really nice. Everybody has their own space, and they keep to themselves when they're not working. One of the foremen on the farm even has a couple of goats that he keeps as pets, and another has a couple of sheep. The sheep should be having lambs soon, and it will be nice to have some new babies around the farm.

I stop on my way to my horse and think about babies for a second. What it would mean if I didn't have any of my own to take over the farm if something happened to me. And how it would feel not being able to have a family of my own. I shake the thought off as I climb onto my horse and ride to the west side of the land. I want to ride the fence line and recheck after the fiasco we had this morning. The thing about this much land is, you're alone a lot, and I'm not sure I should be alone

with my thoughts right now. I've already been contemplating too much today on the fact that I sent Clare away and what that means. Hell, I should be kicking my own ass right about now, but it's getting late, and I've got to figure out getting a cook or something to feed everyone. We've been taking turns doing the cooking, and tonight's Earl's night. He's the best foreman I've got, but damn if that man can't cook for shit.

Riding towards the barn, I catch a couple of guys bedding down the horses for the night, and I help out with that. We lay out new hay and feed for them and close up the barn. It's almost six, and as everyone has been up since four in the morning, it makes for a long day. A normal workday on a farm is tiring, but throw in a broken fence at the crack of dawn and you've got a big group of tired, hungry workers on your hands. All I can do is pray Earl made something semi-edible tonight.

"Damn, something sure does smell good," Travis, one of the farmhands, says beside me as we near the big house.

I raise my nose and take a whiff. My stomach grumbles. "Mmm, sure does. Maybe Earl finally made something we don't have to choke down."

The guys laugh as we make our way over to the big water fountain next to the house and wash up for supper. It's one of those big old farm sinks with a handle you pump and water pours out. A few of us stand around and I wash my bandana out, using it to wash my face and neck. Afterwards, I knock the dirt off my boots and go into the house. It's the same routine I've been doing since I was a kid, and I make all the guys do it, too. My mom always made us wash up and clean our boots before we came in to eat, and it's a habit I just can't break. Even though it's nothing special and it's just us guys, I still make them act like civilized people when we sit down to eat.

When I walk through the door, I make my way to the dining room and stop in my tracks. The table is set, and most of the guys are seated. A few of them are trailing in behind me. I guess Earl really stepped it up tonight. Most of the time, chow is in a line and we all make our plates and sit down. It's not usually served like an actual meal, and the small effort

makes me smile. My stomach rumbles again as I look down the table and see trays of burgers with all the fixings and homemade fries in big bowls between them. It's a simple meal, but a hearty one, and it smells amazing. All the guys sit down, and I walk to the kitchen to thank Earl for a great dinner tonight.

When I walk through the door, I see him standing in the middle of the kitchen, and I smile at him.

“Great effort tonight. It smells good, and they guys are ready to dig in.” I look over at the counter and see five pies sitting on it, cooling. I'm in shock because I can't remember the last time I had a homemade pie, and I know Earl didn't make them. “Where'd those come from?” I ask, making my way into the kitchen.

“Me.”

I hear a soft feminine voice to the side, and I look over to see a beautiful woman with golden ringlets piled on top of her head standing in the pantry. She's so tiny, maybe five feet tall, and she's got rosy cheeks and big blue eyes. She's utterly gorgeous, and as my eyes travel down, I see she's wearing one of my mama's old aprons. She looks so perfect, and I immediately want to go to her and scoop her up in my arms. But before I can say or do anything, Earl speaks.

“This is Miss Clare Stevens. You know, your mail-order bride.”

With that, Earl walks past me to the pantry. He stops and looks at Clare. “Dinner looks wonderful, Miss Clare. Come on out of the pantry and let the boys thank you.”

I see her rosy cheeks blush and she bites her lip, but she goes to take a step towards the door.

What does she think she's doing? She can't go out there and let those men see her. Is she crazy? She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen in my life. No way are those hound dogs gonna lay eyes on this sweet, innocent, little thing.

In three long steps, I'm in front of her. Reaching out, I grab her arm and halt her motion.

“No,” is the only word I can say. My brain and tongue can't seem to work together, and that's all I can get out to stop her from leaving me.

I stare up into the grayest eyes I've even seen. I didn't even know eyes could really be a gray that dark. His tanned hand around my arm tightens a little more. Firm but not painful. My eyes go to the hand engulfing my arm as it wraps around it.

I thought he was big in the picture he'd sent me. That was nothing compared to him in person. The man is well over a foot and a half taller than me. I feel his thumb brush up the sleeve of my shirt, almost like it's petting me in small circles. The rough texture feels good on my skin, too good for a man I want to smack right now for being a jerk. A sexy jerk.

I lick my lips. They suddenly feel dry. His eyes go there, narrowing at my action. His jaw clenches hard, making the stubble that coats his face seem a little more prominent, and I wonder if he shaved just this morning or if it's a few days old. If I had to guess, he shaved this morning and it grows fast.

"No? You just going to keep her locked in the pantry?" Earl laughs at his own joke. "I know you run a tight ship, boss, but that's—" His words cut off as Cash pulls me by the arm, my body coming up against his like he doesn't have any intention of letting me leave the pantry. He smells like the sun, and it catches me off guard just as much as him pulling me into him does.

I use my other arm to tuck a loose blonde curl behind my ear. It's something I always do when I'm nervous. The air in the pantry starts thicken with uneasy silence.

"I should really take the last pie out of the oven." I pull at my arm, and Cash reluctantly frees me. I take the opportunity to flee the pantry, sliding past Cash and Earl like my ass is on

fire. I have no idea what to make of what just happened in there, but that wasn't how I thought I'd meet my new husband.

I head straight for the oven, and a squeal leaves my mouth as I'm picked up and placed on the counter. I know a good wind might be able to blow me over, but he moves me like I'm nothing.

"You'll burn yourself," he says in a deep, commanding voice. The one I'm sure makes everyone jump, too. It even freezes me for a moment as I watch him grab the oven mitts before opening the oven and pulling out the peach pie, placing it on the counter next to the others.

"How do you suppose the others made it onto the counter?" I reply tartly. I'm not sure what to make of this. The only thing the man has done in the two minutes I've actually known him is boss me around. Now I'm getting why Earl calls him *boss*. The title fits well.

He pulls the oven mitts off, tossing them onto the counter. His hand goes to his face and he squeezes the bridge of his slightly crooked nose. It's probably been broken a time or two. He's clearly irritated with me. Maybe it is better I keep it zipped and don't mouth off. I need this place. I have nowhere else to go, but what the heck. If I can't touch the oven, what am I supposed to do around here?

My cheeks start to burn at the dirty thought that comes to mind, and I drop my head, looking down at my worn boots, not wanting Cash to see my blush. Maybe I could blame it on cooking all day. The heat getting to me.

"What am I going to do with her?" I hear him mumble. This is really not a great start. He's a total jerk. He hasn't even bothered to say hi. Is that so hard? *Hi, I'm Cash, the man you'll be marrying tomorrow. It's a pleasure to meet you.* That isn't so freaking hard, is it? The man has no manners. Or he isn't happy with the bride he's gotten. I'm thinking both at this point.

"Why don't you join us, Clare? Get to know everyone?" I hear Earl say, making me look up. I suddenly remember everyone is in the dining room and can see us. They're all

staring at Cash and me. Their eyes dart back and forth between us, waiting to see what will happen next.

“How about you mind you own fucking business, Earl?” Cash barks, not even looking over at the poor man who just smiles again. I’ve never seen smiles come so easily for someone before. It’s nice. Makes me feel like I have someone on my side already. He throws another wink my way like we’re sharing some joke I don’t know about. Getting the best of Cash on purpose.

“I’d love to.” I jump off the counter, ignoring Cash and hearing him mumble something about hurting myself. I grab a plate off the counter and head into the dining room. Earl nudges a man sitting next to him, who quickly moves, giving me a spot to sit after I fill my plate. I can feel Cash’s eyes on me the whole time I move about the table. I barely get my butt in the seat next to Earl and Cash is stomping into the dining room, heading for the chair next to mine at the head of the table.

“Everyone, this is Miss Clare Stevens.” Earl introduces me to everyone as I try to ignore Cash the best I can. Not an easy feat with his size and intensity. I get hellos around mouths full of food. They’re going at the dinner like they haven’t eaten in weeks. “We haven’t had a good meal in a while,” Earl adds, taking a big bite of his own burger.

I gasp as I’m once again picked up and placed on a hard lap. “Mrs. Clare McCallister.” Possession rings loud in Cash’s correction of my name. I’m not a McCallister yet, and I had a feeling I wasn’t going to be one just a few moments ago in the kitchen. I freeze like a deer caught in the headlights as everyone stops eating to look at the end of the table. Their eyes are on Cash, I assume, because they’re aimed over my head.

Reaching around me, he slides my plate over from where I had been sitting. His mouth comes to my ear. “Eat.” He gives yet another command. His warm breath against my ear makes little stray hairs tickle my skin. He pulls back a little, and I feel his nose barely brush against my skin. I hear him take a deep breath like he’s breathing me in. I clench my legs together, and

I wish had on jeans instead of shorts. I'd changed into them when I figured out I wasn't getting married today, and put away the only pretty dress I have.

As if noticing everyone is staring at us, he finally barks at them to eat as well. His tone is not as soft as it was when he'd whispered it in my ear. Everyone jumps at his command and goes back to shoving food into their mouths.

I don't know what to do, so I just eat. Maybe the faster I get done eating, the faster I can get out of his lap. I pick up my burger and take my own big bite. The flavor hits my tongue. I moan around the bite, unable to remember the last time I had a full meal. I've been spreading my money thin, and a full meal isn't something I've had in a long while.

Cash's hand on my hip squeezes at the sound, then I feel it. A hard cock against my ass. I stop the cheeseburger midway to my mouth. I grew up around men when Mama and I worked on the Blackwell farm. I stumbled across many of the men talking about their nights out and so on when they didn't realize I was in earshot, but I'd never been on the receiving end of a man wanting me.

When I was there, I was just too young, and all the men treated my mama and me with respect. The owner, Mr. Blackwell, demanded it, not that it even needed to be said. Everyone was like family to me, or the closest I'd ever had to one. I'd never known my father, and I was an only child. Then after we left, I was in and out of hospitals with my mama until she died. Men weren't even on my radar.

I knew this was coming. Had been thinking about it since the moment I signed on for the whole mail-order bride thing, but having it pressed against my ass was making it all too real. He wanted me, and I didn't know what to do with that. I was excited, happy, scared, and nervous all at once.

"All done," I chirp, trying to jump up from Cash's lap, but his arm comes around my front, snaking around my waist and pulling me back down into his lap. Everyone's eyes come back to us once again. This is like dinner and a show for them or something.

“Eat. You’re too small.” My stomach knots at his words. The first thing he says about me is negative. The hunger I had been feeling is now gone, the knot filling its place.

Maybe he should have taken me up on the offer to send a picture of myself. Then he would have known what he was getting. I thought I’d hit the jackpot when I saw his picture. It was clearly too good to be true.

I jerk from his lap, harder this time, and he releases me with a grunt.

“Earl, you ever buy a stud without getting a look at him first?” I ask, taking a step away from Cash, not looking his way. I know his eyes are trained on me. Just like everyone else’s in the room.

“No, ma’am.”

“I didn’t think so. You’d think Mr. McCallister would know that, being as he owns a farm.” My eyes finally go to his. He’s staring up at me, shock clear on his face. “Maybe you should’ve had a look before you got me. Could’ve passed and found something a little more to your liking.”

With that, I turn and head towards the kitchen, but then I stop, not knowing where to go. I’m not even sure which room I’m supposed to be staying in.

I turn to see everyone still just staring at me, but I lock my eyes on the front door, my new destination in mind. I have to get away from everyone looking at me and kick myself. I just told Cash he could get rid of me. What if he does?

“Don’t you go running off,” Cash says as he stands from his chair like he’s going to stop me if I try. All the man can do is boss me around and insult me.

“Well then you can have the couch,” I huff before turning again, heading towards the hallway that has to lead to a bedroom or something. Stopping in the bathroom, I grab the bag I’d left in there earlier when I changed, and I start opening doors.

The first leads to an office that looks like a paper explosion occurred inside it. I quickly shut the door because if I look at it

even a moment longer, it will get the best of me and I'll start angry-cleaning, something I'm prone to doing.

The next door leads to a bedroom that looks just as minimalist as the rest of the house. A giant bed sits in the middle. I drop my bag right inside before closing the door. My finger hovers over the lock, but I decide against it. This isn't my house.

I walk over to the bed and throw myself on top of the white comforter, praying Cash doesn't send me packing first thing tomorrow morning.

CHAPTER 4

CASH

I stand there as I watch her walk away.

I should probably go after her, but I think right now she could probably use the space. I've been less than welcoming, and I know it.

"Levi and Brandon, you two are on cleanup duty tonight. Once everybody's finished make sure that kitchen sparkles. We don't want Mrs. Clare having a mess in the morning when she fixes breakfast," Earl tells everyone, and I'm glad he spoke up. I can't seem to string two coherent thoughts together, and it's good to know he's looking out.

Turning, I walk out the front door without saying a word and sit on the porch swing, looking out towards the sunset. Then I put my face in my hands and think about what the fuck I've gotten myself into.

She's beautiful. She's the most perfect thing I've ever seen in my life, and I want to keep her. I didn't think I was ready for a wife, and I still may not be. But seeing her has done something to me, and I don't know that I can hold back. I didn't like the men looking at her, but I don't know how to keep that from happening.

Hearing footsteps in front of me, I look up to see Earl standing there holding out a big plate of pie for me. I take it and he sits down beside me on the swing, taking a bite of his dessert.

"Damn. I do believe that little thing can cook," he says around a mouthful of pastry.

Taking a bite of the apple pie, I close my eyes and moan at the taste. I've never tasted anything so sweet, and I start to

wonder if she'd taste like homemade apple pie, too. What I wouldn't give to rub this on her and lick her clean. Her tiny body isn't made for someone as big as me, so I'm not even sure what I'd do once I finished tasting her.

"You know, I'm starting to think I shouldn't ask what you're thinking about out here all alone with the sounds you're making right now."

I look over at Earl and grunt. I was probably moaning just like Clare moaned in my lap earlier. She got me harder than a goddamn fence post making those sounds with her round ass in my lap.

"She ought not to be out here with a bunch of men like this," I say, not looking up at Earl as I finish my pie.

"You don't trust these guys?"

"No," I say quickly. I trust all these men with my life. They're good guys, and I know they wouldn't hurt her. I'm just thinking of excuses. "Why would a pretty little thing like that want to be a mail-order bride?"

"I think we've all got our own reasons for why we choose this life. And I'm sure she has hers." Earl sets his clean plate down on the table next to us. "I know you told me to send her away. Do you still want me to?"

"No." The short word has a little panic on the end of it, and I set down my empty plate, hating that I can't hide my emotions.

"I didn't think so."

We rock a little in silence, watching as the men leave the big house and head out to their bunks. Once the last of the men are gone, and Levi and Brandon let us know the kitchen is spotless, Earl looks to me and speaks again.

"You may not want my advice, but since your daddy passed away, I've felt like it's my job to look out for you. You were always like a son to me, too, Cash, so even if you don't want to hear it, I'm going to say it."

I look over at him as he stands up off the swing and makes his way to the edge of the porch.

“You got a choice to make. You can go through with this mail-order bride and make her yours, or you can send her on her way. Keeping her around and not putting a ring on her sure ain’t fair to all these other men who would give their left arm to take your place.”

With that, he walks off the porch and heads out towards his little cabin next to the bunks where the men sleep. I watch him go, not moving from my spot but letting his words sink in. I may have started this thinking it was a quick solution, and I may have changed my mind because it’s a crazy scheme. But in the end, I want Clare like I’ve never wanted anything before in my life, and I don’t think I can keep that at bay.

I stand up from the swing and go into the big house, closing the door behind me. I flip the lock, and it strikes me as odd at first because I can’t remember the last time I locked my front door. But with Clare here, I want us to have our privacy, and that means keep the boys out until we’re good and ready to feed them.

I go to the hallway bathroom first, taking off my button-up shirt and jeans and boots. I toss my dirty clothes in the hamper before I strip out of my underwear and turn on the hot water. I get in the shower and let it wash away the dirt and sweat from today. All my muscles relax as my hand runs down my chest hair and over the ridges of my stomach until my big palm reaches my cock. It’s hard and straining, nearly purple with need, and I touch myself, thinking that I can’t remember the last time I jerked off. I’m usually so tired by the time I get done with the day’s work that I just take a shower and fall into bed before starting all over again at first light.

Not tonight. Right now I’ve got a burning need running up my balls and shaft that I have to take care of. Reaching out, I grab the soap and rub it in my hands, making some suds. I run both my hands up and down the long length of my cock, squeezing its thickness and trying to get relief. I let the hot water hit my back as I thrust into my hands, thinking about every little curve of Clare’s body. The way her big blue eyes

looked up at me. The way her little blonde curls tickled around her neck, and the way she smelled like fresh apples behind her ear.

No way can her tiny little curves take my cock. There's no way. Maybe if I'm gentle with her, I can slide the tip in. That's all I'd be able to fit in her, and I'd die a happy man if that's all I ever got of her. Just the sweet taste of her little pussy on the end of my cock would be all I ever needed. Just the warm wetness on the tip and I'd cum inside her every night. She wouldn't need to take every inch. Just the head, and we could do that for the rest of our lives.

I run my hand over the bulging tip, thinking about how her tight pussy would squeeze it, and I feel my eyes roll to the back of my head. I'd love to spread her legs and see if she's got blonde curls on her pussy, too. I don't know why porn magazines always have women with bald ones. It does nothing for me. But thinking about Clare and her having a sweet little pussy with a patch of hair on it makes me want to bury my face in it and eat her.

Licking my lips, I moan as I picture her tiny legs wrapped around my head, holding me to her as tight as she can. She has some curves under that apron, so I know she'd be so soft. She'd be sweet and ripe for the picking. I wonder if she's on anything or if she's fertile. I bet even by getting the tip of my cock into her, I could get her pregnant. I could work on shooting my cum out hard and long so that it could get inside her, even if I can't go all the way.

I start rubbing my cock in longer strokes thinking about it. How I need to cum inside her and make her mine. Each thrust into my hand is getting wilder and less controlled. I can't hold on much longer.

Picturing her sweet face looking up at me as she licks her lips, I toss my head back and grunt out my release. I feel the force of my cum shoot out of me and onto the shower wall in front of where I'm standing. I open my eyes and smile at the white splatter on the stone. Should be a good enough length to get the job done.

I soap myself up and wash off, thinking about what I need to do to keep Clare. First off, we need to go into town in the morning and set this marriage thing right. She's going to be Mrs. McCallister, and that's the end of it.

I grab a towel off the rack and dry myself off. When I'm finished I stand there for a second thinking about what I'm going to do. Normally I just go into my room and get into bed naked. But I know Clare is in there, and I don't know if she's asleep or not. She may not be used to the hours on a farm and the frequent early nights and early mornings.

No matter what, my clothes are in my room, so I need to go in there.

Walking from the bathroom, I go to my bedroom and turn the knob slowly. It's not locked and that makes me feel good. At least she isn't trying to keep me out. Once I go in, I close the door behind me.

The room is almost completely dark. I see Clare asleep on the bed, the moonlight streaming in, showing her on her side, still fully dressed. I can't help the pull I feel to her as I walk over to the bed and put my knee on the mattress. I hesitate for a second, but then pull my towel off and drop it to the floor as I pull back the covers and slide in. I spoon up behind Clare, thinking she could get cold, and I pull some of the covers over her as well. She moans a little in her sleep, and I stay stock-still as she moves a bit to cuddle into me. Once she's settled, I put my head next to hers and bury my face in her hair. She smells like fresh-cut apples and home. It's the most wonderful thing I've ever smelled in my life, and as I drift off to sleep, I can feel the smile on my face.

She's my home.

I melt into his embrace, loving the feeling of having his arms around me. I feel cherished. Even if it isn't real, I'm going to soak it up for a little longer. I can't remember the last time I was cuddled. As a child maybe? A range of feelings flood through me at the thought. My mama and I loved each other, but she wasn't super affectionate.

I breathe in his scent as he nuzzles into me a little more, his lips against my neck. He still smells like the sun, but this time it has a hint of soap. I shouldn't be surprised that telling him to sleep on the couch wouldn't work. He didn't seem like the kind of man who could be told what to do. He did the telling and everyone jumped. I bet even when he was a little boy he probably stood his ground. The image flutters into my mind. I imagine a small, dark-haired boy wearing a cowboy hat that's a little too big for him, but he still has that commanding look on his face. I'd guess Cash could stop a bull right in its tracks.

I don't know if I should be irritated that he climbed into bed with me, but this is his house, and we're getting married. Well, I *think* we are anyways. He hadn't chased me down last night, or rebuffed my comment about him picking a bride more to his liking. Though at the moment, he seems to like me a lot. The man has yet to introduce himself to me properly, but he can't seem to keep his hands off me.

Right now he has me locked up tight. It's going to take some serious maneuvering to break free without waking him. I keep telling myself to get up from the bed, that I need to get a start on breakfast before everyone else rises, but here I lie, wanting to keep breathing him in.

When I finally see a sliver of light peek through the window, I slowly unwrap myself from his arms until I can slip free and off the bed. I turn to look at him, but the room is still too dark to get a good look. Tiptoeing to the door, I grab my bag off the floor before pulling the door closed behind me as quietly as I can. I opt to use the bathroom in the hallway once again to keep from waking Cash.

I make quick work in the shower. I fly through my morning routine and slip on my jean shorts and a white T-shirt. I want to get done as fast as possible. I already feel behind, knowing the men will be looking for their breakfast any minute now. I don't want to get off to a bad start with everyone here. I'm already feeling a little embarrassed about snapping in front of all of them.

When I get to the kitchen, I start pulling everything out to make eggs, bacon, and some toast. It's really the only option with what I have here. I'm really going to have to get to town today and get some food. If I want to stock up for a whole week, I'm going to have to take a truck. Maybe Cash will let me take one of the men with me to help.

I flip the bacon but look up when I hear what sounds like someone running into the front door, a string of curses following it. Then a soft knock. When I flip the lock and open the door, I see Brandon, the same man who came in yesterday for the first-aid kit. He's rubbing his head, his cowboy hat in hand. A red blotch is already forming on his forehead. He stops rubbing the spot, his hand going to his hair like he's trying to fix it. It's clear he didn't do anything with it this morning and just flipped on a cowboy hat. The dirty-blond shaggy hair still looks good. Almost like that messy look you see the men in magazines try to do, but I don't think that's what he's going for.

"Not used to the door being locked." His brown eyes crinkle at the edges like he's still trying to catch his bearings.

"Sorry. Is that not normal?" I ask, pulling the door open wider to let him in.

“No, but I’m thinking a lot of things aren’t going to be normal anymore.” He smiles at me and heads straight for the dining room table where I have already put the first round of food down.

“Why is that? Not used to having a woman in the house?” My stomach tightens at my own words, realizing what I just said. I don’t know if there were women in this house before me. Hell, for all I know, Cash could have been married and divorced or have a string of women coming and going.

“Well, that and,” Brandon glances at the clock on the wall, “the boss is still in bed, I take it?”

I turn, going back to the stove, knowing my whole face is probably cherry red. I know what he’s thinking. What everyone is thinking. I shouldn’t be embarrassed. The man is going to be my husband. Of course we shared a bed, and people would just assume we did everything that went along with that.

“Yes, he is,” I answer, keeping my back to him as I start pulling the bacon off the stove and placing it on a plate, adding another round to the skillet.

“He’s usually the first up.” I turn to see Brandon now in the kitchen, grabbing the pot of coffee and taking it to the table.

More men start to trickle into the house, making plates and eating. I keep cooking and adding to the plates on the table. They seem to just eat right through them as fast as I can make them. Grabbing an extra plate, I make one for Cash just in case, because I’m close to being out of stuff to cook for them.

“Miss Clare, you have got to be God’s gift to the ranch,” Kent, one for the men, says as he rubs his belly, making me giggle.

“Mrs. McCallister.” I peek over my shoulder to see Cash standing in the kitchen, his eyes on Kent before they come to me. I feel my breath freeze in my lungs. He’s got on a pair a flannel pants and nothing else. The pants hang low, showing off his perfect V, a line of dark hair trailing down his navel.

When he starts to move towards me, I still can't seem to bring myself to move. Then he's on me, his mouth coming down onto mine. I stay still until I feel his tongue lick the seam of my mouth and I open for him. My body does as he commands. One of his hands snakes into my still-damp hair, the other grabbing my hand, locking his fingers with mine.

I melt into him, my eyelids falling closed. His kiss is just as intense as he is. I have no idea what I'm doing as he devours my mouth like he's starving. When I hear a throat clear, I jump back, having completely forgotten we're in a room full of people, but when I look over at the dining room table it's empty and only Earl is standing there eating a piece of bacon. We cleared the room. It's like one embarrassing thing after another around here.

"I can't believe you did that," I say, my hand going to my mouth. My voice is all breathy.

"What, kissed my wife?" He looks down at me like I'm crazy. That it's normal. Like we've been kissing forever. That this wasn't my first kiss ever.

"First off, I'm not your wife." I take a step towards him, pointing up at him. A half smile forms on his face like he thinks it's cute I'm getting all up in his face.

"Yet," he adds, but I just ignore him.

"Secondly, as of last night this thing wasn't totally on." I motion between us. Then I stop when I see a ring on my finger.

It's stunning. A big circular diamond sits in the center, surrounded by smaller diamonds in a halo. It looks antique.

"It was my mother's." He shrugs like it's no big deal.

"I can't take this." I go to pull it off, but he grabs my wrist to stop me.

"You'll wear it," he says, using the same tone on me he does his men.

"It doesn't seem right," I try to protest. This is his mother's ring. It's something I'm sure was given in love. I'd seen a

picture of his mom and dad last night in his bedroom. I knew it was them. Cash has a mix of both of them in him. His mother had dark hair and gray eyes, but he is built like his father. The look on his father's face as he'd looked down at Cash's mom was full of so much love. It was so beautiful and hurt to look at. I wanted a marriage like that.

"You're going to be my wife." He pushes back.

"It's not the same."

"You'll wear it and that's final." His words are hard. He's clearly upset that I'm pushing against him, but then he places a kiss on the palm of my hand before releasing my wrist. The action is so soft and sweet. It doesn't match his hard words.

I just nod. There's no point fighting with him. I'm here to marry him, and if this is the ring he wants me to wear, I guess I'll wear it. It just feels wrong. Like I'm tainting it. I know this marriage probably won't last.

"And I'll kiss you anytime I like. Even more so to make a point to my men." With that, he turns, leaving me standing there while he goes over and starts eating the plate I'd left on the kitchen counter. It's as if he knew I made it for him.

He glances at the table, then at his own plate, stopping mid-bite.

"You eat?"

I just nod again and he goes back to eating the plate of food. It warms me that he was concerned that he was eating the last of the breakfast and he wanted to make sure I'd eaten before he finished it off.

"How is everything looking?" Cash asks Earl.

"Another fence is down and we can't find Sammy anywhere."

Cash drops his fork. "You're fucking kidding me."

"Nope. Something is starting to stink," Earl adds, taking a drink of his coffee.

“I’ll get dressed and be out in a few.” Cash takes a few more bites of his breakfast, then heads down the hallway. I follow behind him, but not before catching another wink from Earl.

“I need to go to the city to go shopping,” I tell him when I enter the room. He drops his pants, and I turn around quickly, giving him my back. I hear him chuckle.

“I’ll take you tomorrow, and we’ll get our marriage licenses then, too. I planned today, but it looks like I got another mess to clean up.”

I want to protest, but I know he’s got enough on his plate. “Okay,” is all I say as I leave the room, heading back to the kitchen to clean up.

“Even your coffee is wonderful, ma’am. There anything you can’t make?” Earl says, pouring himself another cup.

“Well, that’s all I have until I can make it out to the store,” I tell him as a thought hits me. “If any of your men aren’t too busy, do you think they could take me into town? I’d love to get it out of the way and not bother Cash with it. I can tell he’s real busy and he doesn’t need to spend hours in town getting supplies.”

“I think I can do that. I’ll send Brandon back to take you. Just go grab some petty cash out of Cash’s office. Bottom drawer of his desk in a metal box. Take what you need. We’re done spoiled and would love to come home to a dinner like last night.”

“Thank you. I’ll make sure I set you aside something special for dessert tonight.”

“I’ll be looking forward to it all day.”

Just then Cash comes back into the room, coming right at me and planting another one of those kisses on me, leaving me breathless.

“Lock the door.”

With that, he’s gone. He really needs to get some manners, or maybe I like him without them.

*K*nocking some of the dust off my jeans, I walk towards the big house, thinking about how it's just too damn coincidental to happen two days in a row. One fence breaking every now and then I can see, but two fences, one after the other, and something starts to smell fishy. We still haven't been able to find our top bull, Sammy, and things aren't adding up. I plan on giving the Johnson farm a call to see if they've spotted him. They're a rival farm just next to us, and normally we're not the best at communicating, but I've got to try everything.

My mind wanders back to Clare as it's been doing all morning. I can't seem to go more than thirty seconds without thinking of her, but I don't mind it. It's distracting, but for the first time in my life, I'm welcoming it. I've given all day, every day, to this farm, and for once, I'm taking something for myself. Something that can be a part of this life.

I'd bought a plain gold band for my mail-order bride thinking I'd just keep things simple. But once I saw Clare and felt what's happening between us, I knew that she was special. I knew that she deserved something just as precious as she is, so that's when I knew I wanted her to have my mother's ring. My mama said on several occasions that her ring didn't have a place on a farm and really wasn't the kind of thing someone wore while cooking and cleaning like she did. Yet I never saw her take it off. That ring may have seemed silly to some people because of the simple life we led, but it was beautiful, and my dad wanted her to have it. I understand what that means now. Wanting something to reflect the beauty of the woman wearing it. Something that everyone could see. There was no missing she was a taken woman with that on her finger.

When I woke up and Clare wasn't in bed, I'd scrambled around for a second realizing I'd slept in, something I'd never done in my life. Long ago I stopped setting an alarm because I could damn near set a watch to me waking up. I guess it was the power of having her in my arms and getting the best night's sleep I've ever had. I pulled on some pants and went to my dresser, grabbing the ring. I wanted it on her, and I wanted everyone to see it was on her. I needed to mark her as mine because no way she wasn't.

I walk up on the porch and head inside, going straight to the kitchen. There's no sight of Clare, so I head to the bedroom, hoping maybe I'll find her in here. I just want to see her for a second before I have to get back to work. Maybe she's got time for a quick kiss. Or maybe a not-so-quick kiss.

"Clare?" I keep repeating as I walk through the house unable to find her. When I start to panic, I run out on the porch and see Earl coming towards the big house. "I can't find Clare." I can hear the panic in my voice. What if she changed her mind? She could be long gone.

"Simmer down, Cash. I sent her to town in the truck with Brandon."

Earl's words calm me for a moment before they fully sink in. "You did *what*?" The last word echoes around us, and a few of the guys that are within hearing distance stop what they're doing and watch.

"She said she needed supplies and that she didn't want to bother you. Don't worry. I told her to get petty cash."

Turning back to the house, I stomp in and grab my keys before turning around and heading to my truck at the side of the house.

"Calm down, Cash. She's just getting groceries."

Earl looks at me like I'm crazy, but I just grit my teeth and get in, cranking up my truck and heading out. I'm fuming so much I'm surprised steam isn't coming out of my ears.

She can't just go to town like that. What if she leaves and doesn't come back? She went with Brandon. He's one of the

young guys on the farm. What if he tries to make a move? I hit the steering wheel as I speed up, thinking I could kick myself for not marrying her yesterday like I should have. This ends today. I'm not taking any more chances when it comes to Clare. She's mine, and it's damn sure going to stay that way.

When I finally get into town, I'm not sure where I should start first. I think maybe I should go to the train station, but if Earl was right, then maybe I'm just overreacting. I head towards the grocery store and spot the farm truck out front. I see Brandon loading up the back of it as Clare comes out of the store. I turn in, and the wheels barely stop before I'm out of the truck and going to her.

"What do you think you're doing?" I ask, and for some reason I sound out of breath. Did I run the whole way?

"Cash. What's wrong?" Clare asks, looking around as if she can't see the problem right in front of her.

"You need to go into town, I take you." Reaching out, I take her arm and walk over to where Brandon is standing. "You get what you need?"

She looks up at me, and I see her starting to get mad. "Yes," she snaps at me, and I can't help but smile. I love when that fire lights in her eyes. I don't normally take too kindly to being talked back to. I give orders and everyone follows. I can't quite figure out why I like it when she does it.

Suddenly she's smiling all sweet, but she turns and looks over at Brandon. "Thanks so much for the help, B. I really appreciate all of it." Her words are sugary, and I want to reach out and snatch them so he doesn't get them. Words like that are only meant for me.

"*Brandon.*" I make an exaggerated use of his name while looking at Clare. "Take the truck back to the farm and have the boys help you unload it. Thank you for bringing my wife into town. I've got it from here."

"Yes, sir," he says and goes about his business like nothing is abnormal here.

Taking Clare by the arm, I lead her over to the driver's side of my truck and open the door, not missing some of the townspeople watching what is playing out. Probably wondering what's going on. Gossip will surely start to spread.

"I'm not your wife yet," she says under her breath, but loud enough for me to hear it.

"Oh, trust me, darling. I'm about to change that."

Grabbing her by the waist, I pick her up and put her on the bench seat and then pull myself in behind her. She scoots over all the way to the passenger side, but I reach out, grabbing her thigh and slide her back over so she's right beside me.

"You're a big old brute, you know that, Cash? You can't just manhandle something when it doesn't do what you want," Clare huffs out, and crosses her arms over her chest.

"When it's mine, I do."

I put the truck in gear and drive us over to City Hall. I'm ready to get this little matter taken care of. Once we pull up, I feel her tense beside me.

"Cash, I didn't even wear a dress!"

I laugh at her words, thinking that she's more concerned with the way she looks than the fact that she's about to marry me. I like it. I don't want her to change her mind.

"Afraid it can't happen today, sweetheart. According to the state of Texas, we can get a marriage license, but we have to wait three days. So let's go get this started and on Friday we can come back here and you can wear a dress."

I look down and see her bite her lip as if she's thinking about it. I grab her chin and turn her head so she's looking at me.

"Still want to marry me, don't you?" I stare down into her bright blue eyes, scared of what she might say. I'm not accustomed to the feeling.

She nods her head, making her gold curls bounce, and I can't stand it anymore. I've got to put my mouth on her. Bringing my lips down on hers, the heat of her soft lips makes

me moan. I feel her little tongue sweep into my mouth, and her sweetness fills me. Suddenly our hands are exploring, and it's as if we can't get close enough. I'm pulling her to me while she's climbing up my body, and suddenly she's straddling me in the cab of my truck. I feel her jean-covered pussy start to grind against me, and I break the kiss to look down at it. My hands go to her hips to hold her still as I look around us to see a few people walking by.

“Not here, Clare. I don't want people seeing you gone like this, baby.”

My words seem to wake her from her lust-filled fog, and her cheeks burn with embarrassment. When she tries to pull off my lap, I hold her to me tighter so she can't go.

“Not yet, darling. Just let me enjoy you for one more second.”

I nuzzle my face into her neck and smell her sweet apple scent. She wraps her hands around me, and her fingers grip the short hair at the back of my head. My Stetson fell off in our make-out session.

“I get lost when you kiss me,” she whispers.

Running my hands up and down her back, I smile against her skin. “Good thing I'm right here to find you when it's over. Now come inside and let's make this legal.”

I open the door, slide out, and discreetly adjust myself before I help her out of the truck.

It doesn't take long for us to fill out our paperwork and then get the form. All that's required is proof we are who we say we are, and then we need to wait three days. I watched Clare fill out the form stating that she'd never been married before, and it made me smile. I like knowing that she hasn't ever done this before, because she sure won't be doing it again.

When we get in the truck to go back to the farm, she tries to sit on the passenger side again, but once again I grab her thigh and slide her over next to me as close as I can get her. Hell, I'd ride with her in my lap if I could, but I'd be too busy

feeling her curves bounce on me that I'd probably run us into a ditch.

"Which farm is that?" she asks as we ride down a road close to home.

"That's the Johnson ranch. They've had a problem recently with cattle prices on their ranch and the owner has been trying to undercut me on calves. I told him he can buy from me, but only at fair prices. I'm afraid the guy they let take over is going to get them into trouble."

"What happened?"

"The family that owns the farm wanted to sell but couldn't get the money they wanted. So instead of waiting it out, they brought in someone to run the place, and I think he might be trying to pull one over on them."

"Oh, that's awful," Clare says, and I hear the worry in her voice.

"I need to call and talk to the owner today anyway to see if they've seen Sammy. Might need to check and make sure he's keeping his eye on the place."

"Who's Sammy?"

"Our best bull. He's made more calves on this farm than he's probably willing to admit. Maybe he just wandered off looking for some loving." I look down at Clare and give her a wink. "Can't really blame him. I think I know how he feels."

Her cheeks burn and she looks away from me and crosses her arms. "Oh, yeah? He's just gonna go around to all the farms nearby, hopping from bed to bed? Sounds terrible, if you ask me."

I can't help but laugh at her words. "No darlin', I don't think he'll be getting into anyone's bed. And I meant that I know how he feels what with the way I chased you into town today. I suspect I'd follow you to the end of the earth if it meant getting close to you."

Her arms uncross, and I take her hand in mine, bringing it up to my lips. I kiss the back of her hand. Everything about her

is soft. She's really not made for a farm life. I'm going to have to keep an eye on her.

That blush hits her cheeks again, making my cock ache even more. It's going to be a long three days before I can make her mine.

I can't stop looking over at Cash while he drives us back to the farm. Every time I try to sneak a peek, I swear he fights a smile. One of the dimples under his short stubble gives him away.

This man is so confusing. Or rather, what I've gotten to know about him in the past twenty-four hours is confusing. He can go from barking orders to acting sweet as peach pie. I want to smack him for being a brute, then melt into one of those kisses he keeps laying on me. It's messing with my head. I'm not sure I even like him. Lie. I shake my head at myself. Or maybe it's not a lie. I more than like this man.

Maybe this whole mail-order-bride thing isn't going to be so bad after all. I was worried about who I'd get roped with. I never thought I'd have to worry about losing my heart to someone. I'd pushed the thoughts of romance aside, but now they're starting to bleed back in every time Cash touches me.

I go from crazy mad to a pile of goo that wants to climb his giant body. I've never in my life acted like this with a man. He makes my anger wash away, turning to lust. I wonder how far I would have gone if Cash had let me. He'd been the one to pull us back.

"I want you to stay away from Brandon." Cash easily slips back into his commanding tone, pulling me out of my thoughts.

I snap my eyes up to him. I like Brandon. He's nice. He and Earl are really the only people I know here.

"I'll spend time with whoever I choose," I snark back

“Don’t push it, Clare.” His eyes narrow on mine as if in warning before focusing on the road. I’d come here planning to play nice. Be a doting wife, just try to get by for a while, but for some reason with Cash I can’t stop myself from pushing back.

Then a thought hits me, one that warms me deep in my stomach, reminding me of things he threw at me when he came up on Brandon and me in town. *Mine*, he’d said. I’d gotten the warm feeling then, too. “Are you jealous?” I raise my eyebrows almost in disbelief.

“Hell yes, I’m jealous, so if I were you, I’d stay real clear of him.” I watch his fingers tighten on the steering wheel, his knuckles starting to go white.

“You’re ridiculous, Cash.” I lift my hand, showing him my ring. The very ring he’d put on me hours ago. The thing is unmissable. “It’s clear as day I’m taken. Besides, I’d never do that to you.” I know we don’t know each other well, but it still doesn’t sit right that he doesn’t trust me. Heck, I’m a freaking virgin. It’s not like I go hopping from bed to bed, but he doesn’t know that. Neither one of us has talked much about our past.

“Not worried about you,” he clips, keeping his death grip on the wheel, the house coming into view in the distance.

“Oh, so you don’t trust your own men?” I question. He doesn’t seem like he’d keep men on his land he didn’t trust.

“I don’t even trust myself around you.” He looks at me again, his eyes running over my body. I can almost feel them like a touch on my skin as his gaze roams down my legs.

“You seemed in control in the parking lot,” I remind him.

“Only because thinking about anyone seeing you getting all turned on, working that sweet little body over your husband’s cock, watching your legs open so easily just for me like they were made to do, rode me harder than the need to strip you bare and fuck you right there in my truck.”

My mouth falls open at his crude words, and my body comes back to life like it had in that parking lot.

“No one sees that shit. As far as they’re concerned, you spend your days cooking and sewing, and we’re so old fashioned we sleep in double beds.”

“With that mouth, double beds will become a reality real soon.”

“You could try, but I saw how quickly your body gave into me. I had to pull you off me.” He says it like it’s a sweet reminder.

“Oh, you...” I stutter, unable to think of what I should say. I opt to just smack his arm, which only makes him smile widely, pissing me off. I want him mad, too. Or am I turned on? Grr. I don’t know up from down with this man.

“Anyways, like I was saying, I’ll hang out with whoever I like.” I turn to look out the window, happy we’re almost out of this truck together. It’s like all we can do is kiss or fight.

“Alright then.”

I snap my head around to look at him suspiciously. That was way too easy of a give.

“Alright?”

“Yeah, good luck traveling to wherever his new place of employment might be.”

“You wouldn’t!”

The truck comes to a stop in front of the house. “Oh, when it comes to you, I don’t think there isn’t a lot I wouldn’t do. Like I told you, you’re mine.”

“Brute,” I throw at him for the millionth time today.

He leans in towards me, and I know what’s coming. I slap my hand over my mouth and scurry to the other side of the truck. He wasn’t using that trick on me again. He throws his head back and laughs loudly. His laugh is deep and rich, and I have to clench my teeth to keep from smiling.

“You’re unreasonable.” I grab the door handle, but stop when Cash’s hand comes down on my thigh.

“I know you’re mad, sweetheart, but let me help you down.”

“I can get out of a truck by myself, Cash.”

“No, you’ll wait for me to help you, and you just proved my point.”

“What point was that? That you think I’m a child?”

“There’s nothing childlike about you.” The hand on my thigh slides a little higher, his thumb running little circles, making my skin break out in goose bumps even in this crazy Texas heat. “That even if I ask nicely you’ll still fight me, so I might as well just manhandle you.”

And that’s what he does as he pulls me from the truck, then throws me over his shoulder.

“Not that I don’t like doing it. Keep fighting me. I like picking you up and putting you where I want you.”

I wiggle in his hold like I’m trying to get free, just glad he can’t see my face and the stupid smile I’m sporting when I should be yelling at him for a list of things.

“Cash?”

The sound of a soft female voice stills my movements.

“Miss June,” I hear Cash say, stopping in his tracks. I push some of my hair out of my face and try to see where the voice came from. That’s when I see a girl who looks maybe a few years older than me standing on the porch. I have no idea how I missed her when we pulled up. Maybe she came from around the house or something.

Her eyes go to me, catching me sneaking a look at her. They narrow for a flash, so quick I’m not even sure if it happened. But one thing is clear. She’s been crying. Her eyes are a little red, but the make-up she has coated on still looks good.

Everything about her is put together. She looks like the country girl next door. Pink cowboy boots lead up to legs that seem to go on for days, ending in a pair of short jean shorts. I

wouldn't be surprised if she turned around and I could see her butt cheeks.

Even with her toned long legs, she has hips and a bust. Some women have all the luck. I had some curves before, but nothing like she has.

"Hey, Cash, I wondered if we could talk for a minute." She snuffles again, and a pang of guilt runs through me. Something is clearly wrong. "Alone," she adds.

"Busy with my wife at the moment," is all he says, clearly dismissing her.

"Cash, she's crying," I whisper quietly so only he can hear me.

He just lets out an irritated huff like he couldn't care less.

"Don't be a jerk." This time it's not a whisper. He pulls me off his shoulder, sliding me down his body. His eyes train on mine. He reaches up and brushes a few curls out of my face. The act is so gentle, so incongruous coming from a hulk like him. I get lost in him for a minute, almost forgetting there's a woman behind me watching us.

"I'm Clare," I say, turning to face her. I go to step towards the porch to shake her hand, but Cash's hands go to my waist to keep me in place. I roll my eyes.

"Don't mind him. I'm still teaching him manners." I try to joke to lighten the situation. Then June's eyes turn a little colder, making me wonder if I had been wrong in thinking she'd been crying. Am I standing in the middle of a lovers' spat?

That makes my blood run cold. She's stunning, and it's hard not to compare myself to her. I wonder if she's his type. If they've dated before. Both of us are blonde, but that's where the physical similarities end.

Even with her curves, she still looks like she's built for farm life. I might blow over with a good wind.

"I'm June Johnson, but everyone calls me JJ, don't they, Cash?" she finally says, a sweet smile melting away the cold

I'd seen moments ago. She steps off the porch, reaching out and shaking my hand.

I can feel Cash just shrug. His indifference couldn't be clearer.

"What do you need, June?" His tone is flat.

"Your mama would roll over in her grave if she heard you talk to a lady like that." That's when it clicks. Johnson. The farm next to Cash's. The one he'd just told me about. These two probably grew up together. A montage of young, sweet, first love flickers through my mind—first kisses, dances, and other things I don't want to think about. Cash will be my first everything, and I hate to think this woman in front of me is his first everything. I instantly dislike her for something that isn't even her fault, but I just can't help myself. I'm getting a taste of the same jealousy Cash was feeling minutes ago. Wow, karma sure works fast.

"Yeah, she probably would roll over in her grave if I didn't get my woman into the house, out of this heat, and fed. I bet you didn't even have lunch, did you?" He says the last part softly and next to my ear, his concern for me clear.

"I..." I can't even think what to say here. I'm too busy trying to figure out what's going on with Cash and June. "Why don't I go in and make us a few sandwiches while you talk to June?" I offer.

"I'm not sure there's much to talk about. June, if your father needs something he can call me. I'd planned to call him tonight anyways about Sammy getting out."

"Why are you being like this?" she huffs, a little pout forming on her glossy lips. I really don't want to be here for this. I would love to tell her to step back and keep away from my husband, but the truth is, I don't want Cash to have feelings for another woman. It would be best to figure this out now before I sink deeper into him.

I don't want something like that sitting in the back of my head, even less so if she's going to be living right next door.

It'd always be on my mind. It would already linger some if what I'm thinking about them is true.

“I'm not being like anything. I just don't have time for your little games today. I'm not playing it. I've never played it.”

Her hands go to her hips, that pout dropping from her lips. “I can't believe you're going to marry her. If you wanted a wife, you knew I would do it. End this little war that has been going between our families. Bring the land together. We'd be good together. Why can't you just accept that?”

I try to jerk out of Cash's hold, desperate not to be standing in between them, but Cash just grips me tighter.

“This fucking town. I bet the ink on the marriage license wasn't even dry before everyone knew,” Cash says.

“Yeah, because no one can believe you're doing this. We've just been waiting for you to jerk your head out of your ass and ask me.”

“I'm marring Clare come Friday, so I reckon you and this town should get used to it.” His tone is still bored, like he doesn't actually care if the town gets used to it or not. I doubt Cash cares what anyone thinks of him. He doesn't seem the type to care about those things.

“Is that your mama's ring?” she gasps in shock, taking a step towards me like she's going to grab my hand, but before she can I'm once again over Cash's shoulder.

“Go home, June, and don't come back without an invitation,” Cash says, making his way towards the front door.

“Don't do this, Cash. She's not built for this life,” I hear her yell as the front door slams.

“Please put me down.” I hate how small my voice sounds. I don't know what to make of what just happened. It hurt me a little, but in a way, I'd liked it. It hurt to think he'd been with her, that they'd shared something special at one time. She even knew his family. But I liked how Cash made it clear I was his and that was final.

He was so cold with her it made me think maybe she hurt him. It was clear he didn't want to be with her. She offered herself up on a silver platter, but he turned her down like it was nothing. The emotions from the past twenty-four hours feel like they're pressing down on me. The weight of them just makes me want to collapse into bed.

She might be right. I don't know if I'm built for this life. I know Cash doesn't think I am, considering how he treats me like I'm made of spun glass.

"Sweetheart, don't do that." I hear the lock click on the front door, then he lays me down on the couch and comes over me. "Get mad, but don't do that with your voice."

"My voice?"

His head nestles in my neck like he's trying to nuzzle me, his short facial hair brushing my skin. "With no emotion. Go back to mad."

"Should I be mad?"

"Yes," he says, then places a kiss on my neck.

A feel a lump form in my throat. "Why should I be mad?"

"No one should question our getting married. It's none of their business, but that's small-town life for you. Worse, she shouldn't have said that shit in front of you. If the situation had been reversed, I'd be in jail right now." He growls the last part like he's actually mad at the imaginary scenario of someone offering to marry me.

"Cash, I wanna see your face."

In one quick move, Cash pulls us into a sitting position, him under me as I straddle him.

"Why didn't you take this June up on her offer of marriage instead of getting a mail-order bride? She must have really hurt you for you to do that."

His big hands come to my face, his thumb brushing over my lips, making me lick them.

“No, sweetheart, she never hurt me. Irritated the shit out of me? Yes.” He lets out a breath like he doesn’t really want to talk about it. “We grew up together. Kind of, but not really. I didn’t pay her much mind. I wasn’t girl crazy growing up. More horse crazy than anything. If I wasn’t in school or helping my pa, I was on my horse. I didn’t give anything much mind. A girl like June doesn’t like that much.”

“What about when you got older?” I push, wanting to know more.

“She’d still try to get my attention. I always just thought it was because I was indifferent towards her. More of her ego wanting me than her. When I did start thinking about maybe finding a girl of my own, I wanted something like my ma and pa had. Then they passed.”

I see the pain flash across his eyes. I lean forward, placing a kiss on his lips, wanting to be closer to him.

“It was fast. A car crash when they’d taken a road trip. It was a lot to deal with then. Throw in that, and now I had a farm to run. People depending on me. All other shit went out the window.”

“Why now?” I ask.

He brings a hand to the back of my head, pulling me to him and making me lay my head on his shoulder. He starts playing with my hair. The sensation makes me close my eyes.

“All I do is work. I have these men by my side, but that doesn’t mean I don’t get lonely at night. I still wish I had what my parents had. I didn’t think I could get that with a mail-order bride, but I wanted to try. I definitely knew I wouldn’t have that with June. Not to mention I can barely tolerate her voice. She’s always yapping.”

I smile at that, relief flooding my body.

“Never even kissed her?”

I feel him chuckle.

“No, sweetheart. Never even kissed her. Have to say, I hear men complain about jealous women driving them crazy, but I

happen to like you getting jealous over me.”

“I’m not jealous,” I protest as a yawn leaves my mouth.

“I’ll make sure to stay away from her since you don’t like it. Seems like the right thing to do.”

I snort, not missing him taking another chance to remind me that I’m supposed to be staying away from Brandon.

I know one thing for sure. I’m going to make sure Cash isn’t so lonely anymore. I know what that feels like. I may not be cut out for farm life, but this is something I *can* do.

*R*eluctantly, I leave Clare in the house to, as she said, “organize the kitchen,” while I go back outside and get to work. I made some calls before I left the house, watching Clare wiggle around the kitchen as she worked to put away everything she got at the store. God, I could sit and watch her all day, her little body moving like that. I had to go. I couldn’t keep watching her and not take her, so I left, locking the door behind me.

I climb onto my horse and head out to the west side of the farm to check on some of the guys and help out. They’re branding some of the cattle, and I just want to make sure it’s all going okay. When I get there, I see Earl on his horse and ride over.

“Any sign of Sammy?”

“Not yet. Did you talk to the Johnson farm?” Earl asks.

“Yeah. I talked to their new foreman, and he said he’d keep a look out.” I take a deep breath, shaking my head and looking out beyond the rolling green land. “Not sure I trust him. Old man Johnson hired a shady guy to run the place, and I’m not so sure this new guy has his best interests at heart. I’m starting to suspect Sammy going missing and the fences coming down at the same time is a little suspicious.”

“I’m afraid you might be right. I’ll put some of the guys on late-night watch. See if we can catch whoever it is that’s doing this.”

I look over at Earl and nod my head. It’s a shame it’s had to come to this. After all these years of running this farm, we’ve never had anything like this happen. Instead of dwelling

on it, I get down and help the guys out, knowing that the faster we get this done, the faster we can go in for chow tonight. And the faster I can get my hands back on my woman.

We walk up to the big house, and I wash up with the guys like normal. But this time, I've got a smile on my face and an anticipation growing in my heart. I've never had something like this before. Something to look forward to. I get satisfaction from a hard day's work and taking care of the land, but having someone to come home to at the end of it makes it all worthwhile.

"Something sure does smell good. I'm glad you've brought Mrs. McCallister out here, boss. I was getting real tired of Earl's cooking."

We all laugh as one of the big guys nicknamed Tiny rinses off and heads inside. I take extra care to clean my hands and nails, wanting to look good for Clare. I've never felt that need before: wanting to look good for someone. But I find myself needing to impress her. I want her to look at me and see everything she wants. I want to walk into a room and have everyone disappear for her. Because that's what she does to me. She's rapidly becoming the center of my world, and I want to be the same.

"Brandon's out in the barn with Fluffy. I think she might be going into labor anytime now," Earl says, walking up beside me to clean up for dinner. "I'll have one of the boys bring him a plate."

I just grunt in response, thinking it's for the best. I really don't want him around Clare right now. I don't know where this jealous streak inside me is coming from, but it's in there and it's loud. I try to shake it off knowing that he's a part of this farm, but so is she, so I've got to trust her and let it go. But for the life of me, I can't do what my head is telling me to. My caveman is a lot louder than my sense when it comes to Clare, and for some reason I don't give a shit.

I nearly run into the house when I'm finished, wanting to get to her as soon as possible. When I get inside, I see the table

all set up with plates and food ready to be served family style. I take in a deep breath and my mouth waters at the smell of pot roast. She's made enough for an army, and all the fixings with it. Even homemade biscuits. Looking into the kitchen, I see her setting out a chocolate cake on the counter. I head straight for her.

Once I reach her, I don't stop as I pick her up and carry her into the pantry. Once there, I press her gently against the shelves, and I feel her legs wrap around me for support.

"Cash," she whispers, but it's a half laugh. "What are you doing?"

"Just wanted to thank my woman for a mighty fine dinner."

I lock my lips with hers, licking her lips and feeling her open up for me. I taste a hint of chocolate on her, and I moan at the flavor. So sweet and so good. All I want to do is fall into this kiss for all eternity.

I feel her fingers go to the nape of my neck as she pulls me closer to her. It's as if she can't get enough either. Her legs tighten and the ridge of my cock starts to grind against her as the kiss turns into more than I ever intended. Well, who am I kidding? I always want more than just a kiss when it comes to Clare.

This quick moment turns into so much more as we cling to one another, trying to get as close as possible. My lips need more, so I move them down her neck and lick her there, wanting even more of her sweetness.

"You haven't even tasted dinner and you're doing this. What will you do after you've tasted it?"

Clare's words are coming out in little gasps as my tongue moves lower.

"I think we both know what's going to happen after I get one bite."

She moans and grinds against me, teasing us both into a frenzy.

“Cash,” she whispers, and it’s then I have to pull back.

Hearing my name on her lips is so intimate and filled with sex that I don’t want to risk anyone overhearing it.

Taking my lips away from her neck, I look into her eyes and see just how much she needs me.

“You want more, baby?”

Clare licks her lips and nods her head rapidly without hesitation.

“Tonight. You’re in my bed. I won’t take you until you’re mine on paper. But I want you in my bed tonight.”

She nods her head again, taking in air fast and hard as if out of breath.

“I want you to show me what’s mine. And I want a taste. You won’t deny me, will you?”

It’s not a question, but she closes her eyes and nods, as if the thought is too much to handle.

I let her down slowly as my hard cock rubs as much of her as it can. I want to rub it all over her naked body, but now is not the time. After a second, we both smile at one another. The hurried tension is gone and a comfortable need settles between us. After she’s got her clothes back into place and I’ve adjusted the beast in my jeans, I take her hand and pull her out of the pantry and over to the where everyone is eating dinner.

I help her settle down in my lap at the head of the table, serving us two plates of her delicious food.

“Eat, baby,” I whisper in her ear. She’s so tiny. She could afford to have a little more weight on her, and I’m going to make sure that happens.

All the guys are talking and laughing, enjoying the home-cooked meal. It warms my heart and makes this place feel complete. Squeezing Clare closer to me, I smile as we eat. All the men rave about her cooking. I’m filled with pride, and jealousy but I try to let the pride win out. She’s the best thing that’s happened to this place since I can remember, so I focus on the positive instead of being an asshole about it.

Suddenly, Brandon comes into the dining room, and my arm around Clare tightens.

“Sorry to interrupt, boss, but looks like Fluffy is breech. I think I might need you on this.”

Brandon doesn't so much as look at Clare. This goes a long way to ease some of my unwarranted irritation with him. He's a good worker, and I like having him around. It's just going to take some time to get used to having Clare and my jealousy in the same room.

“I'll take care of it.” I look over at Clare, thinking this might be something she wants to see. “You want to come watch, baby?”

“Sure. I've helped a few times with the animals. I'll see what I can do.”

We stand up, and I take Clare's hand, pulling her behind me.

“Go ahead, clean up, and get yourself some chow. We'll take care of Fluffy tonight.” Looking over to Earl, I see him nod his head. I know he'll take care of things in the house and make sure whoever is on clean up does their job.

Pulling Clare behind me, we walk towards the barn closest to the house. I hold her hand as we walk, and the simple action makes me smile. It's weirdly comfortable and feels like something we do every day instead of something that's completely new to us.

“So who's Fluffy?” Clare asks as we enter the barn.

“She's one of the ewes we keep around here as kind of a pet. We don't have enough to really make money off their wool, so we donate it to the knitting group in town and they make use of it.” I walk Clare to the back stable and see the ewe lying down.

When we go over to her, she's a bit skittish, but I put my hand on her and feel her belly. The lamb has indeed turned from what I feel, and I look to see how close she is to labor.

Looking up, I see Clare get down in the hay with Fluffy and put her head in her lap. She starts to gently stroke her and make soft sounds to try to calm the soon-to-be mother.

“It’s too late for me to turn the lamb, so she’s going to have to deliver feet first. This is going to be painful for the mama, so if you want to help, you’ll need to hold her for me.”

Clare looks up and I see sadness on her face, but it’s quickly banished and she nods, now determined to help. She holds Fluffy and starts talking to her as if she’s a real mama about to give birth.

“You can do this, Fluffy. I know you can. Be brave. We’ve got you.”

Seeing her like this melts something inside of me, and the thought of her having our babies runs through my head. I shake it off before I can fall too far over the edge, thinking I need to concentrate on what we’re about to do. I’ve delivered a few breech animals before, but it’s never easy. We’ve lost a few mamas before, so there’s always worry with this kind of thing.

“Okay, little mama. Let’s have ourselves a baby.”

“What are we going to name it?”

I look over to see Clare holding the lamb as she cleans it off. The labor took hours, and it was rough on all of us, but Fluffy came through like a champ, and now we’ve got the newest addition to the McCallister farm.

“Whatever you want, baby. It’s a girl.”

Clare beams at me, and it’s the sweetest sight. She helps the lamb start to nurse, and once we’ve got them settled, she comes over to my side.

“She looks like a little cotton ball. Can I name her Cotton?”

It’s too much. I wrap her in my arms and hold her to me. “Yes. I think Cotton is perfect. Fluffy and Cotton. It’s nearly too damn cute.”

Clare playfully slaps my arm as we exit the stable, letting the mom and baby get some sleep. We walk hand in hand back to the big house, and by this time, night has fallen upon the farm. All the stars are out, and it feels romantic being out here with her like this.

It took hours to deliver Cotton, and it's late, but I still remember what she promised me earlier. And I intend to hold her to it.

When we get to the big house and go inside, I turn behind me and flip the lock into place. The sound of it has her turning to look at me, and I can almost feel her heartbeat pick up speed.

"I think we could both use a shower before bed."

She looks down the hallway where the bedroom and bathroom are and then looks back at me. I can see the nervousness in her eyes, but she nods slightly, and it's enough to make me go to her. I wrap her in my arms and wait until she looks up at me, locking eyes with my own. I want her to always feel safe with me.

"Let me wash you, baby. Show you just how good I'm going to be to you. Give you a reason to marry me come Friday. Not just because you need to, but because you want to."

"Cash," she whispers, and my name comes out with so much behind it. Nervous need and shy desire all mixed together.

"Do you trust me?" I ask, needing to know and needing to hear her say it.

She smiles, and I see it in her eyes before she says it.
"Yes."

I scoop her up and carry her to the master bathroom. I set her down on the counter next to the sink and go to the shower, turning on all the heads to let the water heat up. When that's finished, I go back to her and see her sitting there biting her lip.

I unbutton my shirt while I kick off my boots. Then I stand there in just my jeans. She bites her lip as she watches me reach for my belt, and it drives me wild. Just having her eyes on me like she can't look away makes me crazy.

When my belt is undone, I unzip my jeans and push them off my hips along with my boxer briefs. Might as well go ahead and show her all of me, seeing as I'm the last man she's going to see naked for the rest of her life.

Standing before her naked, my hard, aching cock pointing at her, I feel like a god. She's looking at me with big eyes. She licks her lips, and it takes everything in me to stay rooted in place.

“Clare.”

Her eyes snap up to mine, and her cheeks burn red as if she's been caught staring at me. I want her looking, and I hope she likes what she sees, but I need more. I need to get my hands on her.

“Take off your clothes, baby.”

After a second of hesitation, her nervous fingers go to her shirt and start to unbutton it. It's the sweetest torture. Each button she undoes shows me a little more of her perfection. When she's finished, she slips it off her shoulders. I walk over to her, unable to hold back. I need to touch her. She's there in a simple white bra, her soft skin glowing.

I reach down to her feet and help her slip off her boots before she stands up and undoes her shorts. She pushes them off her hips, along with her white cotton panties, and I keep my eyes locked on hers. I don't want to scare her or make her feel embarrassed, so I don't look anywhere but in her eyes. I see her move to take her bra off, and once I hear it hit the floor, I take her hand and walk us into the shower.

When the warm water hits us, I pull her to me. She closes her eyes and leans back, letting the warm water run through her hair. I reach up and pull the pins out for her, setting them on the shelf in the shower. Her tight blonde curls fall past her

shoulders. I run my fingers through them, and she opens her eyes to look at me.

“Let me wash you,” I whisper, as I reach for the shampoo and go to wash her hair.

The lather builds in my fingers as I massage her scalp, and she moans. I feel her warm, wet body press against mine, my hard cock rubbing against her soft belly. Fuck. I’m going to get to do this every night for the rest of my life.

I have to grit my teeth to keep from cumming all over her there. The feeling of her skin on mine is almost enough to send me over the edge. I didn’t know skin could be so soft. My eyes wander down her body, seeing her full breasts with dark pink nipples in hardened peaks. My mouth waters as I look at them, but I just keep washing her hair and thinking about all I want to do to them. I want to suck on her there, and then rub my cock between them, their full weight squeezing me.

When I’m finished with her hair, I put in some conditioner as well and run my fingers through her curls. I look down between us again and see the head of my cock peeking up against her belly. The sight of it, the head nearly purple with need against her creamy skin, is too much.

Clare’s hands come up to my chest, resting there as I reach for the soap and start to clean her body. The bubbles run between us, creating a slickness between our skin. Her curves slide against my body, making my cock pulse with need. As my hands move down her chest and to her breasts, I give each of her nipples a gentle pinch, feeling her press further against me and moan a little at the treatment.

“I’m small,” I hear her soft whisper.

I cup her breast in my hand. “Looks like you’re a perfect fit to me,” I tell her, then slide my thumb across her nipple.

“Cash.”

My name echoes off the tile of the shower as I move down her body and kneel before her. From this view, I can see all of her. Her narrow hips and thighs and the small blonde patch of curls that covers her pussy. The little crease in the middle is so

sweet, I want to open it up and taste what she's got in there for me. Her hard clit and sticky nectar are just waiting for my mouth.

Instead of taking her into my mouth like I want to, I gently wash her there and then move down to her thighs and feet. I'm trying to control my need, though it's the hardest thing I've ever done.

Once she's completely cleaned, I soap up as fast as I can so I can get us out of the shower. Her hands start to wander on my chest, but I have to stop her.

"Not yet, baby. If you touch me too much, I won't be able to stop. And I made a promise to myself and to us that I'd wait until you were all mine to take you." I kiss the palms of her hands and lead us out of the shower, drying her off and then drying myself off.

When we're all finished, I scoop her up in my arms and carry her out to our bed. I pull back the covers and place her down on the sheets, and I climb on top of her. We're completely naked, and it would be so easy for me to slip inside her little body, but I don't. I'll give her as much pleasure as I can tonight, and then I'll hold her while she sleeps. I'm not sure she can take me, so this may be all we ever have. As much as I want to put my cock fully inside her, I don't want to risk hurting her.

"My God. How did I get so lucky?"

Her blush hits her cheeks and creeps down her chest. I see her make a move to cover herself, but I gently push her hands away.

"No, baby. Don't hide. Not from me." Leaning down, I kiss her lips softly and then move to her neck. "You're too beautiful. I don't know how much more I can take."

I keep moving lower until I reach her breasts. I take a nipple into my mouth and suck it a little, then nibble on her there, feeling her squirm under me. I take my time loving one breast and then the other. I lick all around her there, in between them and underneath, where she's softest. When I've tasted

every inch of her, I move lower, kissing her soft belly and taking little bites of her there. Clare giggles and moves under me, and I smile against her skin.

“Cash, that tickles!”

I rub the stubble of my beard against her, pulling another giggle out of her. I love the sound. It’s like music to my ears, and I want to keep hearing it for the rest of my life.

When I move lower and my mouth goes to the top of her mound where her small blonde curls are, her breathing picks up and the giggle turns into a moan. I press my nose there, inhaling her sweet apple scent, and my tongue comes out, wanting to taste it. I press on her thighs and they nervously open for me. I look up to see the blush on her cheeks, and I place another kiss there while locking eyes with her. I moan at the feeling, and she shudders under me, her little body loving my mouth on her.

“Cash.”

“It’s okay, baby. I’ll give you what you need.” I rub my hands on the inside of her thighs, trying to calm her down.

“No. I just mean. I’ve never done this before.” I look up and see her blush deepen. “I’ve...” She takes a breath and then puts her hands over her face as if not looking at me makes me disappear. “I’m a virgin. I’ve never done anything like this. Hell, you’re my first kiss.”

Hearing her words makes my hard cock leak a little cum. Knowing I’m her first, and her last, makes my inner caveman roar with pride. I wouldn’t have cared if she’d been with a hundred men, but knowing that it’s only going to be me makes some of the jealousy I didn’t even realize was there melt away. I want her to know there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. This is a gift she’s giving me. I’ll treasure it. Make sure this is perfect for her.

“Thank you, Clare. I take everything you’ve given me as a gift. You’re more important to me than I thought possible. I’ll make sure this is good for you. I’ll be so good to you.” Her hands slip away and she looks at me. I kiss the inside of her

thigh and then move my mouth towards her core. “Just let me take care of you, baby.” I’m going to show her.

My mouth comes down on her pussy, and the sweet taste of her nectar hits my tongue. I give her long licks up and down her clit, wanting to taste every single inch of her. I suck on her lower lips and move my tongue down to her tight entrance. I slide my finger in just a little. I can feel her hymen there, tight and firm. She’s so little and closed up, it will be nearly impossible for me to even get the tip of my cock in.

As if she hears my thoughts, her hips move against my face inviting me into her. She moves up and down against my mouth, taking her pleasure from me. Something about this innocent girl working her pussy against my tongue gets me even hotter. It’s as if her body is coming to life before me, and the ache in my cock starts to pulse with bittersweet pain.

Ignoring my cock, and probably blue balls, I go back to eating her pussy. I grab her thighs, digging my fingers into the soft skin there, and bury my face against her, trying to get as much of her into my mouth as I can. It’s only moments before she’s tensing under me and her hands go to my hair. She grips me hard like she’s trying to pull me off of her, only to end up holding me tighter to her.

As I suck on her clit just a little, her back bows off the bed and she skyrockets over the edge. I feel her pussy pulse against my mouth as her orgasm tears through her. She moans my name through gritted teeth, and all I can think about is how intense it must be for her. Having my mouth on her sweet little pussy as she cums on my face is all I can stand. I feel the cold wetness between my thighs, and I realize I’ve cum on myself. I tried to hold off and keep it together, but she was too much. Her perfect taste, feeling her underneath me, hearing her sounds...I couldn’t control myself.

When I feel her relax under me, I look up and smile. My smile grows even bigger when I see her passed out. Her eyes are closed and her mouth is slightly open, deep breaths coming from her.

I quietly get up and clean up my cum as best as I can before climbing back into bed with her. I spoon her warm body, and she doesn't so much as blink an eye when I pull the covers over us and turn off the light.

I feel the smile on my face as she hums in her sleep. I know that I've given her that peace. I just wish there was a way for me to tell her how special that was for me.

I look at myself in the mirror and can't believe how well the pearl-white dress fits me. I'd only had to take it in just a little in the hips to get it to fit just right, landing just above my knees. The dress flares out but nips in the closer you get to the waist. The top molds to my body and gives a hint of cleavage that's shadowed by white sheer lace running up my neck and around the back, leaving my arms bare.

The day after we'd gotten our marriage license, I had some free time. I'd already cleaned every inch of the house, so that afternoon while my lasagna baked in the oven, I went looking around and found the attic.

The whole area was filled with boxes. Things that belonged to Cash's mom and dad were all boxed and stored away. Now I'd understood why most of the house seemed so bare. He'd put a lot of it away. I found a box labeled *wedding*, and I just couldn't help myself. I opened it to find a simple white wedding dress and a wedding album.

I knew from the first page it was Cash's mom and dad. He looked just like his father. The resemblance was uncanny. They looked so in love. In every picture he was looking at her like she'd just hung the moon. It was truly beautiful and it made me wonder if they would have liked me. I know how much something like that would mean to Cash. It was easy to see how much they'd meant to him. I could tell whenever he talked about them or this farm.

Cash caught me up there. His eyes flashed with something when he saw me on the floor, the album in my lap. That's when I knew. All this was up here because it was hard to look at. It compounded the loneliness he'd told me about. And

when he told me I should wear the dress, that he wanted me to bring something down from the attic said a lot. It signaled that he was moving on from this loss. Moving on with me. We'd both lost our families, but we're ready to start our own. The past is a lot easier to take when we're together.

I don't know if he knew what it meant for him to say that to me. I knew he'd given me the ring already, but this somehow felt different. It was more intimate. It made me feel like I belonged here and that I was becoming a McCallister in more than just name.

I run my fingers through my hair for the millionth time. The curls won't let me do anything with them today. They seem to have a mind of their own. I was going to pin it back, but Cash asked me before he left if I'd leave it down.

I went to protest but found myself flat on my back, his face between my legs. It's something he's doing a lot lately. He brought me to orgasm twice before I tossed in the white flag. Not that it mattered. When I'd gone to the bathroom later, all my bobby pins were gone. He seemed to have a fascination with my wild curls that had me liking them more and more by the day. He was always playing with them or cuddling his face in them while he slept. Wrapping them around his finger, then letting them go, fascinated by their corkscrew shape.

I smile at the reminder. It's hard to believe I only met this man four days ago. My life has changed so much over these four days. The things he makes me feel fill parts of me that I didn't even know were there. Parts I didn't realize were longing to be filled.

Grabbing my little purse, I slip on my white flats and head out of the bedroom and towards the front door. Cash said he was going to run next door to talk to the Johnsons about something. No more fences had been broken the past couple of days, and Sammy was safely back home. But last night someone broke into the barn and released six horses. The men were out hunting them down, and Cash was aggravated but trying to keep his cool.

Flipping the lock, I open the door and let out a little squeak when I see a man I don't know standing there. His hand is up in the air like he was about to knock.

"Sorry, ma'am. I didn't mean to startle you," he says removing his Stetson to reveal short blond hair.

"I'm sorry. I just didn't expect anyone to be standing there when I opened the door."

He smiles as his dark eyes run up and down my body like he's taking me in. It gives me a creepy feeling.

"I'm Billy Buckman, the foreman over at the Johnson farm." He reaches out his free hand.

"Mrs. Clare McCallister," I return, taking his hand. When I go to pull it back, he gives it a little squeeze like he might not let it go, but does.

"Not yet." He half smiles like it's a cute little joke, and it makes me narrow my eyes.

"I suggest you take a step back, Mr. Buckman. My husband doesn't like others in the house when he's not here."

"I didn't realize you two were married yet," he says, ignoring my words.

I slip past him, pulling the door closed behind me, making him take a few steps back. I take a few of my own in the other direction, trying to get some distance from him.

"Cash is over at the Johnson farm right now. Shouldn't you be there?"

"He always fill you in on his affairs?" The way he says the word *affairs* has my heart picking up a few beats. The tone doesn't help any either. He studies me, and I look to the driveway the leads over the hill. Cash should be back any minute. He said he wouldn't be gone long and then we'd be on our way.

His boots click on the wooden porch as he takes a step closer to me.

“I can see why June was so fit to be tied. You are a pretty little thing. I’m not sure what Cash is gonna do with you. I don’t think you could handle one ride.”

I flinch at his words because I don’t think he means a ride on a horse. And the implication runs a little too close to home.

He reaches out, grabbing one of my curls. “The Johnsons aren’t home, you know. Went to a cattle show. Only one there is June. How long has he been gone over there with her?”

My body freezes at his words. He’s been gone for over an hour now. I turn to bat his hand away from my hair and tell him to leave, but before I can, he’s gone. A loud crash fills the porch as Billy is pulled away from me and he hits the house. Cash’s hand is around his throat, and Billy is starting to turn red.

Cash has him a good foot off the ground. I hadn’t noticed how short the other man was, but now that Cash is next to him, it really shows.

“You think you can come on my land and fucking touch my wife?” Cash’s face is so close to Billy’s I have to step to the side a little to see him. His face is turning purple now, and I don’t think Cash is really looking for an answer to his question. It’s clear the man won’t be able to talk with how tight Cash’s squeezing his throat.

“You don’t look at her, you don’t talk to her. In fact, you don’t even know she fucking exists.” Cash is so mad I can feel the anger pulsing off him in waves. He continues to choke Billy, and all I can do is stand there, shocked by how fast everything’s happened. I don’t even know where Cash came from. It was like he knew a man touched me, and *poof*, he just materialized. That actually would not shock me at this point.

“Fuck!” I hear someone yell, pulling my eyes from the scene in front of me. I see Earl and three other hands with him start to run towards the porch. They head for Cash and try to peel him off the other man. It takes all four of them to finally get Cash off Billy. When Cash lets go, Billy slides down, his ass hitting the porch. His hand goes to his throat as he coughs over and over again. I look back to Cash, who’s still being

held back by the men as they try to calm him down, but it doesn't seem to be working.

He keeps pulling to get free, wanting back at Billy.

“He fucking touched her.” He lunges again, this time breaking free of two of the hands, and I jump in front of him. He halts, almost running right into me, and I throw myself into his arms, wrapping myself around him. No way he'll keep going at Billy if I'm locked around him. If we don't stop him, I'm starting to think he might kill the man.

His hands go to my ass, catching me easily. I pull back and cup his face. “You marrying me today or you going to jail?” I ask him as I lean in, my lips just a breath from his, and I can see his face visibly relax.

“Marrying you.”

“Think we should practice that kissing part again?” I tease him, brushing my lips across his.

He takes my mouth. The kiss is hard and demanding, almost knocking the air right out of my lungs. I can feel everything he felt moments ago. All the adrenaline still pumping through his body, only now he's using it on me. He pulls back sooner than I want, breaking the kiss.

“Get him off my land,” Cash says, not taking his eyes from mine as he starts to carry me towards the house.

“I'm calling the Sheriff. He'll hear about this.”

“When you call him, can you tell him he still owes me a hundred dollars from our last poker night?” I hear Earl say as Cash kicks the door closed behind us and places me on my feet.

His eyes run over me, and I can see the rest of the tension leave his body.

“Goddamn, you look perfect.” His voice is gruff, but he takes a step back from me.

I take a step towards him, and he holds one hand up.

“Barely hanging on, sweetheart. I gotta get you to the courthouse, and if you touch me right now with how I’m feeling, I’ll snap and take you right on this floor.”

“There’s more than what just happened out there, isn’t there?” I ask, pointing to the door we just came through.

“Yeah. I was already fucking pissed before I saw Billy reach out and touch you. I went right over the edge after that.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing. Not a goddamn thing.”

I just stare at him. Cash runs a hand over his face, then pulls it through his dark hair.

“I went to the Johnsons’ and they weren’t there.”

“But June was.”

“But June was,” he confirms, making me uneasy. I don’t like that one bit.

“I sat and waited and waited some more while June ran her mouth. Baby, you know how I feel about that voice of hers.” He says it like he was tortured, making me roll my eyes.

“She offered me something to drink. I said no and that if her mom and dad weren’t back in the next five minutes, I was gone. That’s when she fucking lost it. Tried to throw herself at me. I dodged her, and she hit the floor. Hard. Then she started crying.” He studies me for a second, and I can tell there’s more and he doesn’t want to say it.

“What, Cash? Just say it.”

“I just stepped over her and left.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?” He mimics my response. “You’re not mad? I thought you’d be pissed I just left her there crying. Last time she started with those tears, you told me to be nice. I thought —”

“That’s what got you so mad?”

“Big fucking part.” He lets out a deep breath. “All I kept thinking was that if you had to listen to some man talk for thirty minutes about how you should marry him, I’d lose it. Then I came around that corner and there’s a man standing on my goddamn porch fucking touching you.” He yells the last part.

I just shake my head and walk over to him, placing my hands on his chest, smiling up at him.

“How can you be smiling? I still want to go back out there and beat the shit out of someone.”

“I’m smiling because you’re so jealous. You’re even jealous for me over you.” I start to laugh because saying it out loud makes it ever funnier.

He just shakes his head.

“We should go get married. I think that might help.” I’m not sure who he’s trying to convince, me or him.

“Sure it will,” I tease.

“Maybe if you were walking around here with a round little belly, that might help, too,” he adds.

“Can we focus on one thing at a time here? The wedding first,” I remind him.

“We get this wedding done and I’m going to be focusing on that real hard.”

“Promises, promises,” I tease.

He leans down and places a soft kiss on my lips.

“This is going to be the fastest wedding this town has ever seen.”

I hear the hinges shake on the door as I kick it closed behind us.

“Flip the lock, Mrs. McCallister. We’re going to be needing some privacy.”

Clare giggles in my arms but turns the lock as I asked. I nearly run down the long hallway to our bedroom, so desperate am I to get her in there. I feel like once we are in our room, she’ll be mine and she can’t get away.

Our wedding had to have made history. The fastest *I dos* in the state of Texas, guaranteed. When the officiant got to the part about asking if anyone objected, I jerked the ring out of his hand and put it on Clare before he could even finish the sentence. I pulled her to me, kissed her on the mouth and said, “We’re done here.”

Clare was laughing the whole time I carried her out of the courthouse, but I was dead serious. I wasn’t giving anyone time to object to anything, and I sure as hell wasn’t waiting any longer to make her mine. The drive back to the ranch was long enough, so as soon as we got back, I carried her from the truck, across the threshold, and into the house.

“Cash, you’re going to hurt yourself running around with me in your arms like this. Calm down. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Baby, I could carry you for the rest of my life and not even break a sweat. You’re so little. You’re going to have to start eating more. You need to put some weight on,” I tell her, making her giggle.

Once inside the bedroom, I kick the door closed behind us and stand Clare up next to the bed. She looked so beautiful today, and I can't keep my hands to myself any longer. Holding her to me, I look into her eyes and see her bite her lip.

"I'm nervous," she whispers, and I see the blush hit her cheeks.

"I just want to lie naked with you, baby. I'm not sure how much we'll be able to do. You're so tiny, and I'm..." I trail off, not sure what to say.

"Gigantic," she finishes for me, her eyes going wide as she looks at my body.

"We'll go slow. And when we can't do anymore, we'll stop." Holding her chin, I make her look back into my eyes so she knows I'm serious. "You know I won't do anything to hurt you. Slow, baby. Real slow."

She smiles up at me, and it makes my heart nearly burst with love. That's what this all is. I've been falling for her since the second I saw her in our kitchen. All that wild blonde hair and mouthiness she'd thrown at me like I wasn't three times her size. She wasn't intimidated by me in the least. Where many went running, she'd just rolled her eyes or smacked my chest, calling me a brute. I'm a goner, and I've never been happier in my life.

Leaning down, I take her lips and wrap my arms around her waist. Her hands go up and around my neck, and I hold her to me as we just kiss. As always when we connect, the low heat builds to a boiling passion and soon the kiss alone is not enough. Reaching up, I unbutton the lace at the back of her neck and then undo the zipper at her back. The dress falls down softly to her hips, and I hold it there while she leans back from me and steps out of it. She takes off her shoes, leaving her in only white lace panties.

"My God, Clare. You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life." I place my hand on my chest to keep my heart from trying to break through. Just looking at her has me weak in the knees and willing to sacrifice my own life for whatever it takes to make her happy. I hope I can be the

husband she deserves because she deserves the best in life. And I'll try until my last breath to be what she needs.

She smiles at me, her blonde curls falling all around her like a halo. The sun is setting outside, and the golden-pink light is peeking in, and all I can do is stand there like an idiot looking at my beautiful bride. I watch her as she slips off her panties and climbs onto our bed, lying back and waiting for me. I should move and go to her, but I'm stuck, frozen by how utterly perfect she is.

"Cash. Are you going to stand there all night, or are you going to make love to your wife?"

She giggles, and it breaks my trance. Suddenly, I'm in rapid motion. I'm stripping off my boots and white button-up shirt. Then I'm tugging off my jeans and boxer briefs until I'm stripped bare and climbing onto the bed over her.

When I'm on top of her, her small body completely engulfed under mine, I lean down and kiss her neck. "You never have to ask me twice, baby."

I hear the smile in her voice as she hums in approval. Her body is already responding to mine with the way she moves under me. I've been eating that sweet little pussy every chance I get, and she more than loves the attention. I trail kisses down her body and settle between her legs. Her thighs open for me easily, the shyness falling away.

Licking her pussy might be my favorite thing in the world. Next to kissing her. Nothing compares to holding her in my arms and feeling her lips against mine. But these sweet lower lips are damn close. I start eating her just the way she likes it. I've already figured out she likes it slow and steady at first, then she likes me to pick up the speed and get greedy. Her hands fist the back of my head and I know she's done being teased. She's ready to take what she wants, and that's usually the moment I end up cumming on myself and making a mess in the bed. I'd much rather have that cum go inside her, and maybe tonight we'll try it.

Thinking about putting my cum in her has me reaching between my legs and pinching the end of my cock. I don't

want to take a chance of busting a nut when she cums on my face, so I hold it tightly to keep any from leaking out. I want to try to save it for Clare.

The smell of her sticky nectar and the taste of her sweetness has me edging closer and closer. But I hold back and concentrate as she reaches the edge of her pleasure. When her hands come to the back of my head, I suck her clit and give it a little nibble. Bringing my fingers up to her opening, I penetrate her, trying to stretch her little hole as much as I can. I've done this a couple of times now, but every time it feels as tight as the first, and I don't feel any better about putting my cock inside her.

I keep firm pressure on her clit as I rub the sweet spot inside of her, and I feel her start to orgasm. Her legs tense on either side of my face, and she tries to arch off the bed. I keep up the even rhythm, and she skyrockets over the edge and into paradise.

“Cash!”

Hearing my name on her lips nearly sends me over the edge, but I hold back knowing that I want more. I want to try everything I can to be with her fully, and I want to see if I can get my baby inside her. Tonight.

Kissing my way up her body, I see the soft smile on her face. She reaches for me, and I go to her as she wraps her legs around my waist. I feel the length of my cock lay against her wet pussy, and I have to close my eyes tight to keep from cumming. It's almost painful how good she feels, and I'm not even inside of her yet.

“I'm ready, Cash.”

Her words are soft, but they make me open my eyes and look at her. I can't say anything to that because I've lost my ability to speak, so I just nod my head and move against her. I rub against her for a little bit, teasing us both with what we want. In truth, I'm still nervous, so I'm trying to go slow. I want to build her need up so it's not painful. The thought of hurting her makes me ache, so I'm going to do everything I can to prevent it.

I dip a bit lower until the tip of my cock is at her opening, and I settle in there. I can already feel her tightness trying to keep me out, so when I push forward just slightly, I feel her virgin barrier.

Closing my eyes again, I shake my head. “I can’t do it.” It’s all I can get out, because as much as I want to push through, I can’t make myself do it.

Feeling Clare push against me, I open my eyes in shock as she rolls me over and climbs on top. It’s not like she’s big enough to move me on her own, but I’m taken by surprise and just go with it.

I’m on my back and she’s straddling my waist, and I see her look down at me with a determined expression.

“Listen, Cash. I’m sure in the history of the whole wide world, two people of the same size as you and me have done this. I may be little and I may be a bit delicate, but I’m tougher than I look. If you won’t do this, then maybe I should. Because I love you. And I want you in every way possible. Every big part of you.”

“I love you, too, baby.” I sit up a little, pulling her down to me, our lips connecting, fire blazing between us once again. I break away to look up at her, the wild blonde curls once again surrounding her like a halo and making her look so beautiful. “I wanted to say it so many times but was afraid to scare you off.” It’s too soon. At least that’s what I thought she’d say. But I knew it wasn’t. My dad told me he knew from the moment he saw my ma that she was it. I just couldn’t bear to tell her I loved her and not have her say it back. It would have burned deep because all that loneliness I’d been feeling since losing my family seemed bearable. The memories are now sweet, not painful. Because I have her. Someone I love.

“I’m not going anywhere. I love you, and you’re my husband. Forever.” She places her hand on the side of my face and looks into my eyes. I see it there. She feels it, too.

Our lips connect again, and this time I feel her move on top of me. Her hips slide down a little until my cock is at her opening again. She moves down. When I feel the pressure of

her soft, wet hymen against me, I want to pull back, but she's too fast for me and drops down on my cock.

"Fuck." Breaking the kiss, I throw my head back and nearly black out from the pleasure. The tight grip of her pussy squeezes me so tightly, and I may die from it.

I feel my shaky hands go to her hips, and I look up to make sure she's okay. She looks down at me and smiles, and suddenly all my fears melt away.

"You're big all over, Cash. But I think we're gonna be just fine."

I feel her move a little, and it's all I can do not to cum inside her after one stroke. The wet slide of her pussy as she moves up and down my cock is slowly killing me in the best way possible.

"Baby, I've died and gone to heaven."

Leaning up, I take her nipple into my mouth, wanting her to feel as good as I do right now. She moans at the pleasure and starts to move on my cock more, and I help her hips rock on me. After just a few minutes, she's taking all of me and is fully riding up and down. I grit my teeth as I look between us and see our bodies connected.

"I can't wait any longer. I've been trying to hold off, but I can't anymore. You're so fucking tight. I can't take it. This can't be real."

Reaching between us, I rub her little clit and feel her squeeze me as she drops down on my cock. The sticky sweetness between us is so fucking hot, and I rub her harder, needing her to cum with me.

"That's it, Cash. Right there."

Clare sits up on me and leans her head back, closing her eyes, her blonde curls everywhere. She's lost in pleasure as I thrust up into her and finally feel her go over the edge. I'm cumming just as she starts, so I hold her hips down on me and keep her still while I fill her up. As I pump one thick load after another into her, she gets too full and it starts to run out between us.

The sight only turns me on more, and I feel myself giving her more of my seed. I place my hand on her lower belly as I keep cumming into her, hoping it takes root. It's the longest and best orgasm of my entire life, and she gave it to me.

When I finally come back to earth, Clare has collapsed on top of me and is breathing hard. I smile and pet her as we both catch our breath, trying to come up with something to say. It was the single most incredible moment of my life and I can't find the right words to convey that to her.

“I love you, Mrs. Clare McCallister.”

She leans up and looks into my eyes, smiling at me like I hung the moon. “I love you, too, Mr. Cash McCallister.”

We stay connected as I hold her to me, and slowly we start to make love again. I don't think there's a time when we stop or when we sleep, instead spending the whole night together as intimately as possible. She's the most special thing in my life, and I thank the stars above she chose me.

“Cash. Please,” I beg as his callused hand slides between my legs, up my dress, inching closer and closer to where I want it. I try to wiggle closer, but his other hand grips my hip, halting me. I might have gotten Cash on his back that first night, but I haven’t had much control since then. He does with me whatever he likes. Picking me up and moving me where he wants me. This whole brute caveman thing should make me want to smack him, but all it seems to do is turn me on and make me beg.

“You still sore, sweetheart?” he whispers in my ear before taking my lobe between his teeth. We haven’t had sex since our wedding night. We’d made love three times that night, and the next morning I’d woken up pretty sore. Now he won’t take me again and it’s driving me crazy. I’ve been fine to go since yesterday, but he still shut me down, going with the classic *head between my legs until I passed out and couldn’t beg anymore*.

“No. Just please. I need it. It hurts, Cash. I...” I try again, wiggling my hips a little, and I feel him smile against my neck. His hand moves to the nape of my neck, grabbing a fistful of my hair and tilting my head back.

“Oh, I know what you need. What you were doing the second I walked in here. Do you like turning me on? Knowing you’re moving around this kitchen with my eyes on you, my cock getting harder with each sway of your hips? Do you do it on purpose? Trying to get me to sink into your pussy again?”

“Oh, God.” That was another thing. Cash’s dirty talk had increased tenfold since our first night together. The man could leave me utterly speechless. I go from wanting to smack him

to attacking him with my mouth and climbing him like a tree. Sometimes I think he pokes at me on purpose to get me worked up.

His hand tightens in my hair, giving a little pull. "It's Cash, sweetheart. Don't make me tell you again. Only my name comes from that mouth of yours when you're all wet." If I wasn't so turned on, I'd smile at the fact that he just got jealous of God.

"Cash, please."

"Answer me," he growls against me, his hand trailing a little farther up my legs. "Fuck."

It takes everything in me not to giggle. Oh, I did this on purpose all right. Took me an hour to trim six inches off the dress so it barely covered my ass, and I ditched my underwear. I was getting Cash to make love to me again today, one way or another.

I can feel his control break as his fingers finally touch me. I'm so close I know it won't take much.

"Touch it. I ache, Cash," I push.

"I shouldn't. I should make you ache like you've made me ache all day, but you know how much I like to watch you cum. Seeing you come undone for me." He leans back, locking his eyes on mine. His gray eyes seem darker, filled with pure lust. One finger trails down my slit until he reaches my sweet spot. He pushes his way into me, filling me perfectly. I swear my body was made for him. It's how it feels every time he touches me. It's like he knows just what to do with me.

His name falls from my lips in a long moan as his thumb starts to work my clit.

"You wish that was my cock, sweetheart? That I was pumping in and out between your legs?"

I don't answer him. I just try to go for his jeans. He pulls my hair a little tighter, halting my movements once again as he continues to thrust his finger in and out of me.

“Give it to me.” He growls the command, sending me over the edge. I feel his body shake with mine like he’s cumming with me. He enjoys my pleasure just as much as I do “That’s it, Mrs. McCallister. Give your husband what he wants. What belongs to him.”

My body jerks as the intense rush of the orgasm simmers and fades.

“Say it.”

“Yours. Only yours.” It comes so simply from my lips now because it’s true. I know how much he likes when I tell him I belong to him.

“Cash. I want more.” I try to go for his jeans again, but I’m pulled off the kitchen counter and placed behind him as I hear the front door open.

“Something sure smells good in here,” I hear Earl say. I try to peek out from behind Cash, but he moves with me so I can’t see anything.

Cash mumbles a low string of curses.

“Eat,” is all he says before he turns to look down at me, a scowl on his face. He leans down close to my ear so only I can hear him. “Get your little ass into our bedroom. Grab a blanket and put some shorts on under whatever this thing is you’re wearing. I don’t know what it is but it sure ain’t a dress.”

“I have to...” I motion towards the door where all the men are coming in for dinner.

“No. You’re going to do what I told you.” He brings the finger he just had inside me to his mouth, sucking it clean. His expression tells me it’s the sweetest thing he’s ever tasted “Or I might lose my shit. Your face is still flushed from me making you cum, and no one sees that. *No. One.* I’m already on edge from not getting to be in you the last few days, and now the men on my ranch almost saw my wife cum. I would’ve had to cut out all their eyes. You want that?”

I look up at him in shock. He doesn’t even crack a smile like he might be teasing. I hadn’t really thought about anyone walking in on us.

“Go get the blanket, sweetheart. I’ll pull the last pie out of the oven and make us a plate to take outside for us to eat alone.”

“You don’t like my dress?” I ask, taking a step back. When he growls, I jump, dashing off for the bedroom as I catch the murmur of someone saying something about how they’ve never seen Cash take a day off work in his life.

That makes me smile as I go to the bedroom and find some shorts to slip on. I grab the pair of cowboy boots Cash bought me yesterday, too. He hasn’t been working the last few days, just doing things with me. He said it was a mini honeymoon until he found out what was happening around the farm with all the broken fences. Then he’d take me on a real one. Anywhere I liked. I kinda just want to stay here.

He’s taken me fishing and swimming in the lake on his land. He’s brought me shopping in the city and out to explore in one of his four-wheelers. I wanted to take one of the horses, but he said I couldn’t go out on them yet, not until I wasn’t sore anymore. He said the only thing I should want to ride is him.

It has all been so perfect. Every moment with him. I’ve never felt so happy and complete in my whole life. Like I really belong somewhere.

I grab the blanket off the end of the bed and head back to the kitchen where I see Cash holding a basket in his hand. He takes the blanket from me, then takes my hand.

“Clean up when you guys are done,” he throws over his shoulder as he pulls me from the house. People say their goodbyes to us as we exit. Once, Cash pulled me from the room and hoots and hollers rang out. Let’s just say that wouldn’t be happening again. I have to hold in a giggle when I remember his temper that night. He didn’t even like the idea of people thinking that I had sex, even if it was with him.

“Where we going?”

“The barn. I’ll show you,” he says.

When we get to the barn, he pulls me towards the back to a ladder that's partially hidden. I go up first with Cash right behind me.

At the top is a landing with a giant open window that looks out onto the field behind the house. I see the sun setting over the lake from here. It's beautiful.

"You can see the lake from up here." I turn to see Cash sitting on the blanket we'd brought, the food already pulled out from the basket as he just watches me.

"Yeah. I used to come up here as a kid all the time. I even made it a clubhouse for a few years. Thought it was the coolest thing ever. Like I had my own house."

I walk over and sit next to him. Cash pulls me between his legs, my back to his chest. He doesn't talk much about his past, neither of us really do. We both just drop little things here and there.

"It's easier," I say, picking up a piece of chicken and taking a bite.

"It really is."

I turn to look at him, caught off guard by how he got me so easily. He already knew what I was talking about. We'd both lost our families, but the loss isn't so paralyzing now that we have each other. Cash seems to be able to read me like no one else ever has.

"I loved my mama. She was all I had, but things could be hard." I feel Cash's mouth touch the top of my head as he squeezes me a little tighter. "You know I lived on a farm until I was about sixteen, but then we left the Blackwells to go back to the city. We left because Mama got sick. We needed to be closer to the doctors. I held onto her for a few years, then she was just gone, and I was all alone. We'd poured all our money into those doctors, and when she passed I barely had enough to put her in the ground."

I feel Cash's body go completely still, almost like he isn't even breathing. I turn to look at him, and for the first time I see

a look I've never seen on his face before. Panic. Or maybe it's guilt.

I turn all the way around and straddle him. His hands come to my face, cupping it. "I can't let you go. I knew a little about your past. I asked the agency. They told me you were broke and didn't really have much of a choice. I'd actually told Earl that day to send you back. Give you some money and tell you I'd changed my mind. I could have given you an out when you got here. Helped you get set up or something, offered you just a job here, but I was a selfish bastard. All I could think from the moment I laid eyes on you was that I had to get you down the aisle and tied to me. Then that wasn't enough. Now all I can think about is putting a baby in you. Then you really could never leave me. You'd be stuck here forever. Mine. I even stole your birth control pills that first night you passed out. You'd left them in the bathroom. Flushed them right down the toilet so there would be no finding them. Even as I tell you this, I know I'm not letting you leave here, even after my confession. I can't."

I study him for a second, then burst out laughing. I'd actually completely forgotten about my birth control pills. Probably because I wasn't used to taking them to begin with. I know I should probably be mad, but that's Cash and his brute caveman antics. It's one of the things I love most about him.

"Why are you laughing? I trapped you here." His hands drop from my face, and he runs a giant paw through his hair.

"No, that's not how you *trapped* me here." I giggle again, making him turn his scowl on me, the one that doesn't work on me like it does his farmhands. "The way you love me, the way you make me feel, those are the things that make me want to stay with you, Cash. That's how you kept me here, and you keep doing those things. I'll never leave."

I feel him relax, some of the tension leaving his body. "You're never leaving here. Period."

"Okay. I'm never leaving," I confirm. He takes my mouth in a deep kiss. There's no finesse or seduction to it. It's a kiss filled with pure emotion and relief. Like he'd been hanging

onto this one thing that might take me away from him, and now that tension has shattered.

He pulls away, both of us out of breath as he rests his forehead against mine.

“I’ve been so lonely, too. Hell, you saw that attic. It hurt coming home at night, so I put as much of my parents as I could away so it wouldn’t be so hard. It didn’t help much. I miss them, but I think I was longing for what they had together. I thought I’d never have it. It was like a double punch every time I walked into the house. I’d lost them and I’d also somehow lost the possibility of replicating their happiness for my own.”

He places another kiss on my lips. This one is soft, like he needs to finish what he’s saying.

“Now I can’t get back home fast enough. Hell, I remember the first day I went out knowing you were back at the big house. I was busting ass to get shit done so I could run back and just check on you. I was thinking you might change your mind and leave. I just wanted another look at you to see if you were real, or maybe I’d finally gone crazy and dreamed something up. I’ve spent the last few years trying to stay out of the house, and now I can’t seem to get myself to stay away from it. You did that. That’s why I can’t let you go. I need you, Clare. You brought me back to life. I can’t go back to just working myself to death. That’s what I was doing. Up at first light, working hard all day so when I got home all I could do was eat, then hit that bed and crash.”

I feel my eyes start to water, a lump growing in my throat.

“I love you, Cash. You make me feel like the most important person in the world.”

“You are.”

This time I kiss him. I can feel the tears run down my cheeks.

“Don’t cry. Want me to get you all riled up?” he teases, making me smile.

“How come you never tried to?” I sigh, not sure why I’m asking this because I don’t think I want to know, but another part of me does. “You know, like meet a girl or something. Not like you’re bad on the eyes. June couldn’t have been the only girl in this town.”

Cash’s cheeks show a hint of red. Is he blushing? No way my dirty-talking cowboy is blushing at my question.

“Cash,” I push, really wanting to know now.

“I already told you I wasn’t girl crazy. I was always on my horse or helping my pa. I’d gone to the city one time with some of the farmhands. They like to head to the bars a few times a month to let loose. Well, I let a little too loose my first time. Drank a little too much and felt it for three days. I never took them up on going out again.” He takes a deep breath. “Then I lost my parents and all my energy went into making sure I made this farm stay alive. Make them proud.”

“What are you saying, Cash?” He couldn’t be...

“I don’t think it bothered me because I never had it, so I clearly didn’t know what I was missing. No, Clare, I’ve never been with anyone but you.”

I launch myself at him, making him fall back.

“No more teasing. I’m not sore anymore, Cash. Gimme what’s mine now.”

He smiles. “Yes, ma’am.” Then he takes my mouth. We start pulling at each other’s clothes, then Cash suddenly stops. I start to protest, but his hand goes over my mouth. He makes a shushing motion with his other hand.

“Hurry up. I just saw them all head to the bunkhouse,” I hear June say, instantly recognizing her voice. I really get what Cash meant about it driving him crazy now.

I hear a splash, like liquid is being poured onto the ground.

“Should we let the horses out?” Cash’s face fills with rage at the sound of Billy’s voice.

“No. It might draw attention. Just light it already,” June replies, and that’s when I smell the gas.

“When I let you go, you’ll get down that ladder and you run,” Cash whispers to me. “Promise me. You’ll get down that ladder and run. You clear those doors and you get Earl.”

I nod and he kisses me briskly, then he drags us both to our feet. He jumps right over the side, not bothering with the ladder. I follow down as quickly as I can. I see him on top of Billy, June just standing there, looking on in shock. I just turn and run like Cash told me to.

When I clear the barn doors I start screaming. I see Earl and two other hands come flying out of his little cabin in a dead run towards me. I point to the barn and they run past me.

I don’t know what to do. Cash told me to get out of the barn. It takes everything in me to stay rooted to my spot, and thank God Cash comes out just a few minutes later. I jump on him and he catches me.

“Thank you, sweetheart. You don’t know how important it is when I tell you to do something out here and you do it. It means I don’t have to worry.”

I smile at him. “I hope you just mean on the farm because that won’t work so well anywhere else.”

“Wouldn’t want it any other way.”

The doors start to push open and Cash puts me on my feet as Billy and June are pulled out of the barn. Each is held by the arm. Billy looks like he can barely stand. Blood is gushing from his nose and one eye is already starting to swell shut.

I can’t stop the gasp that leaves my mouth.

“He tried to light our barn on fire, sweetheart. With you in it. He’s lucky he can breathe, let alone walk,” Cash says between clenched teeth, like the words taste like acid in his mouth.

I place one hand around his arm, trying to get him to calm down a little.

June just sobs. She jerks from Earl’s hold and he lets her go. She tumbles in a pile on the dirt.

I turn at the sound of a truck I don't recognize coming up the drive.

It comes to a stop about twenty feet from us, and a man who looks to be in his fifties pulls himself from the truck.

"Daddy. I didn't do anything!" June sobs from the ground.

The man just shakes his head like he's not real sure what to do with his sobbing daughter.

"You going to call the Sheriff?" he finally asks.

"That depends," Cash says, turning to fully face the man. His eyes come towards me as if just seeing me for the first time, and Cash steps in front of me, making me want to thump him on the head. I hear Earl chuckle behind me.

"Don't," Cash growls, and I know he's really on edge. I place my hands on his back and he leans into them a little.

"On what?" June's father asks.

"I want him gone," he says referring to Billy, "and you have got to do something with your daughter. They just tried to burn my fucking barn down with my wife inside."

"We didn't know you were in there!" June screams, admitting her own guilt.

Everyone just ignores her. Cash continues. "This leads me to believe that they also had a hand in the half dozen other incidents I've had happen all over my and my wife's land."

My heart melts a little at his sweet words. I don't even think he caught what he said or what it means to me.

"I guess I have no choice. He's gone, but my farm will go with him. I don't have a foreman, and God knows I can't do it myself anymore. My arthritis barely lets me get out of bed."

"Jim, that's not my problem, but if you want I'll let you have Brandon. I'm sure he'd jump at the chance to be a foreman for a farm, not to mention having him over there might cool this little war that has built between these two farms. I know I don't want you losing your land. I'd probably get saddled next to God knows who."

“Don’t do it, Daddy.” June has stopped crying and her anger is plain on her face.

“Get in the truck, June.”

“But, Daddy, I—”

“Get in the goddamn truck!”

June gasps and stomps towards the truck. She gets in and slams the door.

“Billy, you’re fired,” Jim says. His voice makes me feel a little sorry for Billy. “Thank you, Cash, for not calling the cops. I don’t know what’s gotten into June, but I’ll get it all worked out and you have my word she won’t be bothering you again.”

“I’ll talk to Brandon tonight and send him over first thing tomorrow morning to work out all the details.”

“Sounds good.”

“And, Jim, I really think you should think my offer over again. I’ll buy it all, even keep the men you got working over there, if you want out. Take you and your wife a little closer to the city. Retire.”

“I think I might take you up on that. I’ll let you know tomorrow.” I hear the truck door close and pull off.

Cash turns to look down at me, his eyes going soft.

“You can just buy all his land like that?” I ask. He’s showed me where their land meets his. They look to have as much as Cash does, and that’s a lot. I can’t even imagine what something like that might cost.

“Sweetheart, I got oil on my land. There isn’t much around here I can’t buy if we want it,” he tells me, brushing a curl out of my face and tucking it behind my ear.

“But will you have to work more if you get all that land? I don’t want you working more.” I pout a little, and Cash throws his head back and laughs. A full, deep laugh that comes from deep in his chest.

“I just told you you’re filthy rich and all you can think about is not having enough time with me?”

“*You’re* filthy rich,” I correct him, not caring even a little about his money. It isn’t worth anything without him.

“Pretty sure it’s ours. Don’t recall you signing a prenup.”

My mouth falls open. I didn’t even think of that. Well, I really didn’t have time to, what with how fast Cash rushed me in and out of that courthouse.

Then, I’m in his arms.

“Get Mr. Buckman off our land, Earl,” Cash barks as he strides towards the house with me over his shoulder.

“With pleasure, boss,” I hear Earl say.

When we get inside, Cash kicks the door shut, and I turn the lock without having to be asked.

“Sweetheart, you’re about to be sore all over again.”

Taking Clare to our bedroom, I smack her ass playfully on the way. She giggles with delight, and it makes my cock even harder. Hearing her happy is all I ever want in life. Well, that and babies.

It's been a couple of days, so she's had time to heal. Now I'm ready to relive our wedding night and try to top it. It was silly being shy about telling her I was a virgin, but she was, too, so I guess she should have known the feeling better than anyone. I'm glad that I waited until the right one came along. Because she damn sure is. She's the only one for me, and I want to spend the rest of our lives showing her all the reasons why.

When I toss her in the middle of the bed and climb on top of her, she continues to giggle. I pull her clothes from her body, and she starts to do the same to me, and in no time we're both naked and smiling like idiots.

"I love you," I say through a smile, and she reaches up and touches my face.

"I love you, too, Cash."

Sliding between her legs, I don't tease either of us as I press my cock to her opening. Our eyes stay locked, and we hold one another as I ease inside of her slowly. I give her all of me until there's not an inch left, the root of my cock pressing against her pussy.

Once I'm inside of her tightness, I just hold it there, wanting to feel her warmth surrounding me. I put my forehead to hers and feel her fingernails lightly scrape my back. Her

hips start to move under me, and I realize her need for me is growing.

As I rock in and out of her, her channel grips me and I groan at the feeling.

“So fucking tight. Perfect, baby.”

“Cash, more,” she moans, and I look down to see her closing her eyes and tilting her head back.

I place my mouth on her neck and move down her throat, giving her licks and bites. She clings to me as I make love to her body, giving her everything she wants. Her slick sweetness covers my cock, and the smooth glide is almost too much to handle. The tight grip of her pussy starts to contract, and I thank God she’s as close as I am.

“That’s it, Clare. Cum, baby. Cum all over my cock. Get it nice and wet.”

I feel pulses start, and I follow her over the edge. She shouts her pleasure into the room, and I hold her tightly to me as I empty my cum into her waiting womb. I hope we made a baby the first time I took her, but I’ll keep giving her as much of me as she can hold until it plants inside her. I want to breed her and have lots of little babies running around the farm. I want her tied to me in every way possible, and I want her round with my child.

Just thinking about her pregnant makes a little more cum leak out of my cock.

I try not to collapse on top of her when we both come down from the high, but a little of my weight comes down on her, and I hear her grunt under me. She giggles again, and I roll us over so she’s on top and I can stay buried inside of her while I hold her to me.

“You sore?” I ask as I trace the tips of my fingers up and down her naked spine. Her head is on my chest, and she’s breathing evenly. I wonder if she’s fallen asleep already.

“Definitely not.”

I smile at her words and at how sleepy they sound. I expect her to drift off, but after a few moments, she starts to move on top of me. Her pussy grinds down on my still-swollen cock, and I automatically thrust up into her, trying to give her what she needs.

Soon she's sitting up on me fully and riding me better than any rodeo I've ever seen. She loves being on top and in control, and I love holding her hips while she works her pussy. Clare is a goddess when she's lost to her passion, and I'm a slave to whatever desire she has. I hope to spend the rest of our lives doing exactly this until the end of time.

EPILOGUE

CASH

10 years later...

Grandpa Earl, read us another one.
Please!”

Our oldest boy, Joseph, bounces up and down on his spot on the floor, begging for another story. I walk over and wrap my arms around Clare, who’s in the kitchen covering up the cake she made today. There’s only a little bit left, and I have a feeling she’ll be sneaking that tonight after the kids go to bed.

“Alright. One more. And this time I mean it.”

Clare laughs and shakes her head. “Those kids are going to get at least five more stories out of him before he really gives up.”

“They’ve got him wrapped around his finger and they know it.” I kiss the place on her neck just below her ear and squeeze her body closer to mine.

She’s gotten more curves over the years, and I’ve loved seeing her blossom into a full-figured woman. She’s given me five babies, and with each one, she’s looked more beautiful than the last. She had some complications with our youngest, Lily, so we decided it was time to stop. We were blessed with three boys and two girls, so we’ve got a houseful.

I ended up buying the Johnson ranch, and Brandon still runs it. He turned it into a sheep farm, and it does almost as well as the cattle I’ve got here. I don’t have as big of a crew here anymore, what with that side of the business doing so well. I’ve still got about six guys on staff here, including Earl, who has become the grandpa to our little tribe.

The kids love him, and he's always felt like family, so it just felt natural when we started calling him Grandpa. The old guy likes it just as much according to the smile permanently plastered on his face.

"Come on the porch with me and sit awhile, Mrs. McCallister," I say against her skin.

Clare shivers under my touch and looks over to where the kids are. They're all sitting cross-legged on the floor, hanging on every word of the book. She nods and I take her hand, pulling her out the side door and onto the swing with me.

She hums a soft song as I hold her, kissing her forehead and watching the sun go down. We have a simple life here, but it's the most perfect one I could ever imagine. Clare makes everything easy, and our lives just flow. It's as if wave after wave of love keeps moving around us, and it's all her doing.

Clare is the glue that holds me together and the rhythm that makes this place run. She's the one the boys run to when they scrape their knees and the ones the girls follow around pretending to be just like her. Everything she touches falls in love with her, so I make sure to keep her touches just for me. Even after all these years, I'm still a jealous bastard when it comes to sharing her attention. Thankfully, she understands this and ignores me when I'm being unreasonable.

She's the other half of my soul and has given me a life I could only have dreamed of years before this. And as I hold her to me and our kids come out one by one to sit on our laps, I just smile and think about how damn lucky I am that she chose me.

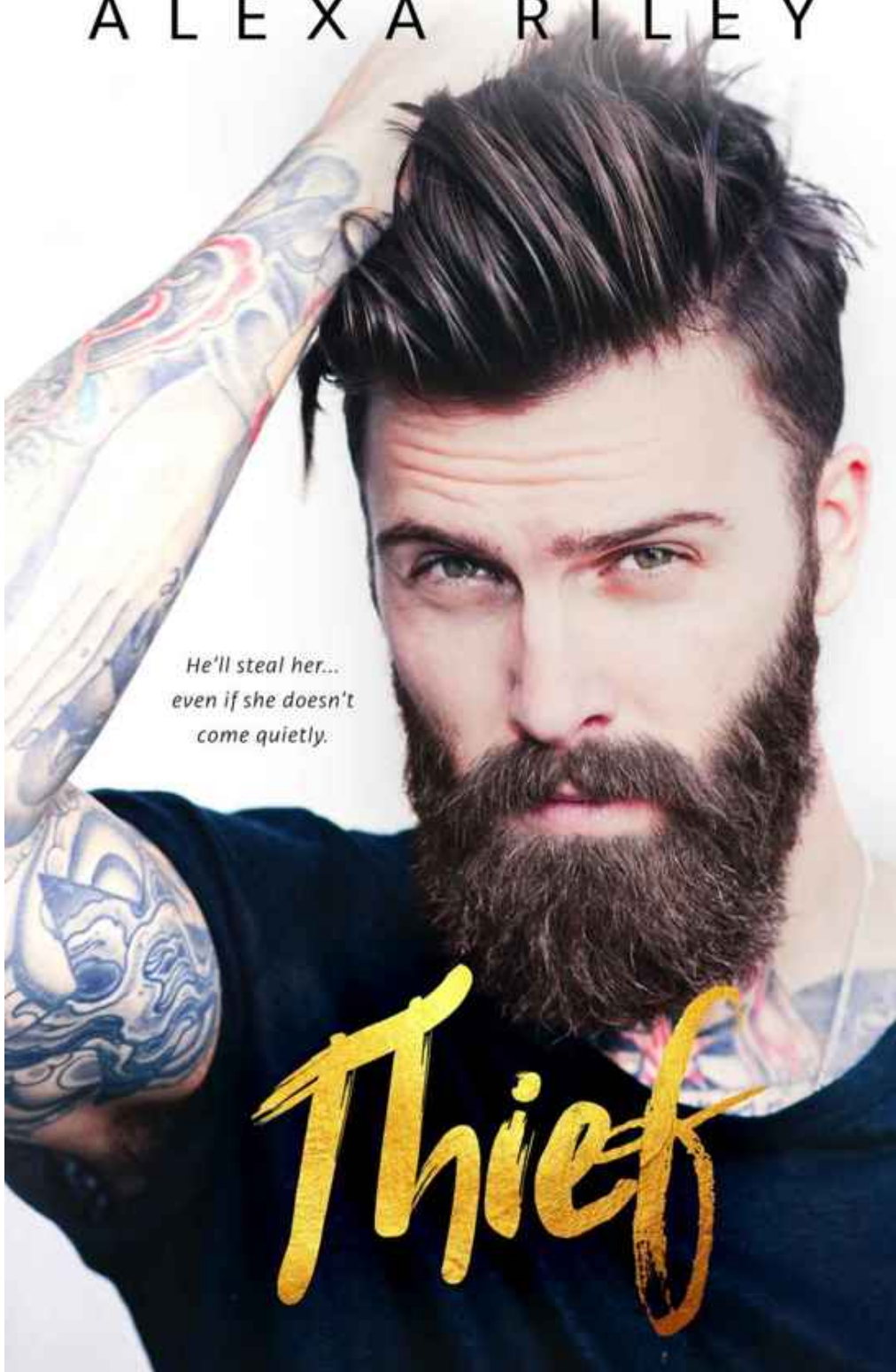
The End



ALEXA RILEY

*He'll steal her...
even if she doesn't
come quietly.*

Thief



Thief

The Breeding Series

by

Alexa Riley

Sean Sparrow has one more job to pull: break into the bank, steal what he was hired to take, and get out. He plans everything to the very last detail, sure of success... until he sees Tessa.

Tessa Martin lives a humdrum life. With a boring job and a crappy roommate, she's sure there must be more to life than this. She's not prepared for the muscle-bound bearded man who walks into her life, offering her everything she's ever wanted.

When Sean breaks down all of Tessa's walls, she has no choice but to fall hard and fast.

But when the truth comes out, and Sean is fully revealed to her, will their instalove be enough to hold them together?

Warning: This book hero is over- the-top obsessed, totally head over heels in love, and desperate to make babies with the heroine ASAP. If you want a fun read with SUPER hot steam, Kindle-melting love, and a beard to rub between thighs, then this book is for you

CHAPTER 1

SEAN



“Oh, fuck, just like that. Take it all the way to the back of your throat.”

The slurping noise from the woman on her knees a few feet from me makes me clench my jaw. The smell of cigars and sex coats the air, making me wish I didn’t have to breathe in the stench.

“Oh, right there. Swallow it all,” Nick mumbles as the slurping noise grows louder, and he grunts his release.

Fucking hell, this is why I like to work alone. Being in the back of a seedy strip club after hours is making my skin crawl.

One last job. I keep reminding myself why I’m here. I’m going to have to scrub my body with sandpaper when I leave this place. I’ll need a scalding hot shower and might even burn my clothes. God knows what’s happened in the very seat I’m sitting in.

“You want her next? Maybe she can pull that stick out of your ass.” Nick laughs at his own joke as the woman pulls herself to her feet. She stumbles as she gets up, almost falling over in her heels. Who knows what she’s on. From how rail thin she is and the glazed look in her sunken eyes, I’m guessing something heavy.

She steps towards me like my silence is an invitation, but I stop her in her tracks with a stare. I’d rather cut my fucking dick off than let her anywhere near it.

“Come on, man. Loosen the fuck up,” Nick says as he adjusts himself and grabs a beer from the table next to him.

“I’m leaving in five.” I clip my words, making them hard. This meeting was supposed to start twenty minutes ago, and I have shit to do. Okay, maybe not shit to do, but I have somewhere else I want to be.

Stuck in the back of a strip club, waiting for the boss to show up, is not my idea of a good time. I took this job for one reason: a diversion. I need these guys, and I’m on a time crunch. Time that is ticking away and being wasted at this very moment. I normally like to work alone, but this job is paying me enough that I can finally retire. I’ll be set for life if everything goes according to plan. *If* being the operative word.

These guys think we’re just robbing a bank, which we are, but I’m after something else. A bank job isn’t enough to have me hanging up my gun, but my real reason for breaking into the bank will give me the good life. There’s a very important deposit box inside that vault, and that’s my moneymaker. That box is the real reason I’ve hooked up with these clowns, and they’re the only way I can get into it with the time I’ve got left.

No one needs to know I was ever in there, which is why I need a robbery to go down. I need chaos to help create a diversion while I get what I’m really after.

“You’ll stay until Heavy gets here,” Nick says, like he can make me stay.

“You forget who asked who to do this job.” I start to rise from my chair, like I don’t give a shit about the job one way or another. They asked me for my help, but only because I’d planted seeds for them to do so. I don’t want them to know how much this job means to me. It’s better if they think I don’t give a shit.

Just then, Heavy walks in.

“Out!” he snaps, and the girls who have been roaming around scurry from the room.

Lazily, I drop back down into my chair and wait. Heavy pours himself a drink before making his way over to where

Nick and I are sitting, a few more of his crew coming in behind him and joining us.

Heavy is anything but heavy. He's barely five foot, balding, and wears the most God-awful suits I've ever seen. The only reason he's got himself this little makeshift gang is because it used to be his father's until he passed a few years back.

What was once a decent crew turned into a bunch of lazy fucks who clearly aren't making ends meet. Seeing as they all latched on to the stupid idea of robbing a Federal bank, these idiots are dumber than I thought.

Or maybe Heavy's as crazy as I've heard he is, and he just doesn't care. Crazy is dangerous and makes for sloppy work. Crazy is hard to understand and not easy to predict. I feel like I've bitten off more than I can chew with this crew, and I'm starting to have second thoughts. My doubts are bubbling to the surface, and I think maybe it's time to call this whole operation off.

Right until Heavy drops a stack of pictures and papers on to the table, making my heart jump into my throat.

I sit perfectly still, trying to appear completely unfazed by what I see. The real reason I want to call off the job. I don't make a single move to indicate I know who the woman is. Her pictures are scattered across the table for all these men to leer at, and I'm cool and calm on the outside. On the inside, though, I'm losing my shit.

I've always been known for my control, and for the first time in my life, I feel a crack split in my facade. The mask I so carefully wear starts to slip, and I have to rein myself in.

"Tessa Morgan." Heavy says her name like he bought himself a winning lottery ticket. I should have seen this coming, and maybe I did but I ignored it. I don't even like her name on his lips. She's too sweet and pure for a man like Heavy to even say her name.

When I knew what bank was my target weeks ago, I started digging up every piece of information I could get my

hands on. Tessa stood out to me right away but probably not for the same reasons she stood out to Heavy.

I hate her name on his lips; it makes my stomach clench. I've been watching her for weeks already, and I told myself it's because she's a part of the job. That's a lie, because I haven't watched anyone else at the bank. Just her. I want to watch her now.

Each day my little obsession for her seems to grow. Now I'm so deep there's no turning back. I have to have her, and I will, by any means necessary.

She's the reason I keep picking up my phone every ten minutes. I've been checking her location. Checking on her.

"What about her?" I manage to ask the question with as much indifference I can muster, but my blood feels like it's ice, moving through my veins as everyone in the room stares down at the pictures of her. She looks like a fucking angel. My angel. That's what I thought the first time I'd laid eyes on her, and I still think it every time I see her.

Her reddish-brown hair falls in waves around her face down to the middle of her back. She has honey-colored eyes like I've never seen before. I didn't even know eyes could look like liquid gold. When I first saw her, I was sure they were contacts. After I planted the camera in her apartment, I learned it was her true color. Those gorgeous eyes hypnotize me.

She's curvy, almost plump, and her short stature makes her seem compact. It's like I could carry her soft little body around with me, and she'd mold against me perfectly. But what drives me wild about her are the little freckles that pepper her cheeks and her little button nose. It makes her look sexy and innocent, all rolled into this fucking package I can't get off my mind.

It started with how she looked, but as the days went on, the more I watched her, it became so much more. She truly was a sweet little angel. Not a mean bone in her body. Always has a smile for everyone, but a lot of the time the smile doesn't reach her eyes. I want to make that smile reach her eyes. Have it directed at me.

Now all these fucks are standing around, staring at her, and I'm trying not to lose my shit.

I know what Heavy's going to suggest, because I'd thought it myself.

"We're going to use her to glean information on the bank and get our hands on her access keys. She looks easy enough to seduce."

"I'm not into chubby chasing," Nick says, picking up one of the pictures of my angel. I feel my fingers twitch, wanting to grab the blade at my side and slam it through his hand.

"You'll do what you're told," Heavy reminds him, but no way could Nick seduce her. He isn't charming enough. She'd run from his sleazy advances the first time he tried to come on to her. He's used to paying women to fuck him.

Heavy's eyes are on me, but I don't want to seem eager. If I try to jump in, the situation could blow up in my face and ruin everything.

"Sparrow should do it. The ladies always seem to be after him." I have no clue what Heavy means by that. Maybe it's because the whores in his club are always trying to latch on to me, but that's probably because I don't look like I'd beat the shit out of them. Like his whole fucking crew does.

"I'm here to make sure the cops don't show up. I'm cutting the lines and hacking the systems. Those are my skills sets," I remind him, as if I want no business seducing the girl. I'll be the one to do it if it's something he's going to push. "We don't need her. I got you the floor plans, schedules, and I can take their system down easy. We don't need to drag a woman into this, one who can end up identifying us when it's all finished."

"Trust me, she won't be identifying anyone when we're done with her." Heavy's intent is clear. But that's something I would never allow to happen. "I just want to make sure everyone is on the same page. Let's not forget she has keys, too. Access to the main vault."

"And what if shit goes wrong? She could ID me if she slips through our fingers," I try again, going at him from

another angle.

“Why do you care? I hear this is your last job anyways.”

I regret giving him that piece of information, but I had to give him something. I was known for working alone, doing random jobs for crews. Normally, when I did pick up a job with another crew, I still did those jobs alone. Got them what they needed, then stepped out. I had to have a reason why this time I was willing to go in with a whole group, and I used this being my final score as that reason. I told Heavy I wanted to walk away with a lot of money so I could be done. But I have a feeling with all this talk about the girl not walking away and wanting me to get close to her that Heavy doesn't plan on me walking away either.

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