

*Big Burly*

**FOREMAN**

CASSI HART

# Big Burly Foreman

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A Big Burly Romance

*Cassi Hart*

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*Cassi H   nt*

Contents:

[Free Book for You](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Up Next...](#)

[Other Books by Cassi](#)

[Free Book](#)

[About the Author](#)

# *Chapter One*

*Ashley*

I've always hated summer.

Nothing is worse than the feeling of sweat dripping down your back or the hot, suffocating air that robs you of your breath and will to live. There's just something about the high humidity that leaves you feeling like you are swimming through the air.

Summer means dehydration, heat exhaustion, and my personal favorite, sunburn.

So, why am I braving the oppressive summer sun to sit on my balcony? It's definitely not to watch the shirtless man seated atop a black stallion wrangling cattle, his tanned skin dripping with sweat and his thick muscles shimmering under the sun.

No, it's definitely not that.

"What are you looking at?"

I jump back and quickly turn around, my eyes colliding with Magda's. She's been my family's housekeeper for the last seven years, and she and I have grown close despite the two-decade age gap between us.

"Nothing," I mutter, wiping my sweaty hands over my yellow sundress before fanning my heated cheeks. My heart picks up pace when her eyes narrow on my flushed face before looking past me and to the field where the men work. The air is heavy with humidity, and a majority of the working men have taken their shirts off, but I barely notice them. I haven't spared a glance for the other men. It's the one on the black horse that has kept my attention for the last hour.

“Nothing, you say?” Magda hums, turning to face me, and there is no missing the humored glint in her eyes.

“Yeah, I heard that we added a few . . . uhm, cattle, and I wanted to check them out.”

“Since when are you interested in cattle?”

“I’ve always been interested in cattle,” I hurry to say. “You know, I like their, uhm . . . horns.”

“Horns? You are interested in their horns?”

“What’s wrong with horns? They’re majestic, and I wanted to see them.”

“Sure, I bet it’s the cattle and their ‘majestic horns’ that have you blushing like that!” She snorts.

“It is,” I declare, trying to figure out how to wrangle myself out of this conversation. “What are you doing out here anyway?”

“Right,” she says with a nod. “Your parents are hosting the Berkleys for dinner tonight.”

“And they sent you to tell me to find something else to do for the evening, huh?” I ask, figuring they’re hosting their new friends for something business related. Although, I am expected to be social and put up a front of enjoying it, I am rarely needed at casual business dinners.

“On the contrary, they would like you to attend this one.”

My brows draw in confusion. “But why?”

“Ash, you are the heiress to the family’s wealth. Soon, you’ll be running all the family businesses, and it’s about time you see how things work and embrace it.”

“I’ve been attending business meetings since I was a little girl, Magda. I already know how things are run, but Dad agreed he would let me finish college first before he pushed me back into that world. We made a deal.”

“I know,” she says compassionately, rubbing her hand on my back. “But they want you to attend this one. They said it’s important for the family. I think your father is anxious to impress the Berkleys.”

I nod at her words even as my gaze strays back to the shirtless cowboy



flexing his muscles as he swings a lasso to catch a steer with his horse in a full gallop.

Logan Smith.

He looks unreal, long dark hair swaying with the wind, one hand firmly clutching the reins as he wrangles a rope with the other, and I find myself imagining those hands on me.

Hell, I've imagined them on my body for two years now.

I remember the first time I saw him, or more like ran into him. I hadn't been looking where I was going, too busy texting my best friend, Luna, when I'd suddenly run smack into a wall of solid muscles. There is no forgetting the strong arms that grabbed me before I could fall or the rock-solid chest I'd been pressed against.

"Careful, princess," he'd said in his deep, growly voice, his ocean blue eyes swimming with mirth, and I'd been robbed of my ability to breathe.

That had been his first day at work, and the foreman had been showing Logan around the ranch when I ran into him. Over the course of two years, we've seen each other plenty of times, and I always smile sweetly at him, pretending I hadn't spent the previous night touching myself and imagining it were his calloused hands running over my body instead.

It's been years of not-so-discreetly watching him, finding excuses to be in the barn on the off-chance I'll get to talk to him, dreaming, imagining, and yet, I know it will never go beyond that.

Of course, Logan has never been rude to me. I'm the boss's daughter, after all. He's always patient and kind whenever I pepper him with questions about the most random things, just to hear his voice. Maybe it would be easier to stay away if he stopped calling me *princess* every time I see him. Maybe if he stopped looking at me the way he does . . .

I shake my head to rid myself of those thoughts. It's useless to imagine myself with Logan, as it will never happen in a million years.

I am the heiress to massive wealth, my fate is written in stone, and the second I finish college, my father will parade his friends' sons before me and demand I pick one to be my husband. At least I'll have a choice, even if it's from a list of men I have no interest in, but that's better than nothing.

“The Berkleys will be arriving in a few hours. Do you need my help in picking something to wear?” Magda says, cutting into my thoughts.

I start to say something, but my mouth runs dry when Logan turns in our direction, and for the first time since stepping onto my bedroom balcony to ogle the man I will never have, I forget how to breathe. Nerves churn in my stomach, and even from a distance, his gaze sends a flurry of heat between my thighs.

From this distance, I can’t see the color of his eyes, but I have them memorized in my mind. Blue, ocean blue, so deep, they threaten to pull you under. His hair is plastered to his face, and I suck in a sharp breath when he sweeps it off his forehead.

His stare lasts less than a minute, but it feels like an hour, and it sends a delicious shiver through my body and goosebumps rising on my arms despite the oppressive heat. His gaze is not a gentle and soft caress over my body.

No, instead, it’s a storm. It’s hotter than the heat threatening to drown me, but it leaves me wanting for more. More of my cowboy’s stares, more of his attention . . .

*I want more!*

Can he feel it?

Can he feel my desire from this far away?

There is more than just this distance between us though.

I am the daughter of a man in the top 10 percent of the wealthiest people in the States. My surname carries more weight than any weapon, and the expectations are just as heavy.

I know it’s useless to want more from a man prohibited from coming close to me, and I can’t help but wonder if that is the reason I actually want it.

*Want him.*

I startle out of my delusions when Magda pats my back again. There is something akin to curiosity in her eyes when I meet her gaze, and for a moment, I am afraid that I let my desire for the cowboy show.

“Dress,” I blurt out. “I was thinking of wearing the green dress I bought the other day. You said it matches my eyes, right? I haven’t found an

occasion for it, but maybe tonight will be it.”

“Uh-huh,” she mutters, following me back into the house. It is not her responsibility to look after me the way she does, but Magda and I have a close bond and she treats me like a daughter.

She follows me to my bedroom where I rummage through my closet for the green dress, but really, I just need something to do with my shaky fingers.

I want that which I cannot have, and how fucking frustrating is that?

*It's scary, too.*

Even scarier is the look I've seen in Logan's eyes every time I look into them. I can't quite put my finger on it, but something about Logan has my mind screaming at me to stay away while my body whispers to move closer. Something tells me that whatever it is, that look means trouble. But I can't help wondering if trouble is just what I need.

“Ash!”

“Huh?” I turn around to face Magda, and by the frown on her face, I can tell it's not the first time she's called out to me. “Sorry, did you say something? I was thinking about tonight.”

“Right,” she says, sounding skeptical, but I don't say anything. “I forgot to mention something else about this dinner. The Berkleys' son will be there as well.”

“Why?” I whisper, worrying my bottom lip with my teeth. My thoughts of Logan are a whole other issue and enough to get my blood pumping hard, but this dinner has me worried.

My parents are notorious for hosting dinner parties with their wealthy friends, but they rarely include their friends' children, not since my father promised I could graduate from college before marrying. The fact that they have invited the Berkleys' son and chosen to wait until the last minute to inform me is worrying, and Magda's next words only confirm my fears.

“They asked me not to tell you why, but to make sure you attend.”

## *Chapter Two*

*Logan*

I've only had my breath robbed twice in all of my thirty-five years.

The first time was three years ago while on active duty in the military. My squad and I were set to be deployed to the Middle East for the next six months, when, in a cruel twist of fate, a fire broke out on our base the night before we were to leave. I could have come out unharmed, but I ran back into the blazing fire to help the others still inside.

I managed to save several people who'd been trapped, but a ceiling beam broke apart and dropped on top of me just as I was making my way out. The beam not only broke my legs, but it cut my military life short. I was lucky to escape with only minor burns thanks to a group of bystanders who pulled the beam off my legs. Still, the damage was done, and I spent the next six months in the hospital and another six after that in rehab. When I got the all clear to return to work, it was with the knowledge that I could never be a soldier again. I had to start a new life.

The second time I lost my breath was not half as dramatic as the first, but equally impactful. I'd just gotten the news that I'd been offered a job as a ranch hand and was looking around the ranch, when a little slip of a thing bumped into me. She was as light as a feather when I grabbed her to stop her from plummeting to the ground, but when my eyes met hers, green like the deepest forest, I'd been sucked in. I accepted the job offer that same day.

Nothing has been the same since then, and despite being surrounded by every luxury money can buy, Ashley Blackwell stands out among all the glitter and shine.

Whenever she is near, I can't take my eyes off her, but I am not the

only one watching her. Every other man present tracks her movements, admiring her angelic beauty.

Tonight, her parents are hosting some fancy dinner party. Normally, I wouldn't be in the main house, but their chef needed help with some heavy lifting, and I volunteered, hoping to catch a glimpse of Ashley. I can just see her through the open door to the dining room. She's wearing a gorgeous green cocktail dress that not only highlights her perfect curves but also emphasizes her innocent forest-green eyes. Her lips are curved in a pretty smile as she talks to the woman seated next to her, but I've known her long enough to know it's not her true smile.

No, my favorite is the shy one she gifts me every time I call her princess. I love the delicate, rosy hue that covers her cheeks and neck every time I am close. I love watching her reactions to my not-so-accidental touches, the way her eyes heat at the sight of my shirtless chest, and how her entire body seems to vibrate when we're close.

Like a ray of sunshine, she attracts everyone's attention wherever she goes, but it's not just her immense beauty. Despite being the heiress of a massive fortune, Ashley is precious inside and out. She is loved and adored by everyone who works at the ranch.

I know it's wrong and likely near impossible, but I have plans for Ashley and me. Soon, they'll all know she's mine.

*And she will too!*

To hell with the difference in our social status and the plan her parents have for her.

As I stare at Ashley, movement on her other side catches my attention, and I notice the man sitting next to her for the first time. He leans in close to talk to her, placing his hand over hers, and I have to grip the counter behind me to stop myself from bursting into the room and ripping him away from her. I hate the smile she gives him as she turns in his direction. However reserved it may be, I still hate it!

It's only when she pulls her hand away from his and settles it into her lap that I can release my hold on the counter.

"Pathetic, isn't it?" someone says from my side, and I don't need to turn to know it's Eric, the foreman.

“What’s pathetic?” I ask, my eyes still on Ashley.

“The man her parents chose for her. I know they haven’t said it yet, but the kid, Joseph Berkley, is the one they want her to marry. I heard her parents discussing it when I dropped off the expense reports to the office earlier.”

My fists clench, but I don’t say a thing, which Eric takes for a sign to carry on.

“I bet the boy doesn’t even know how to saddle a horse. I heard his family deals with tech. I can’t see the poor girl being with someone like him, but then again, they’re both rich.”

Eric flashes me a look of pity that I chose to ignore, but when he offers me a beer, I give him a quizzical look. We aren’t allowed to take anything from the kitchen. Hell, we shouldn’t even still be here now that dinner has started.

Catching my look, Eric smiles mischievously. “We’re off the clock. The least they can do after asking for our help is let us have a beer.”

I return his smile and accept the bottle, lifting it to my mouth and taking a long pull of the bitter liquid, hoping it cools my temper before I do something drastic. I can hardly focus on anything but the fact that Ashley is still talking to the kid, Joseph Berkley.

Calling him a kid is a stretch as he appears to be in his mid or late twenties, but he’s an ill fit for my woman.

And Ashley is mine. She doesn’t know it yet, but I intend to make it known to everyone soon.

The kid lifts a hand and brushes Ashley’s hair over her shoulder. My vision tinges red at the sight, and I start for them when a hand grabs my arm and stops me.

“Stop it, Smith. If you walk in there, you’ll kill the kid. Then you’ll get fired, and where will that leave me?”

I push down the irritation clogging my throat and raise a brow at Eric. “What do you mean?”

“You think I haven’t noticed?” he says with a chuckle, pushing me back to my spot against the counter. “You’ve had your eye on her from the second you started working here. Every time she comes out to the barn, she’s

glued to your side, and you practically snarl at anyone who comes close to her. Hell, you're not the only one who watches her, but you're for damn sure the most territorial."

I narrow my eyes at him even as a deep growl begins to form in my throat, forcing him to raise his hands in surrender, almost spilling his own beer.

"Calm down, tiger," he says with an awkward laugh. "Ashley is a beautiful woman, but no one would dare touch her, and not just because we think her father would shoot us where we stood, but something tells me you would get to us before Mr. Blackwell managed to pick up his rifle."

I nod, glad to know that we are all on the same page before turning to look at Ashley, only to find her gone, and even worse, so is the kid.

I shove my half-empty beer at Eric, and I am out the door before he can stop me. He is right about me doing everything possible to protect Ashley. I don't give a fuck if her father invented the solar system or owns half the universe, no one is going to take her from me. Not unless I'm dead.

I ignore the curious look I get from the chef as I walk past and out the door, looking around to see if I can spot Ashley, my heart hammering at the thought of Joseph laying his filthy hands on what's mine.

I've waited for two years to make Ashley mine, and I'll be damned if someone gets in the way of that. I've been biding my time until she graduates, knowing how important earning her college degree is to her. I'm not about to let some kid cut in when I'm so close to having her.

I spot a ranch hand smoking outside near one of the barns and step in front of him. "Ashley. Did you see her come out?"

"Yeah, she went that way," he says, pointing toward the barn door.

I clench my jaw, fury boiling inside of me as I start for the barn, my steps long and measured, thinking of what I am going to do when I finally find them. I've waited long enough, it's about time Ashley knew to whom she belongs.

I storm into the barn, kicking the door open and making enough noise to make my presence known, but when I walk in, it's to find Ashley alone, leaning against a stack of hay.

She looks startled when I walk in, but her features relax when she sees it's me.

“Logan?”

“Where is he?” I ask, running my eyes over the place, trying to find the kid—Joseph.

Her face falls at my question. “Who are you looking for?”

“The kid.”

“There are no children here,” she says, sounding disappointed.

“I mean the kid that touched you earlier. At dinner.”

Her brows shoot up in surprise, then draw together in confusion. “You mean Joseph? He's not here. Why would you be looking for him?”

*To hurt him*, I think, but I don't say it. I don't need to when it's probably written all over my face.

“You're alone?” I ask instead.

“Yeah, uhm, Joseph left for the bathroom, so I slipped out to catch a breather and hide from my parents. Did you really think I would bring him out here?”

The question is whispered, and she sounds hurt that I would think this of her, which pushes me to close the distance between us. A blush rises up her neck with every foot of distance I cover until I am standing in front of her.

“I saw him touch you,” I grit between clenched teeth, the memory of it leaving a sour taste in my mouth.

“You're . . .” Her voice trails off as her eyes widen at the realization. “Jealous?”

“Damn right, I am!” I growl, pushing her hair behind her ear and drinking in her reaction to my touch. “No one gets to touch you but me.”

“Logan . . .” she protests, her eyes shooting to the half-open barn door, but I don't care about someone walking in on us. My cock has been half-hard since the moment I saw her, but this close to her, I can smell her sweet, flowery scent, and it's driving me insane.

It's reckless to do this in the open, but nothing else matters more than



making sure Ashley learns what she means to me.

“Look at me, princess.”

“I can’t,” she whispers, her voice shaky, but despite her protests, I can read her need in the way she leans into my body. In the way her nails dig into my arm as she clutches me, seemingly unaware she’s even doing it.

“Why not?”

“We just can’t, okay?” she whispers. “This dinner party was meant to introduce Joseph to me. Our families are . . .”

“Do you want him?”

“Of course not, but . . .”

“Then that settles it. You won’t end up with someone you don’t want as long as I am here.”

There is hope in her eyes, but she’s also skeptical of my words.

How can a simple farm hand like myself go up against a powerful family like hers and the Berkleys?

I don’t blame her for doubting my words when she doesn’t really know me as anything beyond the man who works for her parents, but I need her to understand.

I will do everything it takes to make her mine!

If it gets me Ashley, I will stop at nothing until it happens.

## Chapter Three

*Ashley*

Oh, God!

*What am I doing?*

For two years, I have craved, longed for this man, but I dared not get my hopes up. Even now, all I can do is imagine myself leaning closer and taking in his strong earthy, masculine scent. The thought of his hands running over my taugt nipples is enough to drive me to madness, but I cannot touch him.

I just can't.

I can't entertain the idea when I know the result will be heartbreak. I want to believe him when he says he'll take care of it . . . of me. I want to trust that he would face two of the wealthiest families in all of Texas for me, but how is that even possible?

I mean, there is no doubt of his physical strength. His bulging, heavily tattooed arms are strong enough to take on at least a few men at once, and his large, veiny hands . . .

*Snap out of it, Ashley!*

It's a battle between what I want and what I know can happen. And Logan and I . . . No matter how much I want it, we can't happen.

We're too different!

Shit, tonight is not going how I expected it would.

Between meeting Joseph and being alone with Logan, it's too much for my system.

The second I met Joseph, the reason for the dinner party made sense. This was no business dinner.

My father wanted to introduce the Berkley family to a home that would soon belong to them as well, show them the woman who would marry their son.

No one said anything, but the intentions behind dinner were as clear as day, and yet, I couldn't focus on anything, what with the six-foot cowboy I caught a glimpse of in the kitchen, his massive arms folded over his chest, watching me with an expression that bordered on fury.

His look had only darkened when Joseph caught my attention to feed me stories about his backpacking adventures. I'm sure the places he described are as beautiful as he said, but I could hardly pay attention to him when the source of my fascination was watching me with such undiluted need.

Part of me was half afraid that Logan would stalk into the room and punch Joseph in front of everyone, probably getting himself arrested for assault, or worse. The second Joseph excused himself for the bathroom, I hightailed it out of the party when no one was watching.

Hoping Logan would follow me.

*Hoping he wouldn't.*

"Someone could walk in," I offer weakly, my eyes shifting from his arms to the half-open door.

"You don't have to worry about that, princess," he rasps, his voice so deep, it sends a tremor through my body.

"Why do you call me that?" I ask unevenly, avoiding his gaze.

"Because it's what you are."

"I'm not," I say. I don't hate the name, but I don't particularly like it either. My friends used to call me princess when I was younger, and I hated the jealous undertone it carried. It almost felt like they were mocking me when they said it.

"You live in a castle . . ."

"It's a mansion!"

“You have a fairy godmother that follows you everywhere.”

“What!” I splutter, turning to glare at him. “Magda is the housekeeper, and she doesn’t follow me everywhere.”

“You have a pet animal that you talk to . . .”

“It’s a goldfish, and I don’t talk to him,” I argue, only to bite my lip when he raises a single eyebrow. “Okay, maybe I talk to him, but that’s just because I read somewhere that they remember faces and voices, and I don’t want my goldfish to forget me. I never should have told you that.”

There is humor dancing in his eyes, and I realize too late that his intention all along was to get me to look at him. He must’ve realized how my resolve to push him away would weaken if our eyes met.

And it does.

I give up trying to hide my desire for him. My hard nipples are poking against the soft material of the cocktail dress, and not exactly being subtle about it either.

My eyes drop to his chiseled mouth, and I swallow hard with the need to lean in and let him have my first kiss, but I push back the need, still clinging to the little control I have left. My legs are trembling at the continuous tug between my thighs, and I hold back a wince at the slickness that forms. It’s unlike anything I have experienced before.

Everything I’ve learned about intimacy is from a textbook, and it was made so technical, it didn’t sound appealing. Any sexual experience I’ve had involved me experimenting on my own body with the image of a certain cowboy at the back of my mind. Even so, it never felt anything like this.

No one taught me about the achy intensity the slickness between my thighs would cause, or the warm shiver that would race through my body just from our eyes colliding. I was not prepared for the tingling feeling that spread across my body at the slightest touch.

It would be easier if I was only physically attracted to Logan and it didn’t go beyond that, but the warmth that spreads across my chest and the heavy hammering of my heart proves that is not the case.

“Princess,” he says gruffly, snaking an arm around my waist and pulling me flush against him. The feeling between my thighs increases

tenfold; it's fascinating how quickly that happened, but it's terrifying too. "We've waited long enough, don't you think?"

*Way too long.*

He has no idea how often I lie in bed thinking about him, fantasizing about his body, willing it into reality, but knowing I wouldn't be able to do anything when presented with the opportunity, and now that he's here . . .

"Logan, we shouldn't," I protest weakly, my breathing growing labored when he drops his lips to my neck, blowing hot breath against my sensitive skin.

"You're trembling, princess," he rasps against my ear, and I shake my head even as I tilt it back to allow him more access to my neck. "Tell me, are you wet? Aching?"

My eyes flutter to a close when he slides his fingers into my hair and tugs gently, sending a warm rush of liquid heat to my pulsing sex, my will to resist him slipping by the second.

How could I ever think that I would be able to fight the feelings this man brings out in me?

"Logan," I whimper when he gently bites my earlobe before kissing a path down my chin, his kisses soft and teasing, but the heat they leave behind threatens to overwhelm me. His lips graze mine, and I lean into the kiss, but he pulls back, forcing a low, needy whine from my lips.

"Still think it's a bad idea?"

*Yes.*

There is only one way this is going to end, but I can't bring myself to think about that right now. Not when my sex is trembling with need. The hard press of his erection proves that he's just as needy for me as I am for him.

He wants me just as badly.

"Kiss me," I whisper, meeting his hungry blue eyes. "Please."

"You have to know that I won't stop at just that, princess," he growls. "Fuck, I just want to lay you flat in this hay and fuck your little pussy until you're making enough noise for everyone in the house to hear. I want to see these titties jiggle with every pounding!"

My sex clenches madly in my panties at his words. “Oh, God!”

“You have no idea how many times I’ve thought about it,” he says breathily, shoving his hand up the hem of my dress and tugging at my thong. I gasp when he jerks the sodden material from my sex, heat rising up my neck at the thought of him seeing how wet he’s made me, though he has barely even touched me. “Every time you came looking for me out here, I thought about pressing you up against the wall and fucking you in plain view, so everyone would know you’re mine.”

My knees buck when he runs a finger over my sex, his lips hovering over mine, his harsh breathing mixing with mine as his hungry eyes run over my face.

I wrap an arm over his shoulder to support my weight as he rubs his middle finger over my folds, touching me where no man ever has.

I want to feel his lips on mine, and he must hear the plea because he leans in, and our lips crash together in a flurry of need. His kiss is wet and demanding. There is nothing soft or teasing about it. It’s desperate and downright feral, and my lips part in a gasp when his finger strokes my sex faster, drawing me closer and closer to . . .

“Ashley?”

I ignore the distant sound as I lean deeper into the kiss, surrendering my body to the man who has owned it from the start.

“Ashley, are you here?”

I pull back from the kiss, my eyes growing panicked as my gaze shoots to the door. It’s still half-open, but the sound of someone approaching assures me we’ve not been caught yet, but soon . . .

“Logan!”

I pat Logan’s massive shoulder, but he seems to be lost in lust as he trails wet kisses over my jaw and down my neck, and I moan, almost forgetting our impending doom, but snap back to the present when someone calls out to me again.

“Logan, someone is coming,” I whisper shakily, burying my fingers in his dark hair and tugging his head from my neck.

His lust-filled eyes meet mine in confusion, and his eyes shoot to the

entrance when someone calls my name again.

“It’s that kid. I’ll kill him,” he rasps, his eyes growing darker.

“What? No!” I say, panicked. From anyone else, I would take this as a joke, but this is Logan, every bit of his tense body indicates that he is upset by the interruption, and so am I, but he is on an entirely different level. “I’ll just follow him back to the house and . . .”

“No!” he growls. “Get rid of him, or I will.”

My eyes widen at the dangerous glint in Logan’s stare. I am not scared of him, but more scared for Joseph, so I look around the dimly lit barn and try to figure out the best way to hide from Joseph.

If only to protect him from the beast waiting to pounce.

## Chapter Four

*Logan*

I like to think of myself as a pretty patient guy. Hell, I waited two years to claim my woman, and I'll be damned if anyone gets in the way of that.

Ashley grabs my hand and draws me deeper into the stack of hay and away from plain view. We're not well hidden, and if someone chooses to look around, it wouldn't take them any effort to find us. My cock is pounding with the need to be inside her pussy, the flowery scent of her hair sending an ache to my balls.

*Fuck, I want her.*

I want to rip her dress, unzip my pants, thrust my fat cock into her tight pussy, and claim her virginity like some caveman. I have felt the wetness of her sex, how tight she is, and I know I won't last two seconds inside of her.

The sound of the door being pushed open makes its way to our spot, followed by the kid's voice. "Ashley, are you in here?"

She tenses up against me, and I hate the fear I sense in the air around us. Her chest rises, her tits quivering from the motion, and the fingers pressed to my chest start to tremble in fear.

"Did you find her?" another voice I don't recognize asks, and Ashley's body goes into full panic mode.

"No," the kid answers, his voice sounding way too close for comfort.

"I was sure I saw her head this way. She must've left."

"You think?"

"I mean, she's not here, so obviously."



“Fuck, I need a smoke,” the kid says, his voice laced with frustration.

“Hey, you can’t smoke in here. Can’t you see the hay? It would take one stray spark to light the place on fire.”

There is a huff and a frustrated groan before their footsteps move further away from our spot, but they don’t leave entirely. I can still hear them outside the door, and from the conversation, I can tell they’re not in a hurry to leave.

I shift my focus back to Ashley and run a finger down her cheek, and although I can’t see her properly in the dim light, I can imagine her cheeks are flushed.

“I’m going to help you relax,” I whisper into her ear. “Promise you won’t make any noise to alert them, okay?”

She gasps, closing her fingers tightly on my shirt. “What are you doing?”

“Taking care of you,” I rasp, tugging at the straps of her dress, cupping her mouth just in time to stifle a moan when my fingers tug at her pert nipples. Her breasts are a work of art, filling my hands perfectly, and I have to clench my teeth to bite back a growl. My cock is leaking precum, threatening to spill, but I can hold on a little longer.

I’ve imagined having her for too long to release before I’ve even touched her.

Ashley whimpers behind my palm when I run my thumbs over her nipples, and her body bucks against mine when I lower my lips to her ears. The feel of her body against me, the smell of her scent, and the sound of her heavy sighs send spurts of precum firing from the tip of my cock with the need to be inside of her.

Fuck! I can’t wait any longer.

“I’m going to taste you now,” I rasp into her ear. “If you make a sound, the men outside will walk in here to inspect, and princess, you can be sure I won’t stop even if they find us.”

“Oh, God!”

“I intend to bury my tongue into your tight pussy and lap up all your juices. If you don’t want an audience, then you’ll stay quiet for me.”

I pull my shirt over my head and drape it on the bale of hay at her back, then I lean down and grab the back of her knees, lifting her ass onto the edge of the hay bale. I feel her nerves as I nudge her thighs open. The only light in the room comes from the half-open door, but it's enough to make out her shape.

She's shy and hesitant as she spreads her thighs for me, but that only works to feed my hunger. I trail my hand over her creamy thighs, and her hips buck when I run my thumb over her wet sex. She's dripping, and I curse under my breath at the dim lighting. I promise myself to do this next time where I'll be able to see all of her.

I need to see her.

To see what has been driving me insane for years, but for now, I'll settle for only taste.

My eyes are on her as I lean in and lay a soft kiss on her knee. I slide my thumb over her parted slit, rubbing at her clit, and she moans at the move, her hand cupping her mouth a few seconds too late.

"Did you hear that?" calls a voice from outside.

"No, what was it?"

"I don't know. I think I heard a sound coming from the barn. Do you want to check it out?"

Ashley tenses in my arms, but I don't dare let go of her or stop what I am doing. I circle my thumb over her sex fervently before replacing it with my mouth, and goddamnit, does she taste amazing.

Nothing could have prepared me for the flood of her sweet and tangy taste, and her whimpers only urge me forward.

"No, I don't want to check it out. What if it's a wild animal?" The voice from outside registers, but only briefly.

I use my arms and gather her closer to the edge before swiping my tongue over her sex, lapping greedily at her wetness before flicking her clit. Her thighs start to tremble, and she chokes back a sob when I suction my lips over her sensitive bud and paddle it until she's whining in my arms, tiny broken sounds breaking through the hand she has on her mouth.

"I'm telling you man, I hear noises coming from the barn, and it's no

wild animal.”

“Then why don’t you go check it out?”

“No way am I going in there alone.”

My cock pulses behind my fly when she grabs my hair and tugs me closer to her juicy pussy, riding my tongue like it’s her own personal toy, and it is.

I would do anything for this woman.

Her movements grow fevered, and I stiffen my tongue, dragging it from side to side over her bud, drawing muted whimpers from her.

“Dude, I am telling you there is something inside.”

The men could walk in here, and I wouldn’t stop pleasuring her. I am past the point of caring as Ashley rides my tongue, rubbing her swollen bud over me. Even in the shadowy lighting, she’s still the sexiest thing I have ever seen.

*Mine!*

Her legs begin to tremble harder a second before they close over me, and I lap at her creamy juices as she orgasms over my tongue. A tremor runs through her body, and her taste almost sends me to the edge.

“Fine, let’s check it out if only to get you to let it go!”

I pull Ashley down from the hay as the door bursts open and light from the security bulb outside the barn casts a shadow of the two men. They almost catch us, and as much as I wouldn’t care, I know Ashley would.

Her body is shaking even as I draw her to me, and she tucks her head into my neck. I ignore the ache the press of her warm body sends to my throbbing cock.

“See? I told you there was no one here. Maybe you heard the sound of a coyote. We have those around here.”

“Wait, did you say a coyote?” the kid says, alarmed, but I am barely paying attention to them, what with my balls threatening to burst.

I need to come!

I rip open my zipper with my free hand and bury my nose in Ashley’s hair as I jerk off, tuning out the grating voices of the people near us. It

doesn't take me long before I am coming on her stomach, and I have to clench my teeth to make sure the low growl that rises up my throat doesn't carry.

"Mr. Berkley, why don't you head back to the party? I'm sure Ms. Blackwell is back by now." Now that the haze of lust has dissipated somewhat, I recognize the second voice as the farm hand I saw when I left the house on my own search for Ashley.

"Oh, I guess you're probably right," the kid says, and we hear the sounds of footsteps fading away, and this time, they don't stop right outside the door.

"Oh, God," Ashley breathes, collapsing in my arms, and I have to grab her, so she doesn't slide to the ground. "They heard us. I'm sure they did."

"They don't know what they heard," I soothe, leaning down and brushing my lips over hers.

"I . . . What did we just do?" she whispers, panic and wonder in her voice. "I can't believe we just did that. We could have been caught."

"Possibly," I say, but nothing short of a natural disaster would have pried me off her. I would never admit it to her out loud and scare her, but part of me was hoping they would catch us.

The selfish part of me that wanted to claim her and leave no doubt in anyone's mind to whom she belongs would not have stopped had they walked in a few seconds earlier than they did.

Ashley drops her forehead against my chest, her breathing more even than it'd been moments earlier. "What happens now, Logan?"

"You don't need to worry about that. I'll take care of everything."

"My parents will kill you if they find out about this, and the Berkleys, they could hurt you too," she whispers. "I don't want you to get hurt."

"Do you want to be with me?"

"Logan . . ."

"Answer me, princess."

"More than anything," she responds, burying her face deeper into my chest, and I draw my arms around her shoulders.

“Then trust me when I tell you to leave it all to me.”

“Okay, I trust you.”

That’s all I need to hear from her. I spent ten years in the military, and I wouldn’t hesitate to use my hard-earned skills on anyone that dared think they could take Ashley from me. I have connections with some of the most powerful people in the country, and I will use every last one if I need to.

Ashley has stolen my heart. She made it hers the second she bumped into me, and I will do everything it takes to make sure it stays that way.

## *Chapter Five*

*Ashley*

I dream of the blue-eyed cowboy.

I always dream of the cowboy, but this time, it feels so real. His touch feels so real as he runs his hands all over my body; his sighs against my skin are addictive. His kisses are so wild and hot that I ignore the scratch of the hay poking through the thin material I'm sitting on.

“Ashley!”

In this dream, he hugs me in his arms and peppers gentle kisses all over my face moments after he's pleased my body into exhaustion in a dark room. A room where I am not supposed to make any noise, or they'll hear and stop us.

“Ashley!”

I wake up with a start, jumping back when I am met by a green, ghostly face with my mother's glaring eyes. It takes me a minute to place the green sludge on her face as a mask and another one to calm my hammering heart.

It's a lot to wake up from a sex dream with my favorite cowboy, only to be faced with my mother in a green mask. It's more effective than any caffeine, that's for sure.

“What the heck, Mom!” I cry out, burying my face in my pillow. “Did you consider even for a second that I would be terrified to wake up to Shrek breathing down on my face?”

“Yes, Ashley, it did occur to me, and that's why I did it.”

“And what did I do to deserve this form of child abuse?”

“You ditched the dinner last night. Everyone was looking for you, but you were nowhere to be found.”

I sit up at her words.

*That was real?*

The party, Logan, Joseph, the barn . . . all of it was real!

“I’m sorry, I had a slight headache, and I didn’t want to ruin dinner, so I thought I would come up here and nap a bit. I must’ve slept longer than I thought.”

My mother lets out an exasperated sigh before getting up from the bed while patting her green skin. “I told the Berkleys as much. I know my daughter would never just up and leave for no good reason.”

I wince as a stab of guilt pierces my chest. I’ve never lied to my parents about anything. Never had a reason to. Well, until now, but I know she would never understand.

If I told my mother about Logan, she would freak out and tell my dad, and then he would be in trouble.

“I’ll apologize to the Berkleys for leaving so suddenly,” I offer, climbing out of bed to head to the bathroom.

“That’s great. Start with their son. He’s coming over this afternoon, so the two of you can get to know each other better,” my mother says, oblivious to the look of horror that crosses my face. “The two of you never had a chance to chat properly last night, so this will be your opportunity.”

“Mom . . .”

“He has such amazing stories about backpacking through Asia that he wants to tell you, I think he said.”

“Why him?” I ask, and she turns to look at me. Her eyes are hazel, the only thing I didn’t get from her. The shape of our eyes is the same, and so are most of our other features, including the blonde hair tied in a bun at the top of her head.

“What do you mean?” my mom asks with mock confusion, but she knows what I am asking, she just doesn’t want to answer.

When she and my dad were introduced to each other, she was only

eighteen, and although she was not in love with him, she married him six months later. It wasn't until years into the marriage that she grew fond of him and then fell in love. Her words, not mine.

Is that what she wants for me too?

“What if Joseph isn't my type?”

“Type? Nonsense. He is a charming young man with a wealth of experience. You come from similar backgrounds. Albeit, his family's wealth is not as old as ours, but they are every bit as successful. And you did not see the way he was looking at you last night.”

No, I did not, because my eyes were on someone else instead.

“If he and I can't connect, you won't force me to marry him just because his family is wealthy, right?”

“I have no doubt that the two of you will get along,” she says, getting up, and I can tell that she is done with the conversation. “Now get ready and come down for breakfast, and I'll tell you all about the Berkleys and how your father met Mr. Berkley on the golf course last month. It really is a funny story.”

I nod as a sense of helplessness overwhelms me. Most people think arranged marriages are a thing of the past, but they'd be surprised just how often it happens among the wealthy elite. My mother says it is the only way to know someone likes you for who you are and not for your wealth. She makes it sound like our social class is filled with saints looking to make a genuine connection and not use each other for power and influence. But in reality, that's all anyone cares about. It's why I don't have friends and I've never dated.

*You don't need to worry about that. I'll take care of everything.*

Logan's voice telling me not to worry is the only reason I find the strength to move my feet. He asked me to trust him, and I will. Something about the way he said it made it sound like he knew what he was talking about.

I clean up and get dressed in record time, not bothering to put on makeup. In this heat, it'll probably melt off my face anyway.

My heart falls when I find Joseph already at our dining table with my



parents, but I manage to school my face into not showing how I am feeling.

“Look, dear, Joseph showed up earlier than expected,” Mom exclaims when she sees me. The green gunk is gone, and her face glows in the soft morning light. Whatever sorcery she uses on her skin must work because she looks at least a decade younger than her forty-five.

I walk over to greet Joseph, wincing at the large smile on his face. He does look genuinely happy to see me, which in turn sends a twinge of guilt rocking through my chest. It isn’t his fault I don’t want him.

That guilt lasts all of a few minutes before I want to be as far away from him as possible as he starts his monologue about his adventures, pausing only briefly to swallow his food.

“Did you know, they have a tropical climate in Laos? The entire time I was there, I was shirtless and spent most of my days fishing and surfing with the locals.”

“Hmm,” I mutter, swirling the eggs on my plate.

“You have to visit that part of the world, especially the countryside. Indonesia was my personal favorite; the Sumatran tiger is a thing of beauty, not to mention the local food. I would have gained at least a hundred pounds if I wasn’t constantly helping the locals with their rice farms.”

I nod companionably. I can admire a man with passion, and Joseph, well, he has loads of it. What he is bad at, however, is reading the room.

“Ashley, why don’t you show Joseph around, and he can tell you more about his adventures?”

I glare in my mother’s direction and silently question if she ever loved me in the first place. We could all sit here and listen to his stories just fine, but the fact that she’s sending me off into the scorching heat with him leaves me to question her love for me. I wonder idly if the heat or boredom will drive me mad first.

“I would love to see the ranch, and especially the barn. Last night, when I went looking for Ashley, I heard some strange noise coming from—”

“Sure, I’ll show you around,” I say quickly, cutting him off and standing up so fast, I almost tip the chair back. All eyes in the room turn to me, but I don’t stick around for them to question my weird behavior.

I hurry out, ready to escape the house. I am not paying attention to where I am going until I've run smack into someone.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," I say on a gasp, looking up in apology, but my words trail off when I am met by familiar blue eyes. "Logan . . ."

He is half-naked. This early in the morning, and he is shirtless, his blue jeans coated with dust, and it's clear he's been working for hours already. I stare at his sexy body, the rippling muscles, the sleeve tattoo glistening in the sun, and I gasp when I notice the tiny tiara on his shoulder.

I haven't been close enough to him to really study his tattoos. Well, not in decent lighting anyway, but something tells me that this tattoo is a fresh one—at least, the latest of his collection. I want to trace my fingers over it. I'm curious but afraid to ask if it has anything to do with me. I am nearly desperate to touch it, though.

Lord, it's dangerous, but I am tempted to jump into his arms, run my tongue over those beautiful muscles, and . . .

"Careful, princess," he whispers, a warning dancing in his eyes, and I notice for the first time that he is not alone. There are a bunch of other ranch hands watching us curiously, and I imagine they've all just come from having breakfast.

My blood pumps faster, even as my face heats from mortification. It's quite obvious that I was ogling Logan, and to have an audience while I did it is just reckless.

"Oh, uhm, thanks." I stammer out the words, and humor floats in his eyes, but it quickly fades into a blank stare when someone steps up behind me.

"You ran out so fast before I could finish breakfast," Joseph says from over my shoulder, and a cold shiver rakes my body from the emotions I read in Logan's eyes.

His obvious jealousy, I can handle; it's the hint of danger that swims in his gaze and the way he clenches his jaw and shifts a deadly stare in Joseph's direction that scare me a little.

It's hot to have him go all caveman possessive over me, but I don't think it'll be so hot when he lands a blow on Joseph's face and rearranges his teeth, all for the crime of looking at me . . . and hooking his arm over my

shoulder. *Damnit.*

“And that’s our cue to leave.” Eric, the ranch’s foreman, swoops in and drapes his arm over Logan’s shoulder, trying to pull him away before my home becomes a crime scene, but my cowboy doesn’t budge from the spot.

I step out from under Joseph’s arm, but that doesn’t exactly put out the fire in Logan’s eyes.

Eric looks at me pitifully before giving up and calling the other guys to follow, and I have half a mind to tell him to take me away with them. Everyone else walks away, leaving the three of us standing awkwardly in front of the main house.

Well, I seem to be the only one feeling the awkward energy, as the other two in my company are locked in a staring contest.

The tension around us is so heavy, it’s more oppressive than the humidity. I am not used to being in such tense situations, and suddenly, I wish my father had let me enroll in that magic class when I was six.

A disappearing act could really come in handy right about now.

## *Chapter Six*

### *Logan*

Not once during my ten years in the military did I experience murderous thoughts.

Up until I met Ashley, I never thought I would want to crush someone's bones with my bare hands, but every day is a test on my restraint.

Today is particularly hard for me to hold back, but as much as I would love to plow my fist into the kid's face, it's clear he's a coward that would rather hide behind Ashley than step up and face me.

There is something pretentious about this puny kid.

I didn't see it yesterday when I was overcome with jealousy at the thought of Ashley's parents setting her up with someone, but as I stare into his eyes in the light of day, I see him for what he is.

Ashley clears her throat, drawing my attention from him and to her. "Logan, this is Joseph. You might have seen him last night at the dinner party."

I don't respond to the introduction, and she flashes me a pleading look to get a hold of my jealousy before turning to the kid. "Joseph, this is Logan. He works on the ranch."

"A farm hand, huh?" the kid says with a sneer, and I watch with fascination as temper flashes in Ashley's green eyes.

"Yes, and we value everyone that works here," she says, her tone low and laced with muted anger.

The kid must notice he's messed up as he hurries to do damage control. "Oh, I didn't mean for it to come out that way. I always appreciate meeting

people who work with their hands. Did I tell you about the time I visited the Philippines? The people are so lovely and hardworking. One time, we went into the mountains, and they taught me how to fish with just a bamboo stick.”

I fold my arms over my chest and study him. “Where in the Philippines?”

Two sets of curious eyes turn to me. “What?”

“I asked what mountains in the Philippines you visited.”

The kid laughs awkwardly, rubbing a hand on his nape, and I notice the confidence in his eyes slip a little. “I wouldn’t expect you to know the place.”

“Try me,” I say, my eyes narrowing on his. “I lived in the Philippines for over a year, so I might be familiar with the area you are talking about.”

I have never seen someone go sheet white right in front of my eyes, let alone in the middle of summer. “Oh, did I say the Philippines? I meant . . . uhm, I must have confused it with . . . another country.”

I want to grill him and expose him for the two-faced little shit he is in front of Ashley, but Eric calls out to me. Today, we’re moving hay into the barn, and I have stalled long enough here.

It’s become obvious that I will not be able to use my physical strength to get rid of this spoiled little pest that thought it was a good idea to come between Ashley and me. I will have to come up with some other way.

Eric calls out to me once more, and with one last look at Ashley, I head for the barn where the other men have already started working.

“Finished your dick-measuring contest?” Eric asks with a grin when I join them.

“We both know the kid doesn’t stand a chance against me.”

He snorts at my words as he points to a stack of hay that’s ready to be unloaded from the tractor and moved into the barn.

It’s nothing my muscles haven’t grown used to, and they start burning in a satisfying way as I carry the bales into the barn, sweat dripping down my shoulders and back. The hay pricks my skin, leaving a stinging sensation all over my arms, but I don’t pay attention to it. My body has become used to the burn and the stings, so I focus instead on the woman who stole my heart.

Perhaps I should have gone after her when I started working here and our connection was established, but something held me back. She'd just turned eighteen and was already in college when I first started working at the ranch, and I was thirty-two and fresh out of the military. I held back, feeling unworthy of someone as precious as her.

Someone ethereal, and not just because of her angelic looks. Ashley is kind, innocent, and humble despite being the heiress of massive wealth.

She is perfect in every sense of the word, and I am just a man, battle scarred and broken. My scars run deeper than the eye can see, and I didn't want to subject my princess to a man as imperfect as myself. So, I worked . . .

I ignored my desire and heavy need to be with her for years.

No more!

Ashley is mine, and I will do whatever it takes to be worthy of her.

"Logan?" I am startled out of my thoughts when someone pats my back.

I turn around, and my eyes collide with Ashley's green ones, and like the deepest and most mysterious forest, they beckon to me, hypnotizing me with their depths. Her head turns around to look at something before turning back to stare at me, and I realize for the first time that she's alone.

"Where's the kid?"

"Logan," she says with a sigh. "Don't call him that, and he left for the stables with one of the guys to get the horses ready."

"Why?" I ask, gritting my teeth.

Ashley breathes out another sigh, this time shaking her head at me before stepping forward, and I don't notice the towel until she's running it over my neck. "He said he wanted to ride around and look at the ranch."

"Ash . . ."

"Stop," she says firmly, looking around at the guys pretending not to watch us before dropping her voice to a whisper. "I don't want to talk about him or anyone else."

I grab the hand on my neck and hold it hostage before taking a step, closing the distance between us. "Then what do you want to talk about? Last

night?”

“Logan,” she gasps, her eyes shooting to the other people making their best impression of minding their own business, but I can feel their eyes on us, and perhaps, that’s a good thing.

Up until this moment, they’ve only speculated about my feelings for Ashley, and it’s about time they know she is mine.

“Do you want to hear about how I went to bed last night thinking about your taste?” I whisper, my voice low, so only she can hear. “How I fucked my own hand thinking of you? My cock has been hard since, and no amount of jerking off will get it to go down.”

“Oh,” she whispers, her hands fumbling, and the towel drops.

“I’m hard right now. I would show you just how hard if it was only the two of us.”

Her pretty green eyes are unfocused as they stare up at me, soft puffs coming through her lips, and I can tell she wants to kiss me because it’s the same thing I want.

*Fuck, she’s perfect.*

I want to drag her into the privacy of the barn, rake my lips over her neck, and scrape my teeth over her sensitive skin. My mouth waters at the swell of her breasts under her blouse, and I am tempted to tug at the neckline and suck the soft buds between my lips, the way I couldn’t yesterday.

“Everyone is staring,” she whispers, her voice shaky with need.

“I know,” I rasp, need clogging my throat and making my voice deeper than it normally is. “I’ll find you later.”

“We shouldn’t,” she says, but with much less conviction than yesterday. At this point, she is saying the words just for the sake of it. Even she doesn’t believe there is a force on Earth that will keep me from claiming her.

“I’ll find you later,” I say again, pushing back from her and releasing her hand. I crouch down to grab her towel, but now it’s covered with hay, so I dust it off before getting up.

Her cheeks are flushed when she grabs the towel from my hands and looks around. Everyone suddenly looks away, most of them staring at the sky

like it's the most fascinating thing they've ever seen, like they don't feel their faces melting beneath the harsh glare of the sun.

Ashley turns around just in time to catch Joseph and a stable hand walking in our direction with two horses.

"I have to go," she says, but I grab her hand before she can leave.

"I don't want him touching you, or he is dead!"

She snorts at my words. "What? I am not allowed to make out with a guy I met only last night and roll around with him in a field of dandelions?"

"Ashley," I growl.

"I'm kidding." She chuckles, flashing me a dimple. "You shouldn't be so serious all the time. What happens if the wind changes direction, and you are stuck with that scowl for the rest of your life?"

With another laugh, she leaves to join the kid, and all I can do is watch as she rides away on a horse with another man, but to my relief, they don't go beyond eyesight, and I can work while keeping an eye on them.

The thought of seeing her privately later in the evening pushes me to work harder. I ignore the protests of my muscles as we spend half the day moving not just the hay, but a good deal of farm equipment around the ranch.

Between ferrying farm equipment and working cattle, my muscles are singing by the time I let myself into the small farmhouse I share with Eric. Since most of the farm hands are locals, they commute from home, and the rest share the bunkhouse. As the junior foreman, I share this small house with only Eric.

My roommate is not around, giving me space to enjoy the solitude as I shower and wash away the day's exhaustion, so I can go meet Ashley.

I've been thinking about this all day, and I know how risky it is going to be to break into the main house and access her room, but it's a challenge I am willing to take.

Breaking into the house proves to be easier than I expected, and as I hoist myself up the balcony outside her bedroom, I am taken aback by the eerie silence. It's a few minutes past nine and way too early for everyone in the house to be asleep.



I realize too soon the house is silent because no one is in it.  
Ashley isn't waiting for me.

## *Chapter Seven*

*Ashley*

“My best days were spent in a remote temple in Cambodia. The place was calm and peaceful, you could almost hear the heavens whisper through the soft winds and . . .”

My phone starts ringing, and I can't help but smile at the interruption. When Joseph invited my parents and me for dinner tonight, I had a feeling we'd be subjected to another one of his adventure stories, but the man has been talking non-stop for two and a half hours.

Not a single one of us has managed to get a word in, and my phone ringing is a welcome interruption even to my parents, who watch me with envy as I get up from the table.

“This is important,” I say as I leave our table and rush toward the bathrooms to answer the call.

I don't even bother to look who is calling. It could be someone reminding me of my car's extended warranty, and I wouldn't care. Hell, I don't even drive.

A scam call, even better. Those tend to last forever.

As it turns out, it's neither. I smile when I see Luna's name flash on my screen. We have been best friends since we were teens. Her parents are real estate moguls and our families tend to run in the same social circles, but I adore her.

“You just saved me from a boring dinner,” I say in way of greeting.

Her chuckle filters through the speaker. “Who was it this time?”

“You don't even want to know,” I whisper sorrowfully. “Some guy my

parents are trying to set me up with that won't stop going on about his fake trips. At first, I was pretty fascinated by his stories, but at this point, he's just making them up."

"Those are the worst kind."

"It's okay, he's probably trying to impress my parents. His family is new to the country club, and our dads have become close."

I walk to the mirror and stare at my reflection. I really do look a lot like my mother with our matching blonde hair and facial features. I get my green eyes from my dad, but people always tell me I am the splitting image of my mother's younger self, and today, I got all dolled up for . . . him.

My cowboy.

I used makeup for the first time all summer, put more effort than I usually do into myself, and even shaved for him. I thought . . .

"What's with the heavy sigh?" Luna whispers, but it's she who sounds like she's out of breath.

"I was supposed to meet someone, but forget about me. What the heck are you doing? You sound out of breath."

There is some shuffling before she speaks. "Yoga, and what do you mean you were supposed to meet someone?"

"Uhm, well . . . I've been flirting with this guy for years. He's a cowboy at our ranch, and we agreed to meet up later, but I didn't expect I would be invited out for dinner."

"Wait, is this the cowboy you've been whining about for the last two years? Logan?" she asks excitedly, but doesn't give me time to respond before carrying on. "Don't waste time explaining. What you need to do now is to come up with some excuse to leave dinner and go find your cowboy."

"But—"

"Ash, you've been pining after this cowboy and his Adonis muscles for years. You need to drop everything and go ride his lasso."

"I don't think you know what that is . . . or how it works."

"Whatever. Just go, Ash, stop stalling."

"Wait," I call out before she can hang up, "I'm nervous. I don't know

what I am doing. I've never . . .”

“He will know what to do,” she says without hesitation. “Older, wiser, and all that jazz. Now, go and tell me all about it tomorrow.”

I throw one last look at my reflection before leaving the bathroom. I realize I haven't come up with an excuse yet by the time I've made it to the table.

“Oh, you're back,” my mother says with a relieved sigh. “Joseph was just telling us about that time—”

“I have to go, Mom,” I interrupt, certain I am not interested in hearing about another adventure. The more he speaks, the less truthful he sounds.

“Go where?” She looks up at me, her eyes panicked.

“Home. I just heard from Luna that . . . uhm, her iguana died,” I blurt out.

Her brows draw in confusion. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“Well, Mom, my best friend is an emotional wreck, and I need to be there for her. She would do the same thing if something happened to my goldfish. Anyway, I promised her I would video call her to comfort her, so I have to leave, but please, enjoy the dinner without me.”

I grab my purse and sprint out of the restaurant before they can stop me and ask for the nonexistent lizard's name. I can't believe I couldn't come up with a better lie than that, but I can't think about it now.

It worked, and that's all that matters.

I grab a taxi just outside the restaurant, wincing at the time displayed on the dash. I figure it'll be pretty late when I make it back to the ranch. I don't even have Logan's number to call him, but he promised he'd find me. I can only hope that he will find his way into my room before the night's end.

\*\*\*

A hand grabs onto my arm the second I walk into my bedroom and a palm clamps over my mouth before I can open my lungs enough to scream. The hand on my arm moves to my stomach, and I am pulled into a muscular chest.

My first thought is that I walked in on a robbery because I was so eager to leave dinner early, and the next is that it's a kidnapping. I start kicking, but the arm around me has an iron grip, and all I do is exhaust myself, as it doesn't move an inch.

"Calm down, princess," a deep, familiar voice growls into my ear, and my body stills. A warm sensation drops to my stomach, and a deep longing takes place of the fear that'd been rocking my core just mere seconds ago.

I gasp when he shifts behind me, his heavy erection brushing against my ass.

"I've been waiting for hours," he growls, but doesn't let go of my mouth long enough to hear my reply. He runs his hand over my stomach, slipping it under my top and cupping my breasts over the bra, sending a deep ache between my thighs.

"Tell me, princess, did you come home alone?" he rasps into my hair, his warm breath fanning the sensitive skin behind my earlobe. "I need to know just how loud I can make you scream."

I nod, and his hand slips from my mouth. "Magda . . . she's around," I breathe.

"She's half-deaf," he snorts which isn't exactly true, but I don't correct him. It's been a running myth around the ranch that she is hard of hearing because she ignores people and pretends she can't hear them call out to her. Hers is more of a selective hearing loss, but I am not about to expose her secret or ruin the mood by telling Logan that.

"Her room is on the other end of the house," I say instead.

"Good," he whispers, his hand dropping to my jeans and tugging at the button, and I want to turn around and face him, wishing I could see his eyes, but the only light in the room is coming from the open window. "I've been thinking about this all day, all night, and I was just about to go out looking for you."

I moan when his hand brushes against my skin as he tugs my pants down my thighs, leaving me in my panties. My knees grow weak when he runs his fingers over my thighs, caressing his way to my mound, sucking in a sharp breath when he finds my panties wet.

"Fuck me, princess," he rasps, squeezing my breast through the bra as

he drives me mad with the hand between my thighs. I exhale shakily when he slips his finger past my panties and runs it over my sex. “Your pussy is dripping for me.”

His voice, so smooth and deep, has no right making me feel the way it does, but I can hardly stand straight. The feeling only grows when he hooks a finger into the waistband, tugs my panties down my thighs, and helps me step out of them, leaving my sex exposed.

I whimper with need when he gathers the hem of my top and peels it up, the soft caress of his fingers sending a deep ache between my legs, but he is not done torturing me with his touch.

The room is fairly dark, just like it'd been last night in the barn, but I can't help but feel exposed. This time, there are no shadows lurking. There is no haste in his touch when he drags my bra away from my breasts, causing my nipples to harden into achy points. He tosses my bra over his shoulder, leaving me completely naked.

I expect to feel vulnerable, standing nude with him still dressed, but all it does is send a pulse of need down to my sex. His hands are warm against my body, and his erection pushing against my ass is all the evidence I need of just how much he wants me.

I gasp when Logan turns me around, and his lips are on mine before I can even get a clear look at him. I lean into his touch as a tingling feeling spreads through my body, and I curl my toes in pleasure. I wrap my arms around his neck and whimper into the kiss as his tongue seeks mine in the most erotic of moves.

“I'm going to fuck you tonight, princess,” he whispers against my lips. “I've thought about it so many times, kissing a path down your perfect body . . .”

My head falls back when his lips drop to my neck where his open-mouthed kisses send another deep ache between my legs, and I push against his erection.

“ . . . every time you walked around the ranch in those crop tops you like to wear, the outline of your little nipples visible through the fabric, I wanted to suck them and find out if their texture is as soft as the rest of you looks . . .”

“Oh, God!” I cry out when his head drops to my breast, his breath fanning my sensitive skin, and I jerk against his arms when he runs his tongue over the tight buds, sending me quivering in his arms. My mind goes blank when his mouth closes over the left nipple, sucking it gently between his lips before giving the same attention to the other.

I thought last night was mind-blowing. I didn’t think anything he did could top what happened at the barn, but this is more . . . It’s wild.

His touch, however slight, is enough to drive me crazy, and I don’t even notice when he lifts me into his arms, carries me to the bed, and draws me into his lap.

“You’re mine, princess,” he growls, sending goosebumps over every inch of my skin. His words send my head spinning, and I suddenly realize just how long I have wanted that to be true.

I have wanted to belong to him from the second we met. I can’t believe it took him this long to claim me.

Christ, I shouldn’t give this man my entire heart when our future is not guaranteed, but how can I hold back when he touches me the way he does?

When my body sings at the slightest touch from him.

I moan in need with his lips close over mine, and then his hands are everywhere. I whimper into the kiss as he runs his hand over my backside and then slips them up my back into my hair, closing his fist around it. I rub my wet sex against his erection, no doubt staining his jeans, but I can’t think past the delicious feeling that spreads up my spine from the move.

I cry out in protest when he turns around and lays me down on my back before I feel his delicious body press down on me, dropping his elbows on either side of my head. This close, I can see his blue eyes and read the desire in them despite the poor lighting.

“I’ve never let anyone else touch me,” I confess. I can say this now. I can tell him how I preserved my virginity for him now that he is about to take it. “I couldn’t picture anyone but you touching me, so I waited for you, Logan. I stayed innocent for you.”

*Only you.*

## Chapter Eight

*Logan*

*I stayed innocent for you.*

Christ, she undoes me.

I have never in my entire lifetime felt the way I feel about her. It's crazy that I spent my whole life looking for a place to fit in, a place to call home. I even joined the military because I figured a six-foot giant like myself would fit there, and yet . . .

All I needed to do was visit a ranch in the middle of nowhere to find my home.

*My heart.*

Ashley stole it from me, and I thought she couldn't do anything more to send me falling deeper for her, but I am utterly captivated by her.

"I love you," I say, offering her a confession of my own, and as I notice her eyes widen in shock, I can't help but become confused.

She has to know that, right?

She has to recognize it in the way I look at her and see it goes beyond lust. Hell, even the other farmhands have seen it and constantly tease me about it.

I brush my lips over hers, the kiss turning hard and hungry fast. She whimpers when I drop my lips to her neck, raking them over her throat. I lick a path down her skin, committing her taste and scent to memory. Her pleased cries urging me lower. Her back arches when I latch onto her nipple with a hungry groan, tugging gently at the rosy bud with my teeth before circling it with my tongue to soothe the sting.



“Logan, please . . . more,” she moans as I kiss a path down her stomach, my mouth watering with the anticipation of tasting her again. The memory of her creamy juices sends my hard cock pulsing behind my fly, but I ignore it.

She wiggles in my arms in frustration, her fingers dropping to my hair and guiding me down her stomach to her glistening pussy.

“Hungry, aren’t we?” I tease with a chuckle. The sound coming out of me is so thick, it seems foreign even to my own ears. “Do you want my tongue lapping up your juices?”

Her back arches off the bed when I rub the pad on my thumb over her wet sex, parting her folds and exposing her sex to me. Her clit pulses against my thumb, and I lose it. I climb completely off the bed and drop to my knees, tugging her ass to the edge, before placing a gentle kiss on her thigh.

“Logan . . .”

“Tell me what you want, princess.”

“I want . . . I need more.”

“More of this?” I rasp, leaning down and dragging my tongue up the middle of her folds before pulling back. She cries out at the move, and her knees begin to tremble. My cock throbs with need as her taste floods my mouth.

It’s as perfect as it is addictive. I could live here, spend an eternity buried between her legs, pleasuring her until she’s sobbing for me to stop.

Ashley cries out when I bury my face back between her thighs, her fingers tugging at my hair as she grinds impatiently over my mouth.

Overridden with pleasure, her moves are bold as she tugs me closer to her center, her hips working furiously toward her orgasm. Her back bows off the bed, and a scream tears from her lips, no doubt waking everyone in the ranch when my lips close over her swollen clit and suck it gently.

Her legs tremble with need when I drag my middle finger up her sex, gathering moisture, before pressing it against her virgin entrance and pushing in. My cock almost erupts in the tight confines of my jeans when she squeezes around my finger a second before her body erupts.

“Oh, Logan!” she sobs as she creams on my tongue, and it’s the hottest

sound I have ever heard. She wraps her thighs around my head, chanting my name, as her body trembles with pleasure, and I don't let up until the trembling has died down.

I stand up and strip my clothes away quickly, sweeping my eyes hungrily over her heaving chest, the sight of her rosy nipples sends an ache straight to my cock, and I don't even pay attention to where the clothes land.

I just need to be inside of her!

I drop a knee on the bed and gather her up to me, searching her face to find her watching me with desire. She gasps when I take my shaft and press it to her entrance.

"Oh, fuck," I breathe, unsure how long I can last. Her wet flesh closes tightly around me, and I have to force in deep breaths. I've longed for this for such a long time, and now that I have her in my arms, it feels unreal.

She is perfect; every fucking inch of her is carved to perfection, and it takes all my will to hold onto my slipping control.

"Logan," she whimpers when I slide another inch into her. "I . . . I'm not on the pill!"

"Fuck!" I growl, dropping my face and burying it in her hair. My cock throbs hard and my hips burn with the need to thrust through the barrier stopping me from owning her fully. Just the thought of filling her up with my seed, her womb swollen with my child, has me clenching my teeth to stop myself from pounding into her without a care in the world.

"Do you want to stop?" I ask, hating the question, but needing to make sure she wants this as badly as I do.

Ashley meets my eyes, her pupils blown wide with desire. "No, don't stop. I want this, want you."

That's all I need to hear, and I'm moving again, pressing into her once more. I didn't think it would be this hard on my control. I thought I had better restraint than this, but every day is a test with Ashley.

"Your pussy is so fucking tight, baby," I rasp. My spine is tingling with the need to pound into her and come like I've longed to all night, but I don't want to hurt her. I know my cock is a lot to take, especially for her first time, and I would do anything to lessen her pain.

She whimpers when I slide another inch into her tight, virgin pussy. “It’s so big, Logan!”

“It’s okay,” I whisper, pressing my lips against the side of her head a second before I thrust my hips forward and impale her with my cock. She cries out, digging her fingernails into my shoulder and scratching her way down my back.

Fuck! She’s tight.

A shudder racks my body as my cock swells, stretching her inner walls, and the need to pound into her grows stronger.

I thought I was prepared for her virgin pussy closing tightly over my cock, but nothing could have prepared me for the tightness that almost sends me to the edge. She’s milking me, her body testing my control, but I have almost none left. It’s all been torn to shreds at this point.

“Are you okay?” I whisper, dropping my forehead against hers and fighting not to come, but her pussy is cinching hard around me. “Please tell me you’re okay, princess.”

Her breath comes out shaky when she starts moving subtly beneath me. “I don’t . . . It doesn’t hurt. It feels good. I thought—”

She jolts under me, and her lips part in a gasp when I move, slow at first, but my hips start slapping hard against her. All the need and desire I managed to bottle up over the years escapes, and there is no stopping the beast that comes out. All she can do is hold on for the ride and hope I don’t drown us both.

I grab her left thigh with my right hand and lift it to my hip, which sends me impossibly deeper into her, and she must feel every inch as her back arches with a scream, and the nails on my back tear through my skin.

“So fucking tight,” I grit. “I am going to fill this pussy with my come, fill you up, so you feel me for days.”

“Yes,” she pants her hips jerking with mine, eyes shut and neck exposed, as I fuck her into her bed, grinding my cock into her tight channel. Her cries mix with my moans, making enough noise to wake the dead, let alone the people on the ranch. It doesn’t matter how secluded her room is, there is no muting the sounds of our pleasure.

“Oh, God . . . Logan!” she cries, a tremble racking her body as I pound into her. “I’m coming!”

A scream rips out of her throat, and she bucks in my arms just as her pussy closes hard around my cock, and that’s all it takes to send me over the edge with her.

“I love you,” I grind out as I pin her to the bed and spill my seed into her womb. I rear back and slam into her channel as she milks me of every drop and all my strength before dropping on top of her. “I love you so fucking much, Ashley.”

The room falls into silence, filled only by the sounds of our harsh breathing, and I am afraid I scared her with my confession. But when I pull back to study her face, it’s to find longing and desire, mixed with apprehension.

*She’s afraid.*

The confession is written all over her face, and I can practically read it on her lips, but she is afraid to say the words. She is terrified of opening her heart to me, only for it to end in tears when her parents force her to marry someone else.

I want to rage and insist that she trust me, but can I blame her really? All I have done is talk. I need to do something.

“It’s okay,” I assure her, kissing her temple before drawing her into my arms. “I’ve got you, princess.”

It’s time I make some important calls.

## *Chapter Nine*

*Ashley*

Waking up to a lobster-red face staring down at me is not how I expected to start my morning.

I had hoped to wake up in the arms of the man who'd just popped my cherry, snuggled up to his muscles and breathing in his earthy, muscular scent. Logan. That's the one person I would have preferred to wake up to, but in his place is a monster. At least, I think so at first, and it takes me a full minute and a few hundred heartbeats later to recognize my mother's face beneath the red gooey stuff covering it.

"A red facial mask, really?" I scream, kicking at the covers. How is it I never knew my mother was a psycho up until this moment?

Is this the part of her she kept hidden from the world? The part that loves to scare the hell out of her kid and give them a heart attack?

"That's what you get for leaving early last night," she says with a huff, sitting back before pressing at her mask dramatically.

"What even is that, and why is it so . . . red?"

"My cosmetologist said it's great for puffy skin after a night of drinking. After you left the restaurant, your father and I had no choice but to drink two more bottles of wine to make it through the rest of dinner. So, this is your fault, really."

"Well, you've gotten your revenge at the price of a few years off my life," I say, sliding off the bed and walking to my en suite bathroom. I flip on the light and tune out my mother's chatter about skincare and how I've been neglecting it. I spy the bags under my eyes and figure she has a point, but I can't regret them, because they serve as proof of what happened last night

between Logan and me.

When he said he'd been bottling up his desire for two years, he wasn't kidding. The soreness in my body is proof of that, and yet, I want more.

I want to see him and experience my first time all over again with him.

I want to hear him tell me he loves me over and over again.

There's a high probability I won't be able to say it back, but I want to hear the words whispered in my ears in a breathy sigh, I want to feel them on my skin as he trails his lips down my body for the third, fourth, fifth . . . however many times it takes until they're imprinted on me.

I don't want him to stop loving me despite my inability to say the words back to him, but I am a coward.

I have given Logan nearly everything. My body, my heart, my soul, but I hold onto my promise. It's the one thing I have left, and a part of me is afraid to let it go.

"Ashley!" I jump when someone taps my shoulder, my mother's mask startling me afresh and no doubt shaving a few more years off my life. There is no getting used to it. "For goodness sake, I have been calling you forever."

"You have?"

"Yes, your dad and I are leaving for a trip to Houston for a couple of days. I wanted to know if you'll be okay staying here by yourself, or if you would like to join us."

"I'll stay," I say, without missing a beat, wincing at my eagerness, but I can't help it. The thought of being with Logan without having to worry about my parents catching us is too tempting to pass by. "I'm twenty, and there are like fifty people on the ranch. Plus, I have Magda. I'll be fine."

"Okay," she says, her eyes narrowed at me suspiciously, but I smile innocently at her.

My parents are barely off the property before I am running to seek out Logan. It's only ten in the morning, but work on the ranch starts at five, so I figure they must've been working for hours already.

I find him in the hay barn, and for a second, I wonder if this is meant to be our secret hideout. There are close to twenty buildings on the ranch, but we always find ourselves in here.

There are three other men in there with him, and they all exchange a look before they file out, leaving me and my cowboy alone in a room filled with hay. His face is already glistening with sweat, and he grabs a rag and runs it over his forehead, all the while watching me.

“Hi,” I say shyly, brushing my hair behind my ear. The bravado from earlier is gone, and now that I am here, I don’t know what to do or say.

Do we talk about the weather?

I’ve had his tongue buried in my most intimate parts, and now, I have no idea how to tell him I want it to happen again.

“Come here.”

I don’t wait for him to say it again before I am stepping into his space. He wraps a hand around my waist and pulls me flush against him.

“You didn’t wake me up to say goodbye.”

“You needed the rest,” he whispers, his voice so deep and rough that it sends lust curling in my stomach and hardens my nipples. Before Logan, I had no idea someone’s voice could turn me on.

“But—”

Logan slides his erection against me, and I groan deeply. “Feel that? If I had woken you up, there would have been no stopping me from fucking you again.”

I don’t think I would have minded that. Waking up to Logan fucking me into the mattress would have been way better than what I actually woke to, but I don’t get to tell him that before he leans in and locks our lips together.

I gasp against his lips when he slides his fingers under my dress, squeezing my ass in his rough palms and grinding his erection against me as he devours my lips.

“Oh!” I gasp when he runs his fingers over my throbbing sex. “Are you sure we’re safe here? Anyone could walk in . . .”

“Then we better be fast,” he breathes against my lips, slipping his finger past my panties, and I moan into the kiss, but it’s no longer a kiss. Our lips are just pressed together, breathing heavily against each other as he drives me mad with his finger.

“I need you, please,” I whimper, wrapping an arm around his shoulder and arching my neck when he starts to kiss a trail down from my lips.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” he says choppily. “I need to be inside of you.”

I let out a disappointed sigh when his finger slips out of me, and I gasp when he tears my panties down my thighs. My eyes are on his as he tugs down his zipper a second before I feel the head of his cock against my entrance.

I’m still sore from last night, but the need to feel him overshadows it. The need to have him inside me again and feel the closeness to him I have always longed for.

There is a slight discomfort when he fills me with his big cock, but it only lasts for a second before pleasure takes its place.

“Fuck, princess,” he groans. “How can you still be so fucking tight!”

His breath comes in short staccato bursts, and I stare at him in wonder as the composed cowboy I have known for two years comes undone in my arms.

Sweat trickles down his forehead, and I watch in fascination as the pulse on his neck drums hard under his skin. I did that.

He wants *me*. He loves *me*.

And I love him.

I was scared to admit it even to myself, but it’s obvious, and there is no running from the truth. I am completely and utterly in love with this forbidden man, and I don’t want it to end.

I clench my walls around his length, and he loses it, fucking me against the hay with reckless abandon. His thrusts are rough and fevered, his hard eyes staring down at me like I am the most precious thing in his life.

Logan pulls out and turns me around, so I am facing the haystack, before thrusting into me, and I cry out when the new position pushes him deeper.

He falls on my back, groaning into my neck, his warm breath caressing my skin in the most sensual of ways as he slams into me with the hunger of a starved man. His moves are wild and unrestrained.



“You’re perfect,” he breathes, dropping his hand between my thighs and rubbing his finger against the sensitive bud. “I love you so fucking much, princess. Now come on my cock.”

“Logan!”

His voice sends delicious shocks through my body, and I feel myself draw closer and closer to the edge.

“I want to feel your pussy clench around my cock!”

The orgasm tears through me with little warning, and he wraps a hand over my mouth just in time to muffle a scream. He rams himself deeper into me, even as my body trembles through the orgasm, and soon, he is coming too, spilling his hot spend into my womb, marking me as his.

He fucks me through the orgasm until we’re both breathless. He turns me around to face him, and his lips are back on mine, kissing me so hard, it has my toes curling in pleasure.

Logan drops his forehead against mine, and I realize that I would not want to be anywhere or with anyone else but him.

What I feel for him has been years in the making, and I want to tell him just that when he presses me into the haystack, shielding me with his body from something . . . or *someone*.

“What?” I ask, confused as he straightens my dress, but one look over his shoulder, and my heart drops to my feet.

We are well hidden from the entrance and mostly concealed, but what just happened is quite obvious, and there is no denying it.

Christ, I knew this would happen.

I knew someone would find out about Logan and me. That everything would come crashing down, but why now, and most importantly, why *him*?

“I was so sure I heard noises that first night,” Joseph says. “It was no wild animal.”

## *Chapter Ten*

*Logan*

I've only spoken to Mr. Blackwell a handful of times, and I pinned him for a reasonable man. Albeit, old fashioned in his demeanor, but fairly agreeable among the wealthy men I have come across. He is a man in his mid-fifties, with graying hair and green eyes much like his daughter's, but for some reason, her eyes look so much like her mother's, despite the different color.

My gaze shifts from him and to his wife, who is an older version of Ashley. They both have the same hair and facial features, which are now crowded with anger as she glares back at me. Beside her, is the man she expected to be her future son-in-law. For the first time since meeting Joseph, he's been silent, and by the wild look in the eyes, I can tell he is back to his old habit.

A little digging into the Berkleys by some powerful friends of mine turned up a wealth of information, none of it shocking in the least. All his stories about backpacking through Southeast Asia were lies, but that is not even the most scandalous thing about him.

I would find the whole thing amusing if Ashley's fingernails weren't digging into my arm and threatening to tear at the skin. She moves nervously beside me, and my attention shifts back on her to find her watching her father warily.

"Dad . . ."

"Be quiet, Ashley Blackwell!" Mrs. Blackwell scolds. "I cannot believe you would disgrace our family like this!"

"Disgrace our family? How is any of this a disgrace?"

“Y-you . . . Sweet Lord, I can’t even say it,” the woman spits, turning her cold eyes to me. “You animal, you defiled my precious daughter!”

“Careful,” I grit, unwilling to engage the woman, but I am not going to let her insult what Ashley and I share.

“You savage, you can’t threaten me in my own home! Donald, did you hear that?”

“Enough!” Mr. Blackwell yells, speaking for the first time, his hard eyes on me when he continues. “I want you to pack your things in the next five minutes, and if I see you anywhere near my daughter, I’ll make sure you never work again.”

I raise a single brow at his words, but the woman clutching onto me for dear life is not as calm as I am.

“What! Dad, you can’t do that!” she rages, tearing up. “If he leaves, then I will too.”

“Ashley!”

“No, Dad, you cannot kick Logan out and expect me to stay. If he goes, I go.”

“You will do no such thing!”

“Watch me!”

*Fuck!*

She’s so fucking hot, standing up to her parents like she isn’t shaking in her boots. Perhaps this is not the best place and time to get hard, but my cock thickens in my jeans despite having been inside her less than half an hour ago.

It’s like that with Ashley; I will never not want her, and even now, surrounded by angry people, all I want is to be inside of her. I long to kiss her lips, trail my hands over her thighs, slip my finger between her wet folds, and watch her come apart in my arms. I want to kick everyone out, lay her flat on her father’s desk, and fuck her until she’s screaming my name.

I snap out of my fog long enough to grab her hand before she can storm out of the office, but someone else has stepped in her path to stop her as well.

I push Ashley behind me and step between Joseph and everyone else. His eyes darken when he notices the move, and a smirk forms on his lips.

“Do you really think this family will accept you?” he sneers, running his hand over his short blond hair. “A mere farmhand? You have nothing to offer them.”

I don’t care to be accepted by anyone but Ashley, and I have no intention of explaining myself to him or anyone else in the room. Ashley and I are adults and need no one’s approval to be together. Their blessing would mean a lot to Ashley, but that’s the extent of it. Still, I can’t let this asshole get away with the lies he’s told.

“You’re a fraud,” I say, watching with satisfaction as his smirk drops and his face turns sheet white.

Ah, he didn’t think anyone would find out. His family did a good job hiding their criminal past, but nothing is ever truly buried. Not when I know people who can unearth it.

“What did you say?” he rages, storming toward me, but it’s laughable to think this kid would even imagine he has an eighth of a chance against me. I easily shove him back and send him crashing into a table, where he knocks into an expensive-looking vase. We all watch in anticipation as it sways before finally dropping and crashing to the floor.

“You broke my great-grandma’s precious vase!” Mrs. Blackwell shrieks hysterically before letting out another scream as she turns to Joseph, who is holding a sharp piece of the broken vase and pointing it at us.

“Put that down,” I say, my voice dangerously low. “It’s your choice to leave this place conscious or not. One thing is for sure, you’re not getting Ashley or her family’s money. If you want to use someone to get your family out of debt, it’s not going to be her.”

“Shut up!”

“I was suspicious about you. All those lies about backpacking through Asia, when the reality is you and your family are con artists, claiming to have a tech empire to worm your way in with the wealthy elite, only to con some naïve heiress into marrying you so you can steal her family’s money. How many times have you been married, Joseph? Was it three? No, five. Hell, I’m not sure that your last divorce has even been finalized yet.”

Joseph charges, his eyes glowing with anger when he swings the vase shard at me, but I am ready for him. I dodge to the side, and his attack misses, which only infuriates him further. He tries again, and this time, I reach out and grab his wrist, twisting it sharply. He cries out in pain and drops the shard to the floor. I use my other hand to grab his elbow and apply pressure where he tries to pull away, but I am too strong for him.

With a quick motion, I bend his arm back and push him to the ground. He's still struggling, but it's obvious to everyone that he's lost the fight. It would have been beneficial for him if he'd realized that before engaging me. Hell, he should have stopped long ago, when he first thought he could use Ashley to get rich.

I apply more pressure to his arm, then strike his head, and he goes limp. I let go of him, and he drops to the carpeted floor with a soft thud.

I turn around to find the Blackwells huddled in a corner, watching me with shock. Ashley is the first to break out of the trance they seem to be in as she steps up to my side.

"I-Is he dead?" she whispers shakily.

"No, he just passed out. He will be fine," I say to her before looking over her shoulder at her parents. "Tell his parents the arrangement is off. I will not be as forgiving if he comes near Ashley again."

With that, I grab Ashley's hand and start for the door, and she follows without a word. It's only when we're outside that she asks where we're headed.

"To get married," I tell her. "The courthouse will be open today."

"Wait," she protests, tugging at my hand. She chews at her lips as she stares up at me, and for one scary second, I am afraid to think that I may have read her wrong.

"Ash . . ."

"It's not that I don't want to get married to you," she hurries to say, her eyes darting over my shoulder, and I follow her gaze to the hay barn. "I just want it to happen there."

"The barn? But your parents—"

"Will support us," she says, nodding at her parents watching us from

her father's office window. "My dad is just brooding because he made a bad judgment call, but he will come around. We've waited for two years; can we please wait to have it in there?"

"You don't want a grand wedding?"

"No, just a small, intimate ceremony in the old barn with the people closest to us watching from the hay seats as we exchange our vows."

My gaze shifts from her dreamy eyes back to the window her parents are watching us from, and I realize I cannot say no to her. I draw her into my arms; the warm press of her body against mine has my hardened cock throbbing in its confinement.

"Alright," I whisper, tightening my hold. "If they still fight us on this in a month, then I am dragging you to the courthouse and making you legally mine."

"Deal!" She beams, wrapping her arms around my waist. "I love you, cowboy."

"I love you," I say gruffly, my heart hammering hard and threatening to burst out of my chest. Hearing her express her affection so freely makes me want to lay the world at her feet, but for now, I settle for kissing her temple and hugging her close to me.

I have the rest of my life to give her the world.

# *Epilogue*

*Logan*

*Five years later...*

I've always loved summer.

If I ever needed a reason to confirm my wife's undying love for me, I witness it on full display during the summer.

She drops everything and braves the harsh climate just to catch a glimpse of my shirtless torso, and I, like the smitten husband that I am, accommodate her.

It's been like this for years, even before we got together. My precious wife would sit on her balcony with her little fan and watch me while pretending to be reading a book, but she wasn't good at hiding the fact that her eyes were on me, and I would let her get her fill.

Back then, I would let my jeans ride a little too low to give her an unobstructed view of my V-line and leave my tattoos on full display, knowing as soon as I got back to the barn, she'd find some excuse to come find me.

It's no different this year. Well, except for the tattoos. I've gotten a few additions, one of which is on my ring finger, a thick band tattooed on my hand so everyone knows I'm taken when I can't work with my wedding ring on. The other one is a small crown, right next to the tiara I got six years ago. The crown is for our four-year-old son, who is no doubt sweet talking Magda into giving him ice cream right about now.

"Hey boss, let's take a break," Eric calls out to me, and I glare at him, which sends him cackling.

"I'm not your boss, asshole."

“Technically, you’re the ranch manager, and I am but a humble servant. A foreman, whose power could never compare . . .”

I throw a work glove at him to shut him up. When Ashley’s father promoted me ranch manager and put me in charge of overseeing everything, I thought he was doing me a favor, but little did I know the responsibility the position held. Ashley has even pointed out a few gray hairs at my temple, and no way were they from turning forty.

It was important to Ashley that her dad and I get along, and it happened faster than I expected. I guess protecting his daughter from a con artist gained me favor in his eyes.

“Fine,” I say with a wave. “Y’all can take a break.”

We’ve been working on the land in preparation for harvesting season, and I know the guys are exhausted since I was working right alongside them.

Some of the men leave for the bunkhouse and others head for the kitchen to sweettalk Magda into giving them something cold, and I decide to go to my wife, but when I turn around, she’s not on the porch of the little house her father built for us, where she’d been standing earlier.

I consider calling her, but I left my cell phone . . . somewhere.

Fuck! I’m always losing the damn thing.

I figure she must have gone to the main house, and I wonder if she’s left for the city. She’s been working alongside her dad ever since she graduated with her economics degree a few years ago.

I’m starting to think that is the case when it hits me.

The barn.

Three years ago, our hay barn burned down from an accidental fire, and Ashley was so heartbroken, I had to build her another one on the same spot before fucking her on every inch of the large building, recreating some of our favorite memories.

I find her just where I figured she’d be, and like the first time I saw her and every moment since, I am overwhelmed by her beauty. She leaves me weak. Claiming her for myself has done nothing to sate the desire I have for this woman.

She is leaning up against a haystack in a floral skirt and a crop top that



does very little to hide her puckered nipples. My cock hardens in an instant when I realize the top she is wearing is thin and nearly see-through.

Fuck, she's hot. She seems to get hotter with every passing day, making it hard for me to focus on anything but her.

Five years of marriage, and I still want her like I did the first day.

"I thought you would never show up," she whispers, running a hand over her chest, and my eyes follow hungrily along. "I've been waiting forever."

"Then I guess I'll have to make it up to you," I say, closing the distance between us. I wrap a hand around her nape and crush my lips down on hers, swallowing her needy moan as she arches into me. She whimpers deeply as I plunder her with my tongue with the urgency of a sex-starved man.

One would think I haven't touched my wife for days, perhaps weeks, with the way she melts in my arms and pushes hard against my touch, but I've fucked her twice today, and it's barely noon.

When I woke up with my wife's lips around my shaft, it was inevitable that I would end up inside her, making slow, torturous love in our bed. I was barely out of the shower before she was whining for my cock, and I fucked her against the bathroom wall, forcing me to take a second shower.

And now, my cock throbs in my pants like I've been celibate for years and not mere hours.

I trace my lips over her jawline to her neck, laying open-mouthed kisses against her even as I circle my thumb over her nipples.

"Oh," she whimpers when I kiss my way down and lick her nipples over her thin top. She wraps her arm over my shoulder and draws me closer, her lips parting in a cry when I suck the bud into my mouth through the fabric.

I slip my hand beneath her skirt and tug her panties down her thighs, and she steps out of them a second before I lift her into my arms, sitting her atop a stack of hay.

I draw my lips from her nipples before crashing my mouth with hers once more, all the while, working on the closure of my jeans. I push them

down my hips along with my briefs, my angry cock bobbing out.

“You taste so fucking amazing,” I whisper against her lips as I bend my knees and guide my thick shaft to her dripping sex. “I want to taste the rest of you. Lick your pussy and take my time fucking you with my tongue . . .”

“Oh, fuck, Logan!” she cries when I rub my cock against her wet pussy, my precum mixing with her creamy juices. “Fuck me, please.”

I grab her knee and lift it to my hip before thrusting home, filling her dripping hole with my rigid cock.

“So fucking naughty,” I growl as I pump my thick shaft into her. “Look at you, getting all wet and needy in an open space where anyone could walk in and see you . . . hear you . . .”

“Oh!” she moans, her back arching and her pussy clamping hard around me, almost sending me over the edge.

“You like that, don’t you?” I say hoarsely, rocking into her with reckless abandon. “You like the thought of people hearing what a horny little cock slut my wife is, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she whimpers, rocking her hips fervently to meet my thrusts. “Your cock slut.”

“Mine,” I growl, slamming into her dripping sex so hard we send the hay bale she’s leaned up against tumbling to the ground.

“Oh, faster, Logan . . .”

I clamp our lips together and swallow her cries as an orgasm tears through her, triggering my own, so we’re coming together. I bury my face in her neck, inhaling her delicate scent as I let her milk me of everything until we’re both breathless.

“That was . . .”

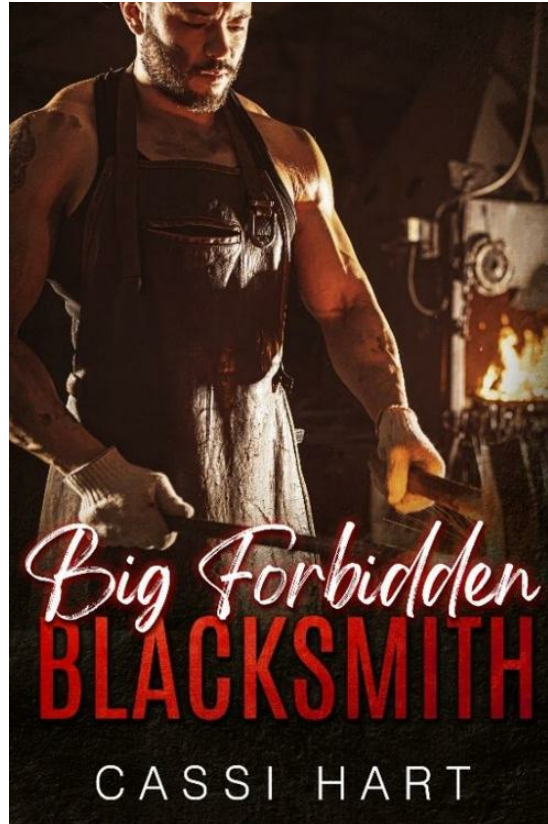
“Yeah,” she nods, and I chuckle as I push hair from her face. Anyone who sees her after this will know she’s been well and truly fucked, but they can think whatever they like.

Ashley is mine, and now, I have the papers to prove it.

~The End



*Up Next...*



**Lara**

I've lost my creative edge somehow, and it's been a struggle to get it back. To help myself reconnect with my artistic side, I make a spur of the moment trip out to the country to see my best friend. My hope was that getting out of the city would be the change of scenery I needed, but instead, I'm hopelessly lost. Thank goodness a kind stranger happened to drive down the road and come to my rescue. Knox is big and a little rough around the edges, but his touch is gentle and soothing. It's possible I like him too much. I think I'm catching feelings for this handsome loner, and they feel far too good to be true. Is it possible he feels the same way?

**Knox**

I've spent the past few years making a new life for myself out in the countryside. After my father died, someone needed to look after his property and his workshop. Turns out that I was well suited to take over for him—I can't imagine doing anything else with my life. That is, until I come across Lara. This little slip of a girl has turned my life upside down. I'd resolved myself to a life of solitude, just me and my cat and my blacksmithing. I didn't think I needed anything or anyone else. Turns out that what I needed was Lara, and I'm hard pressed to let her go now that she's in my world. Will I be able to convince her to give me a chance?

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*Alice*

**I saw something I shouldn't have, and my life is in danger.**

The police won't listen, and I have no choice but to seek help at Benedetti's, a bar known for its criminal clientele. But I'm barely inside the door before a dark eyed devil drags me back out and demands to know why I'm there. I shouldn't trust him, but I don't have a choice when he's the only one willing to help me.

*Too late*, I learn who he really is, and now I'm left to wonder... when this is all over, will he save my life only to break my heart?





## *About the Author*

Cassi lives to write brazen OTT, insta-love, short stories, about possessive alphas and the women they love. Stories that will leave you satisfied, and maybe blushing a little. Cassi loves pedicures, being pampered in any way possible, her darling golden Princess, amazing coffee, and traveling to anywhere warm.



*Cassi H*  *rt*