

Siren Publishing

*Ménage Amour*



# LOVE ON THE RUN

Blaze Ballantine

TASTY  
TREATS

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*Tasty Treats*

**Blaze Ballantine**

**MENAGE AMOUR**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
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# LOVE ON THE RUN

*Tasty Treats*

**BLAZE BALLANTINE**

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## Chapter One

Sarah Roberts watched two cowboys on Appaloosa stallions riding hell-bent for leather trying to beat the storm chasing them across the open range. Behind the pair of riders, in a violent wash of purple and orange, the sky roiled with fury. Overhead, booming thunder rumbled like the hooves of a thousand stampeding buffalo. Taking a deep breath, Sarah could smell the oncoming storm, the scent of ozone, and taste the dust being stirred by the wind. She knew this would be a bad one.

Trapped in the corral, the livestock bawled nervously, and the horses pawed at the ground, snorting in fear. They needed calming. *Where the hell is Collis?* she wondered. He wasn't good for much, but he did have a way with the horses. She suspected he lay passed out drunk somewhere, snoring loudly, unaware of the approaching storm or the incoming riders.

A gust of wind whipped particles of dust in Sarah's eyes, flinging her dark auburn hair wildly around her face as she fought her way through the blowing sand to the livestock enclosure. Financial considerations dictated her decision to leave the bellowing cattle alone. Instead she went for the horses they kept in a separate holding area rented by the Sweetwater Station stagecoach line. To lose any of

the horses would be devastating beyond compare, as they would have to replace the animals.

Sarah tugged on the wooden gate, testing the leather strap holding it shut. The tie seemed secure enough, and she allowed herself to breathe a sigh of relief. Chasing down a corral full of panicked horses during a blinding storm was the last thing she wanted to do. Still, it might be more enjoyable than facing an evening with Collis, she thought.

Sarah screamed involuntarily when a bolt of lightning split a saguaro cactus not more than a hundred yards from the house. *Time for retreat*, she decided, gathering her long calico skirts nearly to her knees and sprinting for the shelter of the porch.

Glancing over her shoulder, she stopped for a moment to watch the riders advance. They drove their mounts hard, galloping side by side like a pair of bookends. Something about the way they rode and the muscular build of their bodies gave Sarah the impression of men in their prime. Certainly not the grizzled old prospectors or well-fatted ranchers that occasionally dropped by the station for a home cooked meal.

The pair of them made a fine sight on their magnificent horses with the Arizona landscape and their flapping black dusters, low-slung gun belts, and leather hats pulled down over their features. Even from this distance, Sarah thought they looked dangerous, and she hoped they weren't bandits or outlaws on the run from the law.

Unable to turn away from the sight they made galloping in the face of the storm, she stood on the porch until the men rode into the yard, stopping no more than a few feet away from her. One of the riders looked up, locking his gaze onto her with such intensity she nearly took a step back. He had deep blue eyes the color of a summer's twilight.

"Ma'am," he said, touching the brim in his hat in a fashionable western greeting. "You mind if we take shelter from the storm?"

It took Sarah a moment to find her voice. He was the finest

looking man she ever laid eyes on. A day's growth of beard couldn't hide the slight cleft in his chin or the attractiveness of his sharply chiseled features. He should have looked unkempt with the stubble on his face. Instead, it gave him the appearance of a handsome desperado.

"Of course," Sarah finally managed, pointing in the direction of the barn. "You can put your horses in there while I fix something to eat."

At the mention of food, the man's partner looked up and Sarah's knees went weak. If someone had put a gun to her head she couldn't have picked out which man she thought most handsome. The cowboy staring at her had warm skin, hazel eyes and glossy black hair that brushed his wide shoulders. Sarah suspected from the height of his cheekbones and the shape of his eyes he had a mixed heritage.

"That would be real nice of you, ma'am." He flashed a grin that showed straight white teeth.

"Go on with you, then. Get your horses settled." A clap of thunder felt like it shook the ground, drowning out Sarah's voice. Without waiting for a reply from the men, she whirled around, fairly running into the cabin.

"Collis!" She shouted. "We've got company. Where are you?"

Not surprisingly, Collis didn't answer. He never seemed to be around when Sarah needed him. With a sigh of resignation, she stoked the kindling that still smoldered in the cast iron cooking stove. When she heard the crackle of wood ignite, she put a pot of water on the back burner to boil. She would make a quick stew with potatoes, onions, and a little beef thrown in for substance. Then she would toast the bread left over from breakfast so the men could soak up the stew with chunks of the fresh baked loaf.

Outside, the storm broke wild. She heard it pounding the tin roof with what sounded like gallons of rain. The men would be drenched when they returned from the barn, and Sarah decided to put on a pot of coffee to warm them. Maybe she would break out the pie she baked



for the stage passengers scheduled to arrive tomorrow around midday. With the amount of rain coming down, it seemed reasonable the stage might be delayed on the other side of the gully. Sweetwater Creek would swell for a day or two, making it impossible to cross, and then everything would be back to normal except for the riot of wildflowers the moisture would bring to the usually parched land.

Another bolt of lightning lit up the sky. Sarah could swear she heard the sizzle of electricity crackling around her just before a boom of thunder left her temporarily deaf. She couldn't hear the hard thumping of boots hurrying across the wooden planks of the porch.

The door suddenly burst open and both men spilled wetly inside with Collis hanging drunkenly limp between them. Too inebriated to stand by himself, his feet dragged uselessly on the floor as they carried him into the room. His hatless head lolled forward, nearly onto his chest, dripping a puddle of water from his lank hair.

"We found him passed out in the barn," one of the men explained. "He was layin' there with his mouth wide open. If he'd been outside in this rain, he would have drowned."

"No such luck," Sarah whispered under her breath, mortified the strangers found her ex-husband in such a fashion.

The warm skinned man cast Collis a look of contempt before dumping him unceremoniously on the cot in the corner of the room. "Pardon me, ma'am, I know it's none of my business, but he doesn't mistreat you, does he?"

"You're right, cowboy," Sarah cut him off before he could ask any more personal questions. "It's not your business."

The blue-eyed man smothered a laugh. "My partner doesn't have any manners, ma'am. You'll have to overlook him."

Sarah immediately felt sorry for her sharp words. She glanced over at Collis sprawled out awkwardly on the bed. He flopped on his side with a resounding snore and a blast of flatulence the storm couldn't completely drown out.

Sarah blushed hotly, wishing she could melt through the cracks in

the floor. "I appreciate your concern." She looked at both men and lowered her voice. "But I can take care of myself. Collis is all right as long as you let him sleep it off. It's best to just avoid him when he's drunk." She extended her hand. "I'm Sarah Roberts. You can call me Sarah. I don't like to be called Mrs. Roberts."

"I can understand that," the blue-eyed man said, clearly trying to keep his laughter in check. "I'm Lucas Boone and this is Cade Hawke."

Sarah shook both of their hands, feeling the strength in their respective grips. Curious about their arrival in the storm, she wanted to know what brought them to Sweetwater, but it would be bad manners to ask. Instead, she busied herself getting rags for the men to dry off with and making sure the stew didn't stick in the pot. Outside, the storm's fury seemed to be subsiding into nothing more than a gully washing rain.

"That's mighty nice of you, ma'am. Takin' the time to fix us supper, I mean." Lucas stretched his legs out closer to the fire, drying the soaked leather of his cowboy boots. "Cade and I have been on the trail for several days now. Have you heard the news?"

Sarah shook her head. "News doesn't travel fast out here, gentlemen. I've been hearing rumors that war is going to be declared between the states. Do you think that will happen?"

Lucas gave an elegant shrug of his shoulders. "It seems more than likely, ma'am. South Carolina has already seceded from the Union, and the rest of the southern states are going to follow. It's just a matter of time."

Sarah blinked a couple of times to stop the quick sting of tears. "War will be a terrible thing, if it happens. Do you think it will reach this far west? Seems to me like we already have enough on our hands without worrying about the future of this country. Or more bloodshed."

Cade looked down at the floor like he couldn't meet her stare, and Sarah knew he hadn't told her everything. "What? What aren't you

saying?”

“We heard rumors this route’s going to be shut down when the war begins.” Cade looked up at her apologetically. “And John Butterfield is going bankrupt.”

Sarah felt dizzy with shock. John Butterfield owned the stagecoach line. What would happen to them if the stage shut down? Collis couldn’t hold a job in any decent city and there sure weren’t any jobs for women. At least no work that Sarah was willing to do, she told herself. She wasn’t going to become a whore to feed her drunken ex-husband. She’d let him starve in the street before she prostituted herself for him.

“Mind you don’t get all upset, Miss Sarah. It’s nothing more than rumors.”

Sarah took a moment to ladle a generous bowl of stew, handing it over to Cade. “Out here you can call me Sarah. We don’t stand on high society manners. Rumor or not, I’ve got to prepare for the worst. If this stagecoach line shuts down I’m going to be in a world of hurt, gentlemen.”

“It’ll be all right,” Lucas said. “You’ve got a husband to take care of you, Sarah.”

She handed him a steaming bowl of stew, casting a bitter glance over at the still snoring Collis stretched out on the cot. She arched one eyebrow at Lucas. “Do I, Mr. Boone?”

Lucas looked from her to Collis. “He is your husband, isn’t he?”

“He used to be.” Sarah met Lucas’s stare. “It’s a long story and I’m not certain I want to share it with a couple of strangers.”

“Didn’t mean to pry, ma’am.”

“No harm done, Mr. Boone.”

Sarah had no intention of explaining the circumstances of her wedding, or her divorce. She and Collis never shared a conventional marriage. She supposed in polite society it would be called a marriage of convenience.

Sarah wondered what the men would think if she told them Collis

had little use for sex. After his initial bumbling attempts at being a husband, he had pretty much left her alone. He preferred to spend his time at the gambling houses and saloons.

Her wedding had been arranged to give her financial security and provide Collis with a level head to keep him from losing his father's fortune if something happened to the old man.

Despite her best efforts, Collis managed to lose most of the money anyway after his father died. When Sarah realized she couldn't control his gambling, she took the remainder of his inheritance and bought the stage franchise. With the help of an understanding judge, she quietly divorced Collis and put everything in her name.

Sarah could have taken advantage of the situation and left Collis with nothing. Instead, she found she couldn't leave him destitute, not after his father's kindness to her. She let him stay as a business partner. He wasn't much help, but he did have a way with the horses.

Oddly, she found he seemed to like the arrangement. She supposed it boiled down to his lack of responsibility. He had little else to do other than take care of the livestock and provide a cover as her husband when the occasional rough traveler showed her unwanted attention.

\* \* \* \*

The two men ate like they were starving, heads tucked down, shoveling food into their mouths as fast as politely acceptable. Sarah wondered when they had eaten last, or at the least, when they had enjoyed a home cooked meal. Their sounds of pleasure cemented her decision to cut the apple pie she baked earlier.

"Save room for dessert and coffee. I baked an apple pie this morning. I'll cut you both a slice."

"I'd kiss you if you wouldn't consider me improper," Lucas said, handing her the empty bowl reluctantly. "It's been a mighty long while since Cade and I had any home cooked meals, never mind

something like apple pie.”

Sarah hid her flush of pleasure. She wondered what it would be like to kiss a man like Lucas Boone. Before her mind could go wandering in that direction, she stopped herself cold. It wouldn’t do to let those thoughts enter her head. Collis could be mean as a snake and intuitive as a wolf when he wanted to be. Even though he had no real claim on her, he wouldn’t take kindly to her attraction to another man.

Until she saved up the money to move back east, she had to keep Collis satisfied with their current situation. When she left Arizona, then he could have the station and drink himself into an early grave. Providing he didn’t lose the whole operation in a game of cards first.

Taking tin cups down from the shelf above the hearth, Sarah poured coffee and sliced two generous wedges of apple pie for the men. “I baked this for the stage passengers tomorrow, but I imagine the storm will slow them down a bit.”

Collis stirred on the bed, opening one bloodshot eye to glare at her. “What are you makin’ so much racket for? Can’t you see I’m sleeping?”

“We have guests, Collis. Two riders sheltering from the storm. I’ve fixed a stew, would you like a bowl?”

Collis groaned, sitting up like it was an effort. He dropped his feet over the edge of the cot, holding on to the mattress with both hands as if he could stop the room from spinning. “I reckon I could eat a little. You say we had a storm?”

\* \* \* \*

Cade kept his thoughts to himself, but he wanted to sink his fist into Collis Robert’s belly so far his backbone shattered. The drunken bastard had a rare gift for these parts of the country. He had a woman, and a beautiful woman at that. Her auburn hair hung in damp ringlets around her oval shaped face, and her wide, thick lashed brown eyes lent an elfin quality to her small features. There were men that would

kill for much less than a woman like Sarah Roberts, and Cade surmised it didn't take a New York lawyer to figure out Collis took her for granted.

Cade observed Sarah through lowered eyes, pretending he wasn't watching the sway of her ass as she walked back and forth, tending to the hearth while she served the dumb shit still clinging to the bed. Despite the camisole she wore beneath the faded calico dress, her breasts strained against the fabric, taut nipples pouting to be loosed. It certainly wasn't cold in the room, and Cade wondered if he or Lucas had anything to do with her condition. He knew he sure as hell sported a hard-on from just looking at her. It would be interesting if she had the same reaction to him.

Reading his thoughts, Lucas gave him a glance and patted the deck of cards he kept in his vest pocket. With a nearly imperceptible nod of his head he motioned toward Sarah. Cade's heart slammed against his ribs, and then began to beat in double time. Did Lucas have it in his mind to get the drunken sod so far in debt he would gamble away his wife? Or his ex-wife, he corrected himself, if Sarah could be believed. Strange circumstances, Cade thought, for a divorced woman to be living with her ex-husband. But, then, with civil war on the horizon and the Indian uprisings, it was strange times.

Although he thought it would be heaven to bury himself in her body, Cade shrugged noncommittally. He didn't want any trouble. Already on the run from the law, the last thing they needed was to give Sheriff Sam Johnson an excuse to put a rope around their necks.

Lucas flashed him a challenging smile and Cade knew he would do it. He would get the man to play a few hands of poker and he would prod him until he gambled away everything he owned. That was Lucas' way. He would help the needy down to his last gold piece, but he thought nothing of taking advantage of those he felt deserved it.

With a little flourish, Lucas pulled the cards from his vest. "Are you a gambling man, Mr. Roberts?" He waved the cards enticingly

before slipping them back in his vest, and Cade wanted to curse. From the look on Collis's face, Lucas already had the damn fool reeled in. Now all he had to do was land him.

Outside, the rain started again, and Sarah gave a little frown of concern. "I need to tend to the livestock. I'll be back in a few minutes. Looks like this rain is going to keep up all evening, and I want to get the stock fed before dark."

"I'll help." Cade heard himself volunteering. "Two of us can get it done faster."

"I'll look after our horses if you want to help Sarah with the evening chores. Then we'll head on out." Lucas stood up, taking his hat from the peg where he hung it to dry next to the fire. He jammed the damp hat back on his head and walked toward the door. "You coming Mr. Roberts?"

"I'd truly like to help, gentlemen, but I got a bad back..."

"Never mind, Collis," Sarah said a little too quickly, casting an apologetic glance at Cade. Her cheeks turned pink. "We've got an extra couple of rooms for the stage travelers. You're welcome to spend the night if you don't want to journey in this weather."

"That's mighty hospitable of you, ma'am. I'm thinking for that pie alone we should do the chores while you stay in here and keep dry." Cade wanted her with him, but he didn't see the reasoning of getting her soaked. If they spent the night he would be able to satisfy some of his curiosity about how a woman like Sarah could end up with a jackass like Collis Roberts.

"Missus is right." Collis spoke up, slurring his words. "You shouldn't be ridin' in weather like this." He turned his bloodshot stare toward Lucas. "I'm lookin' forward to a hand of cards if you still have a mind to play."

"I've always got a mind to play a hand of cards," Lucas answered. "As soon as we get settled in for the evening, we'll begin."

*You dumb son of a bitch.* Cade heard the thoughts so loud in his head he worried for a moment that he had actually spoke them out

loud. Since no one looked at him, he figured he'd kept his mouth shut, despite the volume in his head. "You stay put, ma'am. No need for you to get wet."

Sarah shot him a pleading glance. "I'd better tend to the horses, Cade. Satan is skittish around anyone he's not familiar with. I don't want him riled up with this storm coming on."

Cade understood and kept his mouth shut. He'd made the offer, and the lady would rather go out in the driving rain than stay in the warm cabin with the lazy bastard. He could live with that. He didn't much want her in here with him, either. He'd hate to have to kill the man if he laid a violent hand on her.

"Have you got rain gear?"

Sarah nodded, pulling a heavy oiled duster from a peg near the door. It covered her from head to foot. Cade hid a grin. She looked like a kid playing grownup. But that body of hers didn't belong to any kid. Sarah Roberts was a woman ripe for loving, with the kind of body that drove a man wild with need. He allowed that Lucas might be right. Maybe they should play a few hands of poker and take the woman with them when they rode out. Life on the range would have to be better than whatever she faced here, working herself to death for a man like Collis Roberts.

\* \* \* \*

Cold rain stung Lucas's exposed skin the minute he stepped off the porch. He heard Sarah give a little gasp of shock before she sprinted toward the barn like a cavalry scout trying to outrun a brush fire. He'd never seen a woman move so fast in his life.

Cade gave him a wicked grin over his shoulder as he loped off to catch up with her. That could be a problem. It seemed to Lucas that Cade had fallen hard for the ex-Mrs. Roberts. He never seemed to take his stare off her. Sooner or later, the lazy drunk inside would sober up enough to see Cade wanted more than a warm meal and hot



coffee, and when he did, it would be hell to pay.

Not that he wouldn't be interested in a little piece of action for himself, Lucas admitted. The woman gave him a hard-on the minute he looked at her. He figured her for the sassy type when pushed. Not many women looked a man square in the eye without dropping her gaze, but Sarah took time to study him. *An interesting woman*, Lucas thought. She seemed both tough and vulnerable at the same time. And she knew how to keep from antagonizing Collis. Lucas figured that came from a lot of practice. He wondered how long she'd been married to him. He understood why she would get a divorce, but for the life of him, he couldn't understand why she stayed with the man. A sizzling bolt of lightning nearly blinded Lucas as he reached the shelter of the barn. It wasn't a huge building, more of a large shed than an eastern-style barn, but it had room to shelter the horses, along with storing grain and bales of hay. He patted their two mounts, making sure they ate the fodder he gave them before he went inside for dinner.

"Looks like you both get to rest tonight," he told the horses, reaching for the saddle of the nearest stallion when lightning struck the cabin.

Like a stick of dynamite had been tossed inside, the wooden structure exploded into fiery splinters. Lucas threw himself on the ground as the flaming debris rained down all around him. Even though his ears rang from the blast, he heard Sarah scream and Cade cut loose with a string of curses. The horses tried to bolt, but Lucas jumped to his feet blocking their exit. He managed to grab both sets of reins as they rushed the open door. He managed to hold on tightly even though the galloping horses nearly pulled his shoulder out of socket when they reached the end of the reins.

Outside, the animals trapped within the enclosure stampeded, knocking the fence down as they ran for the open range. In this part of the country, they would never be found in time. Thieves and renegades would have them rounded up before morning.

Miraculously, through the burning debris, Collis crawled out of the remains of the cabin. Lucas shook his head in disbelief. The son of a bitch must be the luckiest man on earth. Collis stood up a few feet from the wreckage, swaying wildly. Lucas couldn't tell if he still felt the effects of liquor, or if the explosion had given him a concussion.

Despite the deluge of rain, thick chunks of burning embers from the cabin landed inside the open door, catching fire to the loose hay lying on the ground. Lucas knew from experience the barn would be an inferno before anyone could stop it. He pulled the two horses through the flames, moving them far away from the blazing shed.

Cade struggled with Sarah. In shock from the explosion, she fought him like a wildcat, screaming and struggling to get out of his arms. Lucas went over to lend a little assistance, wrapping his arms around her, too, so that the three of them stood in an awkward group hug. At last, she stopped fighting and began to cry with heartbreaking finality.

"Everything is gone," she sobbed.

"No, Collis made it out. He's alive." Lucas said.

Sarah raised her head, looking around at the total devastation. She seemed in shock. "Collis survived?"

Lucas nodded and Sarah laughed hysterically.

"Of course," she said through gales of laughter. "Of course he would."

Collis wove his way over to the three of them. "I'm getting the hell outta here." He pointed a finger at Sarah, stabbing it close in her face. "You're bad luck, woman. I've lost everything since I got around you. Pa died an' all my money's gone. You ain't comin' with me."

Sarah looked stunned for a moment. Her eyes welled with tears, then she burst into giggles again.

She's in shock, Lucas thought, gently picking her up into his strong arms. He carried her to his horse and mounted, placing her in front of him on the saddle. There was no reason to stick around any

longer. They needed to find somewhere else to shelter for the night.

“We’ll take her to the next town.” Lucas looked down at Collis. “You want a ride?”

Collis flapped his hand dismissively. “I’ll find Satan. He won’t go far.” In what seemed like an afterthought, Collis squinted at Lucas. “You don’t have no whiskey, do ya?”

Lucas reached into his saddle bag and handed Collis the small flask he kept there. Collis took a long swig before handing the bottle back.

“You keep it,” Lucas said. No way did he want to drink out of the same bottle as Collis Roberts. “Good luck.” Collis reached out hesitantly, taking the bridle in his hand to keep Lucas from riding away. He looked embarrassed now and Lucas couldn’t help but wonder what he had in mind.

“You ain’t gonna hurt her, are you?”

Lucas felt Sarah stir in his arms. He’d never expected Collis to have any concern for Sarah’s well being. From the sudden stiffness of her body he guessed she felt the same.

“No. I’ll see she gets to Tucson safely.”

Collis nodded, keeping his eyes averted from Sarah’s face. “I – I gotta go find that horse.” Finally he looked up at Sarah as he released the bridle. “You ain’t really a bad woman. I shouldn’t have said those things, but I didn’t need no wife. My pa should have married you. The old man loved you, ya know?” Without waiting for a reply, he walked into the rain and disappeared in the darkness.

“You okay?” Lucas whispered. He wrapped his duster around both of them the best he could, drawing her tightly against his chest and placing her head under his chin. “It’s going to be fine, honey.” He reassured her. “We’ll take you to the nearest town and make sure you have enough money to get a coach back east, if that’s what you want to do.”

Cade swung into the saddle and rode up beside him. He didn’t look any too happy with the traveling arrangements.

“Easy, partner, we’ll trade off once we get out of Apache territory.” Lucas told him. “You’re a better scout than me. Right now we need your eyes focused and your head thinking clear.”

That soothed Cade enough he smiled. “This is better for her, anyway.”

“What? Me holding her? Or the house burning down?” Lucas teased. He felt Sarah stir in his arms again, reacting violently to his thoughtless words. She snapped her head out from under his chin so hard his teeth clicked together. *Damn.*

“Fuck you both,” Sarah fumed. Her earlier despair turning to red hot anger. “It’s easy for you to make light of this. How the hell am I supposed to support myself now? I’m not going to be a prostitute. Don’t even think you’ve got a chance. Either one of you.”

Cade burst out laughing when Lucas rubbed his jaw. “I’ve got to ride ahead. Enjoy yourself, Lucas.”

Sarah’s tongue lashed him mercilessly as Cade turned tail and rode out of sight, leaving him to take the full brunt of her anger. Lucas stifled a grin. Feisty, just like he thought. He let her rant for a few minutes while they rode, then he put a hand over her mouth to stop the tirade. She kicked and struggled until he caught her chin between his fingers and thumb, holding her firmly while he lowered his mouth over hers in a brutal kiss.

She had him hotter than a rattlesnake in hell. He liked a sassy woman. A woman that needed tamed and gentled by a man strong enough to conquer her without breaking her spirit. He figured he could tame Sarah Roberts, but it wouldn’t be easy. He wasn’t sure it could be done before they reached Tucson, but he felt like giving it a good old fashioned try.

## **Chapter Two**

Sarah resisted against Lucas's arms until he claimed her mouth with his. He tasted like cinnamon from the apple pie she served earlier. Unyielding, his body felt hard as steel as he clasped her against him with one arm while the other hand held her face so his tongue could ravage her. She willed herself not to respond, but her body was a traitor. A sharp stab of desire clinched her pussy in a nearly painful response to his mouth.

God, she wanted him. She wanted him from the moment she laid eyes on his rugged face and hard body. How long had it been since she felt an orgasm that wasn't brought about by her own hand? Despite her earlier words, she would consider either man if it made her feel like a woman again. She could be persuaded to spread her legs wide if she thought that sharing her body with a couple of strangers could make her feel anything other than alone, tired, and abused.

As the kiss lingered on, Sarah felt her thighs grow damp with eager feminine juices. Lucas's kiss seemed to be awakening something she thought had died within her. Something alive and vital that Collis's disinterest smothered a long time ago. She opened her eyes to find Lucas studying her with half lowered eyes that seemed to smolder from the intensity of his stare.

"Admit it, you liked that." His husky voice came from somewhere deep in his chest, making her shiver and lean a little closer to his mouth.

"Maybe I did, but I'm still not going to..."

"I'll make you a bet that you will," he interrupted, "before we get

to Tucson.”

Sarah narrowed her eyes. “You’re a betting man, aren’t you, Lucas Boone?”

He shrugged lightly, a quick grin flitting across his full lips. “There’s nothing wrong with a friendly little wager now and then. Are you afraid to take the bet?”

Sarah tossed her head. “I have nothing to bet, sir. Do you forget my whole life just went up in flames?”

Lucas grinned wide, his eyes raking over the slight form hidden beneath the bulky duster. “I’d say you’ve got a lot to bargain with, Miss Sarah, but just so we do this fair and square, I’ll lay out the deal for you. If I can seduce you before we get to Tucson, you have to give Cade and me one night of pleasure before we put you on the stage going east. I’m talking about both of us. Together.” He paused as if for effect. “All night.”

Shocked beyond words, Sarah managed a dazed whisper. “You mean both of you at the same time?”

Lucas’s grin turned into a masculine chuckle that shimmered between them on the damp night air. “That’s right.”

Sarah chewed her bottom lip while she thought about it. “Can that even be done?”

Lucas’s blue eyes turned wicked and he arched his brows. “Guess we’ll never know since you aren’t going to give in now, are you?”

“What will you wager if I don’t give in, if I can resist your manly charms?” Sarah enjoyed the provocative exchange, feeling more alive than she had for a very long time.

“We’ll see you on the stage back east with enough money to get you started in a new life, just like I told you before.”

“But you already promised me that, so it doesn’t matter if I win or lose.”

“It will matter a whole hell of a lot to me, Sarah, to me and Cade both.”

She laughed, looking out over the desert night, feeling young and

alive for the first time in months. “You’ve got a deal, Mr. Boone. Shall we seal it with a kiss?”

Lucas lowered his face to hers, his lips promising her passion she’d never experienced in her twenty-one years of life. He kissed her almost tenderly and in the sweet pressure of his lips, he conveyed the way he would treat her body. When he drew back from her, he settled her more comfortably on the saddle.

“Can I ask how a woman like you ended up with Collis Roberts?”

Sarah rested her head against Lucas’s shoulder feeling the stubble of his beard capture the occasional flyaway strands that blew under his chin.

“Last year, my folks decided to move westward from Ohio. My father thought there would be more opportunity in California. Maybe he’d heard rumors of war. He loved to talk politics. I don’t really know what possessed them to up and move, but we sold off everything we couldn’t carry and headed west. We made it as far as Arizona without incident, but a couple of armed highway men stopped the coach and demanded everyone’s gold.”

“And your parents wouldn’t hand it over.” Lucas had seen it happen before. *Better to be dead broke*, he thought, *than plain old dead*.

“That’s exactly what happened,” Sarah acknowledged. “Papa fought tooth and nail, and when they shot him, Mama ran to help and they shot her, too. They told the rest of us if we didn’t hand over our money they would kill everyone.”

“Did they...hurt you?”

Sarah shook her head. “No, they didn’t, thanks to Collis Roberts, Sr. He pretended I was his daughter. He told me to keep quiet and let him talk. He bribed the men to leave me alone.”

She felt Lucas stiffen slightly. “How did he do that, Sarah?”

“He gave them a diamond ring he slipped into his pocket when they stopped the stage. They seemed in a hurry, and I guess the ring seemed a better bargain than me.”

Lucas relaxed slightly. "Go on, tell me everything."

"Collis, Sr. took me home with him because I had nothing. No place to go and no money. I was desperate, as you can imagine. He treated me kindly, Lucas. After a while, it seemed as if I belonged there. He told me I should marry his only son, Collis, Jr. He said if I married Junior, he'd see to it that I would be well treated and never want for anything."

Lucas gave a snort of disgust. "That proved to be a lie, now didn't it?"

"Not at first." Sarah turned to look at Lucas, her eyes pleading with him to understand. "I thought Junior would be like his father, kind, level headed and a good man. It wasn't so bad in the beginning, actually. He wasn't at home a lot. Everything went fine until Collis, Sr. died unexpectedly. He had a heart attack in his sleep and didn't wake up. Without him to monitor Junior's gambling and drinking, everything fell to pieces quickly. In less than six months, all the wealth vanished."

"You were only married to him for a few months?"

"That seemed long enough."

"I imagine it did, darlin'." Lucas gave her a squeeze. "I doubt Collis showed you anything about being a woman. Am I right?"

"I know about being a woman," Sarah huffed.

"Oh, really?" Lucas taunted. "Then you know what it's like to have a man eat your sweet little pussy?"

"*Mr. Boone!*"

Lucas threw his head back with a laugh, and Sarah felt herself blushing hotly. Worse, a delicious, needful wetness soiled her thin muslin pantaloons, causing her to squirm uncomfortably on the hard leather saddle.

"Tell me that thought has never crossed your mind." Lucas whispered the words in her ear so softly she might have thought she imagined them if it hadn't been for the warmth of his fingers under the duster, finding their way down her belly to inch between her legs.



“A proper woman does not think of such things,” Sarah replied primly.

“Of course she does.” Lucas’s fingers stroked her through the layers of clothing. “Wouldn’t you like to have my tongue lapping up your cream and stroking over this little nub right here?”

His finger found the hard little bud of desire that *proper* women protected by wearing too many layers of clothing. The layers presented no barrier as he smoothed out the soft calico and pressed gently against the spot. “Doesn’t that feel good, Sarah? Now, imagine if you had no clothes to dull the sensation. Imagine if my mouth...”

“Don’t. Please don’t say things like that.” Sarah pleaded with him to stop. The mental images he conjured in her head and his husky voice in her ear were more than she could bear. If he kept up his verbal seduction, she would lose the bet before morning.

“Your loss,” Lucas said easily. He moved his hand out of her duster after brushing across her breasts, leaving the tingling of his fingers behind on her skin. If he made her feel this way covered, what would his touch be like on bare flesh?

Leaning back limply against Lucas’s wide chest, Sarah found herself floating in a world of possibilities. Suddenly the future seemed wide open and limitless. Did she really want to go back east? What waited for her in Ohio? She had no family. Her friends had all married and now lived their own lives. If she returned, they would feel pity for her and probably spend their time trying to find her a husband. The thought made Sarah shudder.

“Cold?” Lucas asked, wrapping his arm around her to pull her tighter into the warmth of his body.

Sarah let him think she was chilled from the rain, but in reality her coldness came from within. She didn’t want to face the thought of being alone or having to marry another someone like Collis to survive. She wanted a chance to live and to find love before being tied down to cooking three meals a day and doing endless household chores. Heaven knew she had done enough of all that, and more, over

the past several months. Like a butterfly escaping its sheltered cocoon, a bold plan took flight in Sarah's mind, but first, she needed some information.

"How did you and Cade become partners?"

"He's my cousin." Lucas explained quietly. "We were raised together, so he's more like a brother."

"Oh, I thought...well, I thought..."

"His mother and mine were sisters. Aunt Mina got herself captured by a tribe of Comanche as a child. Later, she married the chief and had his children. Cade is the youngest. She brought him with her when the cavalry rescued her."

"What happened to the other children?"

"They stayed with their father."

"How could she leave them behind?"

Lucas stroked her hair gently. "She didn't want to. She didn't want to leave her husband for that matter. She tried to escape back to him several times."

"She wanted to go back to the Indians?" Sarah couldn't hide her shock. Mostly she heard nothing but bad things about what captives endured.

"Aunt Mina cried every night until my pa said he would take her back. He said it wasn't right for a family to be kept apart like that. A few years later most of the tribe died of tuberculosis, including my aunt. Cade didn't get the sickness, and my folks took him in and raised us together since we were so near the same age."

"They sound like lovely people. Cade is very lucky to have a family like yours."

"Yes, I am."

Sarah leaned around Lucas to see Cade riding a couple of paces behind. She wondered how long he'd been there and how much he'd seen or heard. How could he be so quiet? Why didn't his horse make any sound? Could it be some Comanche trick, or did she let herself get so distracted she did not hear him ride up?

She wondered what the men said to one another when they began conversing in a language she was unfamiliar with. Then a phrase she'd heard before caught her attention. *Comanche*. They both spoke in Cade's native tongue. And she had a feeling the conversation concerned her.

\* \* \* \*

Cade listened to his cousin's plan as he scanned the darkness for shadows that didn't belong. The rain turned into a light mist and would be nonexistent within the hour. Cade didn't like being in Apache territory at night with a woman to slow them down. He had a truce of sorts with the leaders of the various tribes, but that wouldn't do much good if they shot first and asked questions later. He understood their frustration at the invasion of settlers encroaching on their lands, but he didn't think the mass influx could be stopped. Seemed to him life would be simpler if they could all learn to live together, but he didn't see that happening any time soon. Therefore, he kept a sharp lookout for hostiles of any type, human or animal.

Sarah looked up at him from the protection of his cousin's duster. Her eyes looked wide and luminous in the moonlight. Cade wanted nothing more than to kiss her until she melted in his arms. He'd seen Lucas kiss her, just like he'd seen the surrender of her body in the way she stopped struggling after a few moments of his mouth on hers. It made him feel things he didn't want to feel toward his cousin. After hearing Lucas's plan, he felt even guiltier for the stab of jealousy that washed over him when he watched them kiss.

"There's a cabin about two miles from here that should give us cover until daylight." Cade knew the previous occupants were killed by a gang of murdering thieves, but he wasn't going to mention that. Lucas would figure it out soon enough if he didn't already know the place, and hopefully Sarah would remain clueless. Despite the cabin's previous misfortune, Cade thought any shelter in the storm would do

for the rest of the night, and he would have them back on the trail by sunrise.

“I’m scouting ahead,” he told Lucas. “Meet you at the cabin.”

The two of them exchanged lengthy looks. They didn’t have much time if they wanted to convince Sarah Roberts she couldn’t exist without sharing their beds. With any luck, they would be two satisfied men by the time they reached Tucson.

Cade spurred his horse forward. He hoped the cabin hadn’t been burned by the Apache or damaged in the storm. It would not only provide shelter, it would give them a chance to work on Sarah. He didn’t consider his cousin’s plan as cheating. A little underhanded, maybe, but not full out cheating. Besides, it wasn’t like they were out to harm Sarah Roberts, not at all. They had full intentions of making sure Sarah left them as a fulfilled and happy woman. Then, when they reached Tucson, they would fulfill their end of the bargain and see her safely on her way in any direction she wanted to go.

Cresting a small rise, Cade could see an outline of the Sutter’s cabin. It looked like the roof remained intact and all four walls seemed to be standing. The cabin sat on the edge of no-man’s land. Technically, the area belonged to the Apache, but they seldom followed this route. Likewise, the white settlers passing through hardly ever lingered in these parts or simply avoided them all together for a safer northern trail. As a result, the cabin rarely saw visitors. It was the elderly couple’s misfortune that an outlaw gang making a run for the border stumbled across their home. Now the superstitious considered the area unlucky. It would be a long time before anyone settled here that heard about the Sutter’s fate.

Cade felt sorry for the old homesteaders, but he didn’t believe in superstitious nonsense. They were murdered by the Bartram gang, a group of desperate outlaws. The wanted men probably thought by killing the elderly husband and wife they would slow the sheriff and his posse down. It didn’t work. Three of the gang lost their lives at the border. Cade doubted if anyone went back to the cabin since then. He

expected to find everything in reasonably good condition.

He tied Ginger to the porch rail before taking a look inside. The horse whinnied as if she didn't want to be there without him. Cade patted her neck, holding out his hand for her to take the small plug of tobacco he had in his palm. He wasn't a smoking man, but tobacco came in useful for bartering and for bribing nervous horses. Cade always kept a ready stash in his saddlebags.

Pushing open the door of the cabin, Cade saw a rope bed, a handmade table, a rocking chair and two broken stools that could easily be mended. Cooking had obviously been done on the hearth. There were no eating utensils in sight, but Cade suspected the Bartram gang would have taken anything small enough to carry. His gaze wandered back to the rocker and he smiled, remembering a woman in Tucson that taught him a rocking chair wasn't just for old folks and babies. Bringing himself back to the present, Cade thought that all in all, the place remained in pretty good shape, considering it was abandoned. He figured he could have the cabin in respectable order before Lucas made it, taking into consideration the pace he had to set riding double with Sarah.

\* \* \* \*

Lucas knew the cabin the moment he saw it and so did Sarah. "It's the Sutter place," she said softly, stirring in his arms. "Poor old dears. They wouldn't mind us using their cabin for shelter, do you think?"

"No, they wouldn't." Lucas tightened his grip around her, thankful beyond words that Sarah Roberts seemed to be a practical woman. In the same breath, he hoped she was a passionate woman. He guessed they would find out soon enough if their plan worked out.

Lucas could see Cade's horse tied to the hitching post, and a soft light glowed inside the tiny structure. It looked cozy in a ramshackle sort of way. Lucas smoothed Sarah's hair, wishing they could offer her something nicer than this. Still, it seemed a lot better than tossing

bedrolls on the muddy desert floor under the open sky. When they got to Tucson, they would make it up to her. In the meantime, he had to make sure Cade had some time alone with Sarah.

The deal, of course, had been if Lucas himself could seduce Sarah, she had to fuck both of them. As much as she responded to his kiss, Lucas knew she might resist him until it became too late for him to claim victory. She had proven herself to be a strong woman. While she might resist him for the hell of it, Cade could turn out to be a different matter. He wasn't in the equation unless Sarah surrendered to Lucas. So the two of them had hatched a plan for Cade to seduce her, and when she reached the point of no return they would bargain for Lucas to join in. Keeping a plan simple usually got results.

When Lucas reined his horse beside of Ginger, he scooped Sarah out of his lap, leaning over to drop her gently on the ground. "Why don't you go on inside," he suggested. "I'll take care of the horses before I come in."

\* \* \* \*

Sarah hesitated, unsure of what she would find inside the cabin after months of disuse. She felt somewhat adrift now that she was on her feet and without the warmth of Lucas's protecting arms. With a flutter of anxiety, she pushed open the heavy cabin door slowly to encounter a smiling Cade.

The cabin wasn't exactly gleaming, but the floor looked recently swept and a small fire crackled cheerily in the hearth. What little furniture existed was dust free and upright. The bed had thick hand sewn covers tossed over a homemade straw mattress.

"You've been busy." Sarah wondered at the heart of a man that would see to her needs after a day on the range. She knew he must be damp, tired, and eager to rest, but he had thought of her comforts before his own. She blinked back the quick burn of tears that threatened to fill her eyes.

“Have a seat.” Cade motioned toward the rocking chair he’d pulled in front of the hearth.

Sarah watched the play of highlights on his smooth, black hair as the firelight danced across his swarthy skin. Her breath quickened as she watched him move with such fluid ease he seemed to be born of the wind.

“Why don’t you sit down,” she invited. “You’ve had a long day.”

Smiling at him, she placed her hands on his shoulders, gently shoving him into the chair. A quizzical grin flitted across his mouth but he let her lead for the moment. When he dropped into the rocker, his hand caught Sarah’s arm, pulling her into his lap.

She thought it felt like the most natural thing in the world to settle her bottom comfortably on his muscular thighs, squirming around until she found the easiest position for her to look up into his exotic face.

“For a woman who said I didn’t have a chance, you’re giving me a pretty invitation,” he growled.

“A woman can change her mind, can’t she?” Sarah ran her fingers down the stubble of his face feeling the sandpaper roughness of his day’s growth of beard. “I was thinking on the way here that I have nowhere to go, no family, but I have you and Lucas for right now.”

She felt Cade’s heartbeat speed up, but he didn’t speak, so she continued. “Your partner offered me quite a shocking wager, Cade. A bet I took him up on with full intentions of winning.” She ran her cool fingers into the collar of Cade’s shirt feeling the rapid beat of his pulse. “But now that I’ve had time to reconsider, I’m thinking my winning isn’t really such a good thing.”

His eyes glinted with reflections of the fire as he stared down at Sarah. “Why’s that?”

Sarah deliberately raised her face to his so that their lips nearly touched.

“Deep inside me,” she said, touching her heart, “I’m an adventurous woman, Cade Hawke, but I suppressed it while my

parents lived. They deserved a proper daughter.” She dropped a kiss on the edge of Cade’s chin. “Then, because of necessity, I married. It isn’t seemly for a wife to act impulsively, either, and Mr. Roberts treated me kindly, so I continued to perform in the manner expected of me. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“I think so.” Cade’s hand brushed a strand of auburn curls away from Sarah’s neck before trailing lower to skim across the bodice of her dress, seeking out the hard nubs of her breasts. She shivered when his fingertips skipped lightly over the puckered flesh, pushing the damp material against her fevered skin.

“I suddenly find myself in the position of being my own keeper. I’m free to do as I please and there is something about your partner’s wicked offer that...”

“Intrigued you,” Cade finished. “You want to know what it feels like to have two men pleasure you. You feel the wildness in your soul, don’t you, Sarah?” Cade’s voice grew husky. “I knew when you looked at us, when you stared right back at me, bold as brass, that you weren’t afraid. Your eyes showed only curiosity, not fear.”

“Then teach me,” Sarah coaxed breathlessly. “Teach me to be wild and free. Show me the pleasures Lucas whispered in my ear. I said I knew what it was like to be a woman, but I lied. No man has ever touched me like that.”

She stood up from his lap, staring at him as she gathered her skirts high, giving him a look at her shapely legs. When she had her skirts gathered at her waist, she tucked them into the sides of her waistband where they would be easy to release if necessary. “Touch me, Cade.”

\* \* \* \*

Cade’s dick grew so hard he ached. Things weren’t turning out exactly like he and Lucas expected. Hell no. Things were getting better by the minute. He sure didn’t intend to make the lady wait for his touch. With a gentle hand, he ran his palms up her legs before



pulling down the muslin pantaloons she wore. Soft as the serviceable fabric felt, he made a mental note to buy her silk undergarments when they reached Tucson.

With his hands between her legs, she bent over to kiss him, wrapping her arms around his neck and pressing her lips against his until he groaned. He kept his fingers working at her, feeling her pussy get slicker with every stroke of his finger. He kept massaging her clit, rubbing gently across the hard little peak after lubricating his finger with her juices.

At last, she drew back from his mouth. "Get undressed. Please."

Cade did what she asked, and then sat back on the chair. "Sit down here, darlin'."

He watched Sarah study him a moment, her eyes focusing on the sizeable erection he sported. With a dimpled smile she turned away from him, giving Cade an up close and personal view of her ass before she reached back to enclose his dick in her small fist. The sensation of her fingers gripping him made him feel breathless. When she had him firmly in her grasp, she started to lower herself onto him. He felt the head of his cock slip inside her, squeezing its way into her tight channel. She stopped for a second when he was halfway in, as if she enjoyed the sensation of him opening her. She wiggled around as she pushed downward, forcing him deeper with each movement of her hips. When he felt she had taken his full length, Cade reached around her, cupping her breasts in his hands. He rolled her nipples between his fingers as she bounced up and down on his cock. She sat on his lap facing away from him while leaning forward to better accept his long member.

"Wait, Sarah," Cade whispered, dropping a soft kiss on her ear. He trailed his finger between her legs again, finding the swollen clit he'd been teasing earlier. As he put his finger on the button, he pushed his feet against the floor to start the chair rocking. It was an incredible sensation, he thought, as the chair rocked back and forth, shoving his cock deeper into her pussy at the same time his finger

lightly touched the sensitive tip of her clit. The slow rhythm drove them both a little crazy, and Cade couldn't help speeding up until he and Sarah rocked so fast he wondered if the chair could take any more.

Dangerously close to coming, Cade forced himself to slow down when the door opened and Lucas stepped inside. Reluctantly, Cade stiffened his legs, stopping the chair in mid-stroke. Sarah protested with a soft little whimper of disappointment, dropping back limply to lie against his chest with her eyes closed.

Instead of withdrawing, Cade held her hips tightly against him, giving her a hard pump every so often as he watched Lucas over the top of her head. "Sarah wants to lose the bet with you, Lucas. You got any objections to that?"

"*Hell, no.*" Lucas's voice came out sounding hoarse. "Don't let me interrupt, I'm enjoying the show."

"You're overdressed for this show, partner."

\* \* \* \*

Lucas watched Sarah's face as Cade started the chair rocking again slowly. She closed her eyes with a look of rapture as Cade's cock sunk deep into her pussy. Every forward motion brought a slight intake of her breath as his cousin forced her down hard on his shaft.

Cade had the look of all men during sex. Mean. Lucas knew Cade would never hurt his woman, no, he'd die before he let anyone hurt her, but sex brought out the beast and made a man feel like he could do damn near anything. Or take on anybody that fucked with him. In Cade's case, it was probably true.

Cade's hands skimmed across Sarah's tight belly, traveling up over her ribcage, past the bulky waistband of her skirt, to the swell of her full breasts. He cupped both of her breasts in his hands as if weighing them like ripe melons. Every stroke of his thumbs over the sensitive nipples caused her to jerk and throw her head back with her

lips slightly parted. Cade dropped his face down over hers, kissing her upside down while he pumped her gently.

Lucas watched them as he undressed, stepping out of the pants he carelessly dropped on the floor. His thick cock jutted toward the ceiling in anticipation of what was to come.

“Save some for me, cuz.”

Cade looked up with a wolfish smile, half closing his eyes when Sarah obviously did something to him that felt too good to ignore. “She’s got an incredible pussy,” he said roughly. “She does this squeezing thing...”

“Oh fuck, don’t tell me that when I’m standing here all alone, come on to bed,” Lucas demanded.

Cade stopped the chair, reluctantly raising Sarah off his lap. “You have to try this rocking chair sometime, Lucas.”

Sarah turned her full attention to Lucas for the first time since he’d entered the room. He felt his heart slam against his ribcage and his testicles grow heavy with fluid. She looked so damn sexy staring at him through her tousled curls that it made his balls ache with need for her.

Lucas watched her lick her lips in a provocative gesture. He had no doubt in his mind that he would be in for a hell of a ride. He intended to put those pouty lips to good use. Just the thought of her mouth on his cock made a drop of liquid seep out in expectation. He couldn’t stop himself from fondling his erection, pumping it a time or two just to ease the throbbing.

Sarah stepped closer, taking his hand away only to replace it with her own.

“Is this for me?” She teased him like a pro. Lucas thought the woman a natural at sex. She knew exactly what turned a man on and seemed bold enough to use that instinctual knowledge to her advantage.

“Any way you want it, love.”

“I want a little taste of you.” Sarah bent over from the waist. She

didn't drop down on her knees, or squat down. She bent straight over so that her ass was upturned for Cade's appraisal once again. Lucas noticed the leer on his cousin's face as he watched her bend over.

"You keep waving that in my face, baby, and I'm going to do something about it," Cade promised, running his hands over her hips. When his fingers ran down the crease of her buttocks she groaned softly, swallowing Lucas deeper into her throat.

"Do that again," Lucas suggested to Cade. He stifled a groan himself as Sarah's tongue teased the vein of his cock while she rubbed him against the roof of her mouth. Every little bump brought an exquisite sort of torture as the tender skin on the head of his dick rubbed over the slick ridges.

"Fuck, sweetheart." He felt his legs trembling. Hells bells, this woman could eat him alive, quite literally. He needed to calm down or this was going to be over unfortunately fast. He put his hands on both sides of Sarah's head to gently remove her lips from his cock. He thought he must be the craziest bastard alive to take her mouth off him, and the look on his cousin's face confirmed he thought the same thing.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah knew she had Lucas on the verge of coming. She could feel it in the way he pulsed and hardened in her mouth. She sensed him reaching his breaking point. He tugged at her head, pulling her back away from him, and Sarah felt a thrill of triumph. In an urgent gesture, he raised her mouth to his, clamping his soft lips over hers while slowing down the action with gentle kisses.

Behind her, Cade stepped up to put his hands on her ass, simply running his strong hands lightly over her hips, gently kneading the muscles with considerate fingers, working away the hours she had spent in the saddle. Then Sarah felt his hands at her waist, and with agile fingers, he unbuttoned the side closure of her skirt and petticoat,

letting them fall with a whisper down the length of her legs to pool around her feet.

“Fucking beautiful.” He whispered the words in her ear as Lucas buried his tongue in her mouth, effectively cutting off all reply.

With Lucas holding the back of her head, pulling her closer to his kisses, Cade began the ritual of unfastening the tiny bone buttons running down the back of her blouse. Naked from her waist to her feet, Sarah felt him against her hips and legs. She could feel the warm, bulbous head of his cock bumping against her hips and legs as he pressed closer, deliberately reminding her he didn’t want to be forgotten. As if she could forget him, she thought, when her pussy muscles spasmed at the memory of him buried deep inside her. She wanted to feel him again, then realized with a little thrill she wanted to feel both of them inside her.

“Give her up for a moment, Lucas.” Cade gently pulled Sarah out of his cousin’s arms, only long enough to tug the calico blouse from her, leaving her in nothing but a camisole that barely covered her nipples.

The camisole was edged with crocheted lace, frothy and delicate as anything the shops in New York or San Francisco might offer. Sarah took great pride in her needlework. She considered herself an excellent seamstress.

Lucas’s twilight blue eyes widened when he saw the edge of one pink nipple peek teasingly through the open weave crochet. “Leave this on,” he suggested, “you look fucking sexy in it, Sarah. You’ve got me about to explode.”

“Me, too,” she replied almost shyly, glancing over her shoulder at Cade. “I’m about to explode, too, and I want to feel you both inside me.” She hesitated for a heartbeat. “Now.”

Cade gave her a playful little shove, face-down onto the bed. “Stay just like that.”

Sarah’s heart pounded so hard she could barely breathe as she felt one of the men part her hips and run his cock firmly, but gently, down

the crease of her ass. When he reached the hole he pushed just a bit, stretching the tight muscles, and Sarah involuntarily shoved her hips into the bed trying to escape the pressure.

“Got any grease in your saddlebags?” Lucas asked. “She’s going to need some help.”

Sarah trembled in a mixture of fear and anticipation, but Lucas straddled her legs and began massaging her shoulders, dropping soft kisses on her neck.

“Relax, darlin’. You’re going to like this. We just have to get you ready.”

She heard Cade return from across the room, and Lucas moved to the side but kept his hands on her back, rubbing and kneading the tension in her body. “Relax. Loosen your muscles for me.”

Sarah tried to relax, but it was hard when she felt long fingers stroking from the tip of her clit to the small hole no one ever touched before. Suddenly, she felt something cool around the fevered entrance, and a sharp pressure made her gasp. A set of fingers reached around her to tug on the hard pebbles of her nipples as the pressure against her anus grew stronger. A finger inserted itself deeply into her ass. She couldn’t stop from clenching around the foreign object while her pussy clamped on nothing but emptiness. She groaned.

“You’ve got to feel these muscles,” Cade whispered huskily. “She does this with her pussy, too.”

Suddenly, the hands on her breasts left only to be replaced with Cade’s mouth as he turned her slightly onto her side. She felt the pressure again, harder this time, more stretching, and she whimpered as Lucas slid two fingers into her, rubbing his hand across her hips in a gentling motion until she got used to the feeling of him filling her ass.

Cade sucked hard on her nipples, distracting her as Lucas buried his fingers deeper then began to stroke in and out. The sensation seemed overpowering. Sarah felt a liquid burn through her veins setting her on fire and pouring into the molten furnace of her pussy.

She could have screamed with the need she felt to be filled by their cocks.

“She’s ready.” Cade turned her onto her side, pulling her leg over his hips.

“She better be,” Lucas growled. He pushed himself against the length of her, inserting his swollen cock into the crease of her ass. She could feel him slide against the lubrication, up and down, across the entrance, but she was still too tight for him to merely slip inside. He would have to add pressure to breach that virgin territory.

“Look at me,” Cade ordered, taking her in his arms. He gripped her shoulders firmly as Lucas positioned himself against the hole.

Sarah looked into Cade’s eyes, and Lucas shoved forcefully, gaining a measure of entrance into her body. She gasped, trying to pull away from the fiery sensation of pleasure, pain and shock that overtook her.

Cade gave her no room to move. Still holding her tightly with one arm, he fisted his cock between her legs, finding the entrance of her dripping pussy. Nudging himself between her nether lips, he waited until Lucas put his hands firmly on her hips.

“Now.”

They both slid into her at once, and Sarah thought she would be torn apart by their sizes and by the orgasm that ripped through her body. Filled to bursting, she had no relief from the shattering climax that clenched her inner muscles so tightly against their cocks they each moaned with the force of her spasms.

Cade dropped kisses on her mouth and face while Lucas whispered unintelligible encouragements in her ear until she lay limp between them.

When she could finally catch her breath, the men began to stir and move within her. “Our turn to show you what it’s like when we come.”

## Chapter Three

Sarah woke up the next morning to the delicious heat of two men on either side of her. Cade had his hand splayed out on her bare stomach, and Lucas's leg lay entwined between hers. Both men slept soundly, unmoving as she inched her way out of the tight cocoon they formed around her. She thought seriously about staying put and enjoying the sheer decadence of the moment, but nature called, and she badly wanted a cup of coffee.

When her feet hit the rough plank floor, she stretched heartily, giving a soft gasp at the soreness she felt radiating from her overworked muscles. The two men offered her quite a vigorous workout through the night. Casting a glance over her shoulder at their sleeping forms, she conceded that she might have given back as good as she got.

Picking her clothes up from the floor, Sarah slipped on only her skirt and camisole before she left the cabin for the privy. After relieving herself, she went to check on the horses and draw a bucket of water. Back inside, she put on a kettle to boil for the coffee, and had a quick bath before fully dressing for the upcoming day.

She caught herself humming happily as she searched through the men's packs to find any scrap of food they might have squirreled away for their journey. The night's escapades left her ravenous. Between both packs she found four hard biscuits and some jerky. That would have to do, she supposed, and then she remembered something old Mrs. Sutter had confided in her when they met once at the station.

Fear of attack by the Apache lead Andrew Sutter to dig a pantry of sorts under the cabin. He built the small room to serve a double



purpose. He and Mrs. Sutter could hide in the shelter if they ever came under attack. But Andrew also equipped the pantry with rough shelves to store supplies out of sight from marauders that occasionally raided cabins when the owners were away. Knowing their lives might depend on secrecy, Sutter fashioned the floor in such a way the entrance would remain hidden from plain view.

Sarah stared intently down at the floor, looking for an unusual pattern or gap between the boards. She had a feeling no one found Eliza and Andrew's hidden room and she wondered if it would still be well stocked.

"What are you doing?"

Sarah looked over at the sound of the sleepy male voice to see Lucas lying on his side, watching her through half closed eyes.

"I'm looking for a trap door."

"Trap door?" He sat up abruptly, dropping his feet over the edge of the bed. "What trap door?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Sutter stopped by the station one day to pick up supplies the freight stage brought in for them. She told me Andrew had built a secret room under the floor."

Lucas reached for his pants and stood up, tugging the coarse material up his hard, muscular legs. "Did she happen to say what they stored in this room?"

Sarah shook her head, squinting at a plank of wood that seemed to have a larger gap than the others. She knelt down to place her hand over the floor and her heart gave a leap of excitement. "I feel cooler air."

Still shirtless, Lucas dropped down beside her, his muscles straining as he pulled at the plank with his fingers. "Damn," he muttered under his breath, running his fingertips the length of the board for as far as he could reach. "Maybe it's nailed down so thieves can't find it."

"No, I don't think so," Sarah whispered. "Eliza told me Andrew built it so they could hide in case they were attacked. It would be easy

to get into.”

Lucas shook his head. “Didn’t do them much good against the Bartram gang.”

Sarah looked over at him. “Maybe they couldn’t reach it in time.”

“I’m sure they didn’t know what they were dealing with. They probably didn’t recognize the danger until it was too late.” Lucas sat back on his heels examining the room, then with a slow grin of mischief he gave a sharp whistle and Cade exploded from the bed, naked, with a knife in his hand.

“What the fuck?” He glared at Lucas, pushing his thick black hair out of his face. “I should slit your throat. What the hell are you doing down there on the floor?”

Sarah stared at the huge Bowie knife he still clutched in his fist. She wondered how he managed to get his hands on it so quickly and where he kept it hidden during their rather acrobatic bouts of sex.

Lucas seemed unperturbed. “You want to take a look at this floor and tell me if you see anything out of the ordinary?”

Cade muttered something under his breath before tossing the knife between Lucas’s bare feet where it stood upright, quivering as the tip of the blade sunk deep into the wood next to Lucas’s toes. “The boards aren’t nailed down over there.” He pointed in the general direction where Sarah knelt.

Lucas yanked the knife from the plank in front of him, using it for leverage under one of the boards Cade pointed out. It moved slightly, then fell back into place. Before he could abuse the knife any further Cade snatched it from his hand. “Why don’t you try that knothole if you’re looking for a latch?”

Lucas rolled his eyes at Sarah, standing up to move closer to the blemish marring one end of the board. At first glance, it seemed nothing more than a natural imperfection in the timber, but on closer inspection, Lucas pointed out the small cavity hiding beneath the dark ring of wood. He stuck his finger into the hole and pulled. With remarkable ease two boards raised upward and Lucas slid them out of

the way.

Andrew had fashioned the entrance in such a manner that a big man could not have gained entrance to the room. As it was, Cade had to turn sideways and squeeze himself into the small space, scraping a little skin as he slid through the opening to drop into the chamber below.

“Hand me a candle.”

Sarah passed one of the tallow candles down through the opening to him, and he held it above his head, whistling softly at what he saw. Andrew had indeed made a small fortress. Once they were in the room, no one could get to them without tearing the floor up or dropping through the hatch. Sarah stuck her head through the hole to look inside, and Lucas pointed to the bundle of pitchforks and sharp farm instruments piled in the corner.

“They could hold anyone off trying to get to them with these.”

Sarah murmured her agreement, but her attention focused on the canned goods neatly stacked on the floor to ceiling shelves. Mixed among the vegetables on the shelves sat a few jars of jelly and molasses. She noticed the bottom shelves held dusty brown crocks sealed with paraffin wax.

“Bring up one of those crocks,” Sarah suggested, curious to see what the sturdy little containers held inside.

Lucas grabbed a jar from the bottom shelf, giving a soft exclamation at the weight. “They must have fucking rocks in here as heavy as this is. Cade’s going to have to lift it out of the hole for you.”

Cade’s face appeared beside Sarah’s, and he gently shoved her aside far enough to get his arms through the opening so he could reach the plain crockery jar Lucas held up to him. Unprepared for the weight despite his cousin’s warning, Cade very nearly dropped the heavy vessel.

“Sorry,” he said, putting the crock aside and offering an arm for Lucas to pull himself out of the cellar.

"What do you think is in there?" Sarah asked, looking back and forth between both men. "It can't be food, it's too heavy."

"We'll find out soon enough." Cade used the tip of his Bowie knife to dislodge the cover of paraffin wax sealing the jar.

A collective gasp came from the three of them when they saw the dull gleam of gold coins.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah dipped her hand into the crock, letting the riches slide between her fingers.

"It's a fortune," she breathed. "Where do you think it came from?"

Cade looked long and hard at Lucas before glancing back at Sarah and then to the fortune gleaming tantalizingly in the simple crock. He stirred the gold with his fingertips. "I don't think this belonged to the Sutters."

Lucas shook his head. "Me, either."

"We should go," Sarah said with a sense of urgency. "No one would leave this much gold unless they intended to come back for it."

The two men nodded in agreement. Cade moved first. He got to his feet with a single fluid motion. "I'll get the horses. Be ready to ride when I get back."

"There's more gold down there." Lucas looked into the gloom of the cellar, barely able to make out the shelves.

"Leave it." Cade scooped his hat off the floor, shoving it down tight on his head. "We can't carry any more weight safely. This is enough to make us rich. If we ride hard, we can be in Tucson tomorrow."

Lucas looked like he might be about to protest, then he shrugged, heaving the jar up so he could distribute the weight between the two saddle bags.

\* \* \* \*

Harvey Bartram walked around the Sutter's cabin with a scowl on his sharp, weasel-like features. He could smell the aroma of coffee, despite the dust he'd dislodged from his hat when he slapped it against his leg in frustration. Chewing on his ragged brown moustache, he squatted down to feel the hearthstones, grunting with satisfaction when he felt the residual warmth. "They haven't been gone more'n a couple hours. We can track 'em."

"You reckon they found the gold?"

Bartram stood up from the hearth, turning to face Wild-Eye Randy. Bartram nicknamed him that because of the way his prematurely graying hair and sunken black eyes made him look fanatical, like a hell and brimstone preacher or a raving lunatic.

"Why don't you find out?"

It was a cruel request. He knew full well Wild-Eye had a loathing for small dark places since he spent the last two years in a Mexican prison, kept in solitary confinement. He liked watching the shudder that racked the smaller man's body at the thought of dropping into the cellar.

"I'll go."

Bartram's head swiveled to look at Levi. "Did I fuckin' tell you to check on the gold? No, I didn't. I told Wild-Eye to get down there and that's what he's gonna do."

Levi stepped closer to Bartram, staring him straight in the eye without backing down. "You know Wild-Eye spent time in the hole. Ain't no need makin' him relive it."

Bartram didn't care if Levi was his dead brother's son. The bastard had to follow orders like everyone else. "I said..." but he didn't get any further with his threat. His words caught in his throat when Levi pressed a revolver to his chest and cocked the hammer.

"What the fuck do you think you're doin'?" Bartram glared at his nephew.

Levi nudged the gun a little harder. "I'm sick of your bullyin' us

all.” His eyes narrowed as he studied his uncle. “And I’m wonderin’ why my pa got hung on the gallows for killin’ those people and you didn’t.”

Bartram felt himself pale and shifted his feet, trying to take a step away from Levi, only to find himself with another gun in his back. Wild-Eye gave a soft little chuckle. “You think maybe we should put him down there, Lev?”

\* \* \* \*

Levi lifted his chin. “You heard the man, go check on the gold.”

“I can’t get through that hole,” Bartram protested.

Levi kicked the floor boards away, moved his pistol a little higher and fired through the soft tissues of his uncle’s shoulder. “I’m thinkin’ you’ll find a way unless you want some more holes in you.”

Bartram howled, still dancing around like a man on a snake when Levi caught his good shoulder and pushed him over to the opening. He fell through, legs going first, then he caught as his barrel-sized chest lodged between the narrow gap. With a snort of disgust, Levi stomped down on his shoulder, sending him sprawling through the opening, tearing skin and leather as he went.

“See anything?” He asked after the screaming subsided.

Laced with pain, Bartram’s uneven voice answered reluctantly. “It’s too dark. I can’t see a damn thing.”

“Give the man a light,” Levi instructed Wild-Eye.

There were muttered curses, breaking of crockery and hissed exclamations of pain before Bartram’s reply came up through the dust and floorboards. “Silver’s here, but the gold is gone.”

Levi swept a hand across his mouth, looking at Wild-Eye. With a little grimace of anger, he walked to the hole in the floor and emptied his pistol into the shadowy depth. “That takes care of one problem. Now we go after our gold. This is the new Bartram gang and we ain’t a bunch of losers like the old one.”

“What are we gonna do when we find ‘em, boss?”

Levi hesitated before answering, walking over to the bed where he picked up the covers in his gloved hand, bunching them to his face with a deep whiff of appreciation. “We’re gonna skin them two men alive for takin’ our gold, and after that, we’re gonna have ourselves a whole lot of fun.”

Wild-Eye looked confused but remained silent. Levi carelessly tossed the covers back onto the bed and turned to his companion. “You saw the tracks out there, two horses loaded heavy. Two sets of boots, men from the size of ‘em. But these covers? They smell like pussy. There’s a woman travelin’ with ‘em.”

## Chapter Four

Cade's horse trotted up beside Lucas and Sarah moving quickly, but not fast enough to leave a dust trail.

"There's smoke behind us." Despite the calm delivery of his words, Cade's eyes couldn't quite mask his concern. "Looks like it's coming from the Sutter's place. I think we should stash the gold and ride like the devil himself is behind us. I have a feeling the Bartram gang just found out some of their money is missing."

Lucas muttered a curse under his breath. "If it is the Bartram gang on our tail, the devil would be the better choice. Have you got any tricks up your sleeve?"

Cade lifted his head to the sky as if checking for storm clouds or praying. The aftermath of yesterday's storm seemed to have dissipated under the desert sun. He looked into limitless blue skies. "Not unless we get a little help from above. I'll hang back and try to keep them off you and Sarah. You leave the gold somewhere and get the hell out of here."

"No!" Sarah couldn't stop herself. "No. I don't want you to stay behind, Cade."

He leaned over in the saddle to give her a quick kiss. "Shh, I need you to just go along with this. I'll catch up with you in Tucson."

Sarah's eyes welled with tears and she turned to look up at Lucas. "Please."

Lucas tightened his arms around her. "Sorry, darlin'. This is about the best we can do for now. Unless you want to go with Cade and have me stay behind to stall the riders."

"I don't want either of you to stay behind." Sarah looked from one



to the other of the two men. "I want you both safe."

Lucas and Cade exchanged a long, silent stare before Lucas gave his cousin a slap on the back. "See you in Tucson."

Sarah looked back over Lucas's shoulder until Cade became nothing more than a small speck galloping away on the horizon. She didn't try to be brave. She let her tears flow freely down her cheeks, feeling the moisture drip off her chin, soaking the front of her dress.

"He's been in tougher spots." Lucas reassured her. "He'll be fine."

Sarah wanted to believe him, but she knew from the tension in his body that his words were nothing more than empty promises.

"How many men do you think will be riding with Bartram?"

Lucas sighed. "Five. That's my best guess. I'm thinking they must have ridden back to the cabin and hid the gold after they got separated at the border. I heard Harvey's brother was one of the gang that hung for the murders of Andrew and Eliza. It would be like him to leave his brother dangling and head back this way to stash the gold. No one would expect it. Now the thieving bastard has returned for his money. It's just our bad luck we happened to be in the vicinity at the same time and worse that we found it."

"We should have left the gold. It's my fault we're in this trouble."

Lucas dropped a kiss on top of her head. "No. Don't think that way, Sarah. They would have come after us either way. Killing is a sport for these men, and they are always up for the game."

\* \* \* \*

Cade watched them ride away before he wheeled Ginger toward the hogback ridge running along the trail. The rise was strewn with boulders and scraggly brush, making it a perfect spot for ambush if he could reach it before the oncoming riders caught up with him.

He tied Ginger to a small mesquite tree in the shelter of a boulder. Cade didn't think the gang would see her unless they stumbled onto the tracks he'd tried to obliterate by dragging a branch behind them. It

was the best he could do under the circumstances. If they took the horse, he would be out of luck with no chance of survival.

Squatting down beside Ginger, Cade took a wrapped package out of his bedroll. Carefully, he unbound the woven blanket tied around the short bow his father had given him before he died. As a man, he should have a much bigger weapon, but the bow and arrow had given way to the gun. Even though he didn't use it, Cade couldn't bear to part with the last memory of his father. He seldom looked at it these days, taking it out only when he wanted to be reminded of his heritage. One day, he would give the bow to his son.

Slipping four arrows from a rawhide sheath, Cade loped over to stand between a pair of boulders overlooking the trail Bartram's gang would follow if they were tracking him. He made sure to leave some evidence behind. At least enough trace to confuse the gang for a short period of time.

Hopefully, they would follow him and not continue in the direction Lucas and Sarah headed. He conceded that it was possible he worried about nothing. However, after finding the gold, Cade had a feeling it had to be the Bartram gang coming after them. Especially after seeing the telltale smoke that meant the Sutter's place was burning. He couldn't think of anyone else that would destroy a good cabin for no reason.

Cade saw the dust trail the outlaws' horses kicked up long before he could see the men. That meant they rode fast, not worrying about being seen. A slight western breeze fanned the dust behind them like a dull brown rooster tail making their progress easy to follow.

Riding into the wind would tire their horses, making it easier for Sarah and Lucas to gain some ground if Lucas headed north for a few miles instead of continuing westward. Cade figured his cousin would cut through Poisonwood Gulch, dropping off the gold somewhere along the rocks and boulders that could be used for place markers.

The thought of Sarah's tears tightened Cade's chest. Damn, but she was sweet. Her pussy sent him into a fever. He'd never fucked a

woman like her. She did something to his mind, drawing him into her, making him feel like he needed to protect her from anything that might ever harm her. And that was why he volunteered to stay behind. No way would he let the Bartram gang get their filthy hands on her. He would die before that happened.

\* \* \* \*

Wild-Eye Randy and Levi Bartram rode in the lead, pushing the horses hard now they had seen the tracks in the gully. It wouldn't be long till they caught up with the bastards that had taken their gold. Levi amused himself thinking of the ways he'd exact revenge. At first, he planned to kill the men and rape the woman. Then he decided it might be more entertaining to torture the men and let them watch while he and his gang took the bitch over and over in front of them. He wanted to see their faces when she begged for help.

"What are you thinkin' about?" Wild-Eye asked.

"About gettin' me a piece of ass."

Wild-Eye chuckled at the thought. "Been a long time since I had a woman."

"You go second. And take the pussy any way you want."

Wild-Eye seemed to mull that over in his mind. "I want her..." He started to say when Bruce Donovan screamed out a warning.

"Apache!"

Levi yanked the pistol out of his holster, lowering himself as close to the horse's neck as he could to prevent himself from being an easy target. "Fuck!"

The men kicked their mounts but didn't gain much speed. They had already run the beasts full out for several miles, trying to make up time while they tracked their gold.

Percy Matthews grunted, slumping in his saddle when an arrow found its mark in his back. It wasn't a killing shot, but it sure as hell stopped him from galloping. It looked like the arrow might have

pierced a lung, and Levi knew that would feel like a knife blade slicing through him with every jolt. Matthews would have to find a doctor fast or the lung would collapse, or even worse get infected.

“Pick it up, Matthews,” Levi called.

“Can’t,” the man groaned, slumping lower in the saddle.

Levi aimed his gun and squeezed the trigger, watching Matthews crumble in the dust as the panicked horse cut away from the pack and headed toward a nearby bluff.

“Mercy killin’” Levi said to his men. “Don’t want him being caught now, do we?”

“Maybe them Apache will go after the horse. I heard the army killed a bunch of their ponies,” James Sherman said.

“We can’t count on that.” Levi retorted. He did a fast scan of the surrounding lay of the land. “I got an idea, men. Follow me.”

\* \* \* \*

Cade saw Levi shoot his own man out of the saddle when he couldn’t keep up with the gang. It didn’t really shock him, but he did get a surprise that the riderless horse made a beeline straight to the rocks where he stood. A ride for Sarah he thought, grabbing the exhausted mount and tying her close to Ginger.

Looking down at the arrow he held in his hand, Cade grinned. He had deliberately sent a couple arrows off target, shooting between the men so they would think they were under attack. Now, predictably, they rode like demons from hell were on their tails hell for leather, wearing out their exhausted mounts. Cade knew the horses wouldn’t be good for anything but the glue factory unless Levi stopped to give them a rest soon, and Cade was going to see to it they didn’t have time to rest. Things were about to get worse for the outlaws. He hated to kill them all, but he would do so if he had no other choice in protecting Sarah.

Pulling a stick of dynamite from his pack, Cade replaced the bow.

Then he gave both Ginger and the runaway mare a pat on the neck along with a little treat of tobacco. He hoped the horses remained silent and didn't give him away. Cade reasoned that Bartram would do the same thing he had done. He would circle back around the bluff hoping to cut through the boulders until he gained access to the rise. From there he could check the surrounding area. It wouldn't take long for him to figure out they were dealing with a single attacker rather than a hunting party. He might not waste time trying to run down one man when he knew the gold lay within easy reach.

As Cade set up his next ambush, he wondered why Harvey Bartram hadn't been riding with his gang. He recognized Levi as the man in the lead. Cade had met him once in a chance encounter at a saloon in Tombstone. Once had been enough. The sonofabitch was crazy. But, crazy or not, he had good survival skills. He circled the bluff and started up the rocky incline just as Cade expected.

Cade's plan needed Bartram's men to follow the trail into the maze of jagged hills between the boulders, cactus and scrub. At one point in the ascent, a pair of large rocks had tumbled from the hillside eons ago making it nearly impossible for a rider to squeeze between them. That would be where Cade tossed the dynamite as the riders passed through, but first, he would have to climb to the knoll above the passage without being seen.

He scrambled up the steep clay embankment and hunkered down in the middle of a brushy thicket. The recent rains provided the misshapen shrubs with water enough that the normally withered leaves were now plump and full, creating more shelter. Cade figured he would be invisible to all but the best tracker.

Below him, he noted with satisfaction the gang continued getting closer. Cade figured he could take out at least two men in the narrow passageway. He meant to try for Levi Bartram and whatever vermin rode as his second in command. Without them, the other two men would probably head for the hills looking to sign up with another band of outlaws. As the gang headed into the narrow passage, Cade lit

the dynamite.

“Five...four...three...two...” He tossed the heavy stick and ran without waiting to see the results. He didn’t have time. Hopefully the blast would put them all be out of action, but if by some miracle any survived, they would be on him in a flash. He jumped into the saddle and sent Ginger galloping like hell chased their heels.

\* \* \* \*

Lucas heard the pounding of hooves before he saw the riders. He could tell by the sound that two horses approached at a gallop and he prepared for the worst. He and Sarah lay on saddle blankets behind an outcropping of rocks. He had already stashed the gold in a safe place and tied his mare nearby.

Against Cade’s wishes, Lucas stopped in Poisonwood Gully to wait for his cousin. He reasoned Daisy needed a break and he might have a chance at picking off the outlaws if they managed to get past Cade. Sure as hell the horse couldn’t keep running much further. Lucas decided to make a stand where the terrain gave him a measure of protection.

He slipped a tiny revolver out of the saddlebag lying in front of him and handed it to Sarah. *Her beauty could break a man’s heart*, he thought. She was the kind of woman a man wanted to wake up with every morning and make love to every night. Ignoring the anxiety he felt for her safety, he placed the gun in her hand and placed her fingers around the grip.

“It’s little, but at close distance it’s deadly.” He smoothed a tendril of hair back from her face. “Two riders are coming, darlin’, and that don’t sound good. You keep one of these bullets just in case. Do you understand me? You don’t want these men to catch you.”

A silent tear slipped down Sarah’s cheek and she nodded her head. “I understand.”

Lucas leaned forward to kiss her. “Then you just keep down. No

matter what happens, you stay right here and keep low. They might miss you. I'm going to that boulder about halfway down and I don't want to worry about you getting hit."

"I'll stay flat," Sarah promised. "You just kill the bastards."

Lucas gave her a wink before sliding down the steep embankment to lodge himself behind the tallest rock. He lay flat in the dirt aiming the rifle at the point he knew the riders would enter the gully and his finger began to squeeze the trigger. Half a second later, he released the trigger and gave a shrill whistle.

Cade stopped so fast Ginger reared on her two hind legs and the riderless horse he led behind him pranced nervously, jerking its head in a bid for freedom. "You dumb asshole. I told you to ride," he called up at his cousin.

"You going to stand there bitchin' all day, or are you going to tell me what happened?"

Cade turned in the saddle watching the trail behind him. "I don't know if I stopped them, but I bought us some time. Where's Sarah?"

At the mention of her name, she popped her head up and blew him a kiss. Lucas rolled his eyes, motioning her back to the ground. She obediently dropped out of sight with a grin of happiness that did funny things to Lucas's insides. "She sure is happy to see you."

"No more than I am to see you two," Cade returned. "These horses need to rest. They can't keep up this pace."

Lucas scrambled the rest of the way down the wash to take the outlaw horse by the reins. "Yeah, Daisy had some trouble, too. That's one of the reasons I stopped. That and I worried about your thick hide. I should have known you would whip the Bartram gang single handedly."

Cade followed behind Lucas as he led the way to Daisy. "Harvey wasn't riding with the gang. Levi was in command."

"Now there's a scary thought." Lucas tied the horse to a nearby shrub. "We better be prepared to fight if Levi's in charge."

\* \* \* \*

It wasn't as hard to stop two wounded men as Lucas expected. By the time the last two members of the Bartram gang rode into the gully, they didn't have much fight left in them. Still, they were mean as rattlesnakes and ready to kill rather than tend their own wounds. Levi Bartram and Wild-Eye Randy wouldn't be robbing any more banks or killing any more innocent victims.

Twilight had fallen around them while he and Cade tended to what needed taken care of. Now, a blanket of stars spread over the heavens like diamonds strewn across a limitless expanse of black velvet.

Sarah fixed a pot of coffee over the open fire and performed some kind of magic with the meager rations they had taken from the Sutter cabin. Best of all, she actually smuggled a small jar of honey into the saddlebags, and it provided a sweet respite from the hard biscuits and dry jerky.

Sitting around the last embers of the fire, sipping coffee and staring at the heavens, Lucas spoke what he figured had to be lurking in everyone's mind. "We're rich."

Sarah laughed and the sound was infectious. Cade chuckled at her pleasure. "What are you going to buy when we get to Tucson, Sarah?"

"I'm going to buy a bath with rose scented soap, and then I'm going to buy a real corset, just like the gentry in New York wear, and a yellow silk gown."

Cade groaned. "She's going to be borrowing money from us."

Sarah laughed again. "I will not." She pointed an accusing finger at the two men. "I suppose you two will waste your coin on drink and fancy women."

"I don't know," Lucas drawled. He arched one eyebrow at Sarah. "I'm kind of partial to rose scented soap and auburn haired ladies in yellow silk gowns."

"Well, I like my women on a bedroll under the bright western



sky.” Cade stood up to advance toward Sarah. “Do you know where I might find a willing woman to share my bedroll tonight?”

Sarah stood up, too, brushing the dust off her gown. “I might be able to accommodate you if you can offer me a little bonus.”

Lucas knew his cousin well enough to know that his grin had a teasing edge aimed toward him. “Well, he’s not much, but could I offer you the services of this poor excuse for a cowboy along with my expertise?”

Lucas gave a disgusted snort that ended on a laugh at Sarah’s unconcealed merriment.

“Come here, you two.” She opened her arms and both men stepped into them.

## **Chapter Five**

Sarah could feel the cool night breeze chilling her skin when she lay down on the thick roll of blankets the men provided for her comfort. Her nipples hardened into tight little pebbles that drew both Cade and Lucas's mouths like sweets at Christmas.

Lucas sucked hard on his candy, rolling it into the roof of his mouth, sucking as if he enjoyed the sweetness and flavor with a passion that curled Sarah's toes. Cade, on the other hand, savored his sweet, lavishing gentle licks and nibbles as his hand trailed down the peaks and valleys of her body until he found the lower terrain. His fingers ran the crease of her body then dipped between the cheeks of her ass, playfully pushing at her backdoor with insistent nudges that had her arching up from the blanket toward them.

Not to be outdone, Lucas dipped his fingers into her pussy, playfully swirling them in the creamy slickness he found there. At regular intervals he let his fingers escape to dance over the nub of her clit, stoking her with gentle, measured strokes. She moaned softly, pulling both men to her breasts as if their mouths could satisfy the hunger of her body. Wonderful as the sensation felt, it couldn't quench the fire consuming her. She needed more. She needed to feel the two of them within her.

Sarah's hands traveled down their hard male bodies until she found the hard cocks jutting in eager anticipation of what would soon happen. She wrapped her right hand around Lucas. The enlarged head of his penis always felt incredible when he thrust into her, opening her body to prepare for the length to follow. Then she wrapped her left hand around Cade. He was thick from base to head,

filling her completely wherever he entered. The effect of loving two such differently endowed men felt heavenly.

Both men groaned against her breasts as she tugged at them, stroking the velvety steel of their erections back and forth in her small fists. She could feel the pair of them surge, growing as she rubbed her thumbs over the rose petal softness of the crimson heads.

Cade moved his mouth from her breast, reaching up to take her lips with his. After a leisurely kiss with a lot of tongue, he moved back to let Lucas kiss her.

“Let her ride you, Lucas.”

Lucas immediately lay on his back, lifting Sarah across his body so that she straddled him at his hips. His strong arms held her slightly above his erection, letting her slide down until she could feel the thick head of his penis parting the outer layer of her vaginal lips.

“Lower her down slowly. I want to watch that sweet little pussy swallow you whole.”

Sarah focused her gaze on Lucas as he let her down in measured increments. First, his bulky head passed the surface layer, slipping inside to stretch the inner channel of her pussy. The feeling was nearly more than she could bear. She wanted to sink onto him until nothing could slide between them. He let her hover there, her vaginal muscles desperately clamping on the marginal length he had allowed her to experience. Then he gradually eased her lower until her head fell back against her shoulders and she groaned with the pleasure of being full.

Squirming her hips around on his erection, Sarah pushed him deeper, moving him inside to touch the places that felt good. And she decided they all felt good. Rising up on her knees, Sarah placed her hands on his shoulders and rocked back and forth, riding him with a sweet abandon that had them both gasping for air.

Cade’s hand wrapped around the back of her neck, gently urging her forward so that she lay against Lucas’s chest. She could feel the crisp hair of his upper body gently abrade the sensitive peaks of her

nipples. The sensation caused her to shiver and curve her back so that her hips were more accessible to Cade.

Sarah found little room to move at the angle she lay in. It would take Cade's thrusts in her ass to make her stroke Lucas's cock while in this position. "Take me," she whispered breathlessly. She felt as if she couldn't wait one more second to have them both inside her.

Cade pulled her apart with his thumbs, running his cock back and forth down the crease of her hips until he breached her in one firm shove. She could feel the imprint of his fingers on each side of her hips as he drove into her and immediately pulled back, ready to do it again.

Cade's thrust forced Sarah down hard onto Lucas's cock, and Lucas grunted with the force of it, arching his hips off the blanket to push back. At his resistance, she pressed back onto Cade's erection sinking them both so deep she could feel their sacs bouncing against her.

"Can you feel each other inside me?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes." They spoke in unison, half groans, punctuated by thrusts from both of them.

"Ride me hard this time, cowboys," Sarah urged. "Let me know you mean it."

Cade lunged forward at her command, his hands holding himself steady around her waist as he surged into her over and over. The power of his thrusts drew Lucas in and out as if pumping her himself, but Sarah knew he lay still, letting Cade set the pace for all of them.

She could feel him tense beneath her, feel his sac swell, and his cock harden with every stroke. He held her down tightly against his chest, whispering his tangled litany of encouragements that had no meaning, but inflamed her all the same.

Sarah heard Cade moan softly and felt his erection throb, building to a climax as he sheathed himself in her tight confines. She was aware her anal muscles involuntarily squeezed his penis like a hand gripping and releasing. Sarah hovered on the verge of a climax,

teetering on the edge of the chasm, yet unable to leap into the void.

Impossibly, she felt a hand, a finger really, make contact with her clit. The pleasure quickly became unbearable and she screamed, shoving her hips backward with the explosion of her orgasm. She knew the undulating of her muscles was more than Cade could handle when he shot his cum in hot bursts that sent liquid fire through her entire body.

Lucas sucked in a breath through clenched teeth. Sarah felt his cock pump fluid in a heavy jet that continued for as long as her pussy milked him with its powerful compressions.

Cade gently pulled himself from Sarah's ass, rolling over to flop on his back while she disengaged herself from Lucas. Dropping a kiss on Lucas's lips, she fell off him, letting herself crumple limply between her cowboys.

"I would kiss you," she told Cade, "but I'm too tired."

He gave a breathless chuckle, leaning over to plant a kiss on her mouth. "Be ready to do this again in the morning."

"Not until I get a proper bath, Cade Hawke."

"Guess that means we'll be galloping all the way into Tucson." Lucas remarked with a laugh, but Sarah didn't hear him. She had already fallen asleep.

## Chapter Six

Sarah welcomed the sight of Tucson. She couldn't wait to take a bath and get a decent meal. She felt that she must look a fright, but no one paid any attention as they slowly picked their way down the wagon rutted, dusty street.

Main Street was alive with commerce and clogged with wagons, horses and pedestrians. While men carelessly walked the streets, most of the women took care to stay on the planked sidewalks, saving the bottom of their skirts from dust, tobacco juice and horse manure.

Riding single file, they rode past a dry goods store, a barbershop, three saloons, a blacksmith, two banks and a patent medicine drugstore. Sarah began to despair of ever finding a hotel when she noticed The Grand Belle sitting proudly on the corner at the end of the street. With its white washed porch, gleaming tin roof, and brass spittoons next to every rocking chair, the hotel looked like quite a successful establishment for the Wild West.

A sign in front of The Grand Belle advertised room rates and displayed a menu from the hotel's dining room, along with regulations for proper behavior inside the hotel. No cussing, spitting, or drunkenness would be tolerated from any of the patrons.

Too bad, Sarah thought, that most of the citizens in need of a hot bath and place to stay probably couldn't read. She guessed the rougher crowd found shelter in the brothels scattered throughout the town. For the right amount of coin, a man could get a bath with benefits. Sarah assumed a room could be rented by the hour, or the night, if a man were willing to part with his hard earned gold or silver.

Suddenly, Sarah's excitement slipped away to leave her feeling

empty. She couldn't bear the thought of parting with something precious. She wasn't ready to give up her cowboys. On the ride, they explained they were wanted for a bank robbery they didn't commit. The two of them figured they would head out to California. The Gold Rush might be over, but a man could still make a fortune if he wanted. The cousins reckoned by the time they made their fortune and returned to Arizona, the bank job would be sorted out and the real criminals either behind bars or dead.

Finding the gold meant they no longer had to make their fortune, but it wasn't safe to return home with the money, either. With little other choice, the pair decided to continue westward. The two of them were always up for a little adventure. Sarah suspected as one adventure ended in their life, they quickly found another to replace it.

With the manners of a well-bred gentleman, Lucas procured a room for him and his wife and separate sleeping quarters adjoining their room for his cousin. To explain their lack of luggage, he told the clerk they had been robbed along the trail, losing both their guide and provisions. Since his story wasn't all that unusual in the territories, the hotel clerk gave him the name of several businesses that could replace any items they had lost for an honest fee.

At last in their rooms, it seemed awkward. Sarah thought none of them seemed very eager to venture the question that weighed on their minds. She wondered if they would ask her to travel with them, or if they were waiting for her to volunteer. She didn't know what they wanted from her. Maybe they wanted her to go so they would find new escapades along the trail to California. Somehow the thought made her fight back tears.

\* \* \* \*

Cade watched Sarah avoid looking at them and his heart fell somewhere down around his boots. He actually convinced himself she would stay with them. Now, it seemed obvious from her sudden

withdrawal that she would be on the first stage out. Well, hell, in that case he needed a drink and a bath, and maybe a whore to help him remember there were other women besides Sarah Roberts. He knew she wouldn't leave his mind that easily, but a man couldn't be blamed for trying to ease his pain.

He cast a glance at his cousin, and Lucas lifted his shoulders in a shrug as if to say he didn't know. Sarah turned around and caught their look, bright tears flaring in her eyes.

"You two don't have to say anything. I know what our deal is. I'll catch the stage tomorrow."

Cade took a step toward her, but she backed away from him, as if unable to face his touch. "Is that what you want?"

Sarah looked up at him suspiciously. "Isn't that what you two want?"

"Fuck, no!" Cade had her in his arms in two steps. "What the hell ever gave you that idea?" He turned back to glare at Lucas who held up his hands in protest.

"It wasn't me."

Lucas crossed the floor to stand beside Sarah, awkwardly dropping a kiss on her head and rubbing her back as she buried her face in Cade's chest.

"I don't want to leave either of you." Her voice was whisper soft. "But you never said anything, and I thought you wanted me to go."

"Never, darlin'," Lucas said, pulling her out of Cade's arms to give her a kiss.

Cade waited until his cousin came up for air, then pulled her back into his arms for kiss of his own.

Sarah pushed out of his embrace and looked down at herself. "I need a bath."

"I'll tell the clerk downstairs to have the maid prepare one for you. Do you want that rose scented soap now?" Cade asked.

"That would be heavenly." Sarah's eyes shined with happiness. "Then can I go buy a new dress?"



“Right after you make love to us like you promised this morning.”

Sarah scrunched up one eye pretending to remember what she had said earlier.

“Oh, don’t play that game with us. You said you would make love to me and Cade right after you had a proper bath.” Lucas prompted. “Remember?”

“I’ll just need another bath after that.”

“We will tell them to leave the bathwater in the room.”

Sarah laughed. “Then you have a deal, gentlemen.”

Cade gave his cousin a shove on the back, pushing him out the door. “Let’s make this fast. We’ve got to get our own baths, too.”

\* \* \* \*

Sarah leaned her head back against the tub and closed her eyes. The warm water soaked away the soreness of the last few days, and the rose scented soap relaxed her until she could nearly fall asleep. If only the anticipation of loving her two outlaws hadn’t occupied her mind, she might have drifted off. She smiled as she thought about the men, rubbing her hand down over her breasts and between her legs to give her clit a tease of what would happen later.

“Let us help with that, darlin’.”

Sarah’s eyes snapped open to see Lucas and Cade standing in the adjoining door to Cade’s room. Each leaned against opposite sides of the door frame, arms crossed, definitely enjoying the show if the bulges in their pants gave any indication.

Sarah shot the men a smile and crooked her finger. She could see their hair still gleamed with dampness, and they smelled clean with some earthy male scent that made her mouth water for them. They knelt on each side of the tub and began stroking her skin, touching her with the gentlest of fingertips and hands.

Cade lathered his hands with the soap and ran them across her breasts, gliding slickly over the tips of her nipples. The sensation felt

so good, Sarah arched her back and shoved Lucas's hand between her legs. He put a finger against her clit, rubbing back and forth, sliding with ease over the throbbing nub.

Cade teasingly pinched her nipples between his thumb and finger. The thick lather of the soap caused them to slide out of his fingers with a pop, and he repeated the action until Sarah could stand no more.

"Let's take this to the bed."

Hastily toweling off while the two men undressed, Sarah followed them to the bed. Lucas scooted over next to the wall, giving her and Cade room to join him.

"I want to eat that beautiful pussy," Cade said. Sliding down low on the bed, he settled himself between Sarah's legs, taking her ankles in his hands and lifting her legs over his shoulders.

Dropping his mouth to her pussy, he sucked hard on her clit and Sarah's hips bounced off the bed with the wondrous feeling. She felt a shock wave through her system that had her grasping for more, for completion of her need, for Lucas to touch her in the right places, too.

"Let me taste you while Cade is eating me."

Lucas obliged, straddling her chest so that his cock was positioned at the edge of her lips. Sarah felt wild with Cade's tongue fuck sending a burning need through her veins. She dipped her mouth over Lucas's erection, put her hands on his hips, sinking her nails into his ass, and pulled him into her mouth with desperation. She heard him gulp in air as she swallowed him deeply, her throat muscles rippling over the head of his cock.

When she shattered with her climax, she wasn't aware of the pressure she put on Lucas. Her mouth clamped on him and she sucked with the mindless intensity she felt in her pussy. Lucas responded by exploding in her mouth, jerking in hard bursts as he released his semen.

Cade broke off, as if to let them enjoy the moment. Sarah reached down for him, and he scooted up to lay beside her until Lucas moved.

Lucas leaned down to kiss Sarah before rolling off her, lying on his side of the bed still gasping for air.

Sarah's heart hadn't stopped racing when she rolled over to greet Cade. "What can I do for you, cowboy?"

"You can spread those beautiful legs of yours."

Sarah obediently spread her legs, and Cade lifted himself over her. He ran his cock over her clit several times before sliding unerringly into the hole with one smooth stroke. He buried himself with the first thrust, and Sarah wrapped her legs around his hips. Cade reached back with one hand to hold her ankle in place, widening her legs.

As Sarah arched up to greet him, he plunged into her over and over with an unhurried rhythm that slowly drove her crazy. The head of his cock pressed against her pleasure spot sending bursts of gratification in every stroke.

"She's so fucking beautiful when she comes," Lucas whispered.

"Yeah," Cade agreed hoarsely.

Sarah did not shut her eyes. She watched them watching her, fully as turned on by their expressions as they were by hers. She made direct eye contact with Cade when she came, wanting him to know what pleasure he had given her.

Her sounds of gratification mingled with Cade's. He gave one guttural groan of release and shot his cum while Sarah's vaginal muscles clamped on his penis with vice-like contractions.

"I'll never give you up, Sarah," he gasped as he shot his last burst. "Never."

"Me, either." Lucas joined in, rising up on one elbow to look down at her.

Sarah looked back and forth between the two men reading the seriousness of their expressions.

"I don't want you to. I'd like to keep both of you around for a long while."

She got two awkward kisses when both men tried to claim her lips at once. They jerked away from each other as if they had been

scalded, and Sarah burst into peals of laughter, drawing them both a little closer.

“Let’s try that again, one at a time.”

\* \* \* \*

Sarah walked out of the dressing room wearing her new Parisian gown of pale lemon yellow. She splurged on a large hat with a bright orange feather that arched across the brim and dipped nearly to her shoulders. She figured it might take a while to get used to the corset. It felt like she couldn’t breathe, but the agony was worth it when she saw the men’s expressions.

Their eyes ravished her from head to toe, lingering on the low neckline of her gown. Cade licked his lips and Lucas cleared his throat. Both looked at a loss for words.

“You’ll need a parasol for the sun,” the proprietress said. She handed Sarah a delicate white umbrella with yellow ribbons to match the stunning gown. “You look exquisite, dear.”

“We’re going to have to buy a wagon to haul all this stuff,” Lucas said. He looked pointedly at the bags and hat boxes that littered the front of the shop.

“Could I ask one more tiny favor?” Sarah asked. She turned her most charming smile on the cousins, knowing they couldn’t refuse her anything at this point.

“Another hat?” Cade asked.

“Another pair of shoes?” Lucas chimed in.

“Come here.” Sarah motioned for them to follow her behind the curtain. A basketful of puppies frolicked over a scrap of material. One of the fatter puppies gave a baby sized growl, tugging on the edge of the material, shaking his head back and forth in a display of ferocious superiority.

Sarah laughed delightedly. “Aren’t they precious?”

“You want us to haul a dog to California?” Cade asked in

disbelief.

It was Lucas's turn to laugh. "Sarah..."

She sidled up to him, wrapping one arm around his neck. "I've always wanted a puppy. I'll take care of him." She leaned closer so that only he could hear her next words. "I'll make it up to you, promise."

Lucas shot Cade a look that spoke volumes. "I think it might be in our best interest to let her have the puppy."

Cade muttered under his breath, but he gently removed the feisty pup from the litter and received a threatening growl for his effort. "You're going to eat me alive, aren't you, big boy?" Cade scratched the puppy's ears. Causing him to quit growling and squirm with pleasure.

"Let's go before she sees something else she wants." Lucas began filling his arms with Sarah's purchases. "They have dress shops in California, you know."

Sarah started to reply when a deputy burst through the doors of the dress shop, running up to them with his gun drawn. "Cade Hawke and Lucas Boone?"

The two men had their hands full with Sarah's purchases and the squirming puppy. They had no chance to draw their weapons in self defense. Sarah noticed both men stood still, careful to make no threatening moves that would cause the excited deputy to shoot first and ask questions later.

"Why do you ask?" Lucas returned.

"I got a note from Sheriff Johnson about you two. He said the bank robbery in Dunville turned out to be a hoax. The president of the bank took the money and blamed it on you boys. The president wouldn't have said anything, but he got trampled by a horse. He's in pretty bad shape. I guess he told the sheriff he wanted to set things right before he died. Maybe he felt like he should give himself a little bargaining room with the maker. Sheriff Johnson said he thought you might be headed in this direction. He also said to tell you if you want

to collect the reward for taking out the Bartram gang, he'll be glad to pay you."

"Tell him we'll take him up on that deal." Cade grinned and nodded at the young deputy's pistol. "You might want to put that away since you don't need it."

The deputy looked at the gun he seemed to have forgotten about. "Oh." He clumsily returned the revolver to his gun belt. "I'll send a dispatch to Sheriff Johnson right now. He's mighty glad to be rid of the Bartram gang. I reckon he don't feel so good about putting a price on your heads either, now that he knows the truth. Sheriff Johnson is a fair man."

"Honest mistake." Lucas said. "At least he took the bounty off our heads as soon as he found out. I wondered why we didn't have a posse on our tail, along with the Bartram Gang."

The innocent-faced deputy seemed out of words. Lucas watched him walk away with a sense of fatality. The kid was too green. He wouldn't make it in these parts without getting killed if he didn't shuck his naïveté.

Lucas almost let the kid get across the street before he thought of something he wanted to ask. "You don't know of any real estate for sale in town do you?"

The deputy crossed back to the sidewalk and thought about the question. "There's the Merriweather place. It's a mansion on the outskirts of town. A silver baron built it, but he lost his fortune in some bad business ventures. He moved off and left the place after his wife committed suicide. I think he went to Tombstone when they found silver down that way."

"Thanks," Lucas offered. He waited till the man walked out of earshot before turning to Sarah and Cade. "I like Tucson. Any objections to settling here for a while?"

Sarah and Cade shook their heads negatively.

"Then let's go take a look at our new home."

**THE END**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Blaze Ballantine can't remember a time she didn't make up stories to amuse herself and anyone else that would listen. She enjoys paranormal research. One of her favorite activities is staying overnight in haunted hotels. She has lived in various states from coast to coast and now has a home in the Wayne National Forest.

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