

FOUR



IN DEALINGS WITH HER MOTHER—AND TESS ALWAYS thought of contacts with Louella as dealings—Tess prepped herself with a dose of extra-strength Excedrin. There would be a headache, she knew, so why chase the pain?

She chose mid-morning, knowing it was the only time of day she would be likely to find Louella at home in her Bel Air condo. By noon she would be out and about, having her hair done, or her nails, indulging in a facial or a shopping spree.

By four, Louella would be at her club, Louella's, joking with the bartender or regaling the waitresses with tales of her life and loves as a Vegas showgirl.

Tess did her very best to avoid Louella's. Though the condo didn't make her much happier.

It was a lovely little stucco in California Spanish with a tiled roof, graceful shrubbery. It could, and should, have been a small showplace. But as Tess had said on more than one occasion, Louella Mercy could make Buckingham Palace tacky.

When she arrived, promptly at eleven, she tried to ignore

what Louella cheerfully called her lawn art. The lawn jockey with the big, stupid grin, the rearing plaster lions, the glowing blue moonball on its concrete pedestal, and the fountain of the serene-faced girl pouring water from the mouth of a rather startled-looking carp.

Flowers grew in profusion, in wild, clashing colors that seared the eyes. There was no rhyme or reason to the arrangement, no plot or plan. Whatever plants caught Louella's eye had been plunked down wherever Louella's whim had dictated. And, Tess mused, she had a lot of whims.

Standing amid a bed of scarlet and orange impatiens was the newest addition, the headless torso of the goddess Nike. Tess shook her head and rang the bell that played the first bump-and-grind bars of "The Stripper."

Louella opened the door herself and enfolded her daughter in draping silks, heavy perfume, and the candy scent of discount cosmetics. Louella never stepped beyond her own bedroom door in less than full makeup.

She was a tall woman, lushly built, with mile-long legs that still could—and did—execute a high kick. The natural color of her hair had been forgotten long ago. It had been blond for years, as brassy a tone as Louella's huge laugh, and worn big, in a teased and lacquered style admired by TV evangelists. She had a striking face despite the troweled-on layers of base and powder and blush, with strong bones and full lips, slicked now with high-gloss red. Her eyes were baby blue, as was the shadow that decorated their lids, with the brows above them mercilessly plucked and stenciled into dark, thin brackets.

As always, Tess was struck with conflicting waves of love and puzzlement. "Mom." Her lips curved as she returned the embrace, and her eyes rolled as the two yapping Pomeranians her mother adored set up an ear-piercing din in their excitement at having company.

"Back from the Wild West, are you?" Louella's East Texas twang had the resonance of plucked banjo strings. She kissed Tess on the cheek, then rubbed away the smear of lipstick with a spit-dampened finger. "Well, come tell

me all about it. They sent the old bastard off in proper style, I hope.”

“It was . . . interesting.”

“I’ll bet. Let’s have us some coffee, honey. It’s Carmine’s morning off, so we’ll have to fend for ourselves.”

“I’ll make it.” She preferred brewing the coffee herself to facing her mother’s studly houseboy. Tess tried not to imagine what other services the man provided Louella.

She moved through the living area, decorated in scarlets and golds, into a kitchen so white it was like being snow-blinded. As usual, there wasn’t a crumb out of place. Whatever else Carmine did during his daily duties, he was tidy as a nun.

“Got some coffee cake around here, too. I’m hungry as a bear.” With her dogs scrambling around her feet, Louella rummaged in cupboards, through the refrigerator. Within minutes there was chaos.

Tess’s lips twitched again. Chaos followed her mother around as faithfully as the yapping Mimi and Maurice did.

“You meet your kin out there?”

“If you mean the half sisters, yes.” With trepidation, Tess eyed the coffee cake her mother had unearthed. Louella was slicing it into huge slabs with a steak knife. Being transferred to a plate decorated with gargantuan roses were approximately ten billion calories.

“Well, what are they like?” With the same generous hand, Louella cut a piece for her dogs, setting the china plate on the floor. The dogs bolted cake and snarled at each other.

“The one from wife number two is quiet, nervous.”

“That’s the one with the ex who likes to use his fists.” Clucking her tongue, Louella slid her ample hips onto the counter stool. “Poor thing. One of my girls had that kind of trouble. Husband would as soon beat the shit out of her as wink. We finally got her into a shelter. She’s living up in Seattle now. Sends me a card now and again.”

Tess made a small sound of interest. Her mother’s girls were anyone who worked for her, from the waitresses to the bartenders, the strippers to the kitchen help. Louella embraced them all, lending money, giving advice. Tess had

always thought Louella's was part club, part halfway house for topless dancers.

"How about the other one?" Louella asked as she attacked her coffee cake. "The one that's part Indian."

"Oh, that one's a real cowgirl. Tough as leather, striding around in dirty boots. I imagine she can punch cattle, literally." Amused at the thought, Tess poured out coffee. "She didn't trouble to hide the fact that she didn't want either of us there." With a shrug, she sat down and began to pick at her cake. "She's got a half brother."

"Yeah, I knew about that. I knew Mary Wolfchild—at least I'd seen her around. She was one beautiful woman, and that little boy of hers, sweet face. Angel face."

"He's grown up now, and he's still got the angel face. He lives on the ranch, works with horses or something."

"His father was a wrangler, as I recall." Louella reached in the pocket of her scarlet robe, found a pack of Virginia Slims. "How about Bess?" She let out smoke and a big, lusty laugh. "Christ, that was a woman. Had to watch my *p*'s and *q*'s around her. Had to admire her—she ran that house like a top and didn't take any crap off Jack either."

"She's still running the house, as far as I could tell."

"Hell of a house. Hell of a ranch." Louella's bright-red lips curved at the memory. "Hell of a country. Though I can't say I'm sorry I only spent one winter there. Goddamn snow up to your armpits."

"Why did you marry him?" When Louella arched a brow, Tess shifted uncomfortably. "I know I never asked before, but I'm asking now. I'd like to know why."

"It's a simple question with a simple answer." Louella poured an avalanche of sugar into her coffee. "He was the sexiest son of a bitch I'd ever seen. Those eyes of his, the way they could look right through you. The way he'd cock his head and smile like he knew just what he'd be up to later and wanted to take you along."

She remembered it all perfectly. The smells of sweat and whiskey, the lights dazzling her eyes. And the way Jack Mercy had swaggered into the nightclub when she'd been

onstage in little more than feathers and a twenty-pound headdress.

The way he'd puffed on a big cigar and watched her.

Somehow she'd expected that he'd be waiting for her after the last show. And she'd gone with him without a thought, from casino to casino, drinking, gambling, wearing his Stetson perched on her head.

Within forty-eight hours, she'd stood with him in one of those assembly-line chapels with canned music and plastic flowers. And she'd had a gold ring on her finger.

It was hardly a surprise that the ring had stayed put for less than two years.

"Trouble was, we didn't know each other. It was hot pants and gambling fever." Philosophically, Louella crushed out her cigarette on her empty plate. "I wasn't cut out for life on a goddamn cattle ranch in Montana. Maybe I could've made a go of it—who knows? I loved him."

Tess swallowed cake before it stuck in her throat. "You loved him?"

"For a while I did." With the ease of years and distance, Louella shrugged. "A woman couldn't love Jack for long unless she was missing brain cells. But for a while, I loved him. And I got you out of it. And a hundred large. I wouldn't have my girl, and I wouldn't have my club if Jack Mercy hadn't walked in that night and taken a shine to me. So I owe him."

"You owe the man who kicked you, and his own daughter, out of his life? Cut you off with a lousy hundred thousand dollars?"

"A hundred K went a lot farther thirty years ago than it does today." Louella had learned to be a mother and a businesswoman from the ground up. She was proud of both. "And from where I'm sitting, I got a pretty good deal."

"Mercy Ranch is worth twenty million. Do you still think you got a good deal?"

Louella pursed her lips. "It was his ranch, honey. I just visited there for a while."

"Long enough to make a baby and get the boot."

"I wanted the baby."

“Mom.” Most of Tess’s anger faded at the words, but the injustice of it remained hot in her heart. “You had a right to more. I had a right to more.”

“Maybe, maybe not, but that was the deal at the time.” Louella lit another cigarette, decided to be late for her afternoon session at the beauty parlor. There was more here, she thought. “Time goes on. Jack ended up making three daughters, and now he’s dead. You want to tell me what he left you?”

“A problem.” Tess took the cigarette from Louella’s hand and indulged in a quick drag. Smoking was a habit she didn’t approve of—what sensible person did? But it was either that or the several million calories still on her plate. “I get a third of the ranch.”

“A third of the—Good Jesus and little fishes, Tess, honey, that’s a fortune.” Louella bounced up. She might have been five ten and a generous one-fifty, but she’d been trained as a dancer and could move when she had to. She moved now, skimming around the counter to crush her daughter’s ribs in an enthusiastic hug. “What are we doing sitting here drinking coffee? We need ourselves some French champagne. Carmine’s got some stashed somewhere.”

“Wait. Mom, wait.” As Louella tore into the fridge again, Tess tugged on her robe. “It’s not that simple.”

“My daughter the millionaire. The cattle baron.” Louella popped the cork, spewing champagne. “Fucking A.”

“I have to live there for a year.” Tess blew out a breath as Louella cheerfully clamped her mouth over the lip of the bottle and sucked up bubbles. “All three of us have to live there for a year, together. Or we don’t get zip.”

Louella licked champagne from her lips. “You have to live in Montana for a year? On the ranch?” Her voice began to shake. “With the cows? You, with the cows.”

“That’s the deal. Me, and the other two. Together.”

One hand still holding the bottle, the other braced on the counter, Louella began to laugh. She laughed so hard, so long that tears streamed down her face, running with Maybelline mascara and L’Oréal ivory base.

“Jesus H. Christ, the son of a bitch always could make me laugh.”

“I’m glad you think it’s so funny.” Tess’s voice cracked like ice. “You can chuckle over it nightly while I’m out in bumfuck watching the grass grow.”

With a flourish, Louella poured champagne into the coffee cups. “Honey, you can always spit in his eye and go on just as you are.”

“And give up several million in assets? I don’t think so.”

“No.” Louella sobered as she studied her daughter, this mystery she had somehow given birth to. So pretty, she mused, so cool, so sure of herself. “No, you wouldn’t. You’re too much your father’s daughter for that. You’ll do the time, Tess.”

And she wondered if her daughter would get more out of it than a third interest in a cattle ranch. Would the year soften the edges, Louella wondered, or hone them?

She lifted both cups, handed one to Tess. “When do you leave?”

“First thing in the morning.” She sighed loud and long. “I’ve got to go buy some goddamn boots,” she muttered, then with a small smile toasted herself. “What the hell. It’s only a year.”

WHILE TESS WAS DRINKING CHAMPAGNE IN HER mother’s kitchen, Lily was standing at the edge of a pasture, watching horses graze. She’d never seen anything more beautiful than the way the wind blew through their manes, the way the mountains rose behind, all blue and white.

For the first time in months, she had slept through the night, without pills, without nightmares, lulled by the quiet.

It was quiet now. She could hear the grind of machinery in the distance. Just a hum in the air. She’d heard Willa talking to someone that morning about harvesting grain, but she had wanted to stay out of the way. She could be alone here with the horses, bothering no one, with no one bothering her.

For three days she’d been left to her own devices. No one said anything when she wandered the house, or went out to

explore the ranch. The men would tip their hats to her if they passed by, and she imagined there were comments and murmurs. But she didn't care about that.

The air here was sweet to the taste. Wherever she stood, it seemed, she could see something beautiful—water rushing over rocks in a stream, the flash of a bird in the forest, deer bounding across the road.

She thought a year of this would be paradise.

Adam stood for a moment, the bucket in his hand, watching her. She came out here every day, he knew. He'd seen her wander away from the house, the barn, the paddocks, and head for this pasture. She would stand by the fence, very still, very quiet.

Very alone.

He'd waited, believing she needed to be alone. Healing was often a solitary matter. But he also believed she needed a friend. So now he walked toward her, careful to make enough noise so that she wouldn't be startled. When she turned, her smile came slow and hesitant, but it came.

"I'm sorry. I'm not in the way here, am I?"

"You're not in anyone's way."

Because she was already learning to be relaxed around him, she shifted her gaze back to the horses. "I love looking at them."

"You can have a closer look." He didn't need the bucket of grain to lure any of the horses to the fence. Any of them would come for him at a quiet call. He handed the bucket to Lily. "Just give it a shake."

She did, then watched, delighted, as several pairs of ears perked up. Horses trotted over to crowd at the fence. Without thinking, she dipped a hand into the grain and fed a pretty buckskin mare.

"You've been around horses before."

At Adam's comment, she pulled her hand back. "I'm sorry. I should have asked before I fed her."

"It's all right." He was sorry to have startled that smile away from her face. That quick light that had come into eyes that were somewhere between gray and blue. Like lake

water, he thought, caught in the shadows of sunset. "Come along, Molly."

At her name, the roan mare pranced along the fence toward the gate. Adam led her into a corral and slipped a bridle over her head.

Self-conscious again, Lily wiped grain dust on her jeans, took one hesitant step closer. "Her name's Molly?"

"Yes." He kept his eyes on the horse, giving Lily a chance to settle again.

"She's pretty."

"She's a good saddle horse. Kind. Her gait's a bit rough, but she tries. Don't you, girl? Can you ride Western, Lily?"

"I—what?"

"You probably learned on English." Keeping it light, Adam spread the blanket he'd brought along over Molly's back. "Nate keeps some English tack if you'd rather. We can borrow a saddle from him."

Her hands reached for each other, as they did when her nerves jittered. "I don't understand."

"You want to ride, don't you?" He slid one of Willa's old saddles onto Molly's back. "I thought we'd go up in the hills a little way. Might see some elk."

She found herself caught between yearning and fear. "I haven't ridden in—It's been a long time."

"You don't forget how." Adam estimated the length of her legs and adjusted the stirrups accordingly. "You can go alone once you know your way around." He turned then, noting the way she kept glancing back toward the ranch house. As if gauging the distance. "You don't have to be afraid of me."

She believed him. That was what she was afraid of—that it was so easy to believe him. How often had she believed Jesse?

But that was done, she reminded herself. That was over. Her life could begin again, if she'd let it.

"I'd like to go, for a little while, if you're sure it's all right."

"Why wouldn't it be?" He moved toward her, stopping instinctively before she shied again. "You don't have to

worry about Willa. She has a good heart, and a generous one. It's just hurting right now."

"I know she's upset. She has every right to be." Unable to resist, Lily lifted a hand to stroke Molly's cheek. "Even more upset since they found that poor cow. I don't understand who would do something like that. She's so angry. And she's so busy. She's always got something to do, and I'm, well, I'm just here."

"Do you want something to do?"

With the horse between them, it was easy to smile. "Not if it involves castrating cows. I could hear them this morning." She shuddered, then managed to laugh at herself. "I got out of the house before Bess could make me eat breakfast. I don't think I'd have held it down for long."

"It's just one of the things you get used to."

"I don't think so." Lily exhaled, barely noticing how close her hand was to Adam's on the mare's head. "Willa's natural with all of it. She's so sure and confident. I envy that, that knowing just who you are. To her I'm just a nuisance, which is why I haven't been able to work up the courage to talk to her, to ask if there's something I could do around here to help."

"You don't have to be afraid of her, either." He brushed his fingertips against hers, continuing to stroke the mare even when Lily's hand slid out of reach. "But meanwhile, you could ask me. I can use some help. With the horses," he added, when she only stared at him.

"You want me to help you with the horses?"

"It's a lot of work, more when winter gets here." Knowing he'd planted the seed, he stepped back. "Think about it." Then he cupped his hands, smiled again. "I'll give you a leg up. You can walk her around the corral, get acquainted, while I saddle up."

Her throat was closed so that she had to swallow hard to clear it. "You don't even know me."

"I figure we'll get acquainted too." He stood as he was, hands linked in a cup, his eyes patient on hers. "You just have to put your foot in my hands, Lily, not your life."

Feeling foolish, she grabbed the saddle horn and let him

boost her into the saddle. She looked down at him, her eyes solemn in her battered face. "Adam, my life is a mess."

He only nodded as he checked her stirrups. "You'll have to start tidying it up." He rested a hand on her ankle a moment, wanting her to grow easy to his touch. "But today, you just have to take a ride into the hills."

THE LITTLE BITCH. LETTING THAT HALF-BREED PAW HER. Sniveling little whore thought she could get rid of Jesse Cooke, figured she could run and he wouldn't catch her. Put the cops on his ass. She was going to pay for that.

Jesse stared through the field glasses while little bubbles of fury burst in his blood. He wondered if the half-breed horse wrangler had already gotten Lily on her back. Well, the bastard would pay too. Lily was Jesse Cooke's wife, and he was going to be reminding her of that soon enough.

Stupid little cunt thought she was real clever hightailing it to Montana. But the day Jesse Cooke couldn't outwit a woman was the day the sun didn't rise in the east.

He'd known she wouldn't make a move without contacting her dear old mama. So he'd just camped himself within sight of the pretty house in Virginia. And every morning he'd gotten to the mail and checked through it for a letter from Lily.

Persistence had paid off. The letter had come, as he'd known it would. He'd taken it back to the motel room, steamed it open. Oh, Jesse Cooke was nobody's fool. He'd read it, seen where she was going, what she was up to.

Going to cash in on an inheritance, he thought bitterly. And cut her own husband out of his share of the pie. Not in this lifetime, Jesse mused.

The minute the letter had been resealed and put back in the box, he'd headed for Montana. And had gotten there, he thought now, two full days before his idiot wife. Long enough for a man as smart as Jesse Cooke to get the lay of the land and get himself a job on Three Rocks.

A miserable fucking job, he thought now, keeping machines in repair. Well, he knew his way around engines, and there was always a rig that needed fine-tuning. When he

wasn't doing that, they had him out checking fences day and night.

But that came in handy, damn handy, like now. A man out riding in a four-wheel to check fences could take a little detour and check out what else was going on.

And he saw plenty.

Jesse rubbed his fingers over the moustache he'd grown and dyed like his hair, medium brown. Just a precaution, he thought, just a temporary disguise, in case Lily blabbed about him. If she did, they'd have their eye out for a clean-shaven man with blond hair. He had let his hair grow too and would keep on letting it grow. Like a fucking pansy, he thought, resenting the necessity of giving up his severe Marine Corps crew cut.

It would all be worth it in the end. When he had Lily back, when he reminded her who was boss. Who was in charge.

Until that happy day he would stay close. And he would watch.

“You have a good time, bitch,” Jesse muttered, his eyes narrowing behind the high-powered lenses as Lily walked her mount beside Adam's. “Payback time's coming.”

MOST OF THE DAY HAD DIED OUT OF THE SKY BY THE time Willa got back to the ranch house. Dehorning and castrating cattle was a messy, miserable job, and a tedious one. She knew she was pushing herself, and knew she would continue to push. She wanted the men to see her at every angle, at every job. Shifting operators under the best of circumstances could be a rough transition. And these were far from the best of circumstances.

Which is why she'd been on hand when a herd of elk had trampled through a fence, creating havoc. And why she'd personally headed the crew to chase them off again, to repair the fence.

Now with the work done for the day and the hands settling down for supper and cards in the bunkhouse, she wanted nothing more than a hot bath and a hot meal. She was halfway up the steps to get the first when the knock

sounded on the door. Knowing that Bess was likely in the kitchen, Willa stomped back down to answer.

She greeted Ben with a scowl. "What do you want?"

"A cold beer would go down good."

"This isn't a saloon." But she swung away from the door and into the living room to the cold box behind the bar. "Make it fast, Ben. I haven't had my supper."

"Neither have I." He took the bottle she handed him.

"But I don't expect I'm going to get an invitation."

"I'm not in the mood for company."

"I've never known you to be in the mood for company."

He tipped back the beer and drank deep. "I haven't seen you since we were up in the high country. Thought I should let you know I didn't find anything. Trail died out on me. I'd have to say whoever was up there knew his way around tracking."

She took a beer for herself, and since her feet were aching, dropped down beside Ben on the sofa. "Pickles thinks it was kids. Doped up and crazy."

"And you?"

"I didn't." She moved a shoulder. "Now that sounds like the best explanation."

"Maybe. There's not much use going back up. We've got the cattle down. Is your sister back from LA?"

Willa stopped rolling her head to loosen her shoulders and frowned at him. "You're awfully interested in Mercy business, McKinnon."

"That's part of my job now." He liked reminding her of it, just as he liked looking at her, with her hair falling out of her braid and her boots propped beside his. "Have you heard from her?"

"She'll be here tomorrow, so if that concludes your prying into my business, you can—"

"Going to introduce me?" To please himself he reached out to toy with her hair. "Maybe I'll take a shine to her and keep her occupied and out of your way for a while."

She knocked his hand aside, but he only brought it back. "Do women always fall at your feet?"

"All but you, darling. And that's just because I haven't

found the right way to tip your balance.” He skimmed a fingertip down her cheek, watched her eyes narrow. “But I’m working on it. What about the other one?”

“The other what?” Willa wanted to shift over a couple of inches, but she knew it would make her look like a fool.

“The other sister.”

“She’s around. Somewhere.”

He smiled, slowly. “I’m making you nervous. Isn’t that interesting?”

“Your ego needs pruning again.” But she started to rise. He stopped her with a hand on her shoulder.

“Well, well,” he murmured, feeling her vibrate under his hand. “It looks like I haven’t been paying close enough attention. Come here.”

She concentrated on evening her breathing, slowly changed her grip on the beer she held. Oh, he looks so arrogant, she thought. So cocky. So sure I’ll melt if he bothers to push the right button.

“You want me to come there,” she purred, watching his eyes widen slightly in surprise at the warm tone. “And what’ll happen if I do?”

He might have called himself a fool—if there’d been any blood left in his head to allow him to think. But all he could do at that moment was feel the gradual simmer of lust set off by that husky voice.

“I’d say it’s long past time we found out.” He curled his fingers into her shirt, tightened his grip, and pulled her against him. If his gaze hadn’t drifted down from hers to lock onto her mouth, he would have seen it coming. Instead he found himself an inch away from that mouth and soaked from the beer she dumped over his head.

“You’re such a jerk, Ben.” Pleased with herself, she leaned forward to set the empty bottle on the table. “You think I could live on a ranch surrounded by randy men all my life and not see a move like that a mile off?”

Slowly, he dragged a hand through his wet hair. “Guess not. But then again—”

He moved fast. When she found herself trapped under him, Willa thought, even a snake rattles before he strikes.

Now she could only be disgusted with herself for being pressed into the couch by a wiry male with blood in his eye.

“You didn’t see that coming.” He handcuffed her wrists, hauled her arms over her head. Her face was flushed, but he didn’t think it was only temper. Temper didn’t make her tremble, didn’t put that sudden female awareness in her eyes. “Are you afraid to let me kiss you, Willa? Afraid you’ll like it?”

Her heart was beating too fast, felt as though it would shatter through her ribs. Her lips were tingling, as if the nerves centered there were revving up for action. “If I want your mouth on me, I’ll tell you.”

He only smiled, leaned down closer to her face. “Why don’t you tell me you don’t? Go ahead, tell me.” His voice thickened as he nipped lightly at her jaw. “Tell me you don’t want me to taste you. Just once.”

She couldn’t. It would have been a lie, but lying didn’t worry her. She simply couldn’t get a word through her dry throat. So she took the other option, and brought her knee up, fast and hard.

She had the pleasure of seeing him go dead pale before he collapsed on her.

“Get off me. Get off, you goddamn idiot. You’re crushing my lungs.” Desperate for air, she arched, bucked, making him moan. She managed to gasp in a breath before she grabbed a handful of his hair and yanked.

They rolled off the couch and crashed to the floor. She saw stars as her elbow hit the edge of the table. It was pain and fury that had her tearing into him. Something shattered on the floor as they wrestled over it, grunting and cursing.

He was trying to defend himself, but she was obviously out for blood. And proved it by biting his arm just under the shoulder. Yelping, certain that she was going to take a chunk out of him, he managed to get a grip on her jaw and squeeze. Under the pressure the tear of her teeth loosened.

They rolled, boots clattering and digging for purchase, elbows jabbing, hands grappling. Willa didn’t realize she was laughing until he had her pinned. She kept right on

laughing, helpless even to stop for breath as he stared down at her.

“You think it’s funny?” He had to squint, then huff out a breath to get the hair out of his eyes. But all in all, he was grateful she hadn’t managed to tear it out of his head by the handful. “You bit me.”

“I know.” Her voice hitched as she ran a tongue over her teeth. “I think I’ve got some of your shirt in my mouth. Turn me loose, Ben.”

“So you can bite me again, or try to kick my balls into my throat?” Since they were still aching—more than a little—he narrowed his eyes, sneered. “You fight like a girl.”

“So what? It works.”

His mood was shifting again. He could feel that hot, slick transition from temper to lust, from insult to interest. The way they’d ended up, her breasts were pressed nicely against his chest, and her legs were spread with his snugged between them.

“Yeah, it does. You being female seems to suit the situation.”

She saw the change in his eyes, teetered between panic and longing. “Don’t.” His mouth was barely an inch from hers now, and her breath was gone again.

“Why not? It’s not going to hurt anybody.”

“I don’t want your mouth on me.”

He lifted a brow, and he smiled. “Liar.”

And she shuddered. “Yeah.”

His mouth was only a whisper from hers when she heard the first piercing screams.