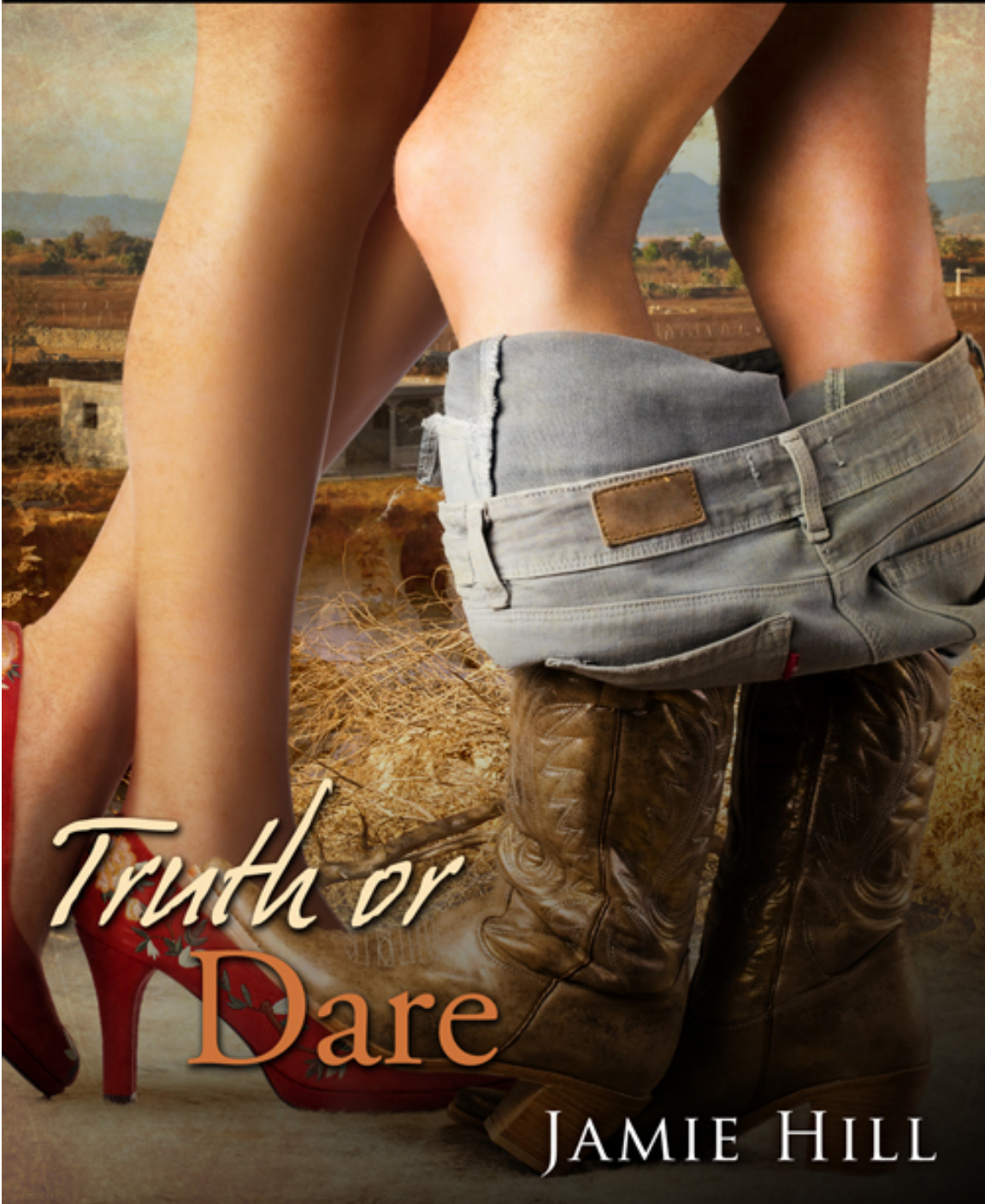




# CATTLE VALLEY



*Truth or*  
**Dare**

JAMIE HILL

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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Truth or Dare

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**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

**Cattle Valley**

# **Truth or Dare**

**Jamie Hill**

## *Dedication*

To Carol Lynne for allowing me to become part of Cattle Valley. Thanks so much!

## *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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## Chapter One

*"The only woman she'd ever loved had just walked out the door."* The author closed her book and looked up, scanning the standing-room only crowd. "Thank you all for being here."

Naomi Rivers started the applause then wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. She'd read *Destiny's Choice* soon after she'd confirmed the book signing event at her store. It was much more poignant hearing the words in the author's resonant, sexy voice. She glanced around. Her friends and fellow townspeople must have agreed. They jostled around the book display, reaching for copies.

"There's a table off to the side." She spoke loudly enough to be heard over the noise, pointing to her left. "As soon as I can get Ms. Cross to it, she'll sign your books. There are refreshments too."

Weaving through the group, she reached the front where Courtney Cross stood chatting with the other bookstore employee, Melissa Danes. "That was great!" Naomi smiled at the gorgeous, well-known writer. "Everyone loved it. Looks like we might sell out."

"I brought a few extra copies, just in case." Courtney brushed her blonde bangs off her face. "I'm amazed at the turnout. I heard Cattle Valley was a small town."

"It is. Less than three thousand people, actually. But lots of folks here have what they like to call 'alternative lifestyles'. The subject matter of your lesbian novel has been a huge topic of discussion since everyone found out you were coming. People were very excited."

Courtney shook her head. "I can't believe that either. A gay town. It's unheard of."

"Not everyone's gay," Melissa said. "Some people moved here to be with gay family members. Some just wanted a peaceful, non-judgemental place to live."

"Speaking of peaceful..." Naomi scanned the crowd, some of whom seemed to be getting restless. "We'd better get the signing started. I'll take her over there, Mel. Would you make sure the display of her books stays stocked? There's another case of her first title, *Destiny's Rule*, in back if we need it."

"Yep." Melissa left the author's side reluctantly, making a face behind the woman's back at Naomi.

Naomi smiled sweetly at the young brunette then took Courtney by the arm. The softness of her skin jolted Naomi for a moment, and she paused to control her breathing. *Keep it together!* she chided herself. With a store full of customers, she had no time to melt into a puddle of lust. "This way, Ms. Cross. Get your fingers limbered up, looks like you'll be doing some writing."

"My favourite part." Courtney settled into the padded chair behind the table. "Next to the writing, that is." Picking up a pen, she smiled at the first person in line and the small talk began.

Stepping back, Naomi watched with interest. She'd always been an avid reader but could only admire someone who put words to paper the way Courtney did. And facing a crowd of strangers—Naomi shuddered. She'd rather spend time in a room full of books than people.

"That's one poised woman." Sheriff Ryan Blackfeather stepped up behind her. "Making nice with one person after another, smiling like there's no place she'd rather be."

Naomi looked over her shoulder and up at the tall man. "She said it's her second favourite thing to do, after writing."

Ryan scanned the crowd. "I can think of several things I'd call my favourites, and none of them include books."

Naomi saw him making eyes at one of his handsome partners, Nate Gills, who waited in line for an autograph. Straight or gay, most people in Cattle Valley agreed—Nate was about the prettiest thing west of the Mississippi River. Naomi concurred, but also knew what a great friend the man was.

She swatted Ryan's arm. "I wasn't talking about *that*. We all know how good you've got it at home. Speaking of which, where's the third partner in your man sandwich? I haven't seen Rio in here."

He snorted. "Rio's at *The Gym*. He said he's not into lesbian book readings but asked you to save him a cookie."

"Tell him to forget it," she teased. "They're lesbian cookies."

"Yeah, well, we happen to know you got them at Brynn's Bakery. Kyle Brynn may be many things, but he's no lesbian."

"Smart ass. I bought them, so they're mine now. Lesbian cookies, get it?"

Ryan smiled. "Nate'll take him one. Nate looks out for Rio." He watched his lover talk to the author.

"I know he does." She looked from one man to the other thoughtfully. They were an unusual trio. Ryan—tall, dark and handsome, massive tattoos and flowing long hair—made a wonderful, yet atypical, town sheriff. He lived with two partners, Rio Adega, also tattooed, with multiple piercings and hair to die for, and the metro-sexual Nate, who along with Rio had opened a fitness centre and called it—thinking like men—*The Gym*. Nate and Rio spent lots of time there, and where they could be found, Ryan usually wasn't far away.

Glancing from Ryan to Nate, Naomi wondered how they did it. Not the physical how—she blushed thinking about that—but the mental *how* of loving two people. Didn't they get jealous? What if one of them wasn't in the mood? Though judging by appearances, that wasn't often a problem. When they weren't working, the men were all over each other.

Nate finished up with Courtney and walked towards Naomi and Ryan. After planting a kiss on the lips of his tall lover, he smiled at Naomi. "Courtney's one nice lady. You should get yourself some of that."

"Excuse me?" She blinked. "Just because she wrote a lesbian book, doesn't make her a lesbian."

"She is." He nodded with authority.

"How do you know?" Naomi scoffed.

Nate shrugged. "I asked her."

"You did not!"

Ryan laughed. "I'm sure he did. Why does that surprise you? You know him well enough, by now."

"Oh my god!" She shook her head.

"We need to go." Ryan slipped an arm around his lover. "Have you paid for your book?"

"No, I'm stealing it." He patted Naomi's face.

She grinned, shoving his hand away. "You bought it weeks ago, jackass. I put the sticker on it myself when you brought it in tonight. Go on, get out. Make room for the paying customers."

"I need a cookie first." Nate looked offended.

She shook her finger. "Don't take any for Rio."

"Cross my heart." He turned his back, where she could see his fingers in the shape of an 'X', the universal symbol for cancelling a promise.

Chuckling, she glanced up at Ryan. "How can you live with him?"

He leaned down, kissing her cheek. "He makes life *very* interesting, if you know what I mean. 'Night, Naomi."

"Goodnight." She watched them wistfully as they walked to the refreshment table. She knew exactly what he meant. Things were happening in their house which hadn't happened in hers for ages. Longer than ages. She couldn't remember the last time she'd had sex that didn't involve her own hand and two 'D' cell batteries.

Glancing back at the author's table, she noticed the crowd thinning. A few more signatures and the sexy blonde woman would be done. For just a moment she let her mind wander. *Is she really a lesbian?* Nate liked to tease, but what a cruel joke if it wasn't true. Courtney was slim with nice sized breasts and long legs. Definitely the hottest thing she'd seen in the small Wyoming town that summer. Lightly tanned skin made Naomi wonder if there'd be bikini lines over the round breasts or if the woman sunbathed topless. Her imagination took the scenario further.

*She removed Courtney's blouse, reaching behind, unfastening her lacy, white bra. Letting it drop to the floor, she saw the narrow white stripe covering the fullest part of the breasts. It pleased Naomi that Courtney didn't tan nude. She wanted to be the only one who got to see the full, luscious mounds. And she wanted to do more than look. Cupping the firm globes in her hands, she leaned down and sucked one brown nipple into her mouth. It hardened immediately, and Courtney squirmed with delight against her.*

Wetness seeped between Naomi's thighs. She closed her eyes and groaned.

"Hey!"

Startled, she opened her eyes and glanced around, seeking the voice. Nate was headed out the door, cookies in one hand, Ryan's arm in the other. With a sly smile, he nodded towards the signing table. "Go for it," he mouthed.

"Scram!" She wrinkled her brow. It was almost as if he knew what she'd been thinking, which was scary. Naomi never considered herself an open book, more a private person. Nate Gills had a way of seeing into a body that amazed her at times.

"See you." Ryan waved Nate's copy of *Destiny's Choice* at her, grinning as they left.



She tossed them one final wave and turned back to the crowd. Melissa rang up the last of the purchases, and as people filtered out, Naomi cleaned up.

"I told Courtney you booked her a room at the Apple Valley Inn Bed and Breakfast," Melissa said, turning back to the author. "It's a beautiful place. You'll like the owner. Tia is great."

"It sounds perfect." Courtney stood, stretching, shaking her writing hand. "I'm exhausted. I want to soak in the tub and maybe get a bite to eat. It's been a long day."

"I'd be happy to show you the way," Melissa added. "It's near my place."

"I'll be taking Ms. Cross to the Inn," Naomi announced. "I actually thought we'd grab a bite at Brewster's Bar and Grill first. They have great munchies, and we can have a drink or some wine. If you're not too tired, that is..."

"Sounds perfect. I'd love a glass of wine. But please, call me Courtney." She studied Naomi for a few moments before gathering up her things and shoving them into a duffle bag.

"Good." Naomi felt her face flush and looked away quickly. "You probably didn't get a chance to sample the cookies. They're fabulous."

"The baker is a hunky guy in a wheelchair. Really dreamy." Melissa raised her eyebrows up and down.

Courtney reached for a chocolate chip cookie. "Ooh, a sexy man who bakes. Sounds tempting."

Naomi wondered again if Nate had been yanking her chain. Most lesbians didn't talk about sexy men being tempting. Now she wasn't so sure of herself. She'd have to find out if Courtney was gay. "Let's box these up." She put the remaining cookies into two packages. "Take some home, Mel. I'll leave these with Courtney at the Inn."

"Thanks." Courtney shoved the last of the treat in her mouth. "They're wonderful! I could eat them all, but certainly don't need to."

Naomi couldn't help noticing the woman's shapely ass. "Nah, you don't have a thing to worry about." She picked up her purse and looped it over one shoulder.

Courtney smiled, and Naomi's heart melted. *She has to be gay. I can almost feel it.*

"Well, thanks." Melissa took the second box of cookies, obviously disappointed to be parting ways with their guest.

"Did you close out the register?" Naomi asked her.

"Not yet."

"I'll let you take care of that, then. Courtney, let me help you."

Courtney handed one bag to Naomi and hoisted the other herself. "The rest of my stuff is in my rental car." She looked at Melissa. "It was lovely meeting you. Thanks for all your help tonight."

"You bet. It was great. Thank *you*."

"Night, Mel." Naomi smiled, leaving her employee standing by the cash register as she and Courtney exited the building.

"You have a wonderful store." Courtney glanced at the small sign in the window which read *Booklovers*. "It's so homey and comfortable. Did you buy it or open it yourself?"

"Did it all by myself," Naomi admitted. "I found the location, which I love, right smack in the middle of town. I was able to lease the building and then I set about making it into my dream store—an inviting place where people can browse and just relax."

"You accomplished that." Courtney pushed the button on the rental car ring, and the trunk of the small, blue Mazda opened. She deposited her armload then took the rest from Naomi. Closing the trunk, she looked around. "Shall I follow you, or—"

"We can walk." Naomi pointed a few doors down on the same side of the street. The bright neon sign for Brewster's illuminated the night.

"Excellent! I've been cooped up in airplanes, bookstores and hotel rooms for weeks. I'd love a chance to stretch my legs."

They headed down the block. "How long have you been on the road?"

"Six long weeks."

"And how many more stops do you have?"

"None." Courtney paused at the front door to the bar. "Cattle Valley was my last. *I am done*."

"Wow!" Naomi opened the door, and they stepped in. "That has to feel good." She chose an empty booth in the corner, and both women slid in. "Was it everything you'd hoped for?"

"Pretty much. There were a few rough patches. Some picketers in Topeka. A wacky reverend and his fanatics, I heard. They followed me to Omaha but finally gave up when I headed west."

"I know that bunch. You're lucky they gave up. They're the same fools who flocked to Laramie when that poor Matthew Shepard was killed. They picketed when his murderers were brought to trial—in support of them, if you can believe that."

"Incredible. Small minded people make me so angry."

Naomi saw an opening and was just about to say something when their waitress appeared.

"Evening, ladies. What can I get for you?"

"Hey, Kitty. I think we'd like to start with some wine. White okay with you, Courtney?"

"Fine." She glanced over the menu quickly. "Maybe something light to eat—nachos or quesadillas?"

"That sounds good. How about an order of each? We can share." She looked up at the buxom, brunette waitress.

"You got it. Be right back with the wine. We're not very busy tonight, so the food will be out in a jiff." Kitty nodded to them and walked off.

Courtney watched her go. "That's one tall drink of water."

*That settles it.* No straight man or lesbian walked into Brewster's without noticing Kitty. "She's a hottie, isn't she? Nice girl too." To be safe, she added a little white lie. "Pretty sure she's taken."

Turning back to the table, Courtney shook her head. "Figures. Course, I guess it's dangerous to assume everyone in town is gay. Melissa said there were straight people here too."

"There are." Naomi saw her chance and jumped on it. "But I'm not. Straight, that is. Or taken." *What?* That last part slipped out. Naomi felt like an idiot.

"Really?" Courtney's eyes widened then softened with her broad smile. "I'm amazed. Someone as pretty as you wouldn't last long in the city. Girls would be all over you, like flies on honey."

Naomi's stomach tingled with delight at the compliment. She stared into the other woman's eyes cautiously. "Nope, no flies."

Kitty returned with their wine, setting a glass down in front of each of them. "There you go, ladies. Food'll be out shortly."

"Thank you." Courtney didn't watch the beautiful woman leave that time. She kept her focus on Naomi.

"Thanks, Kitty," Naomi murmured, eyes locked on the blonde in front of her.

Finally breaking the stare, Courtney raised her glass and sipped. "Good wine. Ah, this feels wonderful. Sitting, relaxing, knowing I have no place to rush off to tomorrow."

"When do you fly out again?" Naomi hated to ask. She'd never been much for one night stands, but something about this sexy stranger had her rethinking that policy.

"My flight leaves Sheridan the day after tomorrow. However, I might push the reservation back."

"Really?" Excitement bubbled within her. She forced herself to breathe. When she raised her glass, her hand shook. She set it down quickly.

"Yeah. I've been going non-stop and I'm tired. I've earned a break, and the longer I'm here, the more I think Cattle Valley might just fill the bill."

Yes! Naomi struggled to quell the enthusiasm building inside her. She tried to speak calmly. "We've got a beautiful town. It's quiet and relaxing, but there's plenty to do if you're interested. "

"I am." Courtney's gaze became intense, and both of them finally looked away. "I mean, I think I am."

"I hope so," Naomi murmured as Kitty brought their food.

She set the nachos and quesadillas in the middle of the table, putting an empty plate in front of each woman. "Anything else you need right now? More wine?"

"We're good." Naomi glanced at Courtney, who nodded.

"Holler if you need me." Kitty strolled to another table.

"So." Courtney scooped some of each dish onto her plate. "What kinds of things are there to do in Cattle Valley?"

"Whatever you like." Naomi followed suit, nibbling on a quesadilla. "There's a beautiful park. Rodeo Days happened over the Fourth of July, so unfortunately you missed that. But there's a ranch just outside town where you could ride a horse if that's your thing."

The other woman crunched a loaded chip. "This is really good. I'm glad you suggested eating here."

Naomi hesitated then spoke up. "We have another wonderful restaurant in town, the *Canoe*. It's a little fancier. If you wanted —"

"I'd love to." Courtney's bright eyes sparkled. "How does tomorrow night sound?"

Naomi's heart fluttered. "It sounds perfect. I'll call and make reservations. That's usually a good idea on a Friday night."

"And what about you? What do you like to do, say, on your days off?"

She shrugged. "I'm not a real party animal. I go for walks around the park, maybe take in a movie. Sometimes I stay in and read a book."

"I like to stay in." Courtney licked sauce from her finger. "Watch old movies on the TV or play games."

"You play games?" Naomi repeated, then blushed when she realised her double entendre. "Board games or card games, I mean."

Courtney smiled. "I play lots of games. Board, card...and more."

The heat spread down Naomi's neck to her chest. An excited tingle moved downwards from her stomach.

"I love to see a fair-skinned, red-haired woman blush. Your face matches your hair. Tiny little freckles appear on your cheeks. And the rosy glow goes all the way down to your..." Wandering eyes left Naomi's, trailed past her neck, settling on her breasts. Courtney stared at them, licking another finger.

Naomi's nipples tightened with anticipation. The nubs hardened, she didn't dare look down. Her excitement would be obvious enough to the woman teasing her. "The curse of redheads," she murmured.

"Not a curse. I like it. Your hair colour and the expressiveness of your face. It's very becoming."

They lingered over dinner in silence, eyeing each other. Finally Courtney shoved her plate towards the edge of the table. "I'm stuffed. That was great."

"You want anything else?" A dangerous question, Naomi realised, once it was out of her mouth. She could think of a couple of things *she* wanted but couldn't be positive Courtney was feeling the same.

"Um..." Courtney acted as if she were thinking about it. "I might like some more wine...and someone to share it with. Suppose we could get a bottle to go?"

"I think that might be arranged. On both counts." She smiled warmly.

Courtney licked her finger, seductively, one last time. She kept her eyes on Naomi as she shifted in her seat.

*We're on the same page.* Naomi inhaled slightly. She recognised the blatant lust in the other woman's eyes. It was the same feeling coursing through her veins, pooling at her very core. Ready to move their evening to the next level, she caught Kitty's attention.

The waitress approached. "How're you ladies doing? Can I get you anything else?"

"We'd like a bottle of that wine to go, Kitty. And the cheque, please." Naomi reached for her purse.

"Sure. I'll be right back." She walked to the bar.

"Allow me." Courtney picked up her handbag.

"No way! You're my guest."

"Look. You arranged a wonderful book signing opportunity for me, and I really appreciate it. I sold a bunch of books tonight. The least I can do is buy dinner to express my thanks."

"Okay." Naomi closed her wallet, mind racing. If that was the *least* Courtney could do, she wondered what the *most* involved. A small smile plastered on her face, she added, "Tonight is on you. Tomorrow night is my treat."

"If you say so. Just remember, tonight isn't over yet." Courtney grinned as Kitty set the chequer down on the table along with a bottle in a brown paper bag.

"Be sure to put the bottle in your trunk when you drive home," the waitress advised. "You've only had half a glass each, but you don't want to take any chances."

"Good idea, thanks." Naomi nodded.

Courtney tossed some cash on the table, and they both stood.

Kitty winked as she scooped up the money. "Ya'll have a nice night, now, ya hear? Don't stir up too much trouble."

"We won't." Courtney clutched the bottle to her chest, turning to Naomi. "Ready?"

"Yeah." They walked out.

"What was that about stirring up trouble?"

"Eh, she's just trying to start a little gossip. Small towns, you know. People want to know everyone else's business."

They headed down the street, stopping when they reached the rental car. "So." Courtney stuck the bottle in her trunk. "The good people of the town might notice you coming *in* to the bed and breakfast with me and not leaving?"

"Is that what you had in mind?" Naomi took a step closer.

"Truthfully? Yes. Please understand, I don't normally proposition a woman I've just met, but there's something about you..." She moved forward, their bodies almost touching. "I can't quite put my finger on it. But it feels like we have some kind of connection."

"I feel it too," Naomi admitted. "Like, for two strangers, we might have a lot in common."

"Exactly." Courtney nodded. "So the question is, do you care what the people of the town think?"

"Most of the time." Naomi inhaled. "Tonight, I'm not so sure. Do you care?"

"I don't. But then I don't have to live here. I wouldn't want to do anything that might cause you embarrassment."

Naomi gazed at her for a moment then decided to be bold. She reached for Courtney's face and planted a kiss on the woman's pink lips.

"Oh!" Courtney mumbled in apparent surprise, then rebounded quickly and deepened the kiss. Her lips parted, tongue sneaking into Naomi's mouth, searching.

"Mmm." Naomi melted against the other woman. They were roughly the same size, Courtney slightly bigger, but they seemed of equal stature. She widened her mouth, allowing her tongue to bat against the new, but welcome, intruder.

Gasping for breath, they parted. "Wow." Courtney brushed her hair back. "Guess you're not too worried about what people think."

"I just now decided not to worry about it. Besides, in this town if anyone sees us, they'll merely think I'm a lucky devil."

Cupping one of Naomi's denim-clad butt cheeks, Courtney smiled. "I think *I'm* the lucky one. Well, come on. You were going to show me to the Inn?"

Revelling in the grip on her ass, Naomi pressed her crotch against the other woman's thigh. "I guess I'd better. People *might* talk if they caught us doing it right here on the sidewalk."

"Could be fun. But not our first time. The first time needs wine, a warm bath and bubbles. Lots of bubbles."

Naomi humped the slim thigh one last time then pulled away with a frustrated groan. "It's going to be a long, torturous drive to the Inn."

"Really? How far away is it?"

She smiled. "About two minutes. But we'll be in separate cars. Wait here, I'm parked in back. I'll pull around, and you can follow me. I drive a small, black SUV."

"I won't follow anyone but you." Courtney batted her eyelashes and slipped into the rental car.

"Promises, promises," Naomi muttered jovially, watching the blonde. A feeling in her gut suggested going to bed with a woman she'd just met wasn't the brightest idea. There was no future in it. It would simply be a roll in the hay. Naomi sighed. It'd been so long, she couldn't remember what hay felt like. The feeling in her tingling pussy was at war with her nagging gut instinct.

A sharp tap of the sports car's horn made her jump.

"Hurry up!" Courtney stuck her head out the door, grinning.

The blonde haired woman looked so cute, so sexy, Naomi's lust won out over common sense. What could be the harm in a one night fling? *Maybe two nights.* "My feet are like wings!" she called back, unlocking the store, locking it up again and dashing through it to reach her vehicle parked behind. Naomi's heart felt like it had wings too. It raced at lightning speed and if it went any faster, she swore it might fly right out of her chest and sail away.



## Chapter Two

Courtney started up the little car she'd leased earlier that day. It wasn't the type of automobile she'd have chosen, but for twenty-four hours it was no big deal. The idea that she might stay longer occurred to her again, but she brushed it aside for now. There'd be time later to decide for sure. She turned on the driving lights and waited.

A black SUV rounded the corner and stopped behind her. She glanced at the driver. It was Naomi, waving to her, looking flushed and sexy as hell. She waved back, and as the SUV took off, she followed.

There wasn't much traffic and the streets were fairly well lit, so she had no trouble keeping up, even in an unfamiliar car. Thoughts raced through her mind faster than she could process them. *What am I doing?* She never had one night stands. Going to bed with a stranger was the last thing she ever imagined when she arrived in the quiet little town.

Something about Naomi brought out pure, feral lust that Courtney hadn't felt in a long time—if ever. They'd have a tumble, and if things felt right, she might consider staying here for a short vacation. It'd been a long book tour and a gruelling year prior to that, with finishing her novel and all that entailed. A vacation was just what she needed. Hot, steamy monkey-sex was what she needed *tonight*. Courtney smiled.

Two minutes and a few blocks later, Naomi pulled up in front of a large house on a corner lot. Courtney parked behind the SUV and got out.

"Wow!" The house was a huge, old Victorian style place in white with dark red trim. "This is beautiful. It looks old but amazingly well kept up."

"Yeah, well, actually—it was built to look that way. The whole town is only, like, twenty-five years old."

"You're kidding!"

Naomi shook her head. "God's honest truth. It's a long story but kind of interesting. I'll tell you about it sometime." She shifted from one foot to the other.

Courtney chuckled. Naomi was apparently anxious to go inside and not stand around talking. That was fine with her. She was plenty anxious herself.

Her mind still nagged that it wasn't like her to hop into bed with a stranger, but something about Naomi had her incredibly aroused. Not to mention the long, dry spell since her last relationship. She opened the trunk and removed what she'd need for the night. "Would you mind carrying this?" She handed over a black bag and the box of cookies then grabbed another suitcase, her laptop computer and the wine.

"I can get something else." Naomi reached for the closest thing, the computer.

"That's okay." She held it back. "I'm pretty careful with my laptop. You can grab this wine though."

"Whatever." Smiling, the redhead snatched the bottle and started up the front steps.

"Sorry. I didn't mean..." Courtney hurried after her.

"No biggie." Naomi held the front door open and motioned her in. "Everyone has their little eccentricities. I'd imagine a writer would, more than most."

"What about you?" She dragged the heavier bag in, setting it down by the front desk. "Got some little strange habits I should know about?"

"Maybe." Naomi rang the bell on the counter. "As someone once said, that's for me to know, and you to find out."

"Ah ha." She smiled. Standing next to Naomi, she realised they were very close to the same size. Approximately the same height, though she had a bit more meat on her bones than the petite woman. Her breasts were slightly bigger, but Naomi's were tantalisingly round and full. Courtney's stomach tingled as she imagined putting her hands—and her mouth—on the perfect orbs. *Where is that desk clerk?*

A door opened and a pretty woman with curly hair and medium-dark skin approached them. "Good evening, Naomi. This must be Mizz Cross." She spoke with a Jamaican accent, extending her hand.

"Hey, sweetie," Naomi replied. "Yes, it is. Tia Brooks, meet the fabulous author, Courtney Cross. Courtney, this is Tia. She runs the Inn."

"Pleased to meet you." Courtney shook her hand. "I love your accent. Are you from Jamaica?"

"I am. The little town of Apple Valley, not far from Kingston. I'm so happy to meet you too. I've read both your books and some of your earlier stuff too. I would have attended the signing, but my night girl called in sick. Perhaps I might sweet talk you into signing my copies sometime while you're here?"

"Absolutely! Anyone who stuck with me through my early work definitely rates an autograph or two."

Naomi spoke up. "She might be staying longer than the two nights, Tia. Would that be a problem?"

"Not in the slightest. With Rodeo Days over, we've got rooms available. Just let me know."

"I will, when I've decided." Courtney saw a flicker of disappointment cross Naomi's face. She added quickly, "I need to figure out my schedule and clear it with my agent."

"Not a problem." Tia handed her a pen. "If you could sign this, please. I'll need to see your credit card."

"Of course." Courtney took care of the details then accepted her room key. She smiled. It wasn't a card key or anything modern. It was an old-fashioned, stick-in-the-door key. "Thank you, Tia. I'll probably see you tomorrow."

"I'll be here," the woman called in a sing-song voice and waved over her shoulder as she walked off. "Naomi, I assume you'll show her where her room is?"

"I think I can handle it." She hefted up both suitcases and moved to the stairs. "This way, ma'am."

"I can get that," Courtney reached for the heavier bag.

Naomi started up the steps. "Grab your computer and that wine. I'm working up a powerful thirst."

"Right behind you." She followed, watching the jean-clad ass sway as Naomi climbed. "I'm enjoying the view."

A sultry chuckle was the only reply, and after one flight of stairs they stopped in front of room two-oh-six. "Here we are."

Courtney presented the key and unlocked the door. Pushing it open, she allowed her guest in first and flipped on a light switch. "Oh, this is beautiful!"

The room was large, decorated in the soft, southwest shades of blue, brown and cream. A large dream catcher adorned the wall, along with other Indian trinkets. The drapes were pale gauze, but the shade was solid and appeared effective at room darkening.

"This is nice," Naomi agreed. "I haven't seen all the rooms. Some are decorated with Jamaican voodoo stuff, which is kind of cool – and creepy at the same time. This is tranquil and relaxing."

Courtney flipped on the bathroom light. "It is. Oh wow, look at this. A huge, claw-footed tub."

"Nice." Naomi peered over her shoulder. "Looks roomy. Maybe even roomy enough for two."

"I totally agree." She returned to the bedroom and closed the door, locking it. She faced Naomi. "So I guess we both know what we're doing here."

Naomi shrugged, a nervous smile playing at her lips. "I guess."

"I mean—" Courtney took a step closer. "I like you. I'm really attracted to you. I don't usually do one night stands—"

"We'll just have to make it last for more than one night then." Naomi's smile widened.

Courtney reached out, touching her cheek softly. "You know what I mean. Even if I stay a little longer, through the weekend or whatever, we both know how this is going to end."

Naomi turned her face into the hand and closed her eyes. "Let's not think about endings. Let's think about beginnings."

"Just so you know—"

"I know." She nuzzled Courtney's palm.

Courtney released her and stepped back. She turned on the lamp in the corner then shut off the overhead light. "Want to find some music on that radio over there?"

Naomi went to the dresser and fiddled with the dial, tuning in a twangy ballad.

"Country music," Courtney muttered.

"You expected something different in these parts?"

"Probably not. Some guy singing about losing his wife, dog or both."

"Or some woman singing about her cheating man."

"You got that right." Courtney laughed and opened her smaller suitcase. She pulled out a bottle of fragrant bubble bath and took it to the bathroom. Letting the water run until the temperature was just slightly too hot, she filled the tub halfway. After adding a capful of the aromatic liquid, she reconsidered and added another. Bubbles exploded over the water, rising to the top of the porcelain.

She found two glasses on the counter by the sink and opened the wine. She poured some in each glass then turned and found Naomi leaning against the doorframe, watching her. "Hey."

"Hey, yourself. This looks nice."

"Only thing missing is candles. Maybe we can get some tomorrow."

"I have candles but I don't have a fancy tub like this. Mine's a plain old thing. This looks like much more fun."

"I think so too." She set the glasses on the ledge behind the tub and faced Naomi. Maintaining eye contact, Courtney began unbuttoning her blouse. She wondered if Naomi felt as self-conscious as she did. *First time jitters*. Courtney saw Naomi's hand shake as she reached for her own shirt, and smiled.

Naomi pulled off her top and tossed it aside. Next she unfastened her lacy, peach-coloured bra. After a moment's hesitation she slid it off, exposing small, pert breasts with large, brown areolas. The bra flew into the other room

Courtney caught her breath at the delicious sight. It seemed like forever since she'd been with another woman. Writing in seclusion then travelling for weeks at a time didn't make dating easy. "Damn," she murmured, eyes on the puckering, brown nipples.

Naomi smiled nervously, and Courtney realised they were both a bit uneasy. "Feels kind of—"

"Strange?" Naomi finished her sentence.

"Yeah." Courtney chuckled. "Been awhile since I've undressed in front of anyone."

"You haven't yet." Naomi nodded to her. "Go ahead. You know the old saying, I won't bite unless you want me to."

Courtney grinned, then realised she'd stopped undressing and quickly took off her blouse. She unfastened her functional white bra and dropped it to the floor.

"I knew it!" Naomi called victoriously.

"What?" Courtney was confused.

"I fantasised about you earlier. Your skin is so pretty, light golden brown. I wondered if you had tan lines or if you sunbathed in the nude."

"You did?" She was amazed. She'd been so busy, she hadn't had time to fantasise.

"Oh yeah." Naomi took a step closer. "I suspected you were modest. I was right." She traced a finger over the line left by Courtney's swimming suit top, across the top of her cleavage.

"I'm usually modest. I mean, I don't usually fall into bed with someone I've just met. This is *so* not like me. It's just been—"

"A long time between dances?" Naomi grinned.

“Well, yeah. An awfully long time. And you’re so pretty and sexy —”

“And horny as hell because I never do this either, and it’s been a damned long time for me, too?” She ran her words together quickly.

Courtney laughed. “Really? I’m not sure why, but that makes me happy.”

“Probably for about the same reason your tan lines make me happy. I don’t want to think about anyone else ogling your gorgeous tits.”

A thrill zipped down Courtney’s spine, sending a spark straight to her core. She felt dampness between her legs and hurried to remove her slacks and panties. “The water’s getting cold.”

“We don’t want that.” Naomi followed her lead, stripping naked and tossing her clothes aside. She dipped one toe into the tub. “It’s just right. Come on.” She settled into one end of the tub, and Courtney climbed into the other, facing her.

They shifted their legs awkwardly for a minute until they intertwined in a comfortable position. Courtney reached for the wine. “Here you are.”

“Thanks.” Naomi accepted her glass, leaning back against the tub. “This is nice.” She sipped it, her gaze on Courtney.

“This is *heaven*. I’ve been on the road for so long.”

“Is that why you’re not with someone? All the travelling you have to do?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged, swirling the pale liquid around in her glass. “It seems like there’s always something. When I write, I bury my nose in the computer. It’s all I want to do—live and breathe my characters. Once I’ve finished a book, I think I’ll get a little break, then edits start rolling in.”

“Are there many changes?” Naomi dragged her big toe across Courtney’s stomach.

“Sometimes. My editor and I work well together. I know what she looks for and all that. But things get past me. Occasionally I wonder, *‘What in world was I thinking?’*”

“No! Surely not.” Naomi’s toe slipped lower, settling in the valley between Courtney’s legs.

Courtney found it harder to concentrate. “Oh yeah. Nobody’s perfect. I wrote a passage where one woman said, *‘Don’t tease me’*, but I left out an ‘e’ and it slipped through as *‘Don’t tase me’*. We laughed about that one for weeks.”

“Not the same thing at all,” Naomi agreed, chuckling. Her toe centred on Courtney’s clit, forming small circles.

Courtney looked at the ceiling, trying to remain focused. "And then there's the promotion. People who think books sell themselves are wrong. There's a lot of footwork involved—Jesus, Naomi!" she gripped the sides of the tub as her clit enlarged, throbbing. "You're pretty good with the footwork there, yourself."

A slow smile spread across Naomi's face. "Hoping you'd think so. Some people aren't into feet. I think they're another, often forgotten, erogenous zone."

"I love feet," Courtney croaked as her sensitive nub was massaged. "That big toe is especially nice."

"You're breathing heavily, babe." Naomi pulled her foot away. "I should give you a minute."

"You should bring that foot back here!" Courtney searched under the layer of bubbles for it but couldn't latch on.

"Easy, now." Naomi reached for one of Courtney's feet, using both thumbs to press small circles into the arch. "Just relax. We have all night."

"Christ!" Courtney settled in. It'd been so long and the stimulation felt so good. But Naomi was right—they had all night. No need to rush. She retrieved her glass and sipped. The foot massage felt good too, and she leaned her head back. "Ah..."

"Like that?" Naomi wiggled each toe, dipping a finger between each pair, caressing.

"Very much. You ever consider becoming a masseuse?"

Naomi chuckled. "Nah. Rubbing bodies gets me too excited. I'd end up fucking all my clients and I believe that would classify me as a hooker. So far no one has paid me for sex." She kneaded the foot with firm strokes then brought it higher and planted light kisses on it.

Courtney squirmed with pleasure. "I might pay you if you'd give that treatment to the other foot."

"Believe me..." Naomi nibbled the smallest toe before switching feet. "I intend to give this treatment to every part of your body."

The idea sent tingles of excitement through Courtney. She sank lower in the water, gripping both sides of the tub. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the sensual massage.

When both feet were as pliable as rubber, Courtney sighed. Before she could speak, Naomi stood and shifted positions in the tub, sliding in behind her, facing the same direction.

"Hello," the sexy redhead whispered in her ear.

“Um, hi. Hang on. Let me warm this up.” She leaned forward and pulled the plug, allowing the tub to partially drain. As she added more hot water, Courtney felt fingers playing over her hips and ass. When the tub was warmer and full again, she leaned back into Naomi’s chest. “There, that’s better.”

“It is.” Naomi circled her arms around Courtney, cupping both breasts. “Much better.”

“Ah...” Courtney reached down but in this position she couldn’t grasp anything except Naomi’s legs, which wrapped around hers. “Fuck.”

“What?” Naomi murmured, kissing her neck.

“I can’t rub you. I want to get my hands on your body.”

“Soon.” She clasped Courtney’s hands and squeezed them, settling them on her thighs. “It’s my turn.” She returned her hands to the breasts, cupping the fullness before pinching the nipples.

“You’re going to drive me crazy.” Courtney squirmed again. “I have very sensitive nipples.”

“Good to know.” Naomi pinched both nubs and pulled them out.

Delightful sensations flooded Courtney. The slightest stimulation of her clit would send her flying—and she was ready for it. She turned her head sideways to meet Naomi’s lips. “More.”

They kissed, tongues darting, seeking. Naomi continued fondling one breast, and the delightful kiss seemed to last forever.

Naomi finally pulled her face away, her hand tweaking the tender nub. “More what, baby?” Her other hand slid between Courtney’s legs, parting the hair matted by water. “More of something like this?”

“Yes...that.” Courtney closed her eyes again. “Lots of that.” She heard a soft chuckle. Fingers parted her, running through folds that weren’t wet strictly from the water. Courtney was primed and ready for her first orgasm at the hands of this woman.

“Mmm, you’re so soft. You feel good.”

“That hand is what feels good. Oh yeah, rub me, baby. Rub my clit and make me come.”

“I want you to come.” Naomi kissed her earlobe, circling the clit with slow pressure that grew more vigorous. “I can’t wait to bury my face down there and make you come with



my tongue. To see your pussy clenching, pulsing...then soaking me with your wet, sticky juices."

"Oh god!" Courtney had always been a sucker for sexy talk. To have Naomi murmuring in her ear, rubbing her clit, pinching her nipples—the sensation was too much. Shockwaves blasted through her. Courtney grasped the thighs holding her in a monster grip and shuddered through a glorious release.

"Mmm." Naomi brushed the hair from Courtney's neck, kissing everywhere she could reach. Cupping the quivering mound, she released the breast she'd been tormenting and cradled Courtney in one arm. "That was nice."

"That's putting it mildly." Courtney looked sideways and smiled. "That was amazing. Kiss me."

"My pleasure." Naomi obliged, their mouths finding each other hungrily, both ravenous for more. "I would love to do so much more to you in the water, but it's getting cold again. I think we should dry off and move to the bed."

"Sounds good." Courtney slid from between the strong legs and stood. She pulled the drain plug and reached for two towels. Passing one back, she stepped out onto a bathmat. "I'm all wrinkly."

"You're gorgeous. Want any more wine?" Naomi glanced at the bottle, half consumed.

"Maybe later." Courtney tossed her towel aside and offered a hand to the other woman.

Naomi stepped out and dried off quickly. Adding her towel to the pile on the floor, she followed Courtney to the bedroom.

"Let's get rid of this." Courtney removed the bedspread and set it aside. She turned down the sheets and patted the bed. "Come over here, sexy."

"I'm not done with you." Naomi sauntered towards her. "I've got several more hours of tasting to do."

"You'll have all the time you want. Right now, it's my turn. I've got to get my hands on you." She settled the woman onto the bed before her, nudging her legs apart. "You're so beautiful! Open up, baby. I'm coming in."

Naomi threw her head back and laughed. She parted her legs then watched as Courtney kissed her way up, starting at one ankle. "Oh yeah."

"Lie back and relax. This might take awhile. I owe you some torment."

Writhing on the bed as Courtney licked behind her knee, Naomi groaned. "It's torture. I haven't come for so long, I honestly can't remember the last time—when batteries weren't involved, that is."

Courtney chuckled. "I hear that. I remember the last time, but it wasn't very satisfying. Not like this." She nipped at the fleshy part of Naomi's thigh. "Not like you. You're perfect."

"Not hardly. Lust has blinded you, my dear."

"Good. I hope I stay blind." She settled in front of the apex where a neatly trimmed patch of red hair glistened with moisture. "Mmm."

Naomi widened her legs for better access.

Courtney blew on the sensitive area then passed over it and nibbled her way down the other leg.

Naomi moaned in frustration. "You're evil!"

"I've barely begun. When I'm finished here I need to spend some time on those luscious tits."

"That won't take long."

"Hey!" Courtney latched onto the second thigh and sucked loudly. "Don't say things like that."

"Ouch! Okay, okay!"

Courtney had to stop in order to laugh. She shook a finger at her lover. "Don't knock yourself like that again. I love the size of your tits. More than a handful is a waste."

"If you say so." Naomi wiggled her legs open and closed. "That's going to leave a mark."

"Behave yourself, or I'll plant one somewhere people can see."

"No promises. I've never been good at staying out of trouble."

Courtney glanced up, into the woman's sultry gaze. "Good. I like it that way. Now lean back and relax. I've had my lust sated, so this could take a while."

A frustrated groan came back in reply, and Courtney grinned. *This is too much fun.* She'd forgotten how wonderful it could be to spend time with a woman. Right then, she decided to vacation in Cattle Valley. She'd call her agent and her family and let them know she was staying for the week. Glancing at the sexy body of the prone woman, she smiled. *Maybe two weeks.*

## Chapter Three

Naomi woke in an unfamiliar bed and took a moment to refresh her memory. The blonde woman asleep next to her, sprawled on her stomach, hadn't been a sexy dream. She was definitely real.

*What a night!* After the bath, they'd romped around on the bed for another couple of hours. Courtney was a sensitive, thorough lover. She'd made sure Naomi was totally satisfied before they stopped to polish off the wine and cookies. After refreshments they were at it again—sucking, licking and nibbling everything they could reach.

She tossed the sheet back and examined her body. Her nipples throbbed sensitively, and her clit stung from repeated use. She hadn't enjoyed a night like that in ages. Despite hours of sex, she was horny as hell watching Courtney sleep.

Running one finger over the slender back and across the tight buttocks, she wondered if Courtney felt the same way. "Are you awake?"

"Hmm?" Courtney's face was buried in her pillow.

"I'll leave you alone if you want to sleep." She reached out, spreading the butt cheeks and dragging a finger down the crack.

"Mmm..." The woman wakened and tried to roll over.

"Stay there." Naomi pressed on her, enjoying the view of Courtney's backside. "I'm looking at your ass."

"Knock yourself out," she mumbled, pushing it higher in the air.

"So you're not sleeping. I didn't want to disturb you."

"The only way you could disturb me is to leave before I get a 'good morning' tumble."

Naomi chuckled. "I wasn't sure, after last night..."

"Wasn't sure what? If I'd want to have sex again? For future reference, you never have to ask me that. I'm up for it whenever you are."

"That's good to know. I think we're a lot alike." Spreading the cheeks wider, she traced a line with her tongue from the puckering anus down to the sweet hole she was more

familiar with. Finding Courtney's pretty pink clit with her finger, she tongued her pussy, driving in and out deeply.

"That's good." Courtney bucked her hips. "Oh yeah. We have to take advantage of the time we have together. I want to get in as much of *this* as possible."

Naomi paused. "There you go, talking about endings again. You're gonna have to stop that."

"I just want us to be realistic. We both know —" A sharp slap to her ass made Courtney gasp. "Hey!"

"I know what we both know. I choose not to think about it right now. Right now, I'm thinking about your sexy ass." The previous night had broken the ice for both of them in a lot of ways, but there was one thing Naomi hadn't mentioned. She adored anal sex. "Actually, I want to do more than look at your ass. I'd like to fuck it, but I never asked if you have a strap-on in that little suitcase of yours. Or even if you like anal."

"I've never, um, you know..."

"Never been fucked with a strap-on?"

"Not in the ass, no. I have in the pussy."

"Did you enjoy it?" Naomi tongued Courtney's pussy one last time before reluctantly leaving it. She grasped the hips of her lover and urged the woman onto her back.

"Yeah." Courtney eyed her warily.

"You don't sound so sure." Naomi spread the sexy thighs before her and straddled the woman, pressing her pussy into Courtney's.

"I like to fuck. I've just never done anything in the ass."

"It's incredible." She ground her body down, rubbing her clit against the other woman's. "If you trust me to be gentle, I'll teach you. I think you'll like it." She fondled her lover's breasts, taking one in each hand, squeezing.

Courtney groaned and reached up for Naomi's tits. She grabbed them in a similar manner, kneading and caressing as they rubbed their pussies together. She slipped one hand between them, fingering both their clits.

"Good," Naomi muttered, pressing rhythmically into the hand. Her climax loomed and it was going to be a sweet one.

"Do you have any strap-ons?" Courtney's voice was staccato with their thrusts.

"Oh yeah. I could fuck you good. Ass or pussy, your choice. "

Gasping for breath, Courtney's eyes rolled back in her head.

"Come on, sugar," Naomi coaxed. "Come real pretty for me." When Courtney convulsed, she gave in to her own desire. An intense climax ripped through Naomi. All she could do was hang on and enjoy the ride.

"Both," Courtney eventually murmured, panting.

"Hmm, baby?" Naomi glanced at her.

"I choose both. We should go to your place and get your strap-ons. I want you to fuck me in every way possible."

She grinned, collapsing on top of the woman. They stroked and fondled each other for a minute, then Naomi rolled to the side. Glancing at the clock on the nightstand, she sighed. "It's late. I need to run home and clean up before opening the store."

Courtney ran a finger over her shoulder. "You could clean up here."

Sitting up, Naomi smiled, shaking her head. "That would take a whole lot longer. Besides, I need clothes. I can't wear the same things I wore yesterday."

"Okay." Courtney sat up with her. "What time do you get off?"

Naomi wandered around the room, gathering her shirt and slacks. "Hopefully, pretty soon after I get home from work."

Courtney laughed. "You're such a naughty girl. I thought we were going out to dinner."

"Oh yeah. Thanks for reminding me. I'll call for reservations. So..." She slipped into her shoes. "How are you going to spend your first day alone in Cattle Valley?"

"Sleeping." Courtney yawned and stretched. "Maybe I'll walk around downtown. Check out the cute redhead in the bookstore."

"Her day is going to drag, I can promise you that." She touched Courtney's cheek. "All she can think about is getting you back into bed."

Standing, facing her, Courtney planted a kiss on her mouth. "They say anticipation is half the fun."

"No way. Anticipation drives me freaking crazy. I have a problem with patience."

"Then stay with me. I'm yours for the taking." Courtney kissed her again, placing one of Naomi's hands on her bare breast.

Naomi squeezed the soft flesh then stepped back. "I would if I could, you know that. I have to work today because Melissa has an appointment. But I'm off all weekend. Come six o'clock tonight, I'm all yours."

"Six, that's not so bad. I thought it might be later."

"Thursday is our only late evening. I'll be ready to go at six."

"I could meet you there, and we could walk down to the *Canoe*."

"That'd be great."

"What about lunch?"

"I usually take something in and eat when I have time."

"Let me bring you something. I'll eat with you."

"Yay!" She pressed one last kiss to Courtney's lips. "I'd love that. I'll see you later."

"Yes, you will." Courtney tossed her a sultry glance.

Naomi grinned as she started out. "If you need directions or anything, ask Tia or someone at the front desk. Or call me. I'm in the book."

"You have a cell phone?"

"Don't need one. I'm either at the store or at home."

"Just asking in case I want to talk dirty to you."

"Hmm, I might need to get one then." She grinned at the pretty blonde.

"I'll write my cell number down for you later," Courtney told her. "Now leave, before I jump you again. I'm going back to bed."

"Umm..." Naomi shook her head. She watched Courtney crawl beneath the covers, then left, reluctantly. *Six o'clock can't come soon enough.*

\* \* \* \*

Naomi was stocking the young adult bookshelf when the front door jingled. Peering around the corner, she smiled. Her next door neighbour, Lily, waddled down the aisle. "Morning, Lily! How are you feeling today?"

"My feet are swollen and my belly is the size of a basketball. A basketball that kicks my bladder and makes me need to pee every twenty minutes. Other than that, I'm okay." She brushed shaggy, brown bangs from her eyes while pressing her other hand to the small of her back.

"Aw, I'm sorry about that." She bent over to speak to Lily's stomach. "Hey there, little Danny. Take it easy on your mum. Lay off the bladder for another month or so."

"I'll never make it a whole 'nother month." Lily leaned against a bookshelf. "This kid is trying to kill me."

Naomi smiled at the woman who seemed so tired. *Is that what pregnancy is like? If it's so bad, women wouldn't choose to go through it again and again, would they?* She fingered the long hair, which had fallen in Lily's face again. "You're overdue for a trim. You ought to call down to the beauty shop and see when they can fit you in. Pamper yourself a little bit."

"I can't. Money's tight now that I'm not working. Gary says we need to save every penny."

Biting her lip, Naomi turned around and strolled towards the checkout counter. She muttered under her breath, "Then maybe Gary shouldn't spend money on cigarettes and beer."

"What?" Lily followed her to the register.

Naomi composed herself and faced the woman, forcing a smile. "Nothing, sweetie. So what can I do for you?"

"I just stopped by to say I was sorry to miss the book signing last night. Gary didn't feel good and he didn't want me to leave. I sure wanted to meet that famous author lady."

"Well, you might have another opportunity. Courtney is thinking about taking a little vacation here in Cattle Valley. Her book tour is over, and she decided this might be the perfect place to relax and unwind."

"Why are you smiling when you talk about her like that?" Lily leaned forward and stared at her face. "You're sweet on her, aren't you?"

Feeling the pink blush which came so easily, Naomi grinned. "I spent the night with her."

"You did not!" Lily squealed.

"Shh!" She glanced around. The store was empty, but she needed to make sure. It wasn't like her to kiss and tell, but Lily was a friend she could trust.

"Oh my god! You're such a tramp!"

"Yeah, she's like the first woman I've been with in how many years?"

"Now wait a minute, there was that waitress in Sheridan —"

"Don't even go there. That was a mistake, and you know it." Naomi shuddered.

"I understand mistakes, believe me." Lily rubbed her stomach absently.

Naomi wondered if she thought her marriage to Gary was a mistake. She said she loved him, but they'd had so many troubles recently. As she studied the woman and her distended stomach, the bell on the front door tinkled again. She glanced up, and a thrill ran down her spine. "It looks like you're going to meet the famous author right now, Lily." She smiled as the pretty blonde made her way to the back of the store, paper bag in hand. "Hello."

"Hi. Is this a bad time?" Courtney looked around.

"No, it's perfect. We've been pretty dead this morning. Courtney, this is my neighbour, Lily Martin. She stopped in to say she was sorry she missed you last night. Her husband was sick."

"Pleased to meet you, Lily." Courtney extended her hand, and they shook.

"I'm thrilled to meet you, Ms. Cross. Wow, this is so exciting! I've never met a celebrity before. Wait, I take that back. One time that *Dukes of Hazzard* guy and his red car were at the State Fair. I got his autograph. But he's the only other one."

Courtney smiled pleasantly. "Would you like me to autograph a book for you?"

Lily's face flushed bright pink. "Oh, I couldn't! But thank you, anyway."

Naomi reached for a copy of *Destiny's Choice*, sitting in a stack on the counter. "Here, Lily. Go ahead and sign it for her, Courtney." She shoved it across the glass, with a pen.

"But I can't—"

"Please." Naomi touched her hand. "I insist. It's a best seller and a wonderful story. You'll love it."

"To Lily?" Courtney asked, poised to write.

"Sure, I guess." The younger woman nodded. "Thanks, Naomi. Thank you, Ms. Cross."

Courtney wrote a short message then closed the book and handed it over. "It's Courtney. And you're very welcome. I hope you enjoy it."

Lily clutched the book to her chest. "I should go. It smells like you brought lunch."

"I did. I could go back and get more—"

"No, really, I was just leaving." Lily backed up. "It was a true honour to meet you, ma'am. Naomi says you might be staying awhile. Maybe I'll see you again."

"Sure, fine. Bye, then."

"See you later, sweetie." Naomi smiled at Lily and watched her leave. She turned back to Courtney. "Something smells wonderful." She tried to peek in the bag.



Pulling it away possessively, Courtney said, "Yeah, I missed breakfast so I'm pretty hungry. Tia sent me to Deb's Diner, and everything sounded so good, I almost couldn't decide."

"So what did you get?" Naomi tapped her toe teasingly, feigning impatience. "I'm hungry too."

Courtney set the bag on the counter, opened it and pulled food out. "Well, Deb told me you usually get a salad when you eat there. So of course I got us bacon cheeseburgers and fries."

"Oh my god!" Naomi laughed. "Do you know how long it's been since I had a bacon cheeseburger? You're evil. Simply wicked." She shook her finger at the woman. "Want something to drink? I've got diet soda in the fridge in back."

"Absolutely. If we drink diet soda, it neutralises the calories in this food."

"Yeah, right." Naomi snorted as she headed to the back room, returning half a minute later with two cans of soda and some napkins. "Just like broken cookies have no calories."

"And anything eaten standing in front of the refrigerator doesn't count."

"I'm so glad we agree." Naomi pulled two stools up to the counter and they sat. Using the paper wrappers as plates, they ate and talked. "Christ, this is good. I haven't eaten anything fried in ages."

"What do you like to eat?" Courtney picked up a fry and dragged it across Naomi's lower lip.

Naomi chuckled. "Now that's a loaded question. Besides you, you mean?"

Courtney's eyes twinkled. "Good answer. Save that thought for later." She shook her head. "And you called *me* wicked. Food, I meant."

Naomi grinned, chomping into the fry the other woman wiggled in front of her face. "What do I like to eat? Let's see. I love the cinnamon rolls at Brynn's Bakery. Sometimes I splurge on the weekend and get one."

"The place you got those cookies? Those were damn good."

"One and the same. I usually eat a salad, or maybe a tuna or turkey sandwich for lunch, lots of veggies for dinner, and a little meat. I love Chinese. Occasionally I'll fix something Mexican. One thing we don't have around here is ethnic food. You have to drive to Sheridan."

Courtney shrugged. "It wasn't a bad drive. I love to cook when I have time. Do you have a good grocery store in town?"

"We do, just down Main Street." Naomi pointed, finishing off the last of her burger.

"Maybe I can cook for us tomorrow night. You did say something about being off the whole weekend?"

"I am. So you're staying then?" Naomi held her breath.

Courtney grinned. "For two weeks."

"Woo hoo!" Naomi threw her arms around the woman's neck and squeezed.

"Careful!" Courtney grabbed her soda can, which teetered precariously. She righted the can and moved it back from the edge of the counter. "That was close."

"No biggie." Naomi looked her in the eye, wedging her body between the woman's knees. "You, staying two weeks, is very big. I'm so excited."

"I hoped you would be." Courtney cupped her ass and squeezed as they kissed. She pulled back gently. "But you've got to keep in mind, it's only two weeks. I don't want either of us to get too attached."

"No promises," Naomi whispered, pressing one finger to Courtney's mouth. "Let's just take each day as it comes and see what happens." She moved her finger and dove back into the kiss.

Courtney kissed her back, then stopped and glanced around. "Maybe we shouldn't—"

"Says who?" Naomi reached behind her neck, pulling her forward again. "I know the owner won't mind."

As their lips pressed together, Courtney mumbled, "I thought you were the owner."

"I am. And I certainly don't mind. Now can we stop talking, please? I want to kiss you some more before the afternoon crowd filters in."

"In that case..." Courtney opened her mouth, and their tongues darted back and forth.

Naomi melted into the kiss. Sheer bliss had washed through her when Courtney announced she was staying for two weeks. If she played her cards right, Naomi hoped to turn those two weeks into something longer. She wouldn't worry about that yet. Right then, in Courtney's arms, she was exactly where she wanted to be.

\* \* \* \*

*Maybe not exactly.* Naomi swore to herself as she scrubbed chocolate ice cream from the carpet in the children's book section. Pam Gleason, the local police dispatcher, was a great mother, and her two sons were nice boys. But ice cream cones and bookstores did not mix on a July Wyoming day. Pam had apologised profusely and bought several more books than she'd probably intended to, so Naomi let it slide.

*As if I'd really have said something.* Confrontation had never been her strong suit. In the past, Naomi had been meek to the point of almost being a doormat. Asserting her independence by moving to Cattle Valley a few years ago had been a big step for her. It wasn't until Nate Gills moved there, and they became friends, that she took her autonomy to the next level.

Nate was skilled in several different martial arts, and he taught Naomi Taekwondo. He said she was a good student and a quick learner. When the lessons ended, they continued to spar at *The Gym* as often as their schedules allowed.

Shaking her head at the brown spot which didn't want to budge, she climbed off her knees and walked to the back room. She'd done the best she could without stain remover. It was nearly six o'clock, time to close the store.

She emptied the register, locking the change and small bills in the safe for the next day. There hadn't been any customers after five, so she already had the daily deposit calculated. She tucked it into the bank's sturdy bag and zipped it.

Courtney was due back at six, which was all Naomi thought about as she shut off the lights and headed to the front door. Beautiful Courtney with the full breasts and long legs. She remembered the feel of those legs clamped around her like a vice, and shivered. If they were lucky, the service at the *Canoe* would be fast. If they were even luckier, the wait staff wouldn't mind them playing footsie under the table. She grinned, then jumped, startled, as the front door flew open.

"Hey, good looking." The tall man pushed his way into the store.

"Holy shit, Ryan!" Naomi slapped the sheriff on the chest. "You scared the hell out of me."

"What the fuck were you thinking, Naomi? Standing there with the bank bag in your hand and your head up your ass? I could have been a robber and I'd be long gone with the money by now."

"When's the last time we had a robbery in Cattle Valley? And I did *not* have my head up my ass, which is such a lovely image, by the way. Thanks for that."

"Remember when someone tried to break into the bakery? We never did solve that case, I'm sorry to say."

"I heard it was someone after Kyle's buns," she teased. "Once he married that massive hunk of man, Gill, the prowler went away."

"Yeah, nobody wants to tangle with Gill's buns, that's for sure. Anyway, you weren't thinking about what you were doing. We've always told you what to do when you walk across the street to make the bank drop. Stay alert, your phone in one hand and the bag tucked under your other arm. Notice who is coming and going around you —"

"I know, I know. I guess I've just gotten lax, with you or one of your deputies stopping by most nights to walk me over."

He poked her shoulder lightly. "I'm not always going to be around to look out for you. My guys and I are driving into town tonight. I'm just heading home to change and pick them up."

"And maybe have a quickie before you go?" She nudged his ribs and winked.

"Jealous?"

"You know, I used to be. Watching you three together is pretty cool. But all of a sudden..." She looked out the window to where Courtney parked and exited her car. Dressed in slinky black slacks and a form-fitting silver blouse, the gorgeous blonde made quite a picture as she approached the front door.

"Ah, I see." Ryan nodded. He opened the door. "Ms. Cross."

"Hello, Sheriff."

"You look lovely this evening. Special plans?"

"We're going to the *Canoe*." Naomi spoke up, smiling sweetly.

He raised his eyebrows. "After Brewster's last night? People will certainly start to talk."

"As if they aren't already. Come on, Courtney. We need to run across the street to drop off this deposit. Ryan was just leaving."

"I'll escort you over." He folded his arms across his muscular chest.

"We'll be fine." Naomi ushered everyone out then locked the store behind them.

"I'd feel better watching you go." He stood his ground firmly.

"Ryan likes to watch," she whispered loudly to Courtney, and they broke into peals of laughter. She tucked her arm through the other woman's and headed across the street.

"Nice seeing you again, Sheriff." Courtney glanced back over her shoulder.

"Yeah, you too. You ladies have a nice evening."

"We will. Same to you, big fella!" Naomi grinned at him and saw the hint of a smile play at his lips.

"He's nice," Courtney commented.

Naomi dropped the bank bag into the slot in the building. She waved as Ryan slowly drove away. "Very nice."

"Pretty hot too. For a guy, that is."

Naomi chuckled. "Yeah, I suppose. He's like a big brother to me. I try not to notice his hotness."

"I know what you mean, but it's kind of hard to miss on that one."

"I agree. So, do you want to stand here talking about men, or shall we go eat?" Their gazes locked. Naomi could see the lust she felt tingling inside reflected in the other woman's eyes. They both knew what would happen after dinner.

"Let's go!" Courtney urged, and smiled.

## Chapter Four

The *Canoe* wasn't crowded for a Friday night. Courtney was surprised to hear the owner and chef, Erico Morrelli, had been well known in her hometown of Chicago before moving to Cattle Valley. She'd never been to his restaurant, but they chatted for a few minutes about places they both knew and loved in the city.

Chef Morrelli had explained that a lot of locals left on vacation after Rodeo Days, the big summer shindig, ended. Listening to people talk and laugh about the popular event made Courtney sorry she'd missed it. The quiet little town she'd stumbled onto was apparently full of surprises.

The *Canoe* was another surprise. The food was exquisite. Courtney didn't want to stop eating. She shared a dessert with Naomi, and once their hand-holding under the table grew more adventurous, they knew it was time to go.

"Why don't we drop your car at the Inn?" Naomi suggested. "It won't be as obvious as your parking in my driveway."

Courtney grinned. "I thought you didn't care about what people said?"

"I don't. I'm simply trying not to flaunt things."

"I see." She thought Naomi cared more than she liked to admit, so she didn't press the issue. She'd leave in a couple of weeks, while Naomi had to stay and face the townspeople every day. She didn't want to make life uncomfortable for her. "I'll follow you then."

"Thanks, babe." Naomi pressed a quick kiss to her lips, and they drove off separately.

Courtney parked and locked her car, then climbed into Naomi's SUV. "I can't wait to see your house."

"It's nothing fancy, but I like it."

"I'm sure I will too."

Naomi pulled into the driveway of a small brick house with a neatly manicured lawn. She pressed the button on the door opener and drove into the tidy garage.

"Wow. You're neat." Courtney got out, glancing around. A garden hose was curled tightly into a loop, hanging on a hook. "When I was growing up, living with my parents, I never could master putting away a hose. It just flopped all over the place."

Naomi gave her a sceptical look. "It's not that hard."

She shrugged. "It always was for me. My dad would get so irritated, he had to take it down and re-roll it. Just one of those things, I guess."

"So who hangs up your hose these days?"

"I don't have one. I live in a condo. No yard work, just the way I like it."

"I love working in my yard!" Naomi opened the door and flipped on a light. "It's relaxing after a day cooped up in the store."

Courtney forced a shudder. "Glad you think so. If I ever have a yard, I'll pay someone to take care of it."

"In some ways, we are very different." Naomi set her purse on the table.

Courtney did the same, then took a step towards her. "And in other ways?"

Naomi smiled. "We are very, very similar." She pressed a kiss against Courtney's lips.

"Mmm, just what I was thinking." Courtney slipped her arms around the sexy redhead and pulled her close.

"Would you like a tour of the place?"

"Sure, if it ends up in the bedroom."

"It can start there. Come on!" Naomi reached for her hand, dragging her through a living area and down a short hall.

"Nice house." Courtney spotted a light blue sofa and filmy white curtains before she entered the hall. A couple of pictures adorned the walls, but she didn't have time to investigate them. *There'll be time later. First things first.*

"This is the bedroom." Naomi flipped on the light.

A queen-size bed took up most of the room. The comforter was off-white with deep red roses. Accent pillows and drapes in the same shade of red made the room feel pulled together and comfortable. "This is lovely!" Courtney exclaimed.

"Thanks. It's the first place I've ever had of my own. I had fun decorating it." Naomi turned to face her, tightening her grip on Courtney's hand. "I think *you* are the lovely one. You look freaking hot in that tight, silver blouse. Did you wear it to drive me crazy?"

"No, but that's an added plus. I'll let you take it off me, if you want."

"If I want?" Naomi's fingers fumbled with the tiny buttons. "Damn, that's an understatement."

Courtney chuckled. "Here, let me help. Why don't you strip for me? I haven't seen your sexy, naked body in twelve hours. I'm going through withdrawals."

"Gladly." Naomi maintained eye contact as she tugged off her shirt and slacks. The pink bra and panties went next.

Courtney deposited her clothes, white bra and pink panties in the corner. "Do you always match? Undergarments, I mean?" She grinned.

"Only when I know someone else is going to see them. Believe me, I haven't matched in a long, long time."

"I almost never match." Courtney sighed. She eyed the perky tits before her hungrily then lowered her gaze to the neatly trimmed patch of red hair. "Mmm, you're like a buffet. Where to begin?"

Naomi raised her arms, drawing her hair off her neck and then letting it drop. She stretched lazily. "We have all weekend. Why don't you begin at the beginning and don't stop until one or both of us passes out from utter satisfaction?"

"I love your way of thinking." Courtney pulled the woman into her arms, caressing soft skin as her hands trailed from back to butt. She captured Naomi's lips in a kiss, which grew more passionate as they caressed each other.

One of Naomi's hands dipped between Courtney's legs, spreading her folds. She squirmed at the delightful touch and widened her stance for better access. Naomi inserted one finger into her pussy and thrust.

"Oh god," Courtney mumbled, needing more.

"Why don't we move to—" The doorbell rang, cutting off Naomi's words. "Who in blazes?"

"Don't answer it." Courtney thrust against the hand which impaled her.

"I'm sorry, sweetie." Naomi's regret showed on her face. "I have to. We just don't do that in Cattle Valley."

Exhaling a frustrated breath of air that blew her bangs upwards, Courtney nodded. She stepped back and they disentangled.

Naomi stopped in the bathroom to wash her hands and grab a robe from the back of the door. She smiled sheepishly as she headed from the room.



Courtney saw another robe on the door so she slipped into it and snuck quietly down the hall to watch.

Naomi peered out the window in her door before opening it. "Hey, Lily! What are you doing?"

"I saw you come home. I brought some ice cream." She held up a carton.

"I, uh, was just getting into bed."

Even from a distance, Courtney could see disappointment on the younger woman's face. Naomi must have seen it too. She glanced towards the hall once, obviously conflicted, then opened the door fully. "I guess you could come in for a little bit."

"Thanks." Lily rushed in, glancing behind her before closing and locking Naomi's door.

Courtney was surprised to see the woman in pyjamas. *Who goes visiting dressed like that?* Maybe Cattle Valley really was that different from Chicago.

"Looks like you were ready for bed too." Naomi commented.

"Yeah, I was. Then Gary and I had a fight, and I had to get out for a while." She went straight to the kitchen.

Shifting positions slightly, Courtney had a view of that room, too. She watched the woman make herself at home, pulling bowls from the cabinet and spoons from a drawer.

Naomi glanced down the hall and spotted her. She mouthed, "I'm sorry."

Courtney shrugged and nodded. She watched Naomi enter the kitchen, saying, "You might want to get another bowl."

Lily looked up as Courtney stepped into the room. The woman froze. "Oh golly! You two were just going to – oh geez, I'll go." She moved towards the kitchen door.

"Of course you won't." Naomi reached for her arm. "We were just talking. But I think a bowl of ice cream might hit the spot right now, don't you, Courtney?"

Courtney glanced at the carton then back at the others. "Only if it's Rocky Road. I have a thing for that flavour."

Lily's eyes widened. "It is! Isn't that a coincidence?" She went back to the counter and brought out another bowl.

Courtney smiled at Naomi, who rolled her eyes and grinned. Lily was obviously young and naïve. She reminded Courtney of a sad puppy, and Courtney could *never* see Naomi turning away a stray.

"Let's take these into the living room," Naomi suggested when the three bowls were filled. She led the way and sat at one end of the long sofa.

Courtney chose the seat in the middle, and Lily took the chair facing them. They ate in silence for a few minutes until Naomi finally spoke up.

"So, what was the argument about?"

"Hmm?" Lily licked her spoon.

"The fight. You said you and Gary had a fight of some kind."

"Oh, it was silly. He missed another birthing class."

"You're taking classes?" Naomi seemed surprised.

"Yeah. You know Dr. Singer, over at the clinic? He arranged for a nurse from Sheridan to come once a week and talk to a group of us. Well, there were only six classes to begin with. Gary missed four of them. I was really disappointed when he didn't show up tonight, it being the last one and all."

Naomi clucked her tongue. "What was his excuse?"

"He forgot. Some guys went out for a beer after work —"

"And of course he had to go with them. You told me he wouldn't let you get a haircut because it was too expensive. Now he's going to Brewster's after work? That's just wrong, Lily." Naomi shook her head.

Courtney watched, amazed. She had a few married friends, and none of them treated each other that way. They were free to spend money as they wished, within reason, of course. She assumed that's how most relationships were. "How long have you been married?"

"Three years. We were high school sweethearts back in Oregon. Gary was a football player, a real big man on campus." She smiled to herself, obviously remembering the way things used to be.

Courtney set her bowl on the coffee table. "If you don't mind my asking, what brought you to Cattle Valley? I'm given to understand most people around here are gay."

Naomi stretched out her leg, nudging Courtney with her toes. "I told you, not everyone here is."

"Most people are." Lily nodded. "Gary's brother was. He moved here with his partner a few years ago. Then Danny got sick, and his fella took off. Gary tried to convince his brother

to move home, but Danny was stubborn. He liked it here. We knew he didn't have that long to live, so we moved here to be with him."

"Wow." Courtney shook her head in disbelief. "What a nice thing to do. I'm sure it was difficult."

"Gary took it bad. I mean, he knew Danny would die sooner or later. But they were close. When it happened, it hit him real hard."

"When did he...?" Courtney couldn't say the word.

"Just over a year ago."

"The one year anniversary of his death was rough," Naomi added. "It was during Rodeo Days."

"Lots of people were drinking," Lily defended her husband.

Naomi snorted. "But only Gary ended up in the pond that night. It was quite a spectacle. Ryan and some of his deputies had to haul his ass home."

"Sounds like someone was being an ass, all right." Courtney rolled her eyes.

"He's not usually that way." Lily crossed her arms. "Gary's always been such a sweetheart."

"Which is why you're over here tonight." The minute the words left her lips, Courtney regretted them. Lily looked at her with surprise.

"You're right. I should go." Lily stood. "Thanks for listening. Sorry I interrupted your evening."

"It was no problem." Naomi walked her to the door. "Are you sure you're ready to go home?"

"Oh yeah. He's probably sleeping by now, anyway. Thanks a lot, Naomi."

Naomi hugged the younger woman then let her go. "Night, Lily."

"Night." She looked back at Courtney on the sofa. "Bye."

"Good night." Courtney watched Naomi, who was making sure the woman got home safely before closing and locking the door.

Turning around, Naomi frowned. "It's barely nine-thirty. If he's asleep already, it's because he's passed out."

"Why didn't you say that to Lily?"

Naomi settled onto the sofa next to her. "Gary has a drinking problem. *I* know it, and *you* know it. We just don't say it out loud." She leaned in to nuzzle Courtney's neck.

"Why not? For a community of 'open' people, you sure like to pussyfoot around the truth."

Leaning back, Naomi grinned. "Did you just say *pussyfoot*?"

"Yes I did. And you have a filthy mind."

Naomi scooted closer, resuming the neck nibbling. "I thought you loved my filthy mind."

"You got me there." Courtney bent her head to expose more of her neck.

Naomi slipped a hand inside Courtney's robe, squeezing one nipple. "I've got you here too. Pretty soon I'm going to have you everywhere."

Courtney knew their conversation wasn't finished, but the pressure on her breast was too pleasurable to ignore. If they continued speaking, she suspected they risked having an argument of their own. She wasn't ready for that yet. *Sex*. She needed lots and lots more sex before she was up for a sparring match. "God that feels good. Can we return to the bedroom, please?"

"Excellent idea." Naomi stood, pulling her up by the hand. "Perhaps you'd like to see my collection of toys." She led them down the hall.

"What?" Courtney blinked, unsure what she meant.

Naomi smiled. "*These* toys." She pulled the bottom drawer of her dresser open and threw back a soft, velvet cover.

A row of dildos and vibrators were lined up neatly. Courtney saw thick ones and smaller sizes, one double ended dildo and several strap-on cocks. "Oh my god! You slut!"

"You're wet just looking at them, aren't you?" Naomi selected the flexible dildo with a cock on each end and held it up. "Want to try this?"

"Hell yes!"

"You slut," she teased in reply. She stood then untied Courtney's robe and tossed it away. "Later I'm going to fuck you with my strap-on. For now, let's fuck each other. It feels incredible."

Courtney threw back the covers and flopped on the bed. "I'm dying to try it. I haven't had a lot of experience with dildos. Never with one like that."

Naomi set it to the side of the bed. She crawled between Courtney's legs and spread them wide. "First I need to get you good and wet. I know the best way to do that."

Courtney leaned back as her lover's mouth zeroed in on her clit. "Oh yes, you do." She was wet already, her pussy oozing as Naomi licked and sucked various fleshy folds. It didn't take long before she felt the first tingles of a climax. "Umm, keep going. I'm close."

"You taste so good." Naomi buried her face in the valley and growled. "I could get lost in here." Her tongue resumed flicking Courtney's throbbing clit.

"Your mouth is perfect." Courtney bucked against the sexy lips which devoured her. Sparks of pleasure zipped through her body, centring at her core. "Ah, I'm coming!"

"Come on." Naomi kept up the frantic pace as Courtney jerked with an intense orgasm.

She zoomed to the heights and slowly came back again, the mouth still working her over. "That was wonderful."

Naomi buried her face in Courtney's belly as she climbed her body. "I'm a sticky mess. Now we both are."

"Come kiss me. I like sticky messes."

She dropped on top of Courtney with a big smile and a glistening face. "You want me to kiss you?"

Courtney raised her head in response, catching the salty lips in a ravenous kiss. She enjoyed the taste of pussy, her own juices turned her on even more. She sucked Naomi's tongue, drawing in as much essence as she could.

"Um, I guess you do." Naomi fondled Courtney's breast as they kissed again.

"Guess what I want you to do now?" Courtney pulled her face away.

"Fuck you?"

"Not quite yet. Only one of us is wet. Climb on up here and sit on my face. After you come real good, then we can fuck like bunnies."

"Mmm." Naomi straddled Courtney's face with her knees. "What makes you think I'm not wet? Watching you come like that, tasting your musk—I'm wet as can be."

"We'll see about that." Courtney parted the curly red hair and dived, face first, into the pussy inches above her. "Mmm," she moaned, as warm juice flowed.

"Told you I was wet." Naomi squirmed.

Lips pressed against nether lips, Courtney murmured, "Not as wet as you're going to be. After I suck your pretty clit, I want you to ride my tongue. Go all out, like you're on a bucking bronco."

The woman above her groaned, and Courtney smiled to herself. As much as she loved hearing dirty talk, she loved speaking it even more. It added another element to the sex, aiding in fabulous orgasms.

She latched on to Naomi's pink clit and sucked it into her mouth. When it felt like her lover was going to burst, she let go and lapped at her pussy. "Come on, baby. Ride me. Impale your cunt on my tongue."

Naomi cried out as her body quivered and shook. Courtney stayed with her until she was sure the climax was complete, finishing with tiny, kitten licks to the engorged area.

"Son-of-a-bitch!" Naomi finally muttered. She climbed backwards off Courtney, sliding her wet pussy along smooth skin. "You know some tricks, baby. I'm not sure I've ever come that good."

Once again face to face, prone in bed, Courtney grinned and swiped at her wet chin. "Kiss me. I want to taste you and me together."

Naomi's eyes glazed over with an emotion Courtney could only identify as lust. Their mouths came together abruptly, the kiss deep and passionate. Hands roamed over breasts, kneading, tweaking, feeling. When they finally separated, Courtney was more voracious than ever before. "Now," she urged. "Fuck me now."

"Yes," Naomi agreed, pulling up enough to reach the dildo. She nudged the tip to Courtney's pussy, shoving it in and out again, slowly.

"More." Courtney thrust her hips. "I'm ready. Give me all of it."

With one smooth motion, Naomi slid the rubber cock in to the hilt.

"Oh yeah!" Courtney hollered. The cock felt fantastic. She bounced her hips up and down, eager for more. "You'd better hurry and join me. I'm gonna come again, real fast."

"Not without me!" Naomi rose, impaling her pussy on the other end of the dildo. She groaned as her body sank, pussies barely touching. "Oh god, oh god," she repeated, grinding herself down.

"Isn't that fabulous?" Courtney gritted her teeth. "Damn, you're hot."

"You and me together, babe." Naomi squeezed Courtney's face with one hand. "Look at me."

Courtney opened her eyes, staring into Naomi's green irises. "You're beautiful."

"We're beautiful together." Naomi pounded her body downwards, and they both groaned. "It's the two of us—you get that, don't you?"

"I get it." Courtney had never felt more cherished in her life. She couldn't put the feeling into words. Naomi still held her face in a grip, and she turned to kiss the hand.

"Stay with me," Naomi encouraged. "Watch with me."

"I'll try." Courtney's eyes desperately wanted to close, to roll back, to explode right out of her head, but she maintained eye contact with her sultry lover. They climaxed together, panting, groaning, watching each other all the while.

"Son-of-a-bitch," Naomi finally muttered. "That was —"

Courtney raised a thumb, swiping a tear from Naomi's glowing face. "Exactly what I was afraid of."

"I was going to say intense."

"I know. More intense than anything I've ever felt."

Naomi smiled. "You're going to have a hard time saying goodbye to me."

"Fuck," Courtney swore, glancing away.

"It's all right." Naomi cupped her cheek, turning her face forward. "We're not talking about that, remember?"

"I remember." Courtney sighed. In two short days, her life had become extremely complicated. She felt better than she ever had, but in some ways she felt worse.

"Don't get so serious on me, baby." Naomi leaned down, pressing a kiss on her lips. "It's all good." She wiped a tear from Courtney's cheek and smiled.

## Chapter Five

Naomi padded out to the kitchen, eyes barely open. If she were a coffee drinker, she could use a whole potful right then. She put the kettle on to boil and pulled out two mugs for tea.

"You out there?" Courtney called, shuffling down the hall.

"Yep. Making tea. Want some?"

Courtney rounded the corner wearing Naomi's robe. "Sure, I guess."

"I don't have any coffee, sorry."

Courtney waved a hand. "I'm not a huge coffee drinker. Some days it helps get me going. Today might be one of those days."

Naomi chuckled. "Are you suggesting you didn't get enough sleep?"

"Suggesting, yeah. Blaming? No way. I wouldn't change a minute if I could do it over again."

"Me either." She smiled at Courtney. "Though I do think we need to talk."

"Yes we do. I'd agree with that. Did you say something about cinnamon rolls at that bakery?"

"They'll be pretty crowded on a Saturday morning. We'd find it hard to talk there, I'm sure. Think we might save the bakery for tomorrow, after church? Today we could try to balance out the calories with some toast or something light."

"Not sure you need to worry. Sex burns lots of calories. Sex like we had burns more — lots more." She wiggled her eyebrows.

Naomi set two mugs on the table, dropped a tea bag in each and poured hot water in them. "Good! I like my new exercise regimen."

"Me too." Courtney ran one finger over the back of Naomi's hand then picked up her tea bag. "I don't know about church though. I'm not a very religious person."

"I'm not either. I resisted it when I was a kid. But things are different here. Our reverend is this young, energetic gay guy, Casey Sharp. I like listening to him. It makes me feel good." She motioned to Courtney to sit.



"An openly gay reverend? I have to see that. This town is too much!" She shook her head, taking a seat.

"It's really great, once you get used to it. There's a feeling of freedom knowing you can walk down the street, hand in hand, with anyone you choose. Not sure you can do that in Chicago." She pulled out a loaf of cinnamon raisin bread. "Toast?"

"Sure." Courtney sipped her tea and settled back in her chair. "You mentioned Cattle Valley had an interesting history."

"Oh yeah!" Naomi got their toast and some butter and sat at the table. "Help yourself." They ate and she continued, "Back in the seventies, a kid named Joshua Beauregard was the victim of a hate crime in San Francisco. His father was beside himself – what parent wouldn't be, of course? Charles Beauregard finally decided to throw his energy and his money into building a town where gay people could live openly and be accepted for who they are. They say he was a billionaire, and he spent a bundle developing Cattle Valley."

"Wow. That's amazing. I've never heard of him, or Joshua, I'm sorry to say. I'd never heard of Cattle Valley until someone suggested to my agent it might be a good stop on my book tour."

Naomi popped the last bite of toast in her mouth. "I'd like to thank that person."

"Me too!" Courtney batted her eyelashes. "So what brought you here? Are you from Wyoming originally?"

"Nah, I was born and raised in a suburb of Los Angeles. It was noisy, smoggy and too close to the city for my tastes. When I heard about this place, I came for a visit and never left."

"Wow," Courtney repeated. "Do you still have family in California?"

Naomi shook her head. *As far as I'm concerned, I don't.* "My dad died when I was in high school. Mom passed away a few years ago. I moved here shortly after that."

"That took a lot of courage. I'm quite impressed with you, Miss Rivers."

Naomi smiled. "Shall we refill our tea and go out to the sofa? We still need to talk."

"I thought we were talking." Courtney stood, holding out her mug as Naomi added more hot water.

"You know what I mean." Naomi nudged her.

"I know." Courtney followed her to the living room where they sat at opposite ends of the sofa, facing each other.

"You go first," Naomi said.

"Well..." Courtney blew across the top of her tea. "Okay. I'm not sure you're doing Lily any favours by beating around the bush about her husband. He obviously has a real problem, and –"

Naomi blinked. "This is what you wanted to talk about?"

Courtney shrugged. "Sure. I know you were a little pissed about what I said last night, but neither of us wanted to bring it up and put a damper on what turned out to be a wonderful evening."

Naomi inhaled. This was definitely *not* what she'd wanted to discuss. But since Courtney brought it up, she'd state her opinion. "I was slightly miffed. I thought you were a touch rude to Lily, and it was uncalled for. She's young and –"

"There you go, defending her again! Her husband is a Class A asshole, and the sooner she admits it, the better. If she stays with him, she's in for a lifetime of misery, for herself and her child."

Naomi's jaw dropped. "How can you say that? You've never met the guy. All you know is what you heard last night."

"Which was plenty. A big shot in high school graduated and suddenly became a small fish in a large pond. I've seen it dozens of times. He feels bad about the way his life turned out and takes it out on his wife and kids."

"Or possibly he's depressed because his brother died of AIDS. That might tend to make a person grumpy."

Courtney chuckled. "You're so cute. You were 'slightly miffed', I was 'a touch rude', and the asshole is 'grumpy'. You don't want to offend anyone, do you?"

Naomi felt her face flush with heat. "I've never thought being discourteous was a pleasant trait, no. Believe me, if I thought Gary was hurting Lily, I'd be the first one to speak up. She loves him, god knows why. I try to live and let live whenever possible."

"What about when that's not possible, Naomi? I don't come from the secluded utopia of Cattle Valley. I live in the real world where people are mean and nasty and cruel to each other. A person has to learn to stick up for herself and not go through life as a doormat."

Her comment hit closer to home than Naomi cared to admit. Gary could be a jerk, and Courtney was probably right about him. But things weren't as bad as she'd described. If they were, Naomi felt sure she'd recognise the signs, or Lily would confide in her. She decided to

keep a close eye on the situation. With Lily's due date approaching, she hoped the couple's problems wouldn't escalate.

She stood. "I like it here, Courtney. No, it's not perfect, and *utopia* is a stretch, but it's a damned site nicer than the mean, nasty place you were describing. Now if you'll excuse me, I think I'll go hop in the shower. Help yourself to anything in the kitchen."

"Naomi!" Courtney stood, calling after her.

She kept walking, stripped off her robe and reached into the shower stall to turn on the water. Talking hadn't gone exactly as she'd hoped. She wanted to discuss their relationship. Evidently she and Courtney were riding on different trains of thought. Suddenly she was glad she hadn't confessed her mushy, romantic feelings so early. Perhaps they both needed more time. Naomi stepped under the warm spray and turned her face to the showerhead.

\* \* \* \*

Naomi dried her hair and applied just a touch of make-up. When she stepped into the bedroom to dress, she found Courtney sitting on the bed.

"I'm sorry." Courtney stood, taking a step towards her. "I'm opinionated and sometimes I let it get the best of me."

"No problem. Writers should be opinionated." She pulled some jeans and a T-shirt from her closet.

"Are you mad at me?"

"Of course not. I saved you some hot water, if you want to shower."

Courtney stepped closer. "You act mad."

"I'm not." Naomi pressed a quick kiss to her lips. "Now get cleaned up, we need to get out and do something."

"You wanted to talk."

"I'm done talking." Naomi smiled, shaking her head. "I'm ready to get out of here. Hurry up! Hop to it!" She swatted Courtney's butt.

"Okay, okay! I'll be fast." Courtney hurried into the shower.

Naomi wandered out to the kitchen and cleaned up the dishes from breakfast. She tidied up the living room then leafed through a magazine until Courtney reappeared.

"I wasn't sure where you planned to go, but I figured since you wore jeans..." She motioned to her denims and pink blouse.

"You look great. I'll be the envy of the town." Naomi smiled at the sexy blonde, forcing her mind to abandon the naughty thoughts flitting through it. It wouldn't take much to walk the woman backwards into the bedroom and remove her clothing, one piece at a time. They could spend the whole day in bed, making love until neither of them could see straight. The thought was tempting.

Naomi shook her head to clear it. "Are you ready? I have a surprise for you."

"If you really want to leave." Courtney batted her long eyelashes seductively.

Shoving her towards the door to the garage, Naomi chuckled. "I could easily turn around and stay here. But this will be fun too. I want to show you some of Cattle Valley."

Courtney pouted. "I guess there's always tonight."

"Oh, there's definitely tonight. Count on it. Come on, sexy. Let's go do the town." She led them out to the garage and her SUV. They climbed in and buckled up, then she raised the door and backed out slowly.

Naomi glanced at Lily and Gary's small house. There were no signs of activity yet today.

Courtney followed her gaze. "Is that where they live?"

"Yeah." She headed down the street.

"You're worried about her, aren't you?"

"A little. What you said about him rings true. I just hope things don't get as bad as you suggested."

"They probably won't. Hell, you said it, I don't know the guy. I was just talking." She glanced out the window. "Oh that's nice! What is it?"

A pretty white gazebo loomed before them. "That's Beauregard Park. It's a popular spot, especially in summer. There are a couple of gazebos, and over there's the pond." She pointed to the north. "Around back is the sports complex, with baseball and soccer fields. It'll be buzzing later today."

"This whole area is just gorgeous! I'm amazed." Courtney looked around with awe.

"We're pretty proud of it. Maybe we can come back later and picnic."

"Sure. Where to now?"

"I thought I'd just drive around town, let you get the flavour of it."

Courtney settled back into her seat. "That sounds good." She perused the streets as Naomi drove, and observed, "Everything is extremely well maintained. You don't see that in a lot of small towns, especially out here in the west."

"There's one thing you're bound to find out quickly – Cattle Valley isn't like other small towns."

"I'm beginning to understand that."

Main Street downtown spanned just a few blocks. The buildings were all neat and tidy. "There's Brynn's Bakery and Wynfield's Department Store. If you need any clothes, Wyn probably carries them."

"I might. I brought enough for a couple of weeks but I'd never turn down a shopping trip. I might need a laundromat, though."

"I've got a washer and dryer." Naomi glanced sideways at her as she drove. "You should just bring over the rest of your stuff. Not much point in keeping the room at the Inn."

Courtney smiled. "I thought we were keeping it for appearances."

"I don't know why I said that. It's not like we're hiding from people."

"I understand, and it's fine. You have to live here even after I'm gone."

A twisted knot of nerves formed in Naomi's stomach. She knew it was true, but thinking about Courtney leaving was painful. She'd just have to try harder to convince the woman to stay. "Let's not talk about that." She turned down a country road on the outskirts of town. "Are you ready for my surprise?"

"Yes!" Courtney peered through the window as if trying to catch a glimpse of where they were going.

Grinning, Naomi reached their destination and pulled into the long drive. A big sign announced the *EZ Does It* ranch. "Here we are."

"Wow, now this place looks cool. Who lives here?"

Naomi nosed her vehicle down the lane but turned off before they reached the main house. She pulled up to the stables and parked. "Ezra James. He's a great big teddy bear of a guy. Don't let his demeanour scare you, he's a sweetheart. He just likes to act all tough and grouchy-like."

"Okay," Courtney said uncertainly and followed her from the car.

Naomi headed into the stables, calling, "Ezra? You in here?"

Shuffling noises came from the last stall, and a pitchfork full of straw flew out. "Back here."

"Don't shoot," Naomi teased, approaching the man. "Hi, Ezra. This is my friend Courtney Cross. She's a famous writer from Chicago. Courtney, this is Ezra James."

"Hello," Courtney said softly.

"I been to Chicago once. It was noisy with too many people milling around."

"That pretty much describes Chicago." Courtney smiled. "I'm enjoying my visit to Cattle Valley. It's a whole new world."

He nodded. "It is, at that."

Naomi strolled down the length of the stable, stopping to pat the nose of a horse or two. "I'd like to ride Misty, of course. I'm not sure which horse would be best for Courtney. Have you ever ridden?"

"No." She eyed the animals uncertainly. "I've never even seen a horse up close."

"Don't let them know that." Ezra walked two stalls down. "I'll have Jax saddle up Dolly. She's gentle. He can lead you around until you're comfortable taking the reins."

"I don't know." Courtney chewed on her lower lip.

Naomi moved closer to her. *I hope the decision to come here doesn't backfire on me.* Getting out of town and back to nature was something Courtney probably didn't get to do very often. Naomi found it relaxing. If Courtney would only try it, she might too. "If you really don't want to do this, we won't. I just thought it might be fun."

"Have you ridden a lot?"

"I wouldn't say *a lot*. Ezra actually taught me, on Misty. She's the only horse I've ridden."

"She'd pitch a fit if you tried to ride one of the others," Ezra muttered in his gruff voice. "You've got her spoiled rotten. I suppose you have an apple in your pocket?"

"One or two." Naomi smiled at him sweetly. "I thought Courtney could use one to make friends with whatever horse she got."

"Oh sure, go ahead and spoil Dolly too." He shook his head as he walked off. "I'll send Jax over."

"Thank you, Ezra!" Naomi called after him.

"Is he mad?" Courtney appeared nervous.

"Nah. He acts like he's not the one who suggested using apples to befriend a horse. Selective memory, I guess."

"I don't want to make him mad."

Naomi saw her watch the big man walk off and chuckled. "He's not. That's just his way. Believe it or not, he used to be worse. Once he got himself a sweetie, he mellowed considerably."

"He has a sweetheart? She must be one tough broad."

Naomi grabbed her forearm and squeezed. "*She* is the handsome proprietor of Wynfield's Department Store, Palmer Wynfield. Everyone calls him Wyn. He's a nice, dignified, quiet guy."

Courtney slapped her temple. "I should have known. Sometimes I forget where I am."

"No biggie. Here comes Jax. You want to do this?" She looked into the blonde woman's eyes and bit her lip. If she pushed Courtney to do something that made her feel uncomfortable, the whole day would be ruined. She wanted her guest to be relaxed and totally at ease—enjoying the good life in Cattle Valley.

"Sure." Courtney nodded, squeezing the hand on her arm. "I'll give it a try."

"Great!" She turned to the young man approaching them. "Hey, Jax. Ezra said Courtney could ride Dolly."

"I've never ridden before," Courtney spoke up.

The handsome man with dark hair and deep-set eyes smiled. "That's what I'm here for. We'll teach you everything you need to know."

He helped Courtney saddle up the roan mare, explaining what he did as he went along. Naomi saddled Misty, a sorrel Quarter Horse, and used a step stool to climb on the animal's back.

"Up you go." Jax guided one of Courtney's feet into a stirrup then pushed on her butt to help get her on the horse.

"Easy, there, cowboy." She glanced down at him, surprise evident on her face.

Naomi grinned. "You getting touchy-feely with my woman, Jax?"

"Sorry." He held his hands up. "I didn't mean anything by it. Didn't think, I guess."

Courtney smiled. "Don't tell me. Good looking guy like yourself, and you never gave my ass a second glance. You must be gay."

He smiled and shrugged. "That's a pretty safe assumption around Cattle Valley."

Courtney shook her head. "I'm still getting used to that. Okay, I'm up here. What next?"

"We'll walk around the corral here for a bit, let you get used to the feel of her between your legs."

Courtney choked back a laugh. "Excuse me?"

Jax's face burned bright red.

"Walk, Jax." Naomi motioned to him. "No use trying to get out of that one. Just walk, my friend."

He led Courtney around the large fenced-in area. Naomi and Misty ambled alongside, watching carefully. It was hard to tell how Courtney felt about the experience so far. All she could do was cross her fingers that the horse would cooperate and Courtney would have fun. After half an hour, Jax let Courtney control the reins as they continued to circle the corral.

"How do you feel?" Naomi finally asked her.

"Good! I like it!" Courtney's face flushed with excitement.

"I hoped you would." Naomi's heart beat rapidly in her chest. She was thrilled to expose her friend to a new experience and very pleased she enjoyed it. "If you're up to it, there's a nice path we can take around the ranch. We can go slow."

"That sounds good."

Jax opened the gate, and Naomi led them out. They walked the horses along the trail, enjoying the fresh air and the countryside.

"Every view is even more incredible than the last one." Courtney gazed around the huge expanse of land.

"Don't have sights like this in Chicago, I'll bet." Naomi scratched Misty's rough coat.

"Not really. Tall buildings, skyscrapers and more people than you can shake a stick at. Ezra was right, you can't walk down a sidewalk in Chicago without breeching a wall of people."

"And you like that?" Naomi bit her lip. She preferred the quiet setting of Cattle Valley. How could she make Courtney prefer it too in the limited time they had together?

"You get used to it. A person can get used to just about anything, I'd imagine." She glanced around again. "This is really beautiful."

Naomi nudged Misty next to Dolly. "I think you're beautiful, Ms. Cross. Just in case I haven't mentioned it lately."



Courtney smiled. "You haven't. And I haven't told you how badly I want to get you alone and strip you naked. For starters."

A tingle zipped down Naomi's spine. "You're a wicked, wicked girl. I like that about you."

"Does that mean we get to go home?" Courtney raised her eyebrows up and down.

"Not yet! I have a few more surprises up my sleeve."

"I'm not sure anything could top this one, Naomi. This was perfect. Thank you so much for arranging it." Courtney patted Dolly's neck.

"We can do it again sometime. Ezra doesn't mind."

"I'd like that."

Back at the stables, Naomi and Jax showed Courtney how to groom the horses after a ride. It was the middle of the afternoon when they climbed back into the SUV.

"We missed lunch," Naomi said. "Are you hungry?"

"For food?" Courtney let one finger slide up Naomi's denim-clad thigh.

Naomi groaned, biting back her desire. "Yes, for food. We could go to the diner."

"I feel a little grubby after riding the horse."

"How about a picnic? I'll get some carryout, and we can eat in the park."

"That sounds nice. If I can't convince you to go home, that is."

"Soon," Naomi promised, her willpower weakening. The more Courtney talked about it, the more she wanted to head home too.

They both went into the diner and washed up in the ladies' room. With a sack full of cheeseburgers and fries, they drove to the park and found a secluded spot.

Naomi spread a blanket on the ground, and they sat.

"This has been a great day. I've enjoyed every minute of it." Courtney picked at her food.

"I'm glad. I wanted you to get a taste of life in Cattle Valley."

"I think I have. It's very peaceful and relaxing. But surely it can't be this way all the time."

Naomi nodded. "Pretty much. Oh, we have a dustup every now and then. There're a few teenagers in town who get rowdy on a Saturday night."

Courtney grinned. "Cow tipping?"

"Something like that." Naomi rolled her eyes. "I guess it sounds kind of boring, doesn't it?"

"A lot quieter than the city."

They ate in silence for a few minutes.

Naomi finally said, "It's not like we're that secluded. People go into Sheridan for the evening if they want to. They have lots of good restaurants and a selection of movies."

Courtney touched her hand. "You don't have to defend your town to me. You love it here, and that's great. I'm happy you do."

Picking at the last of her burger, Naomi looked up. "Do you think—oh, never mind." She wadded up her wrappers and dunked them in the sack.

"What?" Courtney did the same with her trash then set the bag aside. "Go ahead. Ask me anything."

They were some of the hardest words Naomi had ever formed. "Do you think you might learn to love it here too?"

Courtney's eyes widened. "Is that what today was all about? Were you trying to sell me on Cattle Valley?"

"Not exactly. I just wanted you to see how nice it is here."

"Naomi." Courtney took her hand and squeezed. "It's wonderful here. But my life is in Chicago. I love my condo. My agent is there and she's terrific. Most importantly, my parents, my brother, his wife and kids all live there. We're a pretty close family. So you see, I've got a lot of reasons to go home."

Naomi pressed Courtney's hand to her cheek. "And only one reason to stay."

"A damned tempting reason, that's for sure." Courtney slipped an arm around her, pulling her close. She kissed Naomi's temple. "I don't suppose I could convince you to try city life?"

With a quick shake of her head, Naomi buried her face in Courtney's neck. "I'm not cut out for the city anymore. Cattle Valley is just my speed."

"Then I guess we'd better enjoy the rest of my vacation. Two weeks won't be long enough. This day has flown by already." She rocked Naomi back and forth, cradling her.

"It's not going to be easy." Naomi swiped a tear from her cheek. "I'm already getting emotionally involved."

"I know. I feel the same way. But please, we mustn't spoil our time together worrying about what might or might not happen. Let's just enjoy it, okay?"

Looking up into Courtney's eyes, she nodded. "I had to try though. You know I had to give it a shot."

"I know." Courtney brushed a strand of hair from Naomi's eyes. "I expect you'll try again before I go."

"At least once. Probably more." Naomi grinned.

"See how well I'm getting to know you?" Courtney chuckled, pulling Naomi to her for a tender kiss.

Naomi opened her mouth. Their tongues darted in and out eagerly, and the women rolled back onto the blanket.

Courtney pressed her body on top, wrapping her thighs around one of Naomi's legs. Her hand slid up under the thin T-shirt, cupping one breast.

Naomi moaned, jiggling her thigh as it pushed against Courtney's soft centre. "I want you," she murmured, their lips touching.

"Considering it's daylight, you'll have to settle for this now. Unless you're ready to go back to your place."

"Can't wait. There's nobody around. I need to feel your mouth on me." Naomi yanked her shirt up.

Courtney dragged the bra off one breast and blew across the nipple. As the bud tightened, she circled the areola with her tongue. When Naomi whimpered, she sucked the nipple into her mouth.

"Yes," Naomi muttered. "So good." She pressed the blonde head down on her chest.

Courtney laved the puckering nub until it tingled. She reached down, unbuttoned Naomi's jeans and inserted a hand.

"Oh god yes." Naomi spread her legs, anxious to feel the hand inside her. The fingers toyed with her and she bucked her hips, making her desires known.

"Want some of this?" Courtney thrust a finger into the drenched pussy. "Oh, you're wet for me. Nice and wet." She pulled out her hand and sucked the finger. "You taste so good." After tracing the sticky digit around Naomi's nipple, Courtney resumed sucking the tit. Her hand went back into the jeans, and two fingers found their way home.

"Yes!" Naomi groaned. "Oh yes, more of that!"

"Three?" Courtney grazed the bud with her teeth. She added a third finger in the hot channel and thrust. "Mmm, I wish my mouth was down there."

"What's stopping you?" Naomi bucked her hips again. She was close to being finger-fucked into one hell of an orgasm.

"Being in public in broad daylight."

"That makes it more exciting. Besides, no one can see us from the road. I placed the blanket strategically."

"If they come from that direction they can." Courtney nodded to the south. "I like a little exhibitionism as much as the next girl, but that's living pretty dangerously. If anyone comes over that ridge, they'd have a clear view of me eating your juicy pussy."

"Let 'em look." Naomi scrambled to kick her jeans down.

Courtney chuckled. "You're not thinking rationally. Like this, we can spot people coming. If my face was buried between your legs, I wouldn't notice if an army marched by, and I doubt you would either."

"Okay, whatever." Naomi agreed, desperate for release. "Use your hand then. I'm so close, babe. I need it bad."

"Come on, pretty girl." She latched on to the swollen tit and sucked with vigour. Her hand darted in and out of the slick pussy, fingers in the shape of a cone.

"That's it!" Naomi cried, a delightful orgasm washing through her. She rode the waves as her pussy contracted, and the nerves in her breast throbbed to the beat. The sensations were intense and glorious.

She collapsed, spent, and Courtney held her.

"That was beautiful." Courtney pressed a kiss against Naomi's temple. She removed her hand slowly and licked the creamy juices then ran one finger over Naomi's lips.

Naomi sighed with extreme pleasure. She licked her upper lip, tasting her musk, and smiled as her lover cleaned her hand like a cat. "You're beautiful."

"So you've said. You've got me pretty worked up here. I think it's time for a little less talk and a lot more action."

"Gladly!" Naomi sat up, tugging at her jeans. She wondered what wicked things she could do out here in the fresh air to the sultry vixen before her. "For starters, let's loosen these." She tugged at the snap of Courtney's pants, and it popped open.

A sheriff's department cruiser came around the bend and stopped. "Afternoon, ladies," the deputy called from his window.

Naomi grabbed her T-shirt, lowering it over her exposed breast. "Hey, Roy." She whispered out of the side of her mouth, "It's Roy Jenkins, one of Ryan's deputies."

"Oops." Courtney fastened her jeans again.

Roy raised his sunglasses, looking them over coolly. "Nice weather we're having, considering it's July. Sometimes July can be unbearable."

"True." Naomi folded one arm, covering her chest. Her shirt was thin, the extended nipple apparent as it poked out.

"I thought I'd let you know there are some families picnicking just over that ridge." He nodded past them. "If the kids get to playing and come running this way, you all might get a surprise."

"Yeah, we surely would. Well thanks, Roy. We might just go on home now."

"That would probably be best." He stayed put, watching as they gathered up their things.

"He doesn't trust us to leave?" Naomi mumbled.

"Maybe he wants to watch in case we do anything else." Courtney gave him an exaggerated wink.

"Don't bother. He's as gay as the rest of them." Naomi shoved their blanket in the back and slammed her hatchback door.

Courtney slapped her forehead. "Why can't I remember that? Feminine wiles don't get very far in this town, do they?"

"They do with me." She patted her girlfriend's butt. "Let's go home." Entering her vehicle, she rolled down the window and waved. "Bye, Roy!"

He waved, and they drove off in separate directions.

She glanced over at Courtney. "You'll have to remind me where we left off."

"I'm sure I can manage that." Courtney sucked on one finger suggestively.

Naomi grinned and drove straight home.

## Chapter Six

Courtney hadn't been to church in years. She generally found them stuffy and preachers overbearing. There was something about the little Cattle Valley church that held a definite appeal though. The congregation seemed welcoming and less judgmental than most. *And the reverend, holy smokes!* Courtney was a lesbian through and through, but she never minded noticing a fine looking man. Casey Sharp was a total fox. Remembering that he too was gay brought a smile to her face.

When he welcomed her to their community from the pulpit at the end of his service, she was surprised. If Naomi had wanted privacy, there was no chance of that anymore. But Naomi hadn't flinched when he'd introduced Courtney. In fact she seemed rather pleased.

"That shocked the hell out of me," Courtney murmured as they filed out of church.

"I didn't know he was going to do it either. Casey's so nice. I want you to meet him." Naomi took her hand and went to where the reverend greeted churchgoers after the service.

"Good morning, Naomi." Casey shook hands with them. "Hello, Ms. Cross. I was sorry to miss your book signing the other night but pleased to hear you were staying in Cattle Valley a while."

"Two weeks." Courtney nodded. "It seemed like a pleasant place to take a little vacation and unwind after my book tour."

"It is, at that." He looked at Naomi. "I trust you're showing her all the wonderful things we have to offer."

"I'm doing my best." She grinned.

He chuckled, then grew serious. "Say, Naomi, have you seen Lily today?"

"No." She glanced around. "Was she here?"

"She came early, and I tried to talk to her, but I'm afraid I scared her away."

"Why on earth?"

"She has a black eye. Said she ran into a door, but that seems unlikely."

"That son-of-a-bitch! Why, I'm going to —"

"No you are not!" Courtney grabbed her arm. "You're not going to confront a man who would hit his pregnant wife. God knows what he'd do to you. Call your friend Ryan. He's the sheriff. It's his job to handle this."

Casey shook his head. "Ryan and the boys are out of town this weekend. We could call one of the deputies, but I'm not sure that's the best thing."

"Surely you don't think sending tiny little Naomi in there is the best thing!" Courtney's eyes flashed.

"I'm not tiny and I told you, I know Taekwondo, remember?" Naomi was furious with Gary but secretly thrilled to hear Courtney sticking up for her.

"Ms. Cross is right of course." Casey touched Naomi's arm. "I wasn't suggesting you confront Gary. I happen to know he's fishing today. Lily let it slip that they argued about it. He promised to help her paint the baby's room then made other plans with his buddies. I'm sure she questioned him about it, and he'd probably had a few beers..."

"He's a son-of-a-bitch," Naomi repeated. She turned to Courtney. "You warned me this would happen. I didn't want to believe it. I can't believe I was so blind. I should have seen the signs."

"You had no way of knowing. This isn't your fault." Courtney squeezed her hand. "Lily's a grown woman. I know you're trying to look out for her, but it shouldn't be your responsibility."

"Well I'm sorry, but I feel like it is. *I should have known.* And watching out for each other is the way we do things here in Cattle Valley."

"The town can't always be perfect." Courtney released Naomi's hand and folded her arms across her chest.

Casey smiled. "No one ever said Cattle Valley was perfect. We have our share of problems—in fact we've seen domestic abuse here before. I guess you could say we're just more tolerant than other places about alternative lifestyles."

"Does that include wife-beating?" Courtney snarled. She knew she shouldn't have, but Naomi's goody-goody portrayal of the town and its people was driving her absolutely nuts.

"Of course not." His smile faded to a frown. "I'm sorry. Perhaps I shouldn't have brought this up today."

"I'm glad you did." Naomi touched his arm gently. "I'll check on Lily. Thanks, Reverend."

"Have a nice day, ladies." He nodded and turned to another group of people.

"I guess this lets out cinnamon rolls again today." Courtney knew she was pouting and figured she sounded petulant, given Lily's problems.

"We're getting them. Come on." Naomi drove them downtown and parked in front of the little shop with a sign that read 'Brynn's Bakery'. "He closes early on Sunday, so we'll have to get them to go."

"Sure."

Naomi entered the store, Courtney on her heels. "Hey, Kyle. How are you today?"

"I'm good, thanks. How you doing?" The handsome man spoke from his wheelchair.

Courtney remembered someone telling her he was in a chair. They also mentioned he was a hunk. *Right again.* "Hello."

"Hi there." He smiled at her. "I've heard good things about you, Ms. Cross. People are excited to have a famous author in our little town."

"I've heard plenty about you, as well." She extended her hand and they shook.

"Mostly about how cute you are," Naomi added. "A little about the wonderful cinnamon rolls. Speaking of which, are we too late to grab a couple?"

"Not at all. Several people pop in here after services, so I hang around a bit. Gill and I go to church later."

"I've heard about this Gill too." Courtney glanced around. "Is he here?"

"Yep." Kyle raised his voice. "Gill? Come out here a sec?"

A massive black man came through the door from the back. "Hey."

"Hey, Gill." Naomi smiled. "Courtney wanted to say hi."

"Pleased to meet you," he said.

"Oh my god! When they said 'Gill', I never realised. You're Darshawn Gilling!"

He grinned. "One and the same."

"Wow! My brother and father followed your football career. They couldn't believe it when you retired. They'll be so jealous to hear I met you."

"Well, thanks. That seems like a lifetime ago."

"I'm sure it does. This town is something else. I'd love to talk to you sometime about why you chose to settle here. Maybe I could wrangle an autograph or two to take home."

"I'm sure that could be arranged. I'm at the garage every day during the week. It's just down Main Street here." He motioned to the south.



Courtney nodded. "I'll look you up." *That might make an interesting story.* A man giving up his life in the big city and settling for something completely different in small town Wyoming. Going from bright lights to — she glanced around — this. *Not sure I could handle it.*

Kyle picked up a carryout container and asked, "Two cinnamon rolls?"

Naomi bit her lip, glancing at Courtney then back at him. "Could you make it three? I might see if Lily's at home."

"You bet." He filled the order and she paid him.

Naomi initiated more small talk before thanking him. They said their goodbyes and the women left.

They got into Naomi's vehicle and Courtney buckled up. "They were nice. Everyone here is. I'll give you that."

Naomi didn't answer, just smiled as she drove.

"I was surprised to see Darshawn Gilling. I never dreamed he lived here."

"Football players shouldn't be gay?"

"Never said that. Just said I was surprised, is all. His story gives me some interesting potential book ideas. I'll need to think on it some more." She ran a hand through her hair. "So, you really need to talk to Lily?"

"I have to. You understand, don't you?"

"As long as he's not home, sure. I'm coming with you."

Naomi parked in her garage. "I thought you might want to take this time to go back to the Inn and pack up your stuff."

"You were serious about that?" Courtney looked her in the eye.

"Absolutely." Naomi smiled. "I don't want you sleeping anywhere but in my bed. I thought I'd made that clear."

"You did, but after this business with Lily..."

Extending one hand, Naomi squeezed Courtney's wrist. "This stuff with Lily has nothing to do with us. I need to talk to her because she's my friend, and that's what friends do. Other than that, I want to focus on you. I'd like to spend as much time as we can together. Okay?"

Courtney returned the smile. "Okay. But my car's at the Inn." She followed Naomi inside.

"Let's eat our cinnamon rolls, then you can walk me over to Lily's. Once you're satisfied Gary's not there you can take my SUV to get your stuff. Tell Tia we'll pick up your car later."

"Sounds like a plan. First things first. Cinnamon rolls."

"Coming right up!"

\* \* \* \*

Naomi hadn't exaggerated the brilliance of Kyle Brynn's cinnamon rolls. Courtney thought if she lived in Cattle Valley she'd gain ten pounds just from *driving by* the delicious bakery. She shook her head to clear it. Of course she'd never live there. Naomi's wishful thinking was getting to her.

She'd made sure Lily was home alone before leaving Naomi there. The girl had one hell of a shiner and the reverend was right—it hadn't come from running into a door. Courtney hoped the cinnamon roll and some of Naomi's almost-as-sweet talk might help Lily come to her senses.

She settled her tab with the uber-Jamaican Tia and climbed the stairs to her room one last time. Courtney wondered how someone could live in the western United States and still maintain such a thick accent. She chuckled to herself, imagining the woman in bed. "*Damn, girl, you hot!*"

She packed up the few things she'd left at the Inn and hauled them back to Naomi's. No one was home, so she flipped open her laptop and answered a few of the dozens of emails awaiting her. A thought occurred and Courtney typed a few notes to get it down. Meeting Gill had spurred her imagination. Cattle Valley was such a unique town—but would it fly in a fiction novel? If she centred her next novel here, she might have to stick around longer for research. The idea sent a quiver of excitement to her belly.

Naomi would freak. While Courtney delighted in the idea of seeing her lover that happy, she decided to wait to mention anything until her thoughts were better fleshed out. She didn't write non-fiction, so her stories couldn't be about Gill and others, like Tia, exactly. She'd have to create the perfect characters for such a setting and then she'd have to sell her agent on the idea. It was an uphill battle, but worth pursuing. The thought made her tingle.

Buzzing with an almost electric energy, she paced the living room. She couldn't shake thoughts of Naomi. The way her soft red hair looked splayed out on a pillow, her eyes

gazing soulfully as they made love. Courtney's excitement moved from her stomach to her loins, and she squeezed her legs together. Hopefully Naomi would come home soon.

A short while later she heard the front door open and close.

"Hello," Naomi called, entering the house.

"Hi there." Courtney peeked out from the kitchen. "So how did it go?"

Naomi shrugged. "She insists she fell. I tried several different tactics, but she would never admit Gary did anything to her. I know he did."

"I'm sure you're right. Are you going to call the sheriff?"

"What can he do? If Lily wouldn't confide in me, she won't in anyone else. I'll mention it to Ryan next time I see him but for now I think we just have to keep an eye on things."

"Sounds like a plan." Courtney yawned, stretching her arms to the ceiling. "I was just thinking about lying down for a bit."

"Want some company?" Naomi raised her eyebrows up and down.

"You bet. I sat here hoping you'd come home alone."

Naomi grinned, reaching out for Courtney and pointing her towards the bedroom. They walked down the hall together and both began stripping when they reached the back room. "So you've been thinking about this, huh?"

"Oh yeah. I've never been a person who didn't go after what she wanted."

"I totally agree." Naomi eyed her body hungrily. "I see exactly what I want."

"Good." Courtney opened her arms, and they embraced. "I know what I want too," she whispered seductively in Naomi's ear. "I want you to fuck me with your strap-on."

"I'd love to," Naomi agreed. "I could fuck your sweet pussy all day long."

"Nice as that sounds..." Courtney caught her face in one hand. "I mean I want you to fuck my ass. You told me that first day you wanted to."

"Oh Jesus." Naomi licked her lips. "Are you serious? You said you'd never done that before."

"I haven't. I want you to be my first."

"Hot damn!" She wrapped one leg around Courtney's thigh, pressing her pussy down with vigour. "That sounds hot. But if you've never done anal, it's going to take some time to get you ready."

"I'm all yours." Courtney caressed her back.

"Perfect," Naomi purred. She ground her clit against the leg one last time then let go. She rubbed her hands together. "Let's see what we've got." She opened her bottom dresser drawer and removed several objects and a white tube of something.

"What is that stuff?"

"Some butt plugs in various sizes and lube. This is going to feel good, I promise. If it doesn't, just let me know."

"Oh, I will. No worries."

Naomi chuckled. "Lie down, baby. Here, shove this pillow under your stomach. I want your ass up a little bit."

Courtney obliged and settled in comfortably. She wasn't concerned about pain. Already she trusted Naomi as much as she'd ever trusted anyone intimately.

"You have a gorgeous ass." Naomi nuzzled her face between Courtney's butt cheeks.

"Mmm, don't stop. Your mouth feels so good."

"You're going to love this. I never imagined I'd enjoy anal until someone exposed me to it. Now I'm wild about it. I think you will be too." She licked a trail down Courtney's crack to her already wet cunt. "Oh yeah. So wet for me already."

Courtney didn't feel self-conscious with Naomi anymore. *Extremely aroused, yeah.* She pressed her butt up brazenly. "Only for you, sugar."

"I love that. I'm going to eat you up. Spread your thighs a tiny bit, let me get in there."

"Gladly." Courtney sighed as warm lips pressed against her folds. Ass-up was an unusual position for oral sex, but she couldn't complain. The breeze across her butt felt cool compared to the heated mouth devouring her pussy. She clung to the pillows below and let her mind float away as Naomi nipped and sucked her flesh. Shudders of delight took hold as her pussy clenched around the probing tongue.

Her first glorious orgasm took hold. She gasped as liquid heat flowed through her then moaned her enjoyment. She never wanted it to end.

When she opened her eyes, she sensed something unusual. Warmth spread through her backside. "What did you do?"

"While you were coming, I lubed up a butt plug and inserted it in you. How's it feel?"

"Strange. Not bad – different."

"Good. Now just relax." Naomi tapped on the end of the plug.

It sent jolts through Courtney's body. "Oh man. That feels good."

"Like that? Let's try this."

Courtney felt the plug being tugged from her anus. Something else replaced it, something long and narrow. "What's that?"

"An anal toy. Check this out." Naomi flipped a switch, and the dildo in Courtney's ass vibrated.

"Oh my god!"

"Yeah. I thought you'd like it. I'm going to fuck your ass now. Relax, it's very thin. I think you'll enjoy this." She pulled the long dildo out slowly then pressed it back in. "Feel good?"

"Mmm hmm." Courtney buried her face in the pillow. It felt *so* good, she was going to come again in an instant. "Ohhh..." she groaned and shuddered as a deep climax enveloped her.

"Yeah, that's it. Come on, come on." Naomi continued fucking her ass with the vibrating rod.

Finally Courtney couldn't take any more. "Stop, please! Oh god. Stop."

A sultry chuckle resonated from her lover. Naomi eased the dildo out and set it aside on a towel. "How was that for your first ass fucking?"

Courtney sighed. "That was perfect."

"Good." Naomi leaned over and spoke directly into her ear. "By the end of your vacation, I'll be fucking your ass with this." She held up the large-cock strap-on. "It'll be a little slice of heaven."

Courtney rolled onto her back, spreading Naomi's legs so the woman straddled her. "*You* are my little slice of heaven. I want to be one with you, right now."

Reaching across the bed, Naomi picked up the double ended dildo. "This?"

"Oh yeah. God yeah. Put that in me and ride me, baby."

Naomi slipped the rubber cock into Courtney's slick pussy and impaled herself on the other end. "Mmm, yeah."

Courtney groaned with pleasure. "This is good. We're good at this."

Naomi thrust her body downwards, grinding her clit against the hard rubber. "I haven't found anything we're not good at together, baby. Face it, we make quite a team."

Courtney leaned up and grabbed one bobbing tit in each hand. She suckled one, rolling the other nipple between her thumb and forefinger. Groaning with pleasure, she switched sides and slurped greedily.

Naomi pressed the blonde head against her chest. "That's it, suck me harder."

Increasing the suction, Courtney allowed her teeth to graze the swollen nub.

"Ooh yeah. That's perfect, baby. You've got all the right moves."

"I love your tits." Courtney squeezed the small globes together.

Naomi ran her hands over Courtney's bare back. "I love your whole body."

They gazed at each other for a moment before each spoke at the same time.

"I love *you*," Courtney murmured.

"I love you," Naomi echoed, and laughed. "Great minds think alike."

"Are you thinking that it certainly complicates things? Because I am."

"No, I'm not. I'm thinking that I love you and I want to fuck you, well and often."

Courtney laughed. "Tell me again." She lay back, bringing Naomi's body over hers. "Say it over and over again as you're fucking me."

"I love you," Naomi whispered, bouncing up and down with fervour. "I love you and I'm coming..."

"Yes." Courtney arched her back and closed her eyes. She was there too. Intense heat poured through her and she exploded, holding tight to the woman she loved.

## Chapter Seven

### Two weeks later

Naomi glanced around the bookstore before locking up for the night. She loved the little shop she'd established, it was going to be hard leaving it. But she loved Courtney more. It was doubtful a small, individually-owned place like this would work in Chicago, with all the big box chains. They could stock more and sell for less. The charm of personal attention was lost in the city. It wasn't lost in Cattle Valley, it was expected.

She thought she'd miss the town even more than *Booklovers*. In the past few years she'd made some good friends and put down roots. As hard as it would be to leave, she knew it would be harder to tell Courtney goodbye. She could never do that.

"Hey." Ryan Blackfeather sauntered in the front door. "About ready to go?"

"Just about." She looked around one last time. "It's sad leaving this place."

"I can't believe you're really going. Have you told Courtney yet?"

"Nah. I'm going to surprise her this weekend. When she gets ready to leave, I'll drop the bombshell that I'm going with her."

"Are you sure that's such a good idea? Have you ever considered that she might not want you to go?"

Naomi stared at him. "No. That's ridiculous. She asked me once if I'd go back to Chicago with her, and I asked her once if she'd stay here. Okay, maybe more than once. But neither of us would budge. This is going to be a great surprise."

"I hope you're right. We're going to miss you like crazy."

"Aw, I'm going to miss you all too. Leaving Cattle Valley is way harder than leaving California was. This place feels like home."

"You know you're always welcome here. We'd take you back in a heartbeat."

"Thanks, Ryan." She gave him a quick hug. "But this isn't really goodbye. Wyn's going to try to sell the store for me while Melissa runs it. Once it goes, I'll have to come back and

clean out my house to put it on the market. That's going to be tough too. I love that little place."

"Your house should get snapped up fast. Even with the crazy neighbours."

"They've been quiet the past couple of weeks. Hopefully Gary came to his senses and realised that baby will be here soon. He has to grow up, and fast."

Ryan snorted. "Not holding my breath."

"People can change," she insisted, rubbing one finger along a shiny book rack.

He grinned. "You're such a little Pollyanna. Always believing folks are basically good at heart."

"I'd hate to live feeling otherwise. And I am encouraged that you know a character from a classic book."

"Blame that on Nate...and you. Ready?" He held open the front door, and they walked out.

Naomi locked up and they strolled across the street to drop the bank bag in the night depository. "Thanks for everything, Ryan."

"Promise me you'll stop by the house and say goodbye before you leave. I mean it, now."

"I will." She hugged him one last time, standing up on tiptoes to place a small kiss on his cheek. "See you later."

"Later," he confirmed, and they drove off in separate cars.

Exhilarated, she headed towards her house. She and Courtney had plans to stay in all weekend, saying a long goodbye before the flight out of Sheridan on Sunday afternoon. Naomi didn't want to upset any of their plans but she had to find the right moment to break the news. "Hello," she called as she entered through the garage door.

"In here," Courtney answered from the living room.

"Hey." Naomi smiled at the woman sitting cross-legged on the sofa in front of her computer. "Getting some work done?"

"Not much. Getting discouraged, mostly. I told you I queried my agent about a project? Well, I finally heard back, and she's not interested."

"I'm sorry, babe. Was it something you were particularly interested in?"

"Oh yeah. It was a book set in Cattle Valley. I thought if I wrote about this place I'd have to stay longer for research. Guess it was wishful thinking."



"You wanted to stay longer?" Naomi gulped. "Had you made any arrangements yet?"

"No, not yet. Like I said, it was wishful thinking. My agent says a book set in a town like Cattle Valley would never sell."

"Really." Naomi sighed with relief. With a lot of work, she'd reserved the seat next to Courtney's on the flight to Chicago. Her ticket was non-refundable. The surprise might have been on her. "I think your agent is full of shit."

"Possibly." Courtney closed her laptop. "So how was your day?"

"Good. Better now that I'm home."

"I totally agree." Courtney slipped her arms around Naomi's waist. "I've got a crab salad chilling in the fridge with a nice bottle of wine. I thought we could eat a bite, kick back and relax."

"Sounds perfect." She kissed her lover's luscious mouth and all thoughts of food escaped. After two weeks, she still wanted Courtney every time she saw her. From what she could tell, the feeling was mutual. "Can we eat later? Right now I only want you."

"Mmm, me too."

They peeled each other's clothes off and dropped to the sofa. Courtney buried her face between Naomi's legs and nuzzled.

"Want to move to the bedroom?" Naomi asked. "I'll get the strap-on."

"Later. This is good for the moment."

"Umm," Naomi moaned, leaning back and widening her legs. "It is good."

"We're shooting for wonderful," Courtney murmured between licks.

"I meant wonderful. Heavenly. Perfect. Your mouth is perfect." She squirmed as Courtney ran a finger inside her pussy wetting it, then slid the digit into her anus. Pressure filled her ass and warmed it. She bucked into the hand, craving more. "I love how you do that."

"Learned it all from you." Courtney thrust the finger in and out as she resumed licking Naomi's clit. "I love your pretty pink pussy and how wet it gets for me."

"Oh yeah." Naomi wiggled her hips as the bliss continued. Her clit throbbed delightfully and her anus clutched at the invading digit. "My pussy loves you too. The rest of my body is also quite enthused."

Courtney chuckled and dove in to the wetness. She tongued deeply, licking and nibbling around the edges.

Naomi closed her eyes, enjoying the feeling of fullness. Courtney's mouth continued to torment her clit and pussy, sensations so delightful she wished they never had to end. The finger probing her ass pressed deeper, harder, and the movement drove her to the brink of delirium. If she could only prolong it. *No way in hell.* "I'm coming..." She shuddered and released. Waves of pleasure raced from her quivering genitals outwards, and she soaked up every precious moment.

"So good." Courtney cleaned sticky juices from Naomi's folds when she stopped shaking. She eased her finger from the anus. "Damn, that was pretty."

Sighing, not wanting to move, Naomi murmured, "It felt pretty. Pretty fucking fabulous!"

Courtney laughed and they clung to each other to keep from falling.

"My turn." Naomi slipped out from under, climbing over Courtney and spreading her legs. "I get to watch you now. I get to taste you."

"Please." Courtney settled back and widened the space between her thighs. She ran a hand down her belly, twirling it in her curly pubes.

"Impatient minx." Naomi nipped at the fingers. "You want to help?"

"Sure."

Naomi took Courtney's hands and placed them on her breasts. "There. Squeeze your tits while I watch. Pinch your nipples. I know you love that."

"Mmm." Courtney obliged, kneading her soft mounds before tweaking each nipple.

"Oh yeah. That looks nice. Come on, pinch them hard so you feel it."

Courtney did, squirming under her own hands.

"That's it." Naomi kept her eyes on the crimson nipples as she sank her tongue into Courtney's wet pussy. *We are so much alike.* They enjoyed the same things. They shared the same turn-ons. Both their pussies were as wet as kittens caught in a downpour. "Good." She lapped at the sweet cream, flicking the clit with each stroke.

Courtney writhed beneath her. "I'm close."

"You look so hot." Naomi blew on her engorged clit. She lubricated two fingers and worked them, one at a time, into her lover's ass. Pressing them in and out, back and forth, she prolonged the pleasure as her lover gasped for breath.

"I'm coming!" Courtney cried, shuddering.

"Come on! Feel me fucking you with my fingers. Later I'm going to fuck this sexy ass with my big, black dildo. You're going to feel something then. You'll come all over me."

"Christ!" Courtney quivered and shook, finally falling back against the sofa. "That felt fucking fantastic. You know how much I love it when you talk that way to me?"

Naomi grinned, pulling her fingers out and wiping her chin. "I know, baby. I love it too." She lay on top of the prone woman, grinding their pussies together. "And I know I love you. You make me crazy, Courtney Cross. You make me scream."

Courtney sucked Naomi's tongue into her mouth, both women groaning as they kissed. "I love you too, gorgeous," she said when Naomi pulled back at last. "I love it when you stick your fingers in my ass. I'm really going to love it when you stick your dildo in there."

Naomi brushed Courtney's blonde hair back. "You think you're ready? We've been stretching you for a while now."

"God yes. I want it more than anything. Just like I want you." She pressed their lips together again, and they sank back into a long, lingering kiss.

Naomi knew she was doing the right thing. Neither she nor Courtney wanted to be apart. Whether they were here or in Chicago was of little importance. When they were together like this, their world was just the two of them.

\* \* \* \*

They cleaned up and ate Courtney's crab salad, washing it down with the bottle of wine. Naomi wasn't a big drinker, and each time they polished off a whole bottle, crazy behaviour and headaches ensued.

"Let's play strip poker!" Courtney slurred.

"We could, but we're already naked." Naomi pranced around in the living room.

"Then let's play that whoever loses has to do something the winner chooses."

"I'm not running outside with no clothes on."

"Not like that. Other kinds of things. Sexual favours, maybe."

"Hmm, kind of like truth or dare?"

"That's it!" Courtney's eyes flashed. "Let's play truth or dare!"

"I'm game." Naomi flopped onto the chair facing the sofa, opening and closing her legs.

"Quit that," Courtney shut her eyes. "Okay, me first. Truth or dare?"

"You've got to ask me the question first."

"Some people play that way. Brave people take their chances."

"Fuck that. Ask me."

"Okay. Hmm...oh, I've got one! Have you ever had sex with a man, and did you like it? Truth or dare."

"Sounds like a two part question to me. That's okay, I'll answer it." Naomi sat back, smiling. "Yes I have. The first time, I was a sophomore in college. It was—decent. I mean, I like being fucked. I'd just prefer it wasn't a guy that did it."

They burst into laughter.

"My turn," Naomi said.

Courtney nodded.

"Truth or dare. Were you freaked out the first time you had sex with a woman?"

"Truth. For sure I was. I thought we were sick or perverted or something. It took a while to realise it was normal and perfectly fine."

"Some people still don't realise that."

Courtney scrunched up her face. "Don't go there. Ask me another question. A question I won't want to answer and would rather pierce my nipple or something."

"Pierce your nipple?" Naomi laughed. "Now you're talking. Okay, how about this. Truth or Dare. Wouldn't you like to stay in Cattle Valley and write a whole bunch of books from here? And find a new agent and tell the old one, 'nah nah nah nah nah'?" She stuck out her tongue.

"Ooh," Courtney groaned, burying her face in her arms. "No fair."

Naomi looked at her. "You'd rather pierce your nipple?"

Courtney chuckled, looking up. "No. I'd rather stay here and make love to you every day for the rest of our lives. But it's just not that simple. My parents are getting older. I need to be there for them. My brother has a family, and I want to watch his children grow up."

"He's there for your parents," Naomi suggested without much enthusiasm. She knew it was a dead subject.

"He's wrapped up in his life, as he should be. I have more time—"

"So you don't deserve to have a life? Why, because you're a lesbian and you're not going to have kids? It's your duty to take care of your parents as they get older?"

"Of course not." She appeared surprised. "And I never said I wasn't going to have kids. I might want kids someday."

"Really?" Naomi's heart melted. She felt exactly the same way. Lots of people—lesbians included—didn't feel the nurturing urge, but she always had. "I want kids someday too."

A smile spread across Courtney's face. "Really? God, we are alike, aren't we?"

"We're so much alike." Naomi crawled into her lap. "That's why I can't let you go. I love you, Courtney. I love you so much." She pressed their lips together in a kiss.

"I love you too, babe. A lot. I really do. I've been wracking my brain for a way to work this out."

"I thought of a way." Naomi looked into her eyes.

"What's that?"

"I'm coming with you. To Chicago."

"You don't want to live in Chicago. You've told me that before. You love it here."

Naomi spoke quietly. "I love you more. My home is anywhere you are. We'll build a new life together in the city. I'll find a new bookstore or someplace I'd like to work. It'll be great."

Courtney's jaw dropped open, her face a mask of utter surprise. "You'd do that for me?"

"I've already got my plane ticket and the seat next to yours. Mel's going to run the bookstore until Wyn finds a buyer. Ryan's agreed to keep an eye on my house until I can come back and get it ready to sell. But I'm not staying here without you. I need you, Courtney. I need to be the person I am with you. You make me happier than I've ever been in my life."

"Oh my god. Oh my god." Courtney kissed every spot on her face, slowly heading down her neck.

"Is that a yes?" Naomi asked shyly. All of a sudden she was stone cold sober and needed to hear the words.

"Are you crazy? Of course it's a yes. I love you! My family will love you. If you don't like my condo, we'll find a place we both like." She gazed into Naomi's eyes. "There'll be time to figure all that out later. Right now I have to be with you—every inch of me covering every inch of you, top to bottom...and back again. This could take awhile."

"We've got a lifetime," Naomi replied, holding her gaze.

Courtney smiled.

## Chapter Eight

Courtney resisted waking up the next day. Her head throbbed from too much wine, and her body ached from too much sex. *That part isn't so bad. I kind of like that part.*

Turning her head, she watched Naomi sleep peacefully. Her pink skin looked pale against the dark sheets, red hair splayed out across the flowered pillowcase. She reached out and touched one silky lock.

Naomi amazed her. Courtney couldn't believe the woman was willing to uproot her life and move to Chicago, just to be with her. It thrilled her, but also made her feel guilty. *Should I have been as willing to move across the country?* The idea nagged at her. Perhaps she wasn't being the best girlfriend – or person – she could be.

"What are you thinking about?" Naomi whispered sleepily.

"Hey. You're awake. I was just watching you sleep."

"You appeared deep in thought. Spill it."

"Truth?"

Naomi nodded. "Or you might have to pierce your nipple."

Courtney grinned. "Actually I was wondering if you're a better person than me for offering to move across the country when I wouldn't do it."

"That's silly. Of course I'm not. I'm probably just hornier."

Courtney chuckled. "I don't know. Ever since I met you, I've been the horniest girl on the planet. I swear, I've never had so much sex in my life. *Good sex.*"

"Really good sex," Naomi agreed, a drowsy smile playing at her lips. "Last night was incredible."

"You've turned me into an anal whore." Courtney rubbed a hand lightly across her stomach. "I came so hard when you fucked me in the ass. I want to feel that way again."

"My pleasure. I have great orgasms during anal too. I'm up for it again whenever you are."

"Are you kidding?" Courtney groaned. "My body feels used and abused. I've never been so sore. And yet I find myself looking for that big, black dildo. I want it inside me again."

Naomi rolled up, licking one of Courtney's nipples on her way out of bed. "I need to pee. Then I'll come back here and give it to you good. I love it. I love that you love it!" She disappeared into the bathroom.

Courtney squeezed her arms with pleasure. The very idea of Naomi fucking her ass had her creaming. She held each of her breasts and squeezed, tormenting the nipples into erect nubs.

"Ooh, started without me! That's okay. Me likes my horny girl." Naomi gobbled up each of Courtney's tits before flipping her over and slapping her ass. "Get it up here, mama. I'm gonna ream you until you scream for mercy."

With a delighted groan, Courtney raised her hips, burying her face in the pillow. She loved this. *I could spend a lifetime doing this.* Now that Naomi was moving to Chicago, it was more than just a dream. She really, truly could.

A slick finger circled her anus, which already puckered with anticipation. She backed into the finger, forcing it up her channel.

"Slow down, horny babe. Let me get you stretched and ready. Then I'll fuck you with my big, black cock."

Courtney felt fluid gush from her pussy, oozing down her leg. "You're gonna make me come just talking about it."

"I see that." Naomi bent down, sliding her tongue through the drenched folds. "Damn, you taste good. Just think, I'm going to get to taste your sweet cream every day for the rest of my life."

"I thought the same thing. We'll get to do this every day from here on out. Isn't that wild?"

"Extremely fucking wild." Naomi nipped at the engorged clit. She pressed her finger deeper into Courtney's anus, stretching the outer ring, and forced in another. "Mmm, that's it. Loosen up for me. Nice."

Courtney felt her tight hole fluttering open with the pressure. "Yeah," she groaned. "Good. So good. I'm ready for you. I want your full length pounding me."



"Not quite." Naomi kissed one ass cheek. "I'd never rush and hurt you. A little more stretching, then a whole lot of delightful fucking."

"You're driving me crazy."

"Good. I like you that way."

The fingers in her ass thrust in and out firmly, and Courtney couldn't resist rubbing her pulsing clit.

"Hands off the merchandise!" Naomi slapped her ass again. "I'll do the fondling, thank you."

"I want more!" Courtney groaned.

"Greedy girl. All right then." Naomi reached for the big strap-on and the lube, just as the doorbell rang.

"Don't even think about it," Courtney growled.

"I'll ignore it. Maybe they'll go away." She pressed the thick tip of the cock to Courtney's hole.

The bell rang again, then twice more, insistently.

"Fuck me!" Courtney muttered.

"I know," Naomi leaned back. "I feel the same way."

"No, seriously. Fuck me! Now! I'm begging for it!"

Naomi chuckled as the bell sounded again. "Don't beg, sugar. We have a lifetime, remember? Why don't you hold this position, and I'll go get rid of whoever it is."

"Don't expect me not to touch myself. I'm about ready to explode."

"Go ahead." She laughed, standing, reaching for a robe. "Rub it and make it feel better. I'll be right back."

"Grrr..." Courtney dropped to her back, spreading her legs. One hand wandered to her clit, moving in slow circles. She'd come easily enough, but it wouldn't be the same. A couple pinches had her nipples erect and ready. Just a bit more pressure on the clit.

"Time to get up!" Naomi marched back in the room. "Lily's here and she's in labour."

"What?" Courtney froze, her hand in mid-rub.

"You heard me. She's in labour. Gary's nowhere to be found. We need to get her to the clinic."

"Fuck." She sat up, feeling peevish because of the interruption.

"Sorry, babe." Naomi smiled at her, adding in a whisper, "We'll have plenty of time later. Lily needs us now."

"You're right. Can I get dressed?"

"Sure. Take a quick shower if you like. I'm going to make some calls, find out where the town docs are."

"Thanks." Courtney made her way to the bathroom, climbed into the shower and ran the soap over her body. For a moment she considered finishing what she'd started earlier but then felt guilty for being so selfish. Naomi was right. They had a lifetime. This was Lily's big moment, and she had no one since her charming husband was nowhere to be found.

She finished up quickly, slipping into jeans and a T-shirt. In the living room she found Lily on the sofa, doing breathing exercises, and Naomi on the phone.

"What do you mean, you can't get hold of any of them? Surely someone in this town knows how to reach a damn doctor. I know it's the weekend, try telling Lily's baby that. Is there anyone at the clinic? Well shit."

"What is it?" Courtney asked softly.

"There's only a nurse on duty. The doc who's supposed to be there had to go out for an emergency because the ambulance is dealing with a car wreck on the highway."

"That's it? There's only one doctor in this town?" Courtney demanded.

"Oh, no. We have three. But one has gone to a medical conference and the other has the flu. We can either drive Lily to the clinic ourselves or wait until the ambulance—or the doctor—is available."

"Whatever we need to do," she nodded agreeably. Now that she was up and out of bed, she could think more clearly. Lily, panting on the sofa, definitely came first.

"What was that?" Naomi asked into the phone. "Okay, good." She turned to Courtney. "Zac—the paramedic—is heading back with the ambulance. He'll go to help the doc then one or the other of them will be available to help us." She spoke into the mouthpiece again. "We'll hang on here for a while then. She's not too uncomfortable. I know first babies take a long time."

"Not always," Courtney whispered.

Naomi waved her hand, trying to listen to the phone. "Okay, thanks, Pam. Yes, please. If you hear from one of the docs, let them know what's going on. Bye." She hung up. "Well,

Lily, one of the doctors will be available soon. Pam is leaving a voicemail for him, so he'll know you're in labour."

"Good." Lily nodded. "I'm doing fine. Like you said, first babies take a while."

Courtney shrugged. "Not always, you two. I've heard sometimes they can come really fast. I'd feel better if we could get her to a hospital."

"There isn't one around here," Naomi told her. "The clinic handles emergency births quite nicely. I'd feel better if a doctor was there though."

"You think it might be a short labour?" Lily asked worriedly.

"Probably not, sugar." Naomi smoothed the woman's hair back. She turned and walked over to Courtney. "Cool it with the 'it could happen really fast' talk. She needs to stay calm."

"Sorry. Can I do anything?"

"Yes. You can sit with her while I shower. I'm sticky as hell."

"Not my fault." Courtney rolled her eyes as she walked over to Lily.

Naomi grinned and went to shower.

"So this is it, huh?" Courtney sat down on the sofa.

"I think so. Contractions are coming and going."

"It could be false labour. I've heard of that."

Lily nodded. "They told us about that in birthing class. They said to change whatever you were doing. If the contractions continue, they're probably real. I was walking when they started so I sat. They're still coming regularly."

Courtney shrugged. "Sounds real enough to me. It's a good thing you're here. Naomi is good at this kind of stuff. She knows just what to do."

"She's a good friend," Lily agreed, then clutched her stomach. "Oh!"

Courtney glanced at the clock. Timing the contractions was one thing she *could* do. "It's ten thirty on the nose. We'll see how far apart they are."

Lily nodded again, breathing heavily. When the worst of it passed, she relaxed against the pillow. "That was a strong one."

"Can I get you anything?"

"No thanks. I wish I knew where Gary was."

"Is there anyone who would know? We could call them."

"I'm not sure. It's hard to think."

"Just relax. You've been through the classes. This is all going to be fine."

Tears streamed down the younger woman's face. "I never imagined it would be this way! We both wanted this baby. Now I'm afraid I'll be doing it all alone."

"Oh, Lily." Courtney glanced towards the bedroom, willing Naomi's return. She was good at nurturing. Courtney felt lost. She patted Lily's shoulder uncomfortably.

The woman burst into tears. Before Courtney realised what was happening, Lily grabbed her, clinging to her for support.

She continued to pat Lily's back as the tears fell.

"What happened?" Naomi nearly shouted, rushing to the sofa.

"She's afraid. She wants Gary." Courtney made an irritated face.

Naomi nodded in agreement. "It's going to be all right." She sat on the edge of the sofa, pulling Lily into her arms.

Courtney stood up, relieved. She didn't usually have a problem with intimacy, but it was different with strangers. Lily and her weird husband were as foreign to her as if they were from the moon.

"Another contraction," Lily announced, grabbing her stomach.

Courtney looked at the clock. "It's only been five minutes. That's pretty fast, isn't it?"

Naomi looked up at her. "Are you sure?"

She nodded.

"Maybe I need to call for that ambulance. We can wait with her down at the clinic, and at least there'll be a nurse."

"I agree."

"You okay?" Naomi asked before standing.

Lily nodded, breathing heavily.

Naomi went to the table to retrieve her phone. Someone pounded on the front door loudly, and she jumped.

"The doctor?" Courtney asked hopefully. The women looked at each other.

"Lily! Are you in there?" The voice was masculine, his words slurred.

"I take it that's *not* the doctor." Courtney made a face.

"Gary's here!" Lily cried excitedly. "I knew he'd come back. He wouldn't let me go through this alone."

"Come back?" Naomi glanced at her. "He knew you were in labour and he left anyway?"

"He was scared." She defended her husband.

Naomi fumed. "Like you're *not* scared? What does he have to fear? You're the one passing the watermelon through an orange-sized opening. I have half a notion to give that man a piece of my mind."

"Don't let him in." Courtney moved to her side. "You can tell he's been drinking."

"What's he going to do?" Naomi put one hand on the doorknob.

"Please, let him come in," Lily moaned.

Both of them stared at Courtney. She finally relented, saying, "I don't have a good feeling about this."

"We'll be fine. He should be with his wife." Naomi unlocked the door and opened it.

"Hey, Gary. What's all the shouting about?"

"Where's Lily?"

"She's here, of course. She's in labour and shouldn't be alone." Naomi stepped aside so he could enter.

Courtney appraised the tall man. He wasn't bad looking, with curly dark hair and a muscular physique. But it was ten-thirty in the morning, and he already reeked of alcohol.

"Lily, what the fuck are you doing here? Come on, get up, we're going home." He motioned next door.

"I'm in labour, Gary. My contractions are five minutes apart. Naomi was calling for an ambulance."

"We don't need no stinkin' ambulance. Now get your ass off that couch and come on!"

Lily shifted her legs to the floor, but another contraction hit. She grabbed her stomach and groaned.

Courtney looked at the clock. "Still every five minutes. I think you should call that ambulance."

Gary turned to her, tried to focus. "Who the fuck are you?"

She stuck her chin out. "I'm nobody you need to concern yourself with. You should be thinking about your wife and getting her to the clinic."

He gave a lop-sided grin and moved closer to Courtney. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe I want to think about you for a little while. Come 'ere, baby." He grabbed one of her breasts and squeezed.

"Get your filthy paws off me," she muttered angrily. "I've seen some disgusting things in my time, but you take the cake."

"There's cake?" He glanced around in a drunken haze. Turning back to Courtney, he sneered, "I don't need cake, sweet stuff. You're enough sugar for me."

Naomi grabbed his arm from behind. "Leave her alone, Gary."

"Get the fuck off of me." He raised his left arm, backhanding Naomi, sending her crashing to the floor.

"You son-of-a-bitch!" Courtney pounded his chest with both fists, kicking his shins as hard as she could.

Gary chuckled, grabbing her by the arms. "You're a feisty one. That's okay. I like feisty." He pressed his mouth to hers.

Courtney gagged, turning her face away. From the corner of her eye she saw Naomi climb to her feet, shaking her head to clear it. The determined redhead assumed a fighting stance, and Courtney, in Gary's arms, braced herself for impact.

Naomi yelled, swinging her leg, kicking Gary in the side.

He growled with anger and let loose of Courtney, turning to face his attacker. "Why you little bitch. I'm gonna pound the tar outta you."

"Bring it on, jackass. Just keep your paws off my girlfriend." She raised her hands in a martial arts defensive position.

"Your girlfriend? You mean you and her—" He looked from one to the other, laughing.

When his attention was diverted, Naomi kicked again, knocking him to his knees.

He stared up at her, a murderous look in his eye. Before he could stand, Courtney grabbed the first thing she spotted—a lamp—and cracked it over his head.

He groaned, collapsing on the floor.

"Gary!" Lily screamed, rushing to his side.

Courtney watched with disbelief as the pregnant woman dropped to her knees. She stepped around them and approached Naomi, pulling the woman into the circle of her arms. "Are you all right?"

Naomi touched her left cheek, working her jaw back and forth. "I think I'm going to have a shiner."

"We'll need to get an x-ray, make sure nothing's broken." She smoothed the ruffled red hair, planting a kiss on Naomi's forehead. "That was some fighting you did there, girlfriend. Nate'll be proud."

"Nate," Naomi murmured groggily. "Oh! I've got to call Ryan! He can haul this scum out of here."

"An ambulance too. Lily still needs an ambulance."

"Oh yeah." She reached for her phone on the table and punched in a number. "Pam? This is Naomi again. We need that ambulance over here now. Lily's contractions are pretty close together."

"Naomi?" The younger woman stood. Her pants were soaked, a puddle on the floor beneath her.

"Jesus, her water broke," Naomi said into the phone.

Courtney peered at the liquid. "It looks a little bloody, Naomi. Tell that ambulance to hurry!"

Naomi turned away from Lily and spoke firmly into the phone. "Lily's in trouble, Pam. We need a doctor, an ambulance, whatever you got. And the cops. Send Ryan too. Gary got a little out of hand."

Courtney watched her face. She saw Naomi frown and say, "I don't care if he's off today! Send somebody else! Gary's unconscious on my floor, and I don't want him waking up with just us women here. Now hurry!" She disconnected the call, tossing the phone back on the table. She looked at Courtney. "Can you get some towels from the linen closet, please?"

"Of course. Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yeah." Naomi waved her hand, going to Lily's side.

Courtney ran for the towels and hurried back. Naomi didn't seem okay, and she wanted to stick close to her. Handing the towels over, she glanced at the unconscious man. She wanted to throttle him. She hoped the police arrived quickly.

A siren in the distance grew closer. Before it got there, footsteps pounded on Naomi's front porch. One sharp knock, then the door flew open. Courtney saw a handsome, silver-haired man with a concerned look on his face rush in. "Lily! Are you okay?"

"Hi, Doc. I'm okay, but my water just broke. They think it looks a little bloody."

He glanced at the fluid and nodded. "A tinge of blood is normal. Zac's right behind me with the ambulance. Once you're at the clinic, we'll get you all checked out." He looked at the remains of the lamp then leaned down to Gary and pressed two fingers against his neck.

Courtney moved closer. "This is the doctor?"

"Yeah." Naomi nodded. "Dr. Browning."

Gary groaned and stirred.

"You all right, big guy?" the doctor asked.

He sat up. "Fuck. Head hurts. What happened?"

Courtney looked at him with disgust then back at the doctor. "I'd like you to check Naomi's face too. Gary backhanded her, sending her flying across the floor."

"What?" Dr. Browning frowned, stepping around Gary to reach Naomi. "Let me see. Did you lose consciousness?" He felt her facial bones carefully with both hands.

"No. I'm fine, Doc. Take care of Lily."

"We will. And we're going to take care of you and the big lug over there. Did you call Ryan?"

"Pam said he's off today. She's sending someone."

He glanced back at Gary, who sat rubbing his head. "What got into him?"

Courtney frowned. "Judging from the smell, about a twelve-pack of beer."

"Christ." Dr. Browning shook his head.

The front door opened again, and two paramedics with a gurney came in.

"Great. Let's get Lily to the clinic." The doctor supervised her loading onto it. He turned to Courtney. "When you're done here, will you see that Naomi comes in? I'd like to get an x-ray, just in case."

She nodded. "Yes, I will."

"Are you coming with me?" Lily called to Naomi as they wheeled her out.

"I'll be there. Give me a few minutes, but I'll be there, honey."

"Thank you." She relaxed, and they took her to the ambulance.

"What the devil?" Ryan wedged through the front door, around the doctor. "Is Lily okay?"

"Yes, just in labour." The doctor motioned to the living room. "Your patient is in there. He's been drinking, so if it's all right with you, I'll let you take him. As soon as I can, I'll stop by the jail and look him over."



"Okay." Ryan stepped in, absorbing the view of Gary sitting on the floor, muttering to himself.

Another man with long hair had been hanging back until the paramedics were clear. He stepped in behind Ryan. Courtney looked at him, decked out in swim gear.

"That's Rio, another of Ryan's partners," Naomi told her.

"Hey," the tall man said. "You're the author. And this would be Gary Martin, the drunk neighbour."

"I repeat," Ryan said with irritation. "What the *fuck* is going on here?"

"I thought you were off today." Naomi touched her bruised cheek.

Ryan motioned to his Hawaiian shirt and swim trunks. "Do I look like I'm working? I heard the call over the radio, and we were close."

"Sorry for the inconvenience," she replied.

He shot her another irritated glance and Courtney stepped up. "In a nutshell—Lily went into labour, and Gary took that as his cue to go have a few beers. She came here. We've been timing her contractions. Gary showed up, drunk as a smelly skunk, cursing and pawing me. Can you believe that? Right in front of his pregnant wife."

Ryan nodded. "I believe it."

"Hell yeah," Rio agreed.

"Anyway, Naomi reached for his arm and he backhanded her across the room."

"That stupid motherfucker!" Ryan stormed, moving next to Naomi. "Let me see."

"Don't touch it." She sniffled. "It hurts."

"Personally I think she's delirious." Courtney crossed her arms. "I want to get her to the clinic for an x-ray."

A deputy appeared in the doorway. Courtney recognised him from the pond, the day she and Naomi got a little too friendly.

"Boss?" he said.

"Roy, good." Ryan nudged Gary with the toe of his sandal. "Haul this *piece of shit* down to the station and lock him up. Then go over to the clinic and take Naomi's statement. I assume you want to press charges?" He looked at her.

"I don't know..." She held her head. "I'm kind of fuzzy."

"Yes we do." Courtney said firmly. "Absolutely, we want to press charges."

Ryan gazed from one woman to the other. "You know, that means you'll actually have to *be here* when he goes to court."

"I know." Courtney nodded. "We'll be here."

Naomi looked at her, still appearing dazed.

Rio grabbed a towel and dried the puddle on the floor as Roy and Ryan handcuffed a laughing Gary and dragged him out.

"Thank you," Naomi murmured to him.

"No problem," Rio answered. "Sorry this had to happen to you. Hope you'll be okay."

Courtney put her arm around her girlfriend. "She'll be just fine. I'm going to take care of her. Oh, and tell your friend Nate, Naomi came up fighting. She got in a couple of perfectly executed kicks, knocking that idiot to his knees."

"Then Courtney beaned him with a lamp." Naomi chuckled.

Rio smiled. "Nice work, ladies. I'll tell Nate. He'll be very proud."

He slipped out, and Courtney watched the police car and Ryan's SUV drive off. "Are you ready to go?"

"Where are we going?" Naomi blinked.

"To the clinic, sweetie. Lily's having her baby, and you're getting an x-ray."

"Okay." She let Courtney lead her to the SUV in the garage and buckle her in the front seat.

Courtney drove quickly, remembering the medical building was downtown near the bookstore. She parked and helped Naomi in.

"Thank heavens you're here!" a nurse exclaimed. "Lily's close. She's been asking for you."

"Naomi needs to be checked out," Courtney insisted.

"That can wait." Naomi waved a hand. "I should go to Lily. Do you want to come in?"

"Not really. Mind if I hang out here?" She glanced around the waiting room. It looked comfortable, with lots of magazines.

"Sure. See you soon." Naomi pressed a quick kiss to Courtney's lips, and the nurse led her to the back.

Courtney got a drink of water and then sat on a soft chair. She leafed through a magazine before deciding she couldn't concentrate on anything. The day had started off intensely in one way and was now even more intense in a completely different manner.

*What an ordeal!* For a supposed 'vacation', the whole trip to Cattle Valley had been eventful. She'd be glad to get home. *Or will I?* Courtney's head spun, and she hadn't even been hit.

She wondered how Naomi was holding up in the labour room. She really wanted to be with her but knew Lily needed her now. As soon as the baby was born— Courtney wanted to wrap herself around Naomi and never let go.

She leaned back in the comfortable chair and closed her eyes.

\* \* \* \*

"Hey, sleeping beauty." Naomi laid a hand on her arm. "You awake?"

Courtney started, sitting up quickly. "What time is it?"

"Almost five p.m. The baby's here and he's perfect. He and Lily are resting."

"Really?" Courtney smiled. "He's okay? I was worried about him."

"Little Danny is doing just fine. Seven pounds, six ounces, twenty inches long."

"Is that good? I'm afraid I don't know much about babies."

Naomi smiled, nudging her arm. "That's something you might just have to learn."

Courtney smiled back. "Maybe. So, how are you?"

"They took an x-ray and ran a couple of tests. I'm sure I'm fine."

"Is that what the doctor said?"

"Not exactly. He said he'd be out to see me in a minute. But I just want to go home. Will you take me, please?"

"Absolutely. As soon as the doctor says it's okay."

"Ooh!" Naomi muttered a frustrated groan and dropped into the chair next to her.

"Here he is now." Courtney watched the silver-haired doctor stroll into the waiting area.

"Naomi, you have a concussion. I'd like to keep you here overnight, just to be safe."

She shook her head. "Honestly, I'm fine."

"What are you concerned about, Doctor?" Courtney asked.

"Probably nothing. We just need to wake her a few times during the night, make sure she's fine."

"Could I do it? If I took her home, I mean?"

"I don't see why not. She'd probably get more rest at home than she would here. Let me get her some pain meds and some care instructions before you go."

"Perfect." Courtney smiled at him, and he walked out.

"Thank you." Naomi put her head on Courtney's shoulder.

"Anytime, baby. I love you." She turned her head, planting a kiss on Naomi's forehead.

"I love you too." Naomi sighed and closed her eyes.

## Chapter Nine

Naomi's head pounded when she opened her eyes. She was in her own bed but didn't remember how she got there. "Courtney?" She tried to sit up, but it hurt too much.

"Hey! You're awake. How do you feel?"

"Like I was run over by a truck."

"I have something for that. He said you could have more painkillers anytime after eleven."

"What time is it?"

"Midnight." Courtney got two pills, handing them and a glass of water to Naomi.

"Really?" She swallowed them then glanced around. It was dark outside. "How long have I been asleep?"

"Well, we left the clinic at five. You've been sleeping off and on since we got home. I've woken you a few times to make sure you were okay."

"You have? I don't remember."

Courtney smiled. "You took a nasty knock to the head. Slept right through a barrage of phone calls too."

"Who called?"

"I made a list, hang on." She left the room and came right back. "It might be easier to ask who *hasn't* called. Melissa called from the bookstore and said if you need anything at all, don't hesitate to ask. Palmer Wynfield called and said he and Ezra send you their best. Some man named Hal phoned, said to tell you he and Casey would be praying for you. That would be Casey the reverend, I assume?"

Naomi nodded.

"There's more names on the list. Pam, Tia, Jeremy, Isaac, Gill—like I said, a regular barrage."

Naomi smiled. Her head still ached, but her stomach felt warm and fuzzy when she heard about everyone who'd phoned.

"Oh, and Nate brought by some soup and cinnamon rolls from the bakery. He said if Kyle asks how you liked the éclairs to cover for him. I assume you know what that means?"

Naomi chuckled. "Nate loves Kyle's éclairs. I'd guess it to mean the éclairs didn't make it here."

Courtney smiled. "I get it. He's nice. You have really great friends here, babe."

"I sure do. I'm going to miss them."

"We need to talk about that. But later, when you're feeling up to it. Now you should rest."

"I feel very well rested, and those pills are working on my head quite nicely. Sit down and let's talk."

"Are you sure?" Courtney scooted on the bed next to her. "How's that?"

"Closer." Naomi patted her thigh. "Closer."

Courtney moved in so their legs were touching.

"That's better. First of all, I have to tell you how sorry I am, Courtney. You were totally right about Gary Martin, and I was wrong. If I'd listened to you, none of this would have happened."

"We don't know that. He was soused, and it's hard to say what might have happened if you hadn't let him in. He could have broken a window or worse in his anger."

"I suppose so. I just feel badly that I dragged you into this mess."

"I'm fine. You're the one with the concussion."

"Thank god you're fine." Naomi reached for her hand and kissed the back of it. "Thank god Lily and the baby are fine."

"We all are. You're going to be good as new in a few days, and Gary's in jail where he belongs."

"What about our flight to Chicago tomorrow?"

"I've already changed those tickets. I had to rummage through your purse for your credit card. I'm sorry about that. But I pushed the flight back a week."

"You did?" Naomi was surprised and pleased. "Thank you so much."

"My pleasure. I want you in top form when you meet my parents. But before we talk about that, I have a question for you. It's a biggie. Ready?"

Naomi smiled. "This another truth or dare?"

"Sort of. I would like the truth. I think I need to know."

“Know what, Courtney?”

Courtney looked down, rubbing a thumb over Naomi’s hand. “You haven’t told me anything about your family or your past in California. I sense there’s something there. Am I mistaken?” She glanced up, and their eyes caught.

“No, you’re not mistaken. Something happened to me in California. I couldn’t get away fast enough.”

Courtney took a deep breath and exhaled. “I’m not sure I want to hear this, but I have to. Please, tell me.”

“What I said about my parents was true. My father died quite a while ago, and my mom died just a few years back. I didn’t mention that I have a brother. David. He’s two years older.”

“You two aren’t close?”

“We used to be. After mom died, we were very close. In fact I dated his best friend.”

“Dated – was this a guy or a girl?”

“His name was Hank. And before you say anything, I know I should have told you I was a practising bi-sexual in California. Trying to figure out what I wanted and all that.”

“I see. I asked if you’d ever slept with a man. I never asked if you did it regularly.”

Naomi smiled. “I did.”

“Wow.”

“You’ve never been with a guy?”

Courtney shook her head. “Nope. I knew what I was – what I wanted – pretty much from day one.”

“Lucky you.” Naomi squeezed her hand. “Well, like I said, Hank and David were buddies. They both drank too much and smoked too much weed. At first I think David was too wasted to see how Hank treated me. In the end he knew and just never did anything.”

“How did he treat you?” Courtney asked with trepidation.

“Like Gary treats Lily, only worse. He beat me up regularly. The night he knocked out my tooth, I left him.”

“He knocked out your tooth? Oh my god, Naomi!” Courtney pulled her close. “I’m so sorry. I can’t imagine living through that.”

“It was difficult.” She wiped her eyes.

"Can I ask—and please don't take this wrong—but why did you stay? Why didn't you leave sooner?"

"I had nowhere to go. Hank made me feel like I was worthless, like no one else would take me, as if he was doing me a favour by hanging on so tight."

"That bastard. How did you get away from him?"

"He and David were drunk one night, nothing new there, but they started talking about me. David let it slip that I'd dated women, and Hank, well, he hit the roof. He was about as homophobic as a person could get—towards men or women—and said the idea made him sick. He beat the crap out of me until he finally passed out, and I left. I spent a few nights in the hospital, then a few more in a hotel until I decided to come here. That's when I moved to Cattle Valley."

"Did you press charges against him? Surely your brother—"

"My brother was afraid the cops might discover his secret drug stash. He never did a thing to help me out. I asked him to testify, and he refused. We haven't spoken since."

"That sickens me. You were a victim of domestic violence and a hate crime. What happened to Hank?"

"It turned out to be my word against his, but since I was the one in the hospital, the judge took pity on me. Hank was sentenced to eighteen months. I heard he served three before he was released."

"Oh my god." Courtney held her head. She slowly looked up into Naomi's eyes. "Has he tried to contact you? Does he know you're here?"

"I don't know. He hasn't shown up. I actually heard he got married a while back. Ryan thinks the bastard has moved on. In any case, he hasn't bothered me in years."

"You confided in Ryan?"

"Yes. There wasn't the greatest law enforcement in Cattle Valley before he was hired. I never felt good enough about anyone to approach them before. I knew right away I could trust Ryan. When Nate followed him here, we hit it off too. He was the one who suggested Taekwondo lessons."

"A fortuitous move." Courtney smiled. "Thank you for telling me. I know it wasn't easy."

"You were right, you deserved to know. If we're going to be together, I guess there's the possibility I'm putting you in danger."



Courtney kissed Naomi's hand again. "Oh, we're going to be together all right. It'll take more than some ogre named Hank to scare me away from you."

"I feel so stupid that I didn't recognise the signs in Gary. I don't know if I just tried to put California behind me, or what."

"You probably didn't want to see that kind of violence here in Cattle Valley."

Naomi nodded. "It's much easier not to think about it. I shouldn't have done that. I'd never forgive myself if anything happened to you because of my past. And I'm sorry I lied to you about my family. But as far as I'm concerned, I don't have one."

"You do now. My family is going to love you. They've pestered me for years to find a nice girl and settle down. My brother and his wife are great. They have three kids who think I'm a cool aunt. They'll climb all over you."

"That sounds nice." Naomi smiled. "I guess we'll have time to get to know each other."

"Actually, not much. I figured a week in Chicago would be enough time to pack up my things. Of course we'll have to drive back from Chicago to Cattle Valley so I can have my car here. I'm sick of that rental."

Naomi blinked. "What are you talking about?"

Courtney squeezed her hand. "Don't interrupt me now, just listen. I've been doing a lot of thinking these past few hours. You mentioned something last night about the person you are when you're with me. I started thinking about that. I'm a different person with you too. But I haven't exactly liked everything that person has done."

"I don't understand."

"You offered to give up your life—a life that you love—and move across the country with me. That was one hell of an offer."

"I meant it. I'm going to do it. You mean more to me than anything else, Courtney."

She squeezed both of Naomi's hands tightly. "I love that you were willing to do that. I hated that I wasn't. The more I thought about it, the more I realised that."

"But you have a family. I don't have anyone."

"Are you serious? After what happened today, and all the phone calls I fielded? You're honestly going to say you don't have anyone?"

Naomi smiled. "I guess maybe I do."

"I should say so. You have something huge here. And I want to be part of it, babe. I want to share in what you have. I used my family as an excuse, but really, my parents have

each other. They'd welcome the opportunity to travel out here and visit. My brother and his family will be just fine. We can see them on holidays, maybe invite them here for summer vacations."

"Really? You really mean it?" Naomi felt a warm flush spread through her.

"Absolutely. And you know what else? I'm going to tell my agent to go to hell and write all the books I want about Cattle Valley."

"Yay!" she clapped her hands together.

Courtney looked at her seriously. "But you know what cinched it?"

Naomi shook her head.

"When I saw Lily and Danny for just a minute before we left the clinic today. They looked so peaceful. I realised, when we have children, I want them to be born here. I want them to grow up in Cattle Valley, not the mean, cruel world I told you about."

Naomi felt tears trickling down her face but she didn't care. She grabbed Courtney and kissed her squarely on the mouth.

Courtney kissed her back then pulled away, chuckling. "Salty."

"It's not just me." Naomi wiped the tears streaming down Courtney's cheeks too.

"I love you, Naomi. I've never loved anyone more. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Truth?" Naomi's tears fell harder.

"Truth."

"It thrills me to hear that. I love you too, Courtney. I knew right away you were the greatest love of my life. I couldn't be happier."

Courtney leaned in, nibbling the hollow of Naomi's neck. "Oh, I bet you could. Give me about an hour – I'm going to take it slow and easy because of your concussion."

Naomi squirmed as the heated nuzzling turned into soft nips of flesh. "You wouldn't."

"I might." Courtney pulled back, smiling at her.

Grinning, Naomi yanked off her pyjama top and tossed it aside. "I dare you."

## **About the Author**

Jamie Hill was born and raised in the Midwest, where she continues to live with her husband and two sons.

She juggles her spare time to include writing every day, freelance editing, reading as she finds time, tinkering on the computer, listening to country music, as many naps as possible, and watching movies (especially scary movies) with her family.

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Jamie Hill loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

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