

# Paying Up --

Mary Wine

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## Chapter One

Christina Jennifer Faulkner listened to her own sigh and grumbled. Life was being difficult today. She leaned forward to glare at the computer sitting in her dad's store but the machine seemed less than impressed with her temper.

Well...she was going to win!

"Are you still messing with that order?"

"Yes, Dad, the satellite link isn't responding."

Again. She curled her lips back as the screen flashed her a broken connection message. She lifted her head as the open window let a low rumble in. The faint sound of a helicopter's blades made her push away from the computer. The dish wouldn't work right until the military aircraft was over the ridge. Her order would have to wait. Her frustration dissipated along with the aircraft noise. Funny how just knowing a little information made stuff easier to deal with. Most of the residents of Benton County assumed the helicopters used the area as a training ground.

She knew better. It was knowledge she just might be healthier forgetting but she wasn't stupid either. She'd seen the coal black military machines with her own eyes. Watched the men who commanded them, lived in the foreign bustle of a military compound that sat right up over the next ridge.

Looking around her father's shop, she smiled and a silvery giggle rippled out of her throat. Her dad ran a

clothing slash winter stock store. Heavy boots and thick jackets along with propane space heaters and snow gear.

Now, the real truth was, her dad just liked the woods in the winter. The shop was his personal sandbox and he enjoyed playing in it. The computer age was a menace as far as Tomas Faulkner was concerned. He liked a good magazine to order from.

"Where are you off to tonight?"

Her dad looked up from a pile of magazines to run his parental eye over her clothing. Her short skirt didn't miss his attention.

"Cynthia is nursing a twisted ankle. Mick needs some help tonight." The only bar in town was home to the best barbeque in Benton county. Known as The Pit, it was the center of Friday night in Benton. It was also Valentine's Day week. Mick Trunal was too good of a family friend to leave at the mercy of a howling room full of hungry men and no waitress to shuttle beer in between the replays of tonight's baseball game.

Her dad grunted and raised his finger at her. "Call me when you get there."

"I will, Dad." Standing up, she placed a kiss on his leathery cheek before she felt a sharp tug on her skirt.

"Jacobs know you're wearing that short a skirt?"

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"I don't really care if he does." Shane Jacobs hadn't even dropped her so much as a phone call in over two months. Who cared if she wanted to show a little thigh?

"Your attitude needs adjusting, my girl."

She blew her father another kiss as she grabbed her purse and headed for the door. Her dad thought Shane Jacobs walked on water. There was no point in debating any opinion she might have of him. The

man had returned her to parents who believed her dead.

She stepped out into the Benton night and smiled as the stars lit up the road. She lifted her shoulders as she began walking the short distance to the pool hall. It was only two blocks and the streets of Benton were perfectly safe to walk at night.

At least that was what she'd like to believe again. This time her sigh was bitter. How did you resent knowing the truth? The world wasn't a nice place, and living your days under that fairy-tale assumption was a good way to get killed before you even knew there was a gun pointed at your face.

Her shoulder itched and she rubbed it out of habit. Her bullet wounds were healed now, but the scars her mirror showed her haunted her. It was absolutely terrifying the way life would just rise up in a surge

of evil so thick, it devoured people before they even had time to think.

Right here in sweet-looking Benton, she and her best friend had ended up fighting for their lives.

Christina had to remind herself that it had really happened. Well, the four bullet wounds covering her torso weren't the product of her imagination.

Neither was Shane Jacobs. Looking up at the mountains that made up most of Benton County, she tried to see the house that she'd shared with the man. Oh, he'd been more of a jailer than a host but there were parts of the memory that refused to dwindle in her mind.

You are so pathetic, Tina.

Really! The man hadn't remembered she was alive and here she was casting puppy dog eyes at a moonlit forest. Beyond dumb. Love was something that most men were born with the natural ability to avoid. They faked it to get sex. A woman had to be smarter than their slick words if she wanted to keep her sanity intact.

A true smile lifted her lips. Roshelle had found one of those rare men who truly loved. You just couldn't

fake the way Jared Campbell followed her with his eyes. Her friend had emerged from their brush with evil and prevailed.

She would too. Picking up her feet, Christina headed toward her destination. Maybe she'd even get herself a date tonight. It was time to look forward.

\* \* \* \* \*

Major Shane Jacobs took after his parents. The man was a giant. Six-foot ten inches tall just like his father. He wasn't lanky, either, instead his shoulders were broad and his chest wide.

Roshelle hissed as the man used every millimeter of that chest capacity to yell at his men. It wasn't a loss

of temper explosion, instead it was a precise application of military command that shook the window

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behind her. The sentry guarding her snapped to attention before leaving to obey his commanding officer's

order.

Her son sent out a soft whimper as the overabundance of noise startled him. Roshelle frowned at Shane but he seemed completely undisturbed by her pout.

"Is there a problem, ma'am?"

Most women would have considered that rude. Roshelle admitted she would have been one of them just

a few short months ago. Now? Well, she was used to the giant and the way he ran her husband's unit. It wasn't sociable but it was polished in its deadly efficiency. Her mountain home was more of a military base most of the time. The Army Rangers that made up her husband's unit were always ready for any threat that might show up. Here, security took precedence over niceties, manners and even privacy. It was something she accepted as part of the man she'd married.

"Did you have an answer to that, ma'am?"

Her son jumped and filled his month-old chest before wailing in that glass-cutting tone of a newborn. Shane froze in his tracks as he looked at the one person on the premises who wasn't going to be impressed with his authority. Her son turned red as he screamed out his displeasure.

Her breasts instantly responded to her infant. Milk soaked the front of her shirt despite the fact that she'd fed Tivon only forty-five minutes earlier.

"OHHH... Shane Jacobs, you need to work off that steam somewhere away from me!"

The scent of her milk made her son frantic. His arms beat back and forth as he made loud, sucking sounds with his little mouth. She couldn't feed him now! Her breasts weren't full and that meant Tivon wouldn't end up with a full belly either. Getting a newborn on schedule wasn't easy and she glared at Shane as her son continued to demand a nipple.

"Yes, he does." Grace Campbell didn't raise her voice. The woman appeared from the side of the house and walked on silent feet toward Roshelle. Her mother-in-law still fascinated her. The woman held the most amazing will. It seemed to radiate around her.

She reached for her grandson and Tivon immediately stopped his screaming. His eyes locked with the emerald green ones of his grandmother as the baby seemed to connect with her on some higher level.

That was entirely possible. Grace Campbell was a psychic, and Roshelle had learned to respect that fact. Her husband's mind was as sharp as his mother's and the gift seemed to be part of her son's genetic

code.

Grace didn't make a single sound. She didn't cuddle or rock her grandson. Instead she supported his head in a steady hand as her arm took his weight. Tivon stuck a fist into his mouth while his little emerald

eyes stared into his grandmother's.

"Go shower. I'll deal with Jacobs."

Shane snorted but Roshelle had to resist the urge to laugh. Grace was a woman of few words, but she backed up each and everyone of them. Turning around she went looking toward that shower before she ended up smelling like spoiled milk. It would almost be worth the stench to stick around.

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Shane cursed under his breath and waited. He was out of line and knew it. There weren't many people on the mountain who could make him listen to them if he didn't want to, but his father's operative was one of them. Despite her lack of rank, she was his senior.

Grace was busy studying her grandson and seemed to be ignoring him. He knew better. The veteran psychic was razor-sharp even in midlife. She'd lived her entire life in a unit of Army Rangers. Nothing got

past the woman.

Her green eyes shifted to him before the corner of her mouth twitched up ever so slightly. She turned away from the house and walked down the front steps as she continued her mental connection with the baby.

Shane fell into step beside her. She sent those sharp eyes sideways at him before raising an eyebrow.

"Lonely, Jacobs? Sorry, but I don't need any company."

"I thought you were going to deal with me."

She stopped and glared at him. "The only person who can deal with your problem is you. It would be nice for the rest of us if you got around to doing that before that girl goes and marries some other resident

of the county. Then I might have to consider shooting you."

Shane halted and watched the woman head toward the trees. Grace wasn't much on civilization. She preferred the forest to the walls of a house and had raised her three sons among the trees.

He was used to that, actually more comfortable with rugged harsh edges opposed to civil niceties. He lived his life surrounded by military bluntness. His problem was the fact that he had an itch for the soft,

delicate female he'd met right here on his mountain.

Another curse rolled out of his mouth as Shane considered lighting a cigarette. The problem with that was he didn't smoke. The habit seemed to have become attractive just about the same time he'd met Ms. Christina Faulkner.

If he lit up, his mother just might kill him. If he didn't, Christina's memory might make him wish for that

death. Discovering someone else saw right through him didn't help. Grace had more than her fair share of

insight but with his luck, every damn man under his command knew what was eating him.

Shit!

Turning around he headed back across the front drive that separated his house from Jared Campbell's home. A dry laugh escaped his throat. Jared did in fact have himself a home now. It was funny that a woman had brought about that change.

Jared had found himself a rare gem in Roshelle. Damned if Shane had any clue how the woman did it, but she managed to balance out her life among the military element that surrounded her. Civilians didn't

transplant well into the classified realm that he and Jared lived in.

A silver laugh rose from memory as he recalled just how Christina tossed her blonde head of curls. Her blue eyes sparkled every time she giggled. His mouth wanted to twitch up into a stupid grin every time he

heard that voice, even in his memory. No woman should be allowed to keep a man company in his dreams if she hadn't discovered what kind of sheets he slept between. For Christ's sake, he hadn't even

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slapped her bottom.

No, you idiot, all you did was watch her.

Maybe that was the trouble. He'd watched the way she walked and the way she worried her lower lip as she contemplated trying to outwit him. She cuddled up with a pillow as she slept and always kicked the covers off her feet so that her little painted toenails peeked out.

The details of her sultry walk were embedded in his mind, the motion of her hips as they swayed back and forth. Even the soft feminine scent of her hair seemed to be recorded like classified data in his mind.

He'd made the mistake of touching her just one single time and the feel of her bottom across his legs still

made his cock itch.

The word idiot wasn't strong enough. Shane looked at his house and turned toward one of his helicopters instead. He was inventing work to avoid going into his house. Somehow, the place was uncomfortable without his guest in residence. Yup, idiot wasn't the word.

It was fool.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I've got an order for you."

Christina felt a chill run down her neck. She'd been serving customers all night but she knew that tone of

voice. It was deep and hard as steel. The shiver shaking her collided with her temper. She turned on her heel as she refused to shrink away from the man sitting in the corner of the pool hall side of The Pit.

Half the place was a bar and dance floor and the other side a pool hall. Rourke Campbell was leaning against the doorjamb with one booted foot crossed over the other. His arms were crossed over his chest giving him the lazy look of any Benton County resident looking for a little kick back fun.

She knew better. He was Jared Campbell's brother and as lethal as a cobra. Her time on their mountain had been filled with whispers of psychics. It wasn't something they told you about, instead she'd

witnessed it firsthand. This man, just like his brother, was an operative with the black forces of the Army.

They lived on the edge of life and melted into the erased pages of classified operations.

His lips curled back to show her an even row of teeth. His eyes were the same emerald green as Jared's and seemed to cut right into her soul. She stomped her foot into the wooden floor as the urge to scurry off to the kitchen filled her immediate thoughts.

She stood in place and let his eyes inspect her. It wasn't the first time since her return from his secret home that she'd noticed someone watching her. She'd kept her word to his father, Sheriff Brice Campbell. Not a single word had passed her lips about the compound over the ridge. But that didn't mean his family had any intention of letting her memory dim. They watched her and made sure she knew it.

Sometimes the sheriff just dropped in to her father's store, other times it was just that tingle on her neck that called her attention to some musclebound man sitting in a car outside a shop she'd stopped into. Their eyes set them apart from other civilian men. She'd never understood why military men said the word civilian like it referred to another species than their own.

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Now she understood.

"Don't worry, I haven't bitten anyone all day."

"Oh, well, I think that means you're about to snap any second. We have a leash law in The Pit. All animals must be secured in the patio area."

He laughed at her. Tipped his head back and let a rumble of male amusement hit the ceiling. His eyes sparkled when they caught her again. A sharp glint of appreciation made her shift in her shoes. Rourke Campbell was certainly every inch a solid hunk of male but she didn't want him to start looking at her like

a woman.

One dark eyebrow rose in response to her reaction. His lips settled into a grin that was just a little too sympathetic. Confusion hit her but she kept her lips closed. This family didn't answer questions, they bred them.

"If you've got some coffee back there, bring a mug back for me. Black, double strong if you've got it." Oh, they had it. Double black was regular stock at The Pit. For that matter, most establishments that had

a bar doubled as a coffee house. It was just the little fact that Rourke Campbell was planning on staying around long enough to drink that coffee that made her frown on her way to the kitchen.

It was like she was stuck somewhere between her kidnapping ordeal and her real life. Yes, she was home but she wasn't living her life. Instead she felt a rope attaching her to the life and death struggle that

had ended with four bullets hitting her flesh.

You couldn't go back in life. Maybe that was the lesson she needed to accept. Once innocence was gone, you had to make your way as best you could. Using her hip, she pushed the door open while balancing a tray with Rourke's coffee on it. She lifted her chin as she walked back toward the man. She did know about his life—so what? She'd keep her promise and somehow find the courage to stop worrying so much about the possibilities of the hard world out there.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dr. Roshelle Campbell, you look remarkably domesticated this evening."

Roshelle didn't jump. A little smile lifted her lips as she managed to control her need to react to Jared's brother's games. Rourke enjoyed appearing out of a shadow almost as much as her husband did.

"And you look like someone I've repeatedly asked to knock on the door."

Rourke showed her his teeth in response. "Why? You can feel me if you pay attention."

His words sparked a rise of pride that spread over her face. Roshelle enjoyed it as Rourke continued to grin at her. She could feel him. Her empathic senses were gaining focus every time she made herself understand them. It was something that took practice and her husband's family was quite willing to help

her get all the practice she needed.

"Guilty. I was half asleep."

"Well, I'm not. I stopped and had some coffee tonight. That friend of yours makes a mean cup of **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, <http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html>** double black and delivered it in a skirt so short, I'm still thinking about it."

Now that she was paying attention, Roshelle felt the unmistakable rise of heat in her living room. She looked around the room but the men held their faces in calm masks that didn't give her any clue as to who found Rourke's statement so offensive.

Her husband jerked his head up to catch her eyes. Jared had entered her mind the night they met and the

link was strengthening every day. Their son was chewing on his father's finger and looking impossibly tiny

next to her large husband. Tivon wasn't small either! The baby had arrived at nine and a half pounds and

ate like a wolf cub.

Jared suddenly looked at his brother and raised an eyebrow. "I didn't know Christina was working at The Pit."

"Me either, but I'm making a mental note to start having coffee there more often. She's got legs that reach to her rib cage."

This time Roshelle felt that emotion turn into anger. Her eyes moved to Shane Jacobs without conscious

thought. They went where her mind was centered. Shane was always around. He was her husband's partner so she was comfortable with the man's company now.

Tonight, jealousy bled off him like a vapor. His face was a mask of military control but his eyes simmered with the heat her mind told her was nearing an explosive level.

Roshelle pulled her eyes off Shane. Rourke knew exactly what his words were igniting in the man.

Unless she missed her guess, he was baiting Shane with that comment about Christina's legs. All of the men surrounding her were hard. They lived their life on the edge and played just as hard. Even something

as common as friendly advice was handed out differently between them. In this case, Rourke was reaching for a piece of meat and daring Shane to claim it.

A naughty little grin played with her lips as she considered just what would happen if Christina had any idea that she was being talked about between the men. Angelic looks aside, her friend would transform into Satan and make every last male hormone suffer.

Boy, did she miss her friend!

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you off to The Pit again?" Tomas Faulkner wasn't happy about her skirt—again. A daughter just knew her father's eye. The urge to squirm was building as she watched her dad's forehead crease into even deeper folds.

"Daddy, it's a sprained ankle, she can't just get over it in one night. Mick needs the help and it's not like

I don't know every person who comes into the place."

Her dad grunted but raised a finger at her. "We do get strangers, my girl. You tell Mick I said to have one of his boys take out the garbage. I don't want you out back in the dark."

"Yes, Dad." She rolled her eyes and her dad used his finger to tap his cheek. Rising onto her toes, she

gave him his kiss before she felt the tug on her skirt hem again.

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“We are going shopping on Sunday. You’ve grown out of your skirts.”

Her dad stood in the doorway and watched her walk down the block.

“No, Dad, I grew into my skirts.” But how did you tell your father something like that?

The Pit was two blocks from her father’s store. Up one and across the next. Turning the corner, she walked out of her father’s sight and The Pit came into view.

A man stood in the barbershop doorway, leaning against the brick façade. He was facing toward her, his face masked by the shadows. Her feet froze as she considered him. Unless he was asleep on his feet he could see her but no greeting came from him.

Her father’s warning was fresh in her mind. They did get strangers in Benton and any of the locals would

have said hello by now. There was nothing open on the block of small shops, only The Pit at the end of the sidewalk. Music drifted on the night breeze from the open front door, along with laughter.

Fear tingled along her spine as she recognized the perfect setting for another abduction. Her blood turned icy as every muscle she possessed tightened almost unbearably. Terror was trying to capture her completely and reduce her to a screaming animal that reacted instead of thought.

She refused to do that! Clutching at her courage, she fought against the tide of remembered horror. She found her cell phone in her pocket and opened it without looking before using her sense of touch to slip up to the number five. That would speed-dial her dad in a second and he’d be grabbing his shotgun in another second.

Her feet had already taken one step backward as she felt the number five under her fingertip.

Headlights

flashed over her as a truck came up the street, and its brakes squealed as it stopped next to her. The passenger window was already down, Web Nelson grinned at her across the front seat.

“Care for a lift to the end of the block?”

Christina sent Web a smile as she reached for the door handle. Relief hit her as she climbed into the truck and away from the stranger in the doorway. Her eyes flickered back to the shadow in the doorway and found it empty. Her fingers shook as she tried to control the fear eating away at her. It twisted her stomach with nausea as she climbed into the truck. Her head turned as they drove past the doorway.

It was completely empty.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I might have to kick your ass.” Rourke’s words were too quiet. Shane shrugged his shoulders as the man jumped from the limb of a tree.

“You can try, but I’m betting on me tonight.”

Shane felt the other man scan his thoughts lightly. It was a feeling he had grown up with. Tonight, he was

sort of glad Rourke Campbell was a psychic—maybe he’d get the hell away from him before he had to explain to Colonel Jacobs, his father and superior, exactly why he felt the need to smash one of their operatives in the face.

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Shane didn’t want to talk about Christina with anyone and he wanted Rourke Campbell at least three states away from her, too. Rourke suddenly lifted his hands in surrender.

“Fine, I get it. But...” His hands lowered and hooked into his belt. “You scared her, buddy. Bad.” A row of white enamel flashed at him in the night. “And if I didn’t think that fact was going to hurt you, I’d

be happy to let my fist do the job.”

Rourke dissipated into the night as Shane cussed. He hadn’t meant to frighten her. Training had a way of

merging into instinct. Hiding his face was practically bred into him from a lifetime of military training. He looked down the street at The Pit and thought long and hard about a cold beer. That short little skirt just teasing her thighs made Shane forget about the beer. There wasn't a red-blooded man in Benton who wouldn't be enjoying the view and he just might end up in jail if he had to sit there and watch them

looking at his woman.

Potato sack dresses suddenly gained appeal.

## Chapter Two

"Girl, something is eating you!"

Sandra, the cook for The Pit, shook her head as she handed over another order of buffalo wings. She split her lips with a smile that displayed a silver crown, and shook her head again. A spatula was brandished at Christina like a wand.

"You are too young to be so troubled."

"No troubles here."

"Shut your mouth, girl, I see it in those eyes." Sandra looked back at her grill and Christina took her chance to escape. She caught herself looking around The Pit with suspicious eyes and almost screamed. That was it!

Her temper arrived to banish her demons. Better late than never, she supposed! Delivering the appetizer to a couple of truckers, she cleared away their empty mugs. The Pit was quiet now, the people hanging around were shooting pool or just watching a replay of the game on the big screen television.

She could go home. Mick didn't promise service at all hours in his bar. Once the place quieted down for

the night you had to grab your own order from the kitchen window. She had been inventing reasons to stay away from her walk home.

Her temper simmered as she chewed on that fact. It was so easy to think you were over something until you had to face it. The more she thought about it, the madder she got.

"Hey, Mick, I'm heading home."

"Thanks, Chrissy." He sent her a wink over the bar and turned back to the man he was talking to. Half

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the town still called her Chrissy. Yeah, Shelly and Chrissy, the ponytail twins! Sometimes she wondered

if Mick ever noticed that she traded in her hair ribbons for a bra.

On second thought, maybe she didn't need to know. She stepped out into the February night and shrugged into her coat. The chilly air slapped her cheeks making her smile.

The expression faded as she neared the doorway of the barbershop. A shadow filled the doorway.

Setting her teeth into her lip she forced her back straight and walked by it. Nothing moved or materialized from the spot. Whoever he was, the man was long gone now. Picking up her pace she headed around the corner toward home.

"I didn't mean to scare you."

"You didn't scare me." Christina had to drag a huge lungful of air into her chest to make up for the acceleration of her heart. The muscle was beating frantically as she looked at the man standing in a doorway. He looked lazy and relaxed but the sheer size of him could easily overwhelm even the most confident of people.

"I didn't mean to."

Shane Jacob's voice kept her heart racing as she looked at the moon-bathed features of his face. There was a surge of some emotion bubbling through her that made her frown. It felt like she was happy to see

him.

"That helicopter you fly has messed up your hearing."

His lips parted to show her an even row of teeth.

Her little nipples were hard enough to cut glass. Shane couldn't stop staring at the twin points of tattletale

display. Fear was another form of stimulation—desire was almost its twin and the two were incredibly closely related. The breasts on a female were hooked into her sensory receptors, the nipples responding to any stimulus that was strong enough.

His mouth suddenly watered at the idea of those little nipples responding to him stimulating her body.

His

body sent up a surge of need that made his skin itch to be bare. Watching wasn't going to satisfy him anymore. Needs surfaced from his mind that he'd never allowed himself to examine too closely.

Tonight it was crystal clear. His cock slowly stiffened as he looked at the pair of blue eyes that had been

keeping him company.

“So, your nipples get hard for any man you meet?”

“What?”

Shane pushed away from the doorway and moved closer to her. She stared at him in shock as her eyes tried to read his expression in the poor lighting. Raising a hand he gently stroked one little point and listened to her gasp of outrage.

“These little points say you are experiencing a rush of sensation. Either that resulted from a shock, or you

and I have been sharing the same dreams about each other.”

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Her palm hit his cheek. Shane turned his head with the blow to keep the energy from hurting her arm.

He

grabbed her hand and held it prisoner in his larger one.

“Tsk tsk, what a temper.” Shane rubbed the flat of her hand as she tried to jerk it away.

“Let go!”

“I don't think so.”

He continued to rub her smarting hand. Christina jerked her arm again but he simply lifted an eyebrow at

her and moved his grip up her arm one hand length.

“Is that your idea of a warning?”

He shook his head and stopped rubbing her hand. Two fingertips gently traced the delicate skin of her inner wrist. Pleasure raced up her arm making her shiver. The hand holding her arm in place tightened as

his fingers made a second pass before he lifted her hand and pressed his lips onto her palm. Fire shot up her arm at the hot brush of his male lips. For some reason she was acutely aware of the fact that he was a

man and she a woman. An insane desire to drop her eyes to the crotch of his pants made her heart double its pace again.

“For every action, there is a reaction. When you touch me, Christina, I get to touch you back.”

“You touched me first.” She yanked on her arm because she just couldn't control the impulse. Her skin seemed to become one single point of sensation. It raced from her wrist to her nipples where the tight nubs contracted even further and began to ache. A slow flow of fluid eased down her passage as she battled against the idea of turning her hand to touch the solid muscles of the arm holding her.

“Right after I scared you.”

“You did not frighten me, Shane Jacobs!”

“Then I aroused you.”

His voice was rich and dark. It challenged her to admit to either emotion. Both put her at a

disadvantage. Instinct warned her to run, but temptation begged her to stay. She licked her dry lips before pulling her brain into focus.

“Well, I’ll remember not to make the mistake of touching you again. Now, let my arm go!”

He did and her jaw fell open in response. Shane ground his teeth together as he held his body in position. The need to flee was racing across her eyes. The tip of her tongue passed over her bottom lip making him groan. He wanted to taste that lip, lick along its surface and find out what her mouth felt like

under his.

“Sure about that? I think you’ll be the one touching me first next time, Christina.”

“When tarantulas are lovable.”

He flashed those pearly white teeth at her and, lifting his huge hand, spread the fingers out and mimicked

a large spider crawling. “You appeared to like the way these fingers felt on your delightfully soft skin.”

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His voice dipped even lower as the edge of it roughened. “I love the way you feel. I can’t wait for you to

pay your debt.”

His voice was pure temptation. Her body begged her with little jerks to move closer to that rich, deep sound of male promise. Her logic screamed to be heard over the clamoring of her skin. Both sets of impulses got mixed together as she just stood there trying to understand but her eyes dropped to the front

of his pants. The thick bulge pushing against the fabric made her body ache. Her passage suddenly felt empty as it sent a rush of fluid down its walls. His cock was swollen and thick inside those pants and her

body wanted to get much, much closer to its hard length.

“What are you talking about?”

“Our bet. You look nice and healthy, so I won.” He stepped up next to her and tipped her chin up with his hand. The warm scent of his skin surrounded her, making her belly tremble with need. Her lungs deepened their next breath to pull even more of that male scent into her body. Heat erupted in her womb

and bled down the walls of her passage. The hard muscle of his body bushed against her making her yearn for a tighter embrace that would bring that hard cock into contact with her. Her thoughts seemed centered on the idea that she had caused his arousal. Excitement poured from the thought that he had come to see her and his cock was hard in response to her.

“That means you owe me a kiss.”

His mouth captured hers as his arm snaked around her waist and held her against his body. Her hands landed on his shoulders to shove him away but instead sent her the realization of how delightfully powerful he felt beneath her fingertips. There was hard muscle packed onto his shoulders making her hands shake as they flattened and pressed against him.

His kiss wasn’t soft. His mouth moved over her lips in a smooth conquest as the hand cupping her chin pulled her jaw open to admit his tongue. He thrust it deeply into her mouth as she moaned around the hard male taste of him. She was intently aware of how aggressive his body was. His strength seeped into

her body setting off a wave of need so powerful she slumped against his frame and clung to his shoulders.

The tip of his tongue traced the length of hers. Slow and deep, he stroked her tongue until hers twisted with his. The arm across her waist slipped down over her hips to her bottom. His fingers stroked each cheek before curling around one half and pressing her hips forward. Her hips thrust forward and found the hard bulge she’d admired. She was acutely aware of her mons and the passage inside her body

heating and moistening for his hard cock.

Fluid flowed down the walls of her passage as his tongue thrust deeply into her mouth. A whimper escaped her throat as her blood raced too quickly through her veins. It all moved too fast! Her body was too hot! She pushed frantically against the wall of male animal that held her. The need to escape made her tear their mouths apart as she twisted in his grasp.

Shane spun her loose. His breathing was harsh as he looked at her nipples. Christina slowly backed away from the raw passion blazing from his face. The man was always so composed, his face a mask that never hinted at his emotions. Tonight it was harshly cut with the primitive need to take. His nostrils slightly flared as she stepped back even further. It wasn't the look on his face that frightened her the most, it was the huge bulge under his fly that told her he was on the edge of control. The thick rod straining against his fatigues promised her that he wanted more than a kiss. The swollen folds of her sex

screamed at her to invite his need closer so that it could feed her own hunger.

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The animal in the man wanted to mate with her. Spread her body and thrust into the wet channel between her thighs. Leave his mark in the most basic and primitive of ways. She shook her head as she backed away. Shane forced his feet to stand in place. The sweet scent of her pussy drifted on the night air making him battle against the urge to capture her. Instead, he watched her struggle against the wave of

desire flickering across her body. She would be his, just as soon as she got used to the idea.

Her body was a jumble of impulses that slammed into a brain that frantically tried to sort them into understanding. The only idea that rang through her brain was the certain knowledge that once this man took her, she would belong to him. It would be irreversible and her surrender viewed as unconditional. Her pride rebelled against that truth even as her passage wept in agreement.

"I am going home now."

He nodded his head as he crossed his arms over his chest. It made the muscles of his arms bulge out even more. Her eyes slipped over his strength and her lips softened with feminine need for that strength.

"Then go, but I'll be back for my kiss."

Her heart jumped as her eyes widened. "You just took it."

He shook his head and grinned at her. "You bet me a kiss and that means you still owe me one, freely given kiss. You're welcome to come back over here and pay up right now."

She turned around and ran instead. Shane moved after her. He picked out the details of her bottom as she scurried away from him. The full, sultry shape of her hips that seemed to be swaying just for his eyes.

They were like a neon sign that was aimed at his cock. The thing jerked and pulsed in his pants making him cuss as each step sent pain through his hard-on.

He followed her until she shut her front door and turned the bolt. A harsh grunt of approval hit the night as he walked the perimeter of her dad's shop. Everything was secure but his eyes picked out the weaknesses in the structure's defenses. All the ways someone might gain unlawful entry.

Shane felt rage boil up inside him. He actually enjoyed the emotion as it took the bite off his hunger.

His

cock still throbbed but it was a dull steady ache that mixed with his rage giving him the balance to walk back to where he'd parked his Hummer. He slipped behind the wheel and punched the accelerator to the floor.

The winner in any battle was the man who took the time to prepare. A true warrior never faced off in a struggle without planning his attack. The aching cock in his pants was his reward for facing Christina without a plan.

He wouldn't be making that mistake again.

Shane pulled into his driveway and simply walked right into his house. The ranger on duty issued him a salute that he barely returned. There was no such thing as off-duty for him. He ran a classified ranger unit

that didn't exist. That meant his personal life and his military one were a single entity.

If his men didn't know where he'd gone tonight, they would know where he was headed tomorrow. A low snarl of approval came from his lips as he considered that idea. Good. He wanted every male on the

planet to think of Christina as his. He wanted them to believe he'd snap their necks if they even thought about looking at her long legs.

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He marched into his bathroom and turned the shower on. Shane left the light off—the dark fit his mood as he stripped. Moonlight streamed in through the bathroom window. He folded his clothes as he took them off, out of habit, and his boots were lined up against the wall, his gun slipped on the top of the shower stall on a small corner shelf that he'd installed just for his sidearm.

The weapon never sat out of his reach, ever. It was his life. He stepped into the shower and bared his teeth as the icy water coated his hot skin. He'd only turned on the cold water, craved the contrast of temperature against his raging blood.

His cock stuck out from his body, refusing to slacken as the taste of Christina's lips lingered on his. Her scent was deep in his lungs as his cock gave another twitch at the idea of the hot arousal he'd smelled on

her. She'd been wet for him. So wet, he smelled it right through her clothing. His erection stood firm in the cold water as hunger chewed at the logic that had sent him away from her bed.

He curled his fingers around the swollen rod, slipping up and down its rigid length. Pleasure joined the ache as he worked his hand faster. His seed splashed onto the tile as his lips curled away from his clenched teeth.

His mind sharpened as his body's demands quieted. Stepping out of the stall he reached for a towel and began to plot.

### **Chapter Three**

Christina woke up tired. Her sheets were pulled and twisted from her bed and her hair was a nest of knots that pinched her scalp as she forced a brush along the strands.

She looked at her reflection like the body in the mirror belonged to a stranger. Those couldn't be her breasts. The globes looked swollen. The nipples drawn into little puckered nubs that still hadn't returned

to the flat state they normally lay in.

Her skin seemed almost flushed and it was ultra-sensitive too. She lingered over the details of her makeup and hair because the bra she'd removed from her dresser looked like a torture device. Her breasts were still pulsing with little zips of feeling that screamed against the idea of anything containing them except Shane's hands.

She didn't want to put her jeans on. The folds of her sex felt too crowded already, and the idea of stepping into her panties made her mad. All she wanted to do was put on the lightest of cotton sundresses and leave her skin free to feel the air.

Christina hissed with frustration and pulled her clothing on.

Shane Jacobs had done this to her! She didn't know how but somehow he'd pushed some button in her brain that turned her gender against her common sense. Interrupting her normal morning thinking were flashes of his face, images of the way his arms bulged with muscle and the feel of his hard erection against

her belly.

The stack of work she had waiting for her battled against her mental fantasies. She made mistakes and

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forgot details that were so practiced in her routine, she would have laughed if the cause wasn't so frightening.

Oh, she was scared. It made her furious but Christina couldn't very well lie to herself. She'd been kissed

before. On a hundred dates that she couldn't seem to remember faces from. All she saw was Shane and the way he bared his teeth at her.

The boys she'd dated had kissed her but Shane had taken her mouth and tasted it like a man. Her body blossomed with the memory as her sex actually heated and sent its lubricating flow down the walls of her

passage just from the memory.

Yeah, she was scared. Right down to her virginity. She had never gone past first base with any date and never let them see her breasts or touch her nipples. Maybe she had known that her body would tumble into insanity like this. Perhaps that was the reason she had clung to her resolve to deny the offers of love

that had been presented as reasons to yield her body.

Her body shivered as she recognized the basic fact that Shane wouldn't be thinking about getting to second base with her. That man was going to strip her body and take it through the entire game, pitch by

pitch, without missing a single inning.

Her only chance was to refuse to take the field and leave him on the pitching mound alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dad, can I drive a truck to The Pit?"

Her father immediately stood up. His eyebrows slanted over his eyes as he aimed sharp eyes at her.

Christina offered him a smile she hoped was normal. Her stomach was working itself into a huge knot as

the sun set and the time for her walk to The Pit neared.

She didn't own a car anymore. When she'd been kidnapped it had been right out of the front seat of her own car. Out on one of Benton's mountain roads. Two trucks had forced her to stop or collide with them. She still had no clue what became of the car. Her kidnappers had been well-funded and a tow truck came with her abduction. They had hauled away her car just as they had taken her hostage. There hadn't even been skid marks to tell anyone where she'd disappeared from.

Her parents came up with excuse after excuse to keep her away from a car dealership. She had just let it slide because her father owned all three trucks that he'd ever bought in his lifetime. In the four months she'd been home, she'd spent three of them attempting to get her insurance company to pay a settlement

on her previous car. With no wreckage, it was proving to be an uphill climb.

But she wasn't walking to The Pit tonight. She'd rather face her father and ask for a ride before risking another run-in with Shane in the dark.

She would overcome her urges, her gender was not going to control her. Her kidnapping ordeal was just

making the connection with Shane more intense. That had to be the reason her body leapt under his touch. He was part of that cloak and dagger world that had swallowed her up and spat her back out, barely clinging to her soul.

As long as she avoided the man, her body would return to normal. That shouldn't be too hard. Shane didn't belong in her world. He stuck out like a lion at a cat show. Sure he might prowl around the dark

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edges but he'd stay away from the bright lights.

"Sure, take Betty."

“Thanks, Daddy.”

He pointed to his cheek and she ran over to give him his kiss. He had a name for each truck and seemed to like them all just about the same amount. “Betty” was the smallest of the three and the one he knew she liked to drive the best. But since they were each her daddy’s babies, she always let him choose which one to loan her.

After all, she was well past the age of being in the nest. That was another thing her parents kept finding reasons to delay. Moving out on her own once again. But she needed a job for that and her position at the courthouse had been filled while she healed from her gunshot wounds. It wasn’t exactly fair to discharge the current employee since everyone had believed she was dead at the time.

She needed a car so she could drive to a better job that would give her the means to set up her own house. Instead, she unlocked her dad’s truck and drove it toward The Pit.

Tomorrow she was going to buy a car. She needed to get out of Benton and back on track with her own life. Shane Jacobs was part of the things she needed to move beyond.

That meant he had to be retired to her memory as well.

\* \* \* \* \*

Instead he was sitting at a corner table waiting for her. A mug of double black coffee was already resting

in his hand like he knew she wouldn’t serve him if she could avoid it.

His lips offered her a grin as his eyes watched her. Those sharp eyes followed her everywhere for hours.

Her stomach turned into one solid mass of tension that wouldn’t let her drink a glass of water.

The grin melted off his face as the strain bled through her cheerful mask. But he kept his eyes on her.

She fumbled her third set of mugs before lifting her head to stare at him. Somber eyes returned her gaze.

Shane had the most amazing eyes she’d ever seen on a man. They were hazel but so calm and steady she

could find peace while staring into them. She had forgotten just how much she enjoyed looking into his eyes. It seemed so completely right.

He stood up and walked straight toward her. The place was quiet and almost empty. His eyes held hers the entire way until he leaned over the bar to whisper next to her ear.

“I have a question for you. Answer it and I’ll leave.”

A tiny wave of disappointment surfaced as she considered him leaving.

“All right.”

“Are you a virgin?”

His eyes sliced into hers as he watched her face while asking his question. He was making certain he caught her honest reaction. It sprang up as a blush that stained her cheeks crimson. Her jaw dropped

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open but she couldn’t find any way to conceal her innocence from him. The look that sprang into his eyes

made her shiver.

“Answer the question, Christina. Have you ever taken a man’s length?”

“You can’t just ask me a crude question like that,” she hissed under her breath and looked around the room quickly. No one was paying them a bit of attention but it felt like everyone could tell exactly what they were talking about. Her face burned so hot, she was sure the couple in the dark corner could see her blush. “I don’t have to listen to this.”

His hands landed on top of hers to keep her in place. His thumbs eased under her wrists to stroke the skin of her inner wrists once more. This time her body jumped to attention. It didn’t heat up in stages like

last night, it jumped into full arousal with just the first touch. Her nipples instantly hardened. His eyes

lowered to her sweater and found the twin points before rising back to her face again.

She gasped at the hard glitter staring back at her this time. There was nothing friendly about him, not a single shred of peace in his hazel eyes. Pure male aggression aimed its way into her head.

“You don’t want to push me, honey. The way you look at my crotch drives me insane and the smell of your wet pussy makes me want to rip you open but I don’t want to hurt you. So answer my question, have you ever taken a cock into your sweet little body or any kind of sex toy?”

“No.” She hissed the word and hoped he’d choke on it! “Bet or no bet, that won’t be changing either.” She pushed off the bar forcing him to let her go or have her body jerk to a halt like a freshly caught fish.

His hands lifted in a split second as he curled his fingers into fists.

“I answered you, so leave.”

His eyes lowered to her nipples instead. They lingered over her breasts and wandered up the curve of her neck.

“When you make a bet with me, Christina, you’d better plan on paying up.” His eyes turned hard as he leaned back across the bar. “Or I’ll hound you until you die.” His hazel eyes softened as he stroked the side of her face with a warm hand. “But I won’t hurt you, so don’t be mad at me. You want me, honey, I can smell how wet you are right here. Maybe that isn’t warm and flowery but it’s honest and I don’t play little boy games.”

He stood up and straightened to his full height. The hard cut of his body screamed at her to invite him to

do everything a man did with his woman. A hundred dark whispers from her fantasies urged her to indulge his whims. He suddenly grinned at the look in her eyes and leaned toward her to whisper once again.

“I see your face when I close my eyes at night. Every night since I took you back to your father my house has been empty.”

He was gone a second later. A silly smile covered her face as she thought about his admission. He hadn’t come back for their dumb bet.

Shane had come back for her.

\* \* \* \* \*

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He was watching her when she left The Pit. There was no mistaking that the Hummer parked on the curb was Shane’s. Oh, it was plain-looking, not really even military-looking. The dull brown all-terrain vehicle could have belonged to another resident.

It didn’t. The huge form of the driver, even in the dark, was Shane and she just knew it. It was almost like she felt his eyes on her. The Hummer wheeled away from the curb the second she drove past. It made a U-turn and followed her truck around the corner. He pulled over again to watch her park in front

of her dad’s store.

The bottom floor was the store and the upper floor the family residence. Her dad owned a small cabin up the mountain but she had been raised above his shop. Unlocking the door, Christina slipped inside, closed it and peeked through the curtain.

Shane had moved. The curb was empty almost making her question whether or not the man had really been there. She shook her head and turned toward the stairs. He wasn’t like the men she’d been raised around. Even her dad.

Shane was some kind of predator that had been trained to deadly perfection. Just normal everyday things were done differently than she’d always seen. Things like walking. Shane was always watching his

surroundings, his eyes moving and recording anything that moved. Tonight, he’d sat with his back to a

wall and both doors clearly in sight. He didn't sit behind the table either. He angled his chair away from it and left his mug on the edge. He could have sprung out of his chair in a second flat. No fumbling around chairs or the table, the man made certain of that before he sat down. He always expected something to happen and made sure he could respond when it did. Standing in front of her mirror she looked at the evidence that said he had the right to live that way. Four bullets had ripped through her body in a split second. Shane hadn't been there. He and Jared had left her and Roshelle under the guard of their men. The attack had come so quickly, it was over before she realized her life was in danger. Everything had gone silent as she listened to her own heart beating because she expected it to stop forever. Instead, she'd looked into those hazel eyes of Shane's and discovered exactly how much she liked them. Hope had stared back at her as he tended to her wounds, and despite the fact that she'd told him she thought she was dying, somehow he'd made her believe she wouldn't. And she had lived, so she owed the man a kiss. A shiver shook her body. She watched her nipples tighten in the mirror as warm liquid heat slipped down the sides of her passage. She felt so needy with an ache in her womb that clamored for her to answer her needs. Instead she crawled into her bed without her clothing. Her skin refused to be covered and that was the only desire that she seemed to be able to answer.

## Chapter Four

"Damn lovers' holiday." Two dull thuds hit the floor as her dad muttered some more. Standing up from the small desk in the little office of her dad's shop, Christina looked at her father as he scowled at whatever he'd dropped on the floor. Her movement caught his attention and he gave her his disgruntled male expression.

"Your mother has booked us a romantic getaway."

"I'm really sorry, Daddy." She held the corners of her lips down because her dad considered fishing in a remote cabin romantic. The very fact that the two-room structure had indoor plumbing was his idea of luxury. How he had ever married her fashion plate mother was a mystery.

"I'll run the shop, Dad, no worries."

"Aw, forget it! No one came in on last Valentine's Day. Leave the door locked."

"Tomas! Ready or not..."

That was her mother's normal warning before unleashing her newest shopping trip look. There was the tap-tap of high heels on the wooden stairs before Terri slipped into view. Her father's face almost glowed as he looked at her. Suddenly it wasn't so hard to understand what drew the two together.

"Young lady, you appear to be lost, want to get into trouble together?"

"My papa might make you meet me at the church first and make me an honest woman."

Her parents sent each other looks that no daughter wanted to be reminded they knew how to give each other. Her dad grabbed Christina in a hug as he winked at her.

"Hey now, I married her, didn't I?"

"Have fun, Dad."

Her dad twisted his face into a crooked smile before he picked up their luggage and followed her mother out the door.

"If you need us, dear, just call the cell phone." Her mother blew a kiss as she climbed into the front seat of a truck. She seemed out of place in the utility vehicle, as pristine as she looked, but the glow on her

face said she was right where she wanted to be.

\* \* \* \* \*

“You are saving an old man’s life tonight.”

Mick rolled his eyes as his hands continued to mix a drink while he spoke. The Pit was wall-to-wall people. Even Cynthia sat at the register with her injured ankle propped on a crate as she ran the register. Valentine’s Day weekend and no one wanted to stay home. The actual lovers’ holiday wasn’t until tomorrow, but Friday night was a good enough reason to begin the celebration.

Christina was enjoying the night. Her feet ached and there was a pinch between her shoulder blades but the excitement of the place just made her happy. The only thing waiting for her was a dark house. Here, there were friends and a few extra tips to help with that car-buying expedition.

Her parents’ unannounced trip was going to be her opportunity to step back into the world. Tomorrow

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morning she was heading out of Benton and toward a car dealership.

It was midnight when Mick kicked her out. The band was playing a smooth love ballad that stuck in her head as she drove home. She was still humming as she turned her key in the lock.

“Are you ready to pay up?”

\* \* \* \* \*

She hit him this time. Christina didn’t make a single sound as she curled her fingers into a little fist and sent it flying into his face.

“Ouch.” Her hand exploded with pain as she connected with his oversized jaw. Pain traveled down her hand, up her arm and right into that pinch that was between her shoulder blades.

Her memory reminded her of his reaction the last time she struck him. She jumped back but not quickly enough. Her hand ended up a prisoner in his as she glared at him.

“Better, honey, but you need to use your shoulder if you want to make a punch worth anything.

Especially when you’re dealing with someone twice your size.” Shane began rubbing her hand, his fingers

sending little ripples of delight shooting down her smarting arm.

“What are you doing in my dad’s shop? The door was locked.” A sarcastic grin split his face as Shane raised a single eyebrow at her. The cocky expression made her want to try using her shoulder and make her next swing hurt. The giant hadn’t even grunted. “You know, my dad likes his shotgun. Trespassing in

his shop just might get you shot.”

“Guess it’s a good thing your dad isn’t home tonight.”

Shane’s face went blank with his statement. A shiver raced down her backbone as she watched his eyes cut into hers. He was watching her with the intent look of a hunter. Her nipples suddenly tightened almost

unbearably as she considered being his target.

Shane released her hand as he let her take a few steps away from him. Nervousness flickered in her eyes but the blue orbs also moved over his chest and down his length before returning to his face.

Desire

shot through his bloodstream like fire. Arousal wasn’t something you planned—it was either there or not.

The twin points of her nipples lifted her shirt making his cock harden with need.

“Come here, Christina.”

Shane was used to being obeyed. His voice was edged with authority. The order was some sort of test of her will. Her body suddenly insisted she do as he wanted. Walk the three paces that would place her back within his embrace. Heat seemed to radiate from her skin in waves that made her clothing too hot. She understood the rush of sensation now. Knew without a doubt why there was the smooth flow of heat from her breasts to her womb. The folds of her sex became ultra-smooth as fluid eased between

them. Tossing her hair back, she looked at the man standing in front of her. Running her eyes over his shoulders, she looked at the pure strength displayed by their wide width.

Every cell in her body seemed to hum with approval for him. Her body demanded a closer inspection of

his and her temper reared its head. She wanted to wrap her thoughts around the idea that he'd come

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back to her for some reason beyond their bet.

"All right, Shane, I did bet you a kiss and I'm a woman of my word." Taking another step forward she lifted her arms to reach for those shoulders.

His warm breath teased her lips before she went up onto her toes to complete the kiss. Her fingers wandered over his chest as she opened her mouth against his. His male taste teased her. The tip of her tongue couldn't resist the temptation to journey toward the center of his mouth, delve into him and stroke

the length of his tongue.

His hands closed over her waist as he lifted her higher. Their bodies connected as he thrust his tongue deeply into her mouth. Desire contracted around her womb as the hard length of his cock burned into her

belly. His lips left hers as he continued to lift her up, until his lips found the smooth column of her neck and she gasped as pleasure rippled down her body.

Shane placed her on the shop counter and threaded one hand through the silken strands of her hair.

Tipping her head up, he nipped the skin on her neck and groaned. Moving lower he found her shoulder and gently bit the spot where her neck began. A little whimper rose from her chest as he let her head go. Every button on her shirt went flying toward the floor. A quick jerk from his hands snapped the threads before Shane separated the front of the garment. Her bra had a front clasp and he growled approval as his fingers separated it. The cool night air brushed against her overheated flesh making her purr with satisfaction. His fingers gently smoothed over the twin mounds of her breasts before rolling each of her nipples between a thumb and forefinger.

A cry filled the dark store. Christina wasn't even sure it was hers. It was too feminine, too full of primitive pleasure. Her back arched to offer her breasts to him like some mating ritual. Moonlight bathed

them both as he stepped forward and nudged her thighs apart.

"I've been thinking about tasting these nipples for far too long, honey." The look on his face fascinated her. It was pure male appreciation, hard and cut with a primitive edge that made her tremble. His hands cupped her breasts, making her gasp with pleasure. Her back arched even further as she placed her hands on the counter behind her for balance. Her short skirt rose up with her parting thighs. She was suddenly deeply aware of her mons. Only her thin panties shielded her from him, and she was so wet the

cotton stuck to her folds as his head dipped toward her offered breasts.

She cried out as he caught a nipple between his lips. Shane growled around the nub as he used his tongue to worry its tip. The hot smell of her pussy burned into his head as he latched onto her breast and

suckled on it. His cock was throbbing with a need to bury its length in her.

She was a virgin, his virgin. His cock was going to wait until he loosened up her tight passage. Moving his mouth to her opposite breast, Shane sent one hand along her thigh. He pushed her skirt completely to

her hip before gently touching her spread folds for the first time. She jumped but his arm around her waist

held her firmly in place as he pressed his hand over her sex.

"Shane...I need you." And she didn't give a damn about anything else at that moment. Her hand found

the hard bulge of his cock and tried to find the button on his fly in the dark. He captured her hand and firmly returned it to the countertop behind her.

“Shhh...I’m going to touch you first, honey.” His voice was solid with determination, his eyes glittering at

her as the hand sitting over her sex pressed once again. Pleasure shot straight into her womb. She arched

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toward that hand out of pure need. Tension began to throb directly under his hand. The crotch of her underwear was pushed aside as a single finger dipped between her folds. It stroked her length before settling on the little nub at the top of her mons. A strangled cry came from her lips as that finger rubbed and circled her clit.

“Look at me.” She was twisting in his embrace, her hips bucking toward his hand seeking release. Her juices coated his hand as he pressed harder on her little clit. Her eyes flew open as she strained toward the pressure his hand applied, her lungs rose and fell rapidly as climax began to dilate her eyes.

“Come for me, Christina, let it take you.”

She didn’t have a choice. Her body contorted as pleasure broke and exploded across her flesh. Her fingers curled into talons that dug into his shoulders and she screamed at the fabric separating her from his

skin. The smell of her own body rose thick between them as she gasped for breath. His hand was still between her thighs as she tried to form a single word to recover some shred of dignity.

His mouth caught hers instead, pushing her lips open as his tongue invaded and stroked the length of hers. The kiss was hard and deep, and he lingered over it as her body rocked on the waves of her climax.

His fingers moved down her spread sex to the opening of her body. One fingertip circled the slick flesh before thrusting gently into her channel. Her body hummed with pleasure as he pulled free and thrust two

thick fingers into her body once again. Her hips bucked forward as his thumb landed on her clit and gently rubbed as he continued to thrust into her.

“That’s it honey.” His words came out on a groan as Shane thrust further into her. She was so damn tight it made him want to snarl. All he wanted to think about was the way her pussy would feel sucking his cock into it. Instead he pressed his fingers deeply into her and listened to the sounds coming from her

throat to gauge whether or not she was in pain. Her bottom lifted for his next thrust making him grunt with approval.

He lifted her off the counter in one solid movement. She landed against his chest as his legs carried her toward the stairs. There wasn’t any sound except for her breathing, his feet didn’t seem to make a single

noise as he moved through the house. It was almost like he was one of the shadows that had come to life to join her fantasies.

The light in her bathroom was on, and it spilled into the hallway as Shane carried her toward her bedroom. His jaw was set in a hard line as he angled her through the doorway. He let her feet down as she took in her bed with a shocked gasp.

The covers were turned down. A green and brown, camouflage fabric, duffel bag stood on its end in the corner and a pair of huge black boots was lined up against the wall next to it.

“Just because my parents are out of town doesn’t mean you just get to move into my bedroom.”

“Christina, honey, it’s time for you and me to finish some business. Now take that skirt off if you value it.”

Her retort died on her lips as he stepped back and opened his shirt. His chest was magnificent. Every inch of it sculpted to pure feminine perfection. Her fingers itched to run along the ridges and explore the strength that radiated from him.

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The box of condoms sitting on her bedside table made her temper explode.

“I swear you must be the most presumptuous male on the planet!” She didn’t take her skirt off. Instead she jerked it back over her thighs as her face flamed with embarrassment. She’d just stood there with the

thing around her waist like a simpleton.

“You are not sleeping in my bed.”

Shane popped a button on his fly open in response. She didn’t want to look, but her eyes disobeyed her brain and dropped to his hand as he unlatched another button and then another. He wasn’t wearing a stitch under those fatigues either. Hard male flesh fell out of the open fly and thrust forward with clear intent.

“And *that* is not coming anywhere near my body!”

Shane laughed at her. He tipped his head back and roared with male amusement. His open pants dropped to the floor and he simply stepped out of them. She stared at the erection his pants had held. His cock was thick and long and crowned with a ruby head that had just a single drop of fluid shining at

its slit. The insane desire to touch him crossed her mind as her palm itched to see what that monster felt like.

“Spoken like a true virgin.”

She lifted her eyes and Shane sobered. Hurt crossed her face as she tugged on her skirt hem with nervous fingers. She had forgotten that her breasts were bare. They stood out proudly, crowned with little pink nipples.

“I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings, honey.”

She felt like denying that he had but his eyes were too sharp. She simply shrugged and tugged her skirt down into place again. “I don’t want to be a notch on some guy’s belt.” Christina watched his face as she

said that. Just because she had a pretty face didn’t mean she was dumb and too many men had made the mistake of believing just that. If you were pretty then you were shallow enough to believe they loved you

on a second date.

Shane’s face suddenly went hard. His eyes were cold with rage as they focused on her shoulder. Standing close to the bathroom door, the light spilled over her body. The scars from her bullet wounds stood out clearly on her skin. The urge to cover her body made her turn around.

“Turn back around.” That was an order. His voice was hard and edged with rage. “Right now.”

“It’s my body.”

“Wrong.” His hand spun her around as his large body crowded her against the wall. “You belong to me now. Don’t hide from me, honey, I already know about those scars. Seeing them just makes me want to kill those bastards all over again.”

It was such a brutal statement but she turned into the protective shelter of it. Shane’s face was harsh with

anger but his eyes moved over her scars with a firm resolution that told her it would not be happening again. He had made certain of that in a brutal way but there was also a deep sense of caring that came

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from the knowledge that he would defend her so—permanently.

The hard length of his erection brushed her bare leg making that heat flame across her skin and flow

down her passage. The little nub hidden in the folds of her sex throbbed with the desire to be touched once again. Shane's eyes were glued to the scar on her chest where her sternum had stopped a bullet intended for her heart.

"They're ugly."

"Nope, they're the proof that you aren't a quitter." His fingers smoothed over the red skin before catching her chin to lift it to his hard gaze. "The fact that you didn't give up and die makes you the most

attractive woman I've ever met."

His mouth caught hers with a gentle kiss. His lips were firm as they pushed hers open and took a long taste from her mouth. The bare male skin beckoned to her fingers. She had to touch him and feel the pulse of life she could actually smell. All her body wanted was him in whatever way he might demand. Shane was going to take her and she shivered at the raw idea of his body possessing her.

He lifted his head from hers and grinned at the passion-drugged eyes. His cock was throbbing harder as the smell of her hot pussy made it nearly impossible to maintain any kind of control. Shane ground his teeth together and resisted the urge to rip her little excuse of a skirt off her. He was not going to fall on her like an animal...even if he currently felt like one.

"If you want a shower, you have ten minutes."

"Do you know how to talk to a person without giving orders?"

He curled his lips back into a grin. "No, ma'am."

Ask a dumb question and you get an even dumber answer. She did want a shower but the fact that Shane was once again a step ahead of her made her mad. Discovering that he seemed to understand her body as well as she did was too exposing.

"Nine minutes and the clock is ticking."

"I don't belong to you."

This time his smile was predatory. He stroked one of her flaming cheeks before running his eyes down her almost bare body. He caught her chin when she would have tossed her head, and held her jaw with iron strength that was completely unyielding. "If you want your shower, you'd better take it now. You stand here teasing me with the scent of your wet pussy and we'll get right down to seeing just where I think you belong."

Determination blazed from his eyes. A little gasp escaped her mouth as she saw the certainty of his possession on his face. This man was going to have her and her body was going to help him do it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eight minutes was worse than a death sentence. Shane paced and stared at the bathroom door. He cursed and prowled the perimeter of the room once again. Want and need were both trying to break down the wall of his self-control and smash every sane idea in his head into kindling.

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He took a deep breath and forced the idea of Christina's spread body out of his mind. A man didn't fall onto a woman like a fresh kill—that sort of rutting was left behind in his youth when all his adolescent body could do was fuck.

Especially a virgin. Shane looked at the bedroom and snorted. This wasn't a girl's room, there were hints of womanhood all over it. Midnight blue satin sheets on the bed and a little silky nightdress that matched them. Short skirts hung in the closet and there were killer high heels to set off the bottom that made his mouth water. Yeah, Christina had bid farewell to little girl things some time ago. Instead there were subtle cosmetics, delicate perfumes and hip-hugging thong panties.

Those things just made him look at her virginity with more respect. Shane clamped his control solidly in

place over his raging cock. The damn thing was going to have to wait.

But he would have her. The scent of her climax was still on his fingers, the little sound she'd made as he

brought her to that first peak echoing in his ears. They weren't a pair of kids who needed to play dating games.

No, they were two different genders that had circled each other in the most ancient of rituals. Maybe he was a harsh man, but Shane wasn't going to call it some soft, girlie-man name. He wanted to spread her thighs wide open right in the middle of her bed and let her feel his weight as he thrust into that tight pussy.

The water turned off in the shower making him grin. Christina wasn't a coward and that made him want her that much more.

She didn't have to do anything she didn't want to. Christina looked at her beaded nipples and considered the way her blush seemed to bleed all the way down her neck and over her breasts. Every sense seemed acute. She swore she could almost smell Shane in the next room. It was like she was tracking him with her senses. Her body going into some kind of surveillance mode to search for signs of her male.

But that didn't mean she was going to do anything that would land her in the clutches of despair tomorrow morning. Shane Jacobs had to be the worst man for her to decide she wanted so badly. The man didn't exist! He emerged from shadows and he walked through a world that had almost snuffed out her life.

But he'd come back to her. That was a fact her heart clung to. She didn't even have the means of placing a phone call to him but he'd shown up in her life without any invitation from her. The action spoke

louder than any rule about how a man and woman ended up in bed together.

Need moved through her in a hot wave that melted every other thought. Her skin became a network of receptors that seemed to only function to transmit pleasure to her core. She wanted him, and that box of condoms on her nightstand told her Shane had planned to spend the night in her bed. A condom in a man's wallet would serve his lust when any available woman was at hand. The duffel bag told her Shane

was planning on more than just a quick round of lust.

Flipping the water back on, she stepped back into the shower. If she was going to delve into the greatest mystery of life, there was one little detail she intended to see to first. A shadow moved into the doorway

and she opened the glass door.

"Stay out there, Shane Jacobs! I'll shower at my own pace!"

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\* \* \* \* \*

His cock was still ramrod straight. Her eyes fastened onto the erection with amazement. The weapon hadn't slackened at all.

Christina shrugged and forced one foot onto the carpeting. She didn't know what she was doing, only that she'd regret not tasting this man completely before he left her life again.

"Drop the towel."

She batted her eyelashes instead. Shane blinked his eyes and looked again to make sure that was what he'd seen. He'd never seen a woman actually do that sort of thing. She trailed a single finger over the top

of her towel and fluttered her lashes again.

"You mean this towel?" Her finger traveled over the swell of each breast as she looked at him far too innocently. "You know something, Shane Jacobs? Your mother should have taught you how to ask a lady for what you want." Her finger tapped the center of her bottom lip as she lowered her lashes and

watched him through them. The pit of his stomach knotted with anticipation. She sucked just the very end

of that finger between her lips making him groan.

“You see, Shane, I’m not too sure why I have to point this out to you, but I am not one of your men.”

She turned around and looked over her shoulder as she unhooked her towel and held the ends open.

The

blue terrycloth dipped lower across her back. “In fact, it’s somewhat insulting that you haven’t noticed I

don’t look anything like a man at all.”

“I noticed, all right.”

“There you go again.” The towel went back around her body and she turned to show him that she’d

tucked the ends back over each other. “Scowling and hollering at me. That’s really no way to get what you want from a girl.”

Her game restored her balance. Christina was suddenly having fun instead of shivering in pure response to the man. His eyes roamed over her body before he curled his lips back to show her his teeth. He looked every inch the commanding officer as he aimed his hard eyes at her.

“Lose the towel, now.”

“Would you like to know a secret?” Her fingers lingered over the tucked edges of her towel as she fluttered her eyelashes again. Shane felt that knot in his stomach tighten.

“Sure.”

“I shaved in the shower... everywhere.”

“Please drop that Goddamn towel.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Gravity was his best friend. Christina plucked the end of her towel free and let it fall to her feet. His eyes

targeted her mons and his mouth almost fell open.

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Every last strand of golden hair was gone. Her cleft was open to his gaze as she stood and let him look his fill.

“You are so stunning, honey.” It was more than her creamy skin. The relaxed look on her face made her the most beautiful creature on the planet. She was embracing their need for each other and simply enjoying her body. That was a confidence most women never found, the ability to accept who they were.

It went beyond surface beauty and traveled into the deep attraction that took root in the soul.

No man had ever looked at her the way Shane did. He saw through her practiced responses and forced her to reveal her true nature to him. It was so very freeing in that moment. She was just a woman who was going to share her body with a man. Nervousness tried to sneak into her head but she resisted its lure. Instead she looked back into the hazel eyes that were filling with the heat of conquest. Shane Jacobs

was done playing. He was ready to be fed.

He lifted one hand and beckoned to her with the crook of a single finger. “Come over here, honey.”

It was less than a step but being asked made her smile. Her body shivered as she lifted one foot and stepped into his embrace. His hand cupped her chin and raised it to be inspected by his eyes.

“Relax, honey, I won’t hurt you.”

He tightened one arm around her waist and finished closing the gap between them. Her skin erupted with

sensation as it meshed with his. The crisp hair covering his chest felt so right against her. He lifted her from the ground as his mouth covered hers. Christina lifted her arms to clasp the shoulders she’d spent

so

much time coveting. Her fingertips traced the ridges and ripples of hard muscle as Shane carried her to her bed.

Her back touched the sheets as his mouth pushed hers open in a deep kiss of intention. His hands slid down the sides of her body in a slow motion that began at her chest and curved along her waist and then

out again over her hips. His body didn't follow her onto the bed. Instead his mouth lowered to her breasts as he sat back on his knees and used his grip on her hips to pull her toward him. Her thighs were

forced to spread as she got closer to his body.

"Do you have idea how sexy a bare pussy is?"

If she hadn't she did now. His face almost frightened her with its intensity, dark and hard, his eyes focused on her spread body as his hands gripped her hips and held them exactly where he wanted her. But a rush of excitement hit her as she watched the way he looked her open sex. Her clit pulsed with need as she watched his sharp gaze center on the little bud.

The bed moved as he left it, slipped over the edge and knelt on the floor. His hands pulled her toward him again as his shoulders forced her legs to continue spreading even further apart.

"A bare pussy just begs to be eaten."

Her breath caught in her chest as his head dipped and that hot mouth covered her mons. Her hips bucked away from the bed as pleasure shot straight up into her womb. Shane held her in place as he pressed another kiss over her spread body. The tip of his tongue probed the folds of her sex as she twisted with the wave of pleasure.

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His hand released her hips and stroked firmly over her belly. His mouth caught the top of her sex and sucked it, making her whimper. Every inch of her body was too hot! Sweat beaded on her forehead as she flung her arms above her head and clawed at the bedding. Her torso twisted as his mouth continued its torment.

His hand touched her mons and spread the two folds apart uncovering her little nub. Cool air hit the bundle of nerve endings, making her shiver. Her eyes popped open to watch Shane's head as he lowered

his mouth to suck on her clit.

She cried out as pleasure split her in two. It was too tight and hot, everything twisting and tightening under the tip of his tongue. He drove her toward climax again as she moaned in a low voice that didn't even sound human.

Just as she began to shatter, his hand moved. His tongue still worried the nub controlling her pleasure but

two thick fingers thrust deeply into her passage. The climax speared through her body with the penetration. Her hips gave a desperate surge upwards as he worked his fingers in and out of her body with her shudders.

"That's it, honey, ride it out."

His cock was painful as Shane pressed his fingers into the wet pussy it craved. He penetrated her body again as she lay gasping for breath. Her body clung to his fingers making his erection twitch in anticipation

of the tight embrace. Instead he stood up and walked toward the nightstand.

Her eyes flew open as he left her. She could smell his male skin all around her. It was carried into her lungs with her labored breaths and seemed to transfuse through the membranes of her lungs right into her

bloodstream. He moved back toward the bed and her eyes found the thrust of his hard cock. Her hand reached for the weapon from pure need. The raw gasp from his lips made her roll over and slide her hand all the way up his length.

His cock was hot against her palm, the skin stretched over its width. Pulling her hand back down, she moved her fingers over the swollen head of it. Fluid crowned the tip and she sat up to taste him. "Oh God, Christina!" His hand fisted in her hair as she relaxed her jaw to open her mouth even further. She wanted to taste him exactly like he'd tasted her. She needed to apply the same pleasure to her partner and listen to him moan with a satisfaction that she incited.

"Christ, baby, that feels so damn good!"

She smiled around his cock as his hand cupped her head. His hips thrust forward as she stroked the skin with her tongue. A harsh sound came from his chest making her bolder. Rising onto her elbows, she used

her hands to stroke the length she couldn't get into her mouth. His hips began to thrust toward her as his

breath hissed between his clenched teeth.

Every girl's locker room whisper rose into her memory as she used her tongue to circle the head in her mouth. Her fingers worked up and down his cock as she relaxed and opened her mouth wider. His fingers twisted in her hair almost brutally as his hips jerked and thrust toward her face. A hot blast of fluid

hit her tongue as his body became rigid.

Christina licked every last drop of his climax away, and she purred around his staff as triumph filled her.

His hand relaxed as he dropped onto the bed with her, and pulling her against his body, he placed her [Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html](http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html) head against his laboring chest. Low cussing rolled out between his breaths as the moonlight showed her

his cock still thrusting forward with need. A shiver went through her passage as she considered the next place he would relieve that swollen rod.

"Where in the hell did you learn to suck a man off?"

She laughed at his temper. Shane threaded his fingers through her hair but couldn't move beyond that. His body was still jerking with pulses of pleasure. No virgin alive should be able to do that to a man's cock with her mouth!

"Girls talk, you know, and I didn't ask where you learned to do it because I can figure that out all by myself. Just because I haven't let anyone have sex with me doesn't mean I didn't find out exactly what went on during the event."

And she was proud of herself too. Shane felt his jealousy bleed away as he listened to the ring of accomplishment in her voice. The idea that she'd ever touched another man's cock with her sweet lips made him want to kill. But the fact that she'd taken the time to study sex made his cock twitch with anticipation.

Rolling onto his side, he pressed her down onto her back. Gently cupping a breast, he rolled the nipple and listened to her breathing increase.

"You're an 'A' student, honey."

Her body responded to him so completely. His hand moved between her breasts igniting that same burning flash of heat again. This time it was a slow wave that moved from her breast to her passage and grew stronger with each touch. It settled into her womb where it twisted into an ache that throbbed and begged for true satisfaction.

"I haven't touched another woman since I met you, honey." She shivered in his embrace. Shane stroked her bare body with a firm hand. "All I think about is you. Maybe your dad should take out his shotgun and run me off."

"He likes you."

"It would have been better if he didn't." He caught her jaw and forced her to look at him while indecision crossed his face. "The last time our lives got mixed up you ended up in a pool of your own

blood.” His fingers stroked down her neck to the scar just below her collarbone.

“Roshelle seems to be doing just fine.”

“Roshelle is a psychic. You saw what happens to psychics that aren’t protected.”

She didn’t like the wall he was building with his words. Their bodies were bare and tangled together but

he was laying a solid foundation for separating them. They hadn’t shared enough of each other yet. Her body drew into a knot of tension as she considered the idea that he might leave her without completing what he’d started.

“Are you leaving now?”

His jaw tightened as she curled her fingers around his cock. The hard flesh twitched against her palm as

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her passage sent up a plea for the hard thrust of it within her.

“No, honey, I was just waiting for you to relax a little more. You won’t be leaving this bed as a virgin.”

His rose onto an elbow and pressed her back against the bed. His mouth landed on hers as he pushed her lips apart with a tongue that thrust deeply into her depths. Her body didn’t seem to care about anything except the heat that flared between them.

So she wouldn’t let her mind worry either.

## **Chapter Five**

He was stealing time. Shane caught the renewed scent of her arousal and just didn’t give a damn about anything else. He’d always known that his life wasn’t one that a guy offered to share with a girl like Christina. Fate had dumped her in his lap and now he just couldn’t let her go.

At least not yet. The last of his control was shredding as he looked over the body next to him. His senses were so full of her. He seemed aware of even the tempo of her heart rate. Her hips slowly gyrated

as he found her slit and rubbed the little nub at the top of her mons.

The whimper that came from her lips set his blood pounding through his brain.

The condom he’d taken out of its foil was lying behind him on the bed. Grabbing the latex sheath, he applied it to his cock. The thin barrier was his only concession to the future.

He rolled over her body. Christina felt her thighs rise and grip his hips from some primitive instinct.

Her

pelvis tipped up as she felt the first blunt probing of her body. The hard head of his cock pressed past the

folds protecting her passage but he held in place instead of giving her the deep penetration her body craved.

“Easy, baby, there’s no hurry.”

Her hips twitched but he wouldn’t let her raise them to deepen their connection. Instead he reached between their bodies to gently stroke her little clit. Pleasure shot out from the touch making more fluid flow toward his entry.

The hard flesh stretching her body throbbed and twitched as her hips jerked with the deep need for friction. Her fingers had curled into claws on his biceps. She gasped as she felt the tiny seep of blood around her fingernails. His chest rumbled with amusement as his hips flexed and sent his rod further into

her again.

“Claw me, honey. Let the pain loose.” His hips flexed again and again as he deepened his penetration.

“Just take me slow and easy.”

Her body was twisting into a single flame that seemed to burn them both. She surged up to meet the thrust of his body and strained to take his length even deeper.

Sweat beaded on his forehead as her little moans tried to break the last bit of civilized thought in him.

His

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hands fisted in the bedding as he slid his cock into her body. She was so wet he moved easily into her sheath, pushing his length back and forth within her. She thrashed beneath his body as her pussy suddenly

gripped and milked his rod. Climax tightened her body so hard he exploded again and again as the muscles of her body pulled and contracted around his cock. Pleasure slammed into his brain as a harsh cry came from her lips.

Shane rolled onto his back taking her body with him. She lay completely on top of him as he tried to fill

his lungs with enough oxygen to feed his pounding heart. The flutter of her heart hit his chest as he stroked the length of her back. They were still locked together. His cock still gripped within the tight walls of her pussy while her thighs still clung to his hips. Shane gently rubbed the cheeks of her bottom and the top of her bare thighs as he lifted her off him.

Pleasure rippled through her as she found herself listening to the beat of Shane's heart. The deep sound seemed almost hypnotic as her head began to emerge from the mist of sensation surrounding it. Every muscle she had was loose and relaxed. Sleep simmered like a shining reward. Shane rolled her over and gently controlled her descent to the mattress. His huge body surrounded and tangled with hers as her brain refused to function any further. One of those strong hands of his stroked along her hip and over her

thigh making her skin hum with delight. The warm male scent of his skin lured her away into slumber as

she felt truly protected for the first time since leaving his home.

Shane brushed the tangled hair back from her face and listened to her breathing lengthen and deepen.

He softly cursed as his cock twitched and complained about her need for sleep. Rolled away from her sleeping body he stood up and walked silently to the bathroom. Tossing the used condom into the trash can Shane stepped into the shower for exactly three minutes. A quick swipe of a towel and he went back

to his sleeping companion.

He wasn't tired, instead he was captivated by the delicate shape of her body next to his instead of just a dream. Pure enjoyment poured through his thoughts as he was able to stroke and touch her at will.

Moonlight spilled over her body granting him the view of her feminine curves and mounds. Nothing intruded and he found himself listening to her breathing like the most peaceful sound his ears had ever heard.

\* \* \* \* \*

Morning wasn't kind. Christina stretched and gasped as her body bitterly complained. Every muscle she

had seemed to be strained so she simply froze in place as she lifted her eyelids.

Sunlight lit the room and the arm lying over her waist. She stared at the overly large and very obviously male hand as her face filled with heat. All the covers were kicked off but Shane's body heat was amazing. Just his body lying next to her was plenty of heat to keep her warm.

Her bed was filled to its capacity by her company. Only a double-sized mattress, Shane took up most of the bed and she was curled on her side just a few inches from the edge. Her bedside table caught her attention as she looked at the box of condoms sitting there. The thing was open and one foil package lay

on the whitewashed wooden surface, empty of its product. The coal black butt of a pistol lay right next to it.

She stared at the blunt reminder of what Shane was, in the form of that weapon. It wasn't any small caliber handgun, instead the thing was oversized just like the hand of the man that owned it. It was

polished to a blue-black shine and she would just bet there was a bullet in the chamber.

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“Never touch my sidearm unless I’m dead.”

“I wasn’t planning on it.”

The hand around her waist moved to cup her breast as Shane rolled over and his body curled along her back.

The blunt thrust of his cock made her breath lodge in her throat. His fingers began gently pinching her nipple as one of his legs nudged its way between her thighs. Heat flowed between her breast and her belly as he cupped her breast again. His mouth found the column of her neck and gently bit it.

“Hum... Good morning to you too.”

He laughed against her neck and bit her again. The leg between her thighs moved and rose, parting her legs for the length of his cock. The hard head of his erection found the entrance to her body and slipped gently into her.

“I can smell you. Did you know that? Knowing your pussy is wet makes me a little crazy.”

Her passage was flooding for him too, the fluid slipping down the walls of her body as he pressed his rod deeper into her. Her bottom lifted instinctively. The woman in her wanted to be exactly where she was.

No one ever talked to her with those kinds of words. She should have been mad to hear him call a part of her body a word like pussy. Instead it sent another jolt of fire shooting toward her passage and the hard intruder thrusting into her.

Maybe the language was just part of the difference between the boys she’d dated and the man who was lying in her bed.

“Am I hurting you too badly?”

Her bottom lifted toward his next thrust without conscious thought. Her body groaned but yearned for him at the same time. That knot of tension was twisting in her womb once again as she tried to move their

pace faster.

His hands gripped her hips and kept them in place, her body screamed for the liberty to move but she was held still with his huge erection deeply inside her.

“Answer me.”

Admitting her need in spoken words seemed almost too exposing. Her pride battled with her body as Shane refused to grant her any motion until she answered.

“I’m fine.”

She snapped the words and it made him mad. Shane clapped his hands over her hips and denied his own desire. He wanted to hear her say it.

“And you want what, honey?” Shane nipped her ear before trailing soft kisses over her cheek. Her body trembled as he refused to release her hips. The walls of her pussy began to grip and tighten around his

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cock. It was a sweet torture that tested his will. Pulling out of her body, he thrust deeply into her and grinned at the little moan that escaped her lips. Lodged deeply inside her body, he once again held her hips solidly in place.

“I hear some women like to be the ones calling the shots in bed. Just tell me what your sweet little body would like or I could just wait right here for you to think about it.”

Oh God, she couldn’t survive that. The thick length of his rod was throbbing in her body. She needed it to move so badly. Every nerve ending seemed to be poised on that connection between their flesh.

“I just need you, Shane.”

His hips jerked and thrust into her. She purred with delight as he stretched and deepened the penetration. One of his hands slipped over her hip and found the little nub at the top of her sex.

Pleasure

spiked through her as he rubbed that sensitive bud and thrust deeply into her body at the same time. "That's it, isn't it, honey?" His hips flexed and his finger rubbed harder. Her hands clawed the sheets as his breath became harsh and cut with his approaching climax.

"Come for me! I want to feel that little pussy milking me again."

She didn't have any choice. Her body erupted into pleasure so tight it made her yell. A hard grunt hit her

ear as his hand gripped her hip and held it in place for a deeper thrust. He shuddered inside her as she felt her body pulling on his length but the deepest desire wasn't fed. Her womb felt the climax and lamented the lack of his seed hitting it. She looked over her shoulder to see a second box of condoms on

the other bedside table. She hadn't even noticed him slipping the thing on.

Turning her head slightly, she noticed there was a second box of condoms on the opposite bedside table. A hand stroked her face as he rose up onto an elbow to look into her eyes.

"I'll leave the damn things off but you have to accept one thing about that."

His face fell into a solid mask of stone as his eyes cut into hers.

"I fill your belly and you belong to me, forever."

## Chapter Six

She was turning into a jellyfish. Christina gave in to the urge to snort with her frustration because the sound of her shower would cover it.

His? Forever? Sex had damaged her brain! A silly little thrill of excitement had raced through her at those barbarian words. She wasn't some cavewoman and shouldn't delight at the idea of being dragged home like a prize kill.

Relationships should be comfortable and open to discussion. She snorted again. Yeah, right! Shane Jacobs didn't have the word negotiation in his vocabulary.

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Yes, but you liked the way he took over.

She didn't like that fact but couldn't exactly lie to herself. It was like he'd unlocked some secret door and found the control to her passion. Sex just wasn't that intense normally, it couldn't be. If it was, she'd

have jumped into bed with half the boys who'd chased her. She had never felt her body erupt into lawless disorder, but it had last night.

Her face was flaming as she stepped out of the shower. Not sure where Shane had gone was making the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. He was not the sort of man you wanted sneaking up behind you.

A low whistle came from the hallway. Her lips twisted into a crooked grin as she turned to see Shane leaning against the top of the stairs. His face told her he'd been watching the doorway for her.

That same silly thrill crossed her mind as she noticed the fact that his duffel bag was still in the corner of

her room. Somehow, the idea that he hadn't disappeared once he'd gotten what he wanted made her want to smile and think a little more about that forever idea he'd planted in her imagination.

Yup, brain damage for sure.

"Hungry?"

"A little."

He frowned at her response. Shane pushed his frame away from the wall and walked toward her. His eyes moved over her in a precise assessment of her body.

"You need to eat more. Are you on one of those stupid trend diets?"

"Excuse me, but my eating habits are just fine and there is nothing stupid about watching my weight."

His face told her otherwise. He reached for her hand and captured it. He pulled her behind him as he went down the stairs and headed toward the back of the store.

"You've lost weight since you were with me last." He pulled her out the back door and turned around

to

lock it. He pushed her ring of keys into his pocket before aiming his sharp eyes back at her. "You're thin

and that is definitely my concern."

"Since when?"

That was a good question. One Shane wasn't sure he was ready to answer. Instead he pulled her after him as he moved to the place he'd parked his Hummer.

He sent her door closed with a slam as she raised an eyebrow at him. Communication definitely wasn't one of the man's charms. Her stomach grumbled, making her giggle. Lunch did sound good after all.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You are a barbarian."

Shane grinned and displayed an even row of teeth in response. His eyebrow twitched up as he looked across the table at her. "Maybe I'm just a real bad boy."

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"I think you're past the spanking stage."

A low rumble of amusement shook his chest before he leaned across the table and lowered his voice for his next comment. "Spanking does have its stages, you know. First when it's used to punish a child and then when it turns into a woman's bedtime fantasy. Maybe we should see if you've entered your second one yet."

"You are not going to spank me."

He pressed his lips together and sent her a kiss in response. "Then maybe you shouldn't look so excited by the idea."

Her cheeks were burning but it was temper. Christina glared at him but the waitress appeared to refill his

coffee mug. Loving couples did not spank one another! Well, somehow she got the idea that Shane wasn't planning on being on the receiving end of any paddling, but still! What kind of man spanked his

girlfriend?

Her eyes went wide as she applied that word to them. She'd labeled him a barbarian because everyone in the diner was watching them and Shane made sure they had something to witness too. He caught her hand and sent her dark looks of longing that even a nun couldn't miss.

"My lucky day, two friends to have lunch with."

Sheriff Brice Campbell lowered his body into the booth right next to her as Christina stared at the man in

shock. His brown eyes considered her with the same sharp movements that Shane always used. The waitress appeared with a lunch plate already cooked and sat it in front of him.

"Heard your folks were out of Benton for a spell. Any trouble around the shop?" Brice Campbell kept his eyes on her as he waited for a response. The question sounded so benign but it wasn't. The sheriff was part of that dark, shadow-breeding world that Shane belonged to. His wife was some kind of high-level psychic and Shane's father was her bodyguard.

The sheriff was just another reminder of the constant surveillance she was under but his face wasn't unkind. In fact, there was the firm authority of a parent lurking in his brown eyes. Her own father couldn't

have done anything to protect her from a man like Shane, but Brice could.

"Everything's fine, thank you."

He nodded and looked across the table at Shane. "Nice to see you in town."

Shane lifted his mug and watched the sheriff over its rim. Christina got the impression that any other man

would have been sent packing but Brice Campbell had the edge of respect from Shane. They glared at

each other in a male battle of wills before the sheriff lifted his fork and pointed it at Shane.

“Relax, son, there are a few parts of my job I take seriously.”

The protective manner of both men rubbed her pride. They both had just decided to look after her and nothing she had to say was going to change that fact. She pushed her half-eaten meal away because her stomach was suddenly too knotted to eat anything else.

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Shane pushed it back in front of her. “Eat.”

She would have laughed but the sheriff’s eyes suddenly inspected her arm before he nodded his head with approval. “I hope you’re not following this new fashion trend of looking half-starved.”

“I don’t stuff myself just to please some male idea of how much food is enough for me.”

Brice inspected her, his eyes making her temper simmer.

“You’ve lost weight.”

“All right! Fine, so what?”

Brice grinned at her before wiggling his eyebrows at her. “So, maybe you need a little more exercise to stimulate that appetite. Shane should have some good ideas for you.”

She snorted and didn’t care who heard the unladylike sound! Shane and Brice grinned like a pair of jackals before she borrowed one of Roshelle’s favorite sayings.

Lifting her hand, she waved it in front of her face. “The testosterone fumes are nearing toxic levels.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Wrong.”

Most men never argued with that tone of his voice. Women normally retreated. Christina stood and folded her arms across her chest and faced off with him. Shane couldn’t help but be impressed.

“You are the one who’s wrong, Shane Jacobs.”

She always used his surname when she was mad at him. Shane grinned as he recorded the detail and stored it in his brain.

“I told Mick I’d do the job, I’m going to work.”

“My woman isn’t serving in a bar.”

“Who said I’m your woman?”

His eyes erupted with rage. Christina stood firmly in her place. Maybe she’d said that just to see what would happen. Shane stretched his hands out and looked ready to kill.

“I didn’t ask you to break your word, Shane. Mick wouldn’t have asked me if he didn’t need the extra pair of hands. Besides, you didn’t exactly tell me you were going to show up. I told him I’d be there.”

That brought him up short. His eyes turned somber as he considered the set look on her face.

“Besides, you’re treating me like a toy. You can’t just show up and play with me at your whim. I didn’t ask you to toss that cell phone on your hip out the window so stop acting like my commitment isn’t worth

spit.”

“All right, honey, you’ve got a point.” His hand gripped her jaw as he placed a hard kiss over her mouth.

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He pushed right through her lips to stroke the length of her tongue. Her nipples tightened immediately as

she kissed him back.

“But I’ll be here when you get back.”

\* \* \* \* \*

She had to stop thinking about his promise. Actually, it had been more like an order but that just made her smile. Orders and Shane went together like a pair of shoes. That sneaky little voice in her head tried to suggest that she and Shane matched up like shoes as well.

Christina sighed and tried to drop her thoughts. Instead she found her eyes watching the clock because

she had to know if he'd keep his word. Going home had never seemed so important before. Sure, she loved her parents and before her kidnapping, the end of the workday was met with joy, but this was vastly different. She wanted to go home to Shane. Details didn't seem to matter a bit as she felt the unmistakable rise of heat in her passage. She hadn't realized how much she'd missed him. Maybe that was why she hadn't really pushed for her independence back from her parents. She had been living in a haze of undefined emotions that still had strings running back to Shane.

Time suddenly became more precious than gold. The moments that you got to share with those you loved were the most valuable passions you could ever have. Her kidnapping had taught her that lesson. She and Roshelle had clung to life as they fought to live just one more day. She'd lain at Shane's feet in her own blood and made that bet with him just to make him think she was willing to fight to see the next sunrise.

So tonight he would be waiting for her and tomorrow he would be gone. Each minute remaining sparkled like a diamond as she looked at the harsh reality of their coming separation. Shane would return

to his men and the worst part about that was the idea that he wouldn't even bother to ask her to go with him.

Turning on her heel she looked at the time. She would just worry about a broken heart later! Tonight she

was going home to make some more memories to fuel her dreams.

\* \* \* \* \*

She came home early. Shane watched her walk out of The Pit two full hours before she had the night before. People still milled around the pool tables but she sent Mick a wave and began her walk home. She was coming to him. Shane couldn't suppress the emotion that filled his chest in response. He had no

clue what he was doing coming after her like he was, only that he just couldn't resist the opening her parents' trip had provided him.

He wasn't sorry either, keeping pace with her he watched the little skirt bounce with her steps. His cock filled with raging need to get back into her tight pussy. It was a basic and maybe even crude reaction to her but it went deeper than just fucking. He wanted her, the sassy and soft civilian that was the very definition of off-limits to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

A heavy step behind her made her spin around. Shane sent her a cocky grin and lifted his arm to defend against any punches she might launch at him.

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"You didn't really think I'd let you walk home alone."

That was just a flat statement. The truth was, she hadn't even considered it but she should have. Shane didn't forget the details. His fingers stroked the side of her face as he considered her in the dark.

"You came home early." His expression was hidden but his voice was low and husky.

"Yes." Simple and straight, she didn't want to worry about words, all she wanted was to feel him once more. He stepped closer and the warm scent of his skin touched her senses. Her body instantly recognized it. Heat flowed over her skin and down to her belly.

"Why?"

In answer, Christina laid her hands on his wide chest. His breath turned harsh as she moved her hands over the ridges of his pectoral muscles and down over his abdomen. Her entire body seemed to hum with

approval for his. It was more than prime conditioning, it included his stubborn commanding attitude and

the blunt, frontal approach he always used to get what he wanted.

Shane pushed the door of her dad's shop open and pulled her inside with him. The door swung back shut and they both became shadows merging into a single form. His lips brushed her neck and as his fingers threaded through her hair, he leaned forward and inhaled the scent of her blonde curls before aiming his glittering eyes at her.

"Why, Christina?"

The man never gave up. Christina refused to listen to her pride as it ordered her to keep her feelings buried. "You said you'd be here."

Her words cut deep. Shane felt his own hands shake before catching her mouth in a hard kiss. He didn't want to hear anything that would give him a reason to hold onto her. Desperation drove him to deepen the kiss. Her mouth yielded and her body pressed toward his. That soft female form that soothed the hard edges of his own.

Hard little nipples dug into his chest as the scent of her pussy reached his nose. Need shot through him as restraint retreated at full force. She twisted in his embrace as one small hand boldly rubbed his cock. Christina couldn't help herself and she didn't want to! What she wanted was him. She filled her hand with the swollen erection being held by his pants. Her body was already moist and wet in anticipation of

being once again impaled on the weapon. Her fingers found a button and pulled on it. A little pop hit her

ears making her search out another one to open.

His swollen cock fell out into her hand the second she opened the last button. The thing pulsed in her hands as she gripped its width. Shane lifted his head and sucked in a huge gasp of air between clenched teeth as she stroked his length.

His hands suddenly slipped up her thigh to the little elastic straps of her panties. One sharp tug and he snapped them at the hips. He dropped the ruined garment and cupped her bottom in his hands. Her feet left the floor as he lifted her up and placed her back against the wall. His hips spread her thighs as her body opened and the tip of his erection nudged its way toward her passage.

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"Hold on to me, honey."

"Yes, Sir."

He growled at her response and thrust up into her body. She clung to his shoulders as her passage stretched and he lifted her even higher. His next thrust penetrated deeper, making her moan as pleasure shot into her womb. His movements were hard and deep. His hands held her in place for the deep penetrating thrust of his body.

He couldn't stop. She was too damn wet and his cock too hard to slow down. He felt the first twinge of climax nipping at his cock and slammed into her body harder. She moaned and dug her fingers into his shoulders. His next thrust was just as hard and she gasped as her pussy tried to grip his length.

"Come for me, baby. Now."

She did. Her body tumbled into climax as he slammed his length up into her with a force that shook the wall behind her. Pleasure exploded in her womb as the hot spurt of his seed hit her center. Her body clamped around him and greedily tried to extract even more.

He cussed low and hard as his brain managed to get a single thought through his skull. His climax had been so hard he was practically dizzy and grateful for the wall behind them. She lifted her head from his

shoulder as his profanity hit her ears.

"If you become pregnant..."

"I'll have my baby." Her words were soft but firmly spoken. Her lips touched his with a gentle kiss as she wiggled her bottom against the hard surface behind her.

The length still lodged inside her body twitched in response. Shane glared at her but she refused to look away. "One of my reasons for waiting was the fact that no birth control is foolproof, Shane. A woman

should think long and hard about a man before she takes the chance of having his child. So save your cussing for your men, I could have gone to my cousin's house for the night."

Instead she came to him. That humbled him. Her thighs wrapped around his hips made him shake his head with the pure gift she was giving him. Lifting her off his cock, he cradled her against his chest as he

turned toward the stairs and her bed.

The night seemed far too short.

## Chapter Seven

The bed was empty. Christine shoved the comforter away and looked around her room. Shane's gear was missing. She blinked her eyes and look at the corner where the army duffel bag had sat and found nothing but the wall staring back at her.

Jumping to her feet, she grabbed her clothing and jerked it on. She took the stairs at a breakneck speed on bare feet and slid to a halt as she found Shane standing by the back door. He was leaning against the doorframe watching the stairs and obviously waiting for her.

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He looked so foreign to her. Head to toe he was dressed like the oversized action figure she'd first labeled him. Twin press marks went down his chest and his belt was buckled over his fatigue pants. His pistol was resting against his thigh. She searched his face for any hint of the man who had been her lover.

His lips twitched up just slightly in response as he stood up and stepped forward.

His hands cupped her head, holding it in place. His mouth took a sip from her lips before slipping over their surface and parting them. He turned her head as his lips coaxed her to open her mouth for him.

The

tip of his tongue slipped in to join hers as she yielded and took the hot taste he offered her. Her hand lifted to his shoulders and smoothed over the fabric of his shirt. The green and brown camouflage garment seemed so foreign to hands that had spent an endless day free to roam over his skin.

She sighed as he lifted his head and ran his hands down her neck. Goose bumps rose all over her skin making her smile. Shane lifted one of her hands and gently bit the skin on the underside of her wrist. A little purr of delight came from her as another, deeper shiver traveled over her body. The sharp pressed lines running down his crisp shirt made her push her lip into a pout.

"I want to tell you something." His hand cupped the side of her head again. His eyes were somber as they looked into hers. "I want you to remember this one thing, honey. I love you."

Christina felt the blood drain from her face. The words weren't said in a joyful voice. Instead, his face had taken on its military mask of blankness as his voice became the steady firm commanding one she remembered too well.

"I don't live here, Christina. Not here in this world with you. It's time for me to go back."

He wasn't coming back to see her either! She saw it written in his eyes. The mask on his face was impenetrable. Not even the hint of an emotion rippled across it.

"Shane..."

His thumb closed her jaw. Her teeth snapped together as he held her jaw shut and her eyes locked with his. It was another one of those holds that just drove home how deadly he could be. His thumb applied just a small amount of pressure to an area that seemed completely vulnerable and she had never known it

was.

"Remember that I loved you enough to walk away from you, honey."

Her head was suddenly free as he lifted one hand in his. There was a small click before he released her completely and turned toward the door. He grasped his duffel bag and was out the door in the same second he'd opened it. She surged forward to follow him but was jerked to a halt by her wrist. Looking behind her she saw the shine of a handcuff around her wrist. It bound her to the checkout counter as the

door shut with a slam that shattered her heart.

He was leaving her.

It felt like half of her body was being torn away. Pain coursed through a body that only seconds earlier had rejoiced under his touch. His scent still clung to her skin, the taste of his kiss still lingering on her lips.

She felt like screaming as she frantically jerked on the handcuffs. The metal bracelet cut into her wrist as

an engine turned over and she listened to the Hummer drive away.

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Shane wouldn't look back. She knew it in the center of her heart. He was a man who stuck to his decisions no matter the cost. But he had never lied to her.

Christina collapsed against the counter as her eyes refused to contain the tears that slipped down her cheeks. Shane had been painfully honest with her. He didn't live in her world and he had never intended

to stay.

She wiped her tears away and straightened her back. Shane hadn't treated her like a child and she certainly wasn't going to stand there acting like one! Her parents were going to walk through the door in

ten minutes and she didn't need them to witness her breakdown.

Her eyes looked at her wrist and tried to figure out how to get unhitched from the counter. It was a solid connection. Shane had cuffed the metal railing with one side of the manacles and the other was secure around her wrist. No cheap imitation handcuffs either, they looked like heavy-duty ones. Even the links between the cuffs were large and double-welded.

Great.

Her eyes moved over the counter looking for help in any form. A small brown box sat just within her reach, opposite the door. Reaching for it she pulled it across the counter to look at its lid. Her name was written on the top and it was simply tucked into itself.

Well, of course he'd made it easy to open. He'd planned to handcuff her to the counter. She lifted the lid. A small silver key lay over a single piece of paper. Lifting the key she fit it into the lock and ended her

imprisonment. The note was curled from the weight of the key but she didn't have to lift it in order to read it.

"And if you love me enough, follow me."

The message didn't make any sense. She pulled it out of the box to look closer. She froze at what she found. In the bottom of the cardboard box was a small velvet jewelry box.

Her fingers shook as she picked it up. The soft velvet tickled her palm as she opened the lid. The white brilliance of a diamond flashed at her as she revealed a single stone, solitaire engagement ring. The stone

had to be over two carats and was cut in a marquise-shape. A tiny note was taped under the ring.

Sunday 1400 hrs.

It's a one way trip, honey.

That was less than a week away! Oh God, it was almost forever! She pulled the ring from its velvet and pushed it down her finger. It fit her perfectly, making her smile. Shane certainly was a man who got the details right.

The front door suddenly swung in as her mother bustled into the room.

"There you are! Christina! Why didn't you tell me? Honestly! There is so much to do! One week? Who plans a wedding in one week?"

"Stop fussing at the girl, Terry. One week is plenty! Shane's a military man, he hasn't got time for nonsense. There's only one church in town and they already booked it. Go get the girl a dress and order

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some flowers. I'm sure Mick can handle the drinks."

Her mother ran off to the stairs as she continued to lament the lack of time. Her father stopped and pointed to his cheek. Christina gave him his kiss as she curled her fingers around her engagement ring. One week was horribly too long!

\* \* \* \* \*

Little girls fantasized about the wrong things. Christina stood in the open door that lead to the sanctuary of Benton's church and stared at the man waiting for her. Yes, little girls dreamed about their wedding dress and the flowers and the dresses they would insist their girlfriends wore.

What was really worth dreaming about was the man standing at the front of the aisle. Shane Jacobs wore his dress uniform. A smile covered her face as she realized that was exactly the most perfect thing he could ever wear. It defined him, almost looked like a reflection of his soul.

Her dad looked ready to burst as he took her toward the man he fully approved of. Roshelle stood waiting to witness the wedding that would unite not only a couple in wedlock but a pair of friends separated by adulthood. Roshelle's new husband, Jared Campbell, stood behind Shane as her father handed her over.

The words spoken weren't really needed, the man standing there with her said everything she needed to know with his eyes. The message went straight to her heart and settled there.

Turning around she looked at the church. The faces that stared back at her were ones that most of Benton had rarely laid eyes on. Sheriff Campbell stood with a green-eyed woman that few knew was his

wife. There were more uniforms in the pews than not. Rourke Campbell stood with his brother and winked at her.

It was a family. Their habits might be different but they were all bound by the common thread of love. Life could be carried out in so many different ways, right there civilian and military stood together for a

single moment of life-changing action. A one-way trip? If she was lucky, Shane would keep that promise

and never let her go.

The second the minister finished, Shane bent her over his arm to the delight of the men in the chapel. He

winked at her as he took off down the aisle at a near run. Christina ran after her husband as his men leaned over the pews to swat her bottom.

She picked her feet up faster and doubled her pace. After all, life was too short to be slow!