



Spanked Wives - Book Two

*Falon's*  
Captivity

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**TRENT EVANS**

## *Prologue*

I didn't know what was worse anymore — when he opened that door or when he closed it. How many times had she wondered? How many minutes had she counted until they'd fallen away in the blackness, unmoored in the shadows of her cell?

But it was a waste of time. He had her, and there was nothing she could do about it now.

The only thing that mattered was figuring him out. What was he really after? What did he truly want?

It wasn't just her body — he could have that any time he wanted, and we both knew it. And yet, here she stayed — in this dark hole, lost to the world, her only connection to it that man who was both her protector and her captor.

She had to remember the deal. The agreement was her only true protection.

“Keep it the fuck together, Falon!”

She clapped her hand over her lips. At least he'd left enough slack in her chains for her to do that much. She had to be careful though. He could be out there, just outside the threshold of her dark, little kingdom of a single soul.

Tracking the time was perhaps the best way to regain her bearings. It kept her anchored in the now, in what might happen, in the knowledge that — however far away it might seem — eventually she'd be free.

For the thousandth time, she cursed her stupidity, her hubris, her idiotic conviction that she could pull this off. It was a cruel irony of fate that a single, impulsive, split second decision could profoundly influence the rest of a person's life.

In ways one could never expect.

“Calm, Falon. You can do this.”

Shaking her head again, she bit into her tongue, the pinching burn a reminder to shut the fuck up, to keep her thoughts in the one place they were still safe — her mind.

Maybe he'd figure out a way in there too?

It was true though. A bastard he might have been, perhaps even a monster. But somehow, she knew he wouldn't hurt her.

Well, not more than she could bear anyway.

Not that it mattered much anymore. Nobody knew where she was, not yet. Hell, her boss probably didn't even miss her yet.

*Not setting a check-in date wasn't your smartest choice, Falon.*

Among many.

She missed clothes — a luxury more precious than almost anything, now that she'd been deprived of them. But she knew he only saw them as an impediment, something that got in the way of his enjoyment of the physical attributes of his living sex toy.

The traitorous tightening of her nipples didn't surprise her anymore. She'd given up on making sense of any of it. How had he managed it? How had he turned her against... herself? Was it that he saw what was already there and simply brought it to the fore? Was she that shallow, that *simple*?

What did it mean that her body readied itself with an anticipation borne of far more than a need to survive? More than was even logical?

*Stockholm syndrome.*

The thought echoed in her mind more and more now, even if she tried to suppress it, tried to argue against even the possibility that it could be.

She wasn't that weak. That much she knew. It would take a lot more than this to break her.

But how much more of this could she take? How much more did he intend to put her through? What was the end game, when terms of the agreement had been fulfilled?

She already suspected, deep down, that there could only be one end to this, a single conclusion to what this had become. Her strength was ebbing, something she couldn't deny it any longer. Her exhaustion was bad enough, but what was the worst was the temptation, the increasingly appealing prospect of simply... surrendering.

Giving him what he wanted.

*What then, Falon?*

Maybe he'd turn her into one of the Stepfords populating that town? Hadn't that been the worst? That they'd all agreed to it? Wanted a life like that?

*I think you know why it really bothered you. Why lie to yourself?*

"Stop it, you idiot," she whispered, her voice rasping like the slither of a serpent through fallen leaves. She hated the way every sound was amplified in her little cell. He'd installed some sort of lighting along the tops of the walls in the basement though the faint illumination spraying up onto the painted ceiling doing little to brighten the dismal space she occupied.

At least it seemed dim enough to let her sleep.

Her heart froze in her chest at the sound, the familiar thump and creaking of stairs filling her with that maddening mix of dread and anticipation, her body exhibiting an increasingly Pavlovian response that mortified her more every time. Had he wanted it that way? Was turning her body against her just part of his plan?

With a creak of hinges, the cell door swung open, his shadowed silhouette all she could make out in the low light.

He was here again.

## Chapter 1

He thought she'd talk more.

Ford watched her in his rear-view mirror, her blonde sun-kissed good looks paler now, the set of her jaw betraying something different than fright.

Her blue eyes met his gaze. "You can't do this, you know. You think arresting me is going to stop this shit from getting out?"

"That's exactly what I think."

He turned the truck onto Dyer Road. Though he hoped he'd never have to do this, he knew the protocol well in such cases. If she knew just how much trouble she was really in, he suspected she'd be a blubbering mess there in the back seat.

Or maybe not.

Falon, young, hapless producer girl or not, was a smart one. And tougher than she looked, if he had to guess. Things would have been much, much different if Deputy Anders hadn't tailed her. The spot she'd chosen in the park was perfect for concealment. They'd never have spotted her in a million years. Who knew what god-awful chaos she'd have unleashed for White Valley if she'd slipped away?

"What am I being charged with, *Sheriff*?"

The new venom in her tone made him crack a grin. He liked a woman who didn't just roll over and give up. He respected that kind of strength, even though it wouldn't matter in the end.

"I'm sure we can think of something," he muttered, stopping at the light where Waters Avenue crossed Dyer, the intersection marking the western edge of town. "Disturbing the peace comes to mind."

"Bullshit."

"I don't think a judge is going to think much of that defense."

"As if I'll see a fucking judge," she hissed under her breath, looking out her window again. "You didn't have to leave these cuffs on, Sheriff. Not like I'm going to overpower mister Big Bad Cop."

"I'm not taking any chances, Ms. Moore. You've already proven I can't trust you. Until you've disabused me of the inclination to not trust you any farther than I can throw you, I'll have to err on the side of caution. I think you understand."

Her murmured curse wasn't quite audible, but it didn't need to be. He got the message loud and clear — she was going to fight.

"Where are you taking me? The station's the other way, isn't it?"

"Observant, I see." He pulled the truck over onto the gravel shoulder, rocks jumping up and crackling against the undercarriage as he brought the Tahoe to a stop. He flipped on the light bar, then draped an elbow over the side of his seat, turning toward her. "We're not going to the police station."

"Why not? I need to make my phone call. Then we'll see how you like it when you've fucked somebody in the press." She smiled, a bitter edge to it utterly devoid of amusement or warmth. "You think criminals are bad? We'll make your life hell."

"I haven't fucked anyone in the press, Ms. Moore. Not yet anyway."

"What—?"

“Just keep quiet for a minute.” He paused, looking out his window. The first applicant in The Walk would be reaching the viewpoint soon, perhaps at that very moment. He was irritated at having to miss this one, but something — and someone — even more intriguing had fallen into his lap.

And that person currently sat cuffed in his backseat.

“Need to talk to someone — and being in town isn’t the best place for you at the moment.”

“Not *the best place*? What the fuck?” Her eyes were wide now. “I want to talk to a lawyer, Ford. Now.”

This was something she didn’t expect, and he knew keeping her off balance, uncertain, was the best way to handle her. She was a lot smarter than some might think, and he wasn’t about to give her an opportunity to prove it.

“No lawyer is going to get your ass out of the sling it’s in right now.” He lowered his voice, glaring at her. “If you’d simply listened to me, headed on out of here for greener pastures, this wouldn’t be happening. Now, you’ve forced me to do this — for your own good.”

“So, you’re arresting me — without charges — for... *my own good*?” She burst out laughing, looking down. “I can’t fucking believe this shit.”

“Believe it, Falon.” He faced forward once more, taking a deep breath as he brought the Tahoe back onto the road, gunning it up to fifty and leaving the lights on. “We’re going to have a little talk and figure out what we’re going to do with you.”

She was silent after that, another sign that she was a cooler customer than one might otherwise think. The more time she had to work out her situation, the more dangerous she was. Though he thought he could probably keep a handle on her, the girl would indeed bear watching. Close watching.

One thing was troubling him though. After he’d cuffed and stuffed her, he’d had a look at the documents she still had with her. She didn’t have much on her, but in her car they’d found a treasure trove of information, including laptops, tablets and thumb drives.

Most of the “dirt” she’d dug up on White Valley was exactly what he’d expected. That wasn’t the problem. Her source, which frustratingly wasn’t identified anywhere that they’d found thus far, had provided her information — damaging information.

The worst part of it though was that it was information that was entirely new to Ford. And if even half of it was true, Ms. Moore was going to turn out to be a whole lot more trouble than even he thought. For the entire goddamned town.

\* \* \*

She couldn’t help but wonder what he had in mind. Where was he taking her? Would he hurt her? At this point, she wasn’t sure what he would do. The question now was: how the hell was she going to get out of this? She suspected the town might try something like this, but she hadn’t expected it would be someone like Ford doing it. She thought of him as, well, one of the good guys. She was usually pretty good at reading people — it was part of the job. This time though, she’d screwed up. Badly.

The truck flew along the road, west of town, in a part of the country she had no familiarity with — she’d never gone this far in her travels around White Valley. There was one thing for sure though, he wasn’t taking her back to the police station.

*What does that mean?*

Each time she thought of it, the possibility of what might come next ran through her mind, and she tried to push away her fright, her fear of the unknown. And yet, a part of her was morbidly fascinated at what was happening. She really had no reference, no experience to draw upon for something like this. What she’d seen in the town through that telephoto lens was something she still didn’t know how to process.

*Everything* her source had told her was true.

So often sources flaked, or had a hidden agenda, an ax to grind.

Not this time.

She watched Ford as he drove, the man silent as ever, and wondered. Was he really one of the good guys? Or was he just one of the many people in White Valley her source had warned her could be dangerous?

He pulled the truck off the road, gravel spraying against the undercarriage, Falon bouncing and groaning as the cuffs abraded her wrists once more. Then they came to a stop, a cloud of dust rising around them, her heart suddenly pounding like a jackhammer in her chest.

*Oh my god.*

She watched Ford as he got out of the truck, turning her head to follow him as he walked around the rear of the vehicle. She tried to prepare herself for what might come next. Would he pull out a gun? A knife? It could be anything. She didn't know what he was capable of doing anymore. She had to assume he was capable of anything.

*Stop this, Falon. He would have killed you already if that's what he wanted to do.*

Her door opened, and then Ford stood there, filling the exit. He peered inside, his gaze meeting hers. "I need you to cooperate with me. This will go easier. For both of us."

"You could start by taking these off, you know." Falon leaned over on one side, wiggling fingers just beginning to grow numb in the stricture of the cuffs. "Then you could try telling me what *this* is."

"Proving you can be trusted is the only way those are coming off, Ms. Moore. Thus far, you haven't even come close to earning that trust." Ford tapped his fingers upon the roof at the top of the doorway. "I need you to sit tight for a minute."

"Why?"

Instinctively, she knew she shouldn't argue the point. She was in even more danger outside. It was the middle of nowhere, well outside of town, and though she still couldn't believe he'd *really* hurt her, it felt a tiny bit safer in that backseat, cuffs or not.

Falon wasn't about to let Ford know that though. She glared at him, but didn't move.

"Now, you can choose to sit quietly for a minute, or you can choose to defy me. I promise you won't like it if you choose the latter."

"Fuck this," Falon said under her breath.

Ford watched her, his eyes narrowing, and for one terrifying moment, she feared she'd pushed him a little too far. Then he sighed, slamming the door and walking several paces toward the road, his phone to his ear.

Falon nearly screamed in startled fright as the radio in the truck crackled twice, the sound jarring in the hushed silence.

She looked around at the expanse of tall conifers surrounding them, the shadowed undergrowth choked with brambles, the few bright yellow flowers in its midst belying the flesh-shredding danger of the mass of thorns within. The road seemed to be following the base of a ridge that stretched up to their left, what looked like might be a foot trail disappearing into the tangled vegetation. There wasn't a single sign of civilization aside from the two-lane blacktop.

"Where the hell are we?" she whispered.

Then she saw a second vehicle, another truck, jacked up, with a well-worn steel rack in the bed, various ladders and lengths of lumber strapped to the top of it. A red circle with the words Ellison Companies emblazoned in bold, white letters across it decorated the driver's side door.

*Shit.*

The truck slid to a stop in the gravel behind Ford's truck, and a tall man stepped out, walking slowly toward the Sheriff.

Then she recognized him. The tall bastard on the street watching the... festivities.

The newcomer talked with Ford for a minute, both men turning their backs to Falon, the tall man occasionally looking over his shoulder toward her, his eyes equal parts darkness and cold.

Then they walked over to the truck, Ford opening her door again, the cool air whispering against the

sweat gathering at the base of her throat. The stranger leaned a head in, his jaw as hard as granite, his eyes like twin points of obsidian.

"You should've stayed in Portland, girl." His voice matched his look, deep and gravelly.

"Who the hell are you?" Falon swallowed hard, her mouth suddenly dry. The man may have been twice her size, but she knew it was unlikely he'd try anything with a cop around.

They both needed to understand they were fucking with the wrong chick.

"Doesn't matter who I am. What *matters* is that you tell Ford here what he needs to know. Do that, and you might have a chance at getting that cute little ass of yours out of the trouble it's in right now."

"I don't know who you are, but unless you're helping me out of these cuffs, you're not really helping anything."

The man shook his head, then stepped back.

"Shut up," Ford said, leaning in and taking hold of her upper arm, laying a hand across the top of her head as he extricated her from the truck.

The gravel shifted beneath the soles of her shoes as she peered up at the two hulking men.

"At this point, running that mouth isn't doing you any favors," the tall stranger said, jabbing a finger at her. "I see Ford wasn't lying about your attitude."

"What's that supposed to mean? Should I have thanked the good Sheriff for detaining me without charge?"

Ford slammed the door behind her, then spun her around to face him.

"I want a goddamned lawyer," she spat. "I want to know what I'm being arrested for. This is America. You can't fucking *do* this."

His strong fingers bit into her chin as he lifted it. For the first time since she'd met him, she saw real anger in his dark blue eyes, something she couldn't say was *entirely* unappealing.

*Hardly the time to be drooling over the big, bad alpha male cop, you idiot.*

"The way I see it, Ms. Moore, you're out to sea. And I'm the only hope you have of ever making it back home. Yes, we're still in America, but after what you've pulled? You might as well be in a different galaxy for all the good that will do you. Now, shut that smart mouth, or I'll gag you." He jabbed a thumb back toward town. "What you did back there? You've got a lot of explaining to do."

"Ford, this is fu—"

"I'm done arguing with you. Quiet, or else." He tilted his head. "Are we clear?"

The tall man looked her up and down, a new interest sparking in his dark gaze. A smile quirked at the corners of his mouth. "I'm starting to understand your interest in her, Ford."

*What?*

"Don't start, Von." Ford let go of her chin, then ran his fingers through his hair, the hard bulge of his biceps straining the fabric of his tan uniform.

*Stop looking at his muscles and think about that name. Who the fuck is that?*

Von put his hands on his hips, emphasizing the breadth of the towering man's shoulders, his battered and well-worn black denim jacket sliding open. "Now, I didn't say a thing, Sheriff." He grinned, nodding toward Ford. "Need any help with her?"

"I've got it." Ford took hold of her upper arm again, his tight grip making her wince. "She stays with me for the time being."

"I'll let them know then," Von said, giving her one last look before heading back to his truck. "I'm guessing it will need to be right away, now that he's back in town."

*He?*

"I'll use the station then until we decide what to do." Ford tugged her back toward the Tahoe. "Come on."

As Von climbed in, closing the door behind him, he draped an elbow out his open window, his expression suddenly somber. "This... isn't gonna be good. You know that, right?"

"You don't know the half of it." Ford nudged Falon. "She's so far into the deep end of the pool, she

doesn't even know which way is up anymore. Isn't that right, Ms. Moore?"

Still trying to process the threat of both his words and the naked possessiveness she saw in both mens' gazes, she simply nodded, momentarily deprived of speech, if not her will to keep fighting.

They'd never extinguish that.

## Chapter 2

Lacey never knew they'd take away even her *sight*.

Her heart began to jackhammer in her chest as the blindfold descended, the morning breeze impossibly cold against her hardened nipples. She wished she could hear Troy. Even the sound of his voice would help her endure this.

While the idea held a sort of twisted allure to her, the reality of The Walk was so intense, so overwhelming that she didn't know how she'd ever complete it. That she longed for Troy's touch, even in the midst of her public debasement, only made things more confusing.

All around her was a cacophony of sound, voices, grunts, laughter, the moan of the wind in her ears. A lock of her hair had been caught in the blindfold, the roots protesting angrily. But with her arms securely trussed up, there wasn't a thing she could do but ignore it.

"Applicants, begin," said the man who she'd come to think of as the master of ceremonies. In her mind's eye he was equipped with the full regalia, the ill-fitting black suit, with faded white undershirt protruding under his chin, the battered top hat, and oh, the black cord of the deadly whip.

Of course here, there was no whip — the women's shame was far more effective than any instrument of corporal punishment.

A hand patted her on the shoulder, another caressing one of her obscenely presented breasts, that Master of Ceremonies' voice right at her ear.

"You'll walk as I lead you, girl. If someone stops you, you'll stop. When you're touched, you're not to flinch, not to resist. Nod your head if you understand."

She frantically obeyed, as if a mere second's delay might make her lot even worse. Still, in the back of her mind, insane thoughts swirled. She wondered exactly what they must look like, even envying the view Troy and the others must have had. Was she pleasing him? She debated whether or not to confess how aroused she was, even as the source of that arousal made her want to curl in upon herself. Why was being exposed before all such a dark, twisted thrill for her? She was no beauty, and she knew every flaw, every stretch mark, every imperfection would be illuminated by her ordeal for all to see. Still, she knew how much it turned on her husband. She'd seen the look in his eyes when she'd asked those first tentative questions about The Walk. That it aroused him, in turn increased her own illicit, shameful lust.

*What is wrong with you?*

How had she gone so astray that her exposure to all those strangers, evaluating, criticizing, enjoying was something she willfully cooperated with? Her debasement, her humiliation was real — in an almost physical sense — yet her nipples were hard enough to cut steel, her clit throbbing in a way it hadn't in a very long time. Her mouth was dry, her breath coming faster and faster, the smell of the leather gag overlaying all of it.

At that one moment, the blindfold was a blessing, for it allowed her to fall into it, to surrender to her helplessness, to let the humiliation, the buzz and murmur of the crowd wash over her and take her under. She was no longer a woman now, she was an exhibition, a thing, a tool for the crowd's amusement and pleasure.

Two men in particular were the focus of her attention. That she be arousing to them, that they'd be pleased by her obedience, that they see her strength and fortitude — even in her debasement — was what she hoped for above all else.

*Make them proud.*

The hand at her shoulder urged her forward, and she stumbled a moment, her breasts wobbling, the surrounding crowd murmuring their amusement.

"Let's see her do that again," someone said, their tone one of good-natured mirth. Laughter and approving sounds followed, making her thankful once more that she could hide her shame behind the blackness of her blindfold.

She'd studied the route that most Walks took. Though there was some variation the Directors enjoyed employing to keep both Applicants and spectators guessing, she thought they'd begun to head down the long, long stretch of Columbia. The smell of cedar could just be detected on the wind, which confirmed her guess, the general noise level of the crowd around her preventing her from picking up any auditory signals that might help her pinpoint her location. Once again, she longed to hear Troy — or Hunter. Even a word of encouragement, or a rumbled exhortation to be a good girl, would be worth so much. The feeling of being lost, disoriented, threatened her as she shambled down the sidewalk, her breasts and hips swinging, the movement of her buttocks something she wanted very much to cover with her strictly bound hands.

"Well, what do we have here?"

The voice was deep, male, a hint of roughness to the tone suggesting that of a more mature man. The voice was unfamiliar, but she had no doubt it was referring to either her or Celina, stumbling along behind her in bondage even more heartless than her own.

The hand at her shoulder squeezed, drawing her to a stop, the Master of Ceremonies whispering once more at her ear. "Stay where you are."

"Look at the nipples on this one. My God," the older man said. "Almost like cows udders."

A female gasp sounded at her right.

*Celina!*

"There you go, girl," the older man said, pleasure obvious in his tone. "You know, I have a friend who owns a dairy farm outside Olympia. He keeps more than cows there though, I assure you. He has one or two lovelies like you, though I must admit, even after their twice a day turn at the cups, they still don't have nipples as long as yours."

Celina groaned again.

The older man chuckled as Celina's breath came faster. "There, that's better — nice and hard and throbbing for the crowd. Walk proudly, girl. You're making Von a happy man today."

Thinking he had finished with them, Lacey moved forward, only to have the hand at her shoulder clamp down brutally tight.

"Oh, where are you going, beautiful?" The older man drew close to her then, his cologne a strong, but clean, scent. "My my, we've got some big girls on today's walk, don't we?"

Laughter rippled through the crowd off to her left, and she cringed, suddenly reminded of their presence once more.

Hands closed upon her breasts, but not cruelly so, fingers instead stroking across the upper slopes of her bosom, leaving gooseflesh in their wake, chills cascading down her spine.

"You're a new one, aren't you? Hmm?"

"This is this applicant's first Walk," the master of ceremonies said, a hint of a sneer in his voice. "You'll have to excuse her skittishness."

"Oh she's a good girl, I can tell," the older man said. He leaned in, his grip upon her breasts tightening. "I never did much approve of putting you girls through this ordeal, but with such the display of tits you and your partner are putting on, I couldn't resist. Know this, anonymous girl. You're gorgeous. Every man in that crowd wants you — and I'd venture to guess a few of the women do too. Remember

this, when you're snuggling in your husband's arms tonight."

Then he planted a gentle kiss on each of Lacey's upturned nipples, her breath catching in her throat at both his brazen touch and his unexpectedly kind words.

A big hand patted her bottom. "Best run along, girl," the older man said. "You've got a fair bit still to go."

Then she was walking once more, her nipples already strangely missing such a gentle touch. She wished it were Troy or Hunter, even as she burned with shame that she'd take the smallest of comforts from any stranger kind enough to offer it. The abandon that welled within her at the thought surprised her, as exhilarating as it was frightening. Somehow, her helplessness and her anonymity allowed her the freedom, the leave, to accept and embrace whatever was given, whether kindness or cruelty, the sum of both heightening her senses, increasing the depth of her arousal, the heat of her shame, and the strength of her lust.

The noise around her grew louder, a jarring sea of voices, laughter, the sounds of plates being stacked. The mouthwatering scent of garlic wafted by, her stomach growling as if on cue.

"Ah now, this is what I'm after," another voice said. He was male, with a faint accent of indeterminate origin. Maybe Spanish or Italian? She decided Italian.

The hand at her shoulder turned her and guided her inside a structure, the air suddenly warmer, the noise of the crowd outside receding, replaced by the bustle and buzz of what sounded like many people inside.

*A restaurant. Paglianos?*

Then she smelled pasta, and mozzarella, and that cinched it. Definitely Paglianos. At once relieved to have somewhat regained her bearings, she was also more mortified than she'd been yet, remembering the close confines of the interior of the place, tables crowded down a large L-shaped dining area, while raised booths lined the length of the wall. She could almost see the bright red of the vinyl that covered the seats, the smells of garlic and onion and savory meats making her fear she might actually drool around her gag. She wondered why the place was open quite so early, but suspected she knew the answer was the woman being driven into its doors. Her.

*Dear, God.*

The grip of the hand at her shoulder tightened, guiding her deeper into the space. The weight of the diners' stares, the murmuring, the muffled laughter, the admiring hums, all of it served to deepen the sense of abject debasement, the feeling of Lacey being reduced to a thing, a toy for the amusement of others. It should have horrified her, but the heat between her legs, the throb of her tight nipples, the stirring in her belly, told an entirely different story. Yes, here, now, in this place, she *was* a thing — and there was nothing she could do about it. There was a freedom, a release in that, the thing she clung to in her mind, even as she sunk deeper and deeper into her humiliation.

She was stopped, her head lolling on her shoulders at the abruptness of the grip of the master of ceremonies, guiding her every step. A hand stroked up her thigh, squeezing gently, then patting her.

"Troy's girl, right?" The voice was female, though she couldn't determine if the hand touching her was the same woman.

"I was surprised to see her out here," a new male voice said, his tone cultured, cool. "She's new — didn't need to do this so soon, really." A palm molded itself to her pubis, and her hips jerked forward reflexively, her blush burning hot, the entire table bursting into laughter. "I guess we have our answer."

Her pussy was stroked, fingers splaying her labia to a low whistle from someone at the table.

"Quite a clit on this one." It was tapped gently. "You should be proud of that, my dear."

"I'm sure Troy is," another deeper male voice retorted, to murmured agreement.

She didn't know it was possible to feel so embarrassed, yet she also knew everyone at the table could very well see the moisture collecting between now swollen labia, the clit that throbbed like a metronome now, the coolness of the air caressing it. She wanted that finger to touch it again, even though she feared she wouldn't be able to stay her hips from that wanton, bucking response.

*You're insane!*

Then other hands touched her, all over her body, and she surrendered to it again, their voices thickened with lust, her entire consciousness drowning in her shame, her arousal, impossibly, growing as they explored her even further.

She gasped as fingers plunged within her, others testing the hardness of her nipples, knuckles brushing across the tips, the sensation making her shudder.

"Look at these tits," someone said, a male, as one of her breasts were raised upon the back of a hand. "Even harnessed up they've got good movement. Nice and heavy. Troy's a lucky man."

Lacey moaned behind her gag as fingers worked her clit, circling it lazily no doubt so all could watch the shamefaced, blindfolded, and gagged woman struggle with her response, with her mortification. The digits withdrew from her sex, her wetness wiped casually across her thigh. Hands touched her everywhere again, investigating the swell of her flesh where the leather of the straps bit into her, the well of her navel, a fingernail scratching at the stubble upon her bare mons.

"Needs a shave though," a murmured voice said, to a scattering of chuckles.

"Tell Troy we appreciated him sharing his slave girl with us." It was the same person who'd commented on her breasts.

Then she was dismissed, the hand turning her brusquely, guiding her along to another booth, more tables, more shame. She was turned this way and that, made to bend, her face burning anew while someone commented that she needed a nice stout plug "to stretch that cute little bottomhole for her."

Others tsked over the livid marks across the backs of her thighs, numerous hands smacking her ass lightly, fingers giving her sharp pinches to the tender flesh at the junction of thigh and buttock. The compliments made her beam, as much as the slights made her wither, the general laughter and enjoyment at her plight drawing her deeper into a near trance. She was a vessel only, a means of enjoyment, a pleasant diversion for all who cared to look at her, touch her, shame her with their caustic words, lift her up with their endearments.

She guessed she'd been led to every table in the place, though the blackness of her blindfold and the heightening of her other senses seemed to have warped her perception of time and place. Reduced to a feeling thing, she could only react, responding to stimuli in ways she sometimes couldn't control. It was precisely that loss of control that was the hardest to bear, and yet bear it she did.

Finally, she was led back outside, the sweat upon her skin suddenly like ice in the cool morning breeze. She looked around blindly as saliva began to slip from around her gag, threatening to add yet another layer to her debasement. She wanted, needed, to know that Troy and Hunter were there, were watching, taking in her surrender, enjoying what she'd laid bare for her men, for them all. Somehow knowing they took pleasure in this made it easier, the thought lending her a strength she couldn't quite understand.

"Get moving, applicant," the man at her shoulder said. "You've got a long way to go yet."

She stayed planted where she was, even as she tottered on her heels.

Fire laced across her bottom, the impact of the heavy paddle shaking her entire body.

"I said, move."

The crowd still gathered outside rose in a chorus of murmuring, oohs and aahs all around her. Still, she wasn't moving. Not until she knew they were there. Her men. Her Masters.

"Lacey, do as you're told," a voice rang out from the crowd. "You know better than to disobey."

*Troy!*

She smiled around her gag, even as another searing stroke of the leather slammed against her ass.

"You're doing fine, girl. Be good and do as you're told."

The sound of Hunter's voice had her letting out an exultant yell against her gag, the sound coming out as more a high-pitched squealing. Laughter and applause washed through the watching throng, likely mistaking her squeal for an exclamation of pain.

It couldn't be further from the truth.

Lacey started forward on her heels, stumbling a little, the grip of her tormentor's hand upon her shoulder saving her from a spill to the pavement.

His kindness was fleeting, another stroke of the paddle smacking across the backs of her thighs, the blast of pain making her cry out for real this time.

"You defy an order again, and we'll have us a whipping right here in the street, applicant. Now, *move.*"

## Chapter 3

Falon had seen plenty of jail cells. She'd even sat in one in an interview — with several giant, club-toting guards steps away.

It was a decidedly different experience sitting on the paper-thin mattress of a bunk, her wrists throbbing in the confinement of metal cuffs Mathis had yet to let her out of.

She watched Ford as he worked, the single cell looking remarkably like something right out of that old black and white Andy Griffith show her Grandpa used to watch on Sunday afternoons.

White Valley was a helluva long way from lazy Sundays sitting at grandpa's knee.

Looking to Ford once more, she tried to force herself to think, to calm down, and work out just what the hell was going on. Yes, she'd gone back on her word, and it was obvious Ford was irritated at that.

She'd had to outsmart lawmen before, and she had no doubt she'd have to do it again. Just part of the job.

This was the first time going back on her word had landed her ass in the klink though.

*But that's not all that's wrong here, is it, Falon?*

Somehow, deceiving the tall, gruff Ford Mathis had her feeling almost... guilty. There was zero reason to feel guilt, of course — this place was as fucked up a story as she could ever remember covering — and she certainly hadn't violated any laws by not exactly staying true to her word. But that didn't matter. She felt unease, even a little twinge of... shame? Why would she feel sheepish at trying to dupe the small-town cop?

*Because you like him, dippy.*

There was truth in that, despite the fact she'd love to kick him in the nuts right at that moment. There might be time for that later, if she played her cards right. Still, no matter what had already happened, she felt a draw to him, a pull she didn't understand, and had no time or inclination to try to process.

At that moment, all she had time for was figuring out how to get herself out of what appeared to be increasingly deep shit.

"Sheriff, is it really necessary to keep me cuffed — inside a locked cell?" She jiggled the steel links of the cuffs behind her, biting down hard against the flaring heat of her abraded wrists. Why did he have to make them so tight?

He looked over at her from his desk, his fingers pausing on the keyboard. He'd been typing away for the last five minutes. Probably a police report or a booking doc. But she hadn't broken any laws. What the hell was he doing?

"I'll release your cuffs when I'm ready, Ms. Moore. You sit tight until I'm done."

"I'm in a locked cell. Cuffs are kind of overkill, don't you think?"

His gaze traversed down the tight, brown button down she'd chosen that morning, his eyes pausing at the swell of her breasts. The shirt *was* a little snug, but it was the best one she had for the job. Blending into the trees and surrounding landscape of the park was what she had been concerned about, not fashion.

Ford's eyes locked with hers then, and the hardness she saw there made her shiver, though whether in fear or something else, she wasn't entirely sure.

"I think you'll keep those cuffs on. No, there isn't any reason to keep you cuffed while you're in a locked cell, is there? Except maybe one." He glanced at her breasts once more, just long enough for the point to be made, before meeting her gaze once more. "I like them. It's a good look for you, Falon."

"You can't *do* this, Ford."

He stood suddenly, and her heart galloped a little faster as she watched him saunter around his desk, thumbs hooked in that heavy belt, her gaze unerringly moving to the bulge of his genitals in the snug tan trousers, then over to the black menace of the large pistol at his hip.

*Jesus, Falon. His cock and his gun?*

He retrieved one of the straight-backed wooden chairs from in front of his desk, dragging it over to her cell, the legs screeching jarringly on the worn wood floorboards. Turning it away from the bars, he straddled the chair, laying both arms across the back. He looked upon her in silence for a long, disconcerting moment, as a boy might look upon a butterfly captured in a jar.

"The longer you wait to let me see a lawyer, the more this is going to cost the city when I get done suing the shit out of it."

The venom of her words surprised her, but she was in trouble. Her last hope was to possibly bluff him — or at least get him thinking about the cost of holding her without charge. She knew very well he held all the cards here. Screwing up wasn't something unknown to her, of course, but she'd really stepped in it here. She suddenly wished she was back in Portland covering school board meetings, or the latest weirdness that city never ceased to provide local journalists.

Ford rested his chin on his arms. "You don't follow orders very well, do you?"

"W-what?"

"Orders. Directions." He smiled at her. "You probably curse under your breath every time your boss gives you an assignment, don't you?"

"This is fucking ridiculous. I want—"

His eyes narrowed. "First thing, before we go any further — a rule. There will be plenty more, but this one needs to be first. You speak to me with respect, and that includes no cursing. You'll address me as Sir or, I guess, Sheriff. Do you understand this rule?"

"Ford, unlock the cuffs."

"Do you *understand*, Ms. Moore?"

Trying to establish authority and dominance was Cop 101... but that didn't mean it wasn't effective. She'd play along.

"Yes, Sheriff."

"Good."

His smile returned, and she tried not to think about how handsome it was.

"One thing you're going to have to get used to is this. You have zero leverage here, Falon. None. This isn't the big city. This is White Valley, and when I say someone stays in a cell, or stays in their cuffs... they do. That's it." He drew in a breath, his gaze upon her growing even harder, if that were possible. "Now, I'm not a cruel man, nor an unfeeling one. If you can prove you can be trusted to be let out of the cuffs, and if you decide you're going to cooperate, then we can think about freeing you."

"From the cell too?" Falon tried to calm herself at the prospect of freedom, something she never, ever thought she'd find herself deprived of. "I could—"

"You're not getting out of that cell anytime soon. Little steps, Ms. Moore."

Her heart sank at that, anger rising within her at the unfairness, the unjustness of the small-town cop holding her for no reason other than that he felt like it. How could this happen? This wasn't *right*.

*Calm down, idiot. You're getting nowhere if you keep antagonizing him.*

"I want you to answer my question. Do you get angry when someone tells you what to do? Even if it's your boss? Be honest."

"I don't see what any of this has to do with you holding me without charge."

"I've got all day, Ms. Moore. Would you rather continue acting like a petulant child, or do you want

to answer a simple question?”

*Fuck.*

She knew exactly what he was doing here. Give the suspect no leeway, no room to maneuver. Controlling even speech was the first step. Speech was intimately intertwined with thought, but thought was unassailable... at first.

Little steps, indeed.

“Honestly, yes. I don’t like being told what to do. How do you think I ended up doing investigative journalism?”

He arched a brow. “You like to interrogate — but not the other way around.”

“Does anyone like it the other way around?”

“You might be surprised,” he said with a soft chuckle.

Why was he asking this? What the hell was Ford up to? Handsome or not, it was maddeningly frustrating how he kept everything so close to the vest.

“One thing you’re going to have to get used to here, is doing what you’re told. No back talk. Definitely no cursing.”

“Whatever,” she muttered, looking away. She wasn’t going to give him a reaction, but she sure wasn’t going to sit up and agree to everything he said. If he thought she was that much of a pushover, he was dumber than he looked.

He merely gazed at her, as one might wait on a child until their tantrum ran out of steam.

“Fine. Okay, *Sheriff*.”

“Now that we have that out of the way, I’m going to help you out a little.” He looked at his watch, the silver band catching the light, the dark hair on his wrist somehow rendered starker against the shiny metal.

“Thank you.”

The quirk of his lips was pure mirth. “I’m holding you on several charges.”

“Ford, I didn’t—”

“What did I just tell you?”

Her mouth went dry. “I’m not a child.”

“No, you’re not. You’re my prisoner.” A growling note slipped into his tone. “Now, answer my question.”

Speaking the words was like chewing on broken glass. “To address you as... *Sheriff*.”

“Or?”

*Is he serious with this shit?*

“Sir.”

“I actually like that one better than *Sheriff*, but we’ll get to that later.”

*What does that mean?*

“Don’t do that again, Ms. Moore.”

“Do what?”

“Forget your agreement to address me with respect. You won’t like what happens next time you do it.”

His eyes glittered as he said it, a chill running down her spine at the cool certainty in his tone. She didn’t really know what he was getting at, but she did know now wasn’t a good time to press her luck.

“Okay.”

“Okay, *what*?” The chair creaked as he shifted his weight forward. She resisted the urge to pull away from the bars, suddenly feeling penned-in.

“Okay... *Sheriff*.”

“Good. As I was saying, you’re being held on suspicion of disturbing the peace, trespassing, and failure to obtain a park permit.”

“You’ve got to be fu”—Falon swallowed down the curse—“kidding me.”

"I don't kid about the law, Ms. Moore." Ford pointed toward her. "You're guilty as sin on the first charge, and I could make a very good case for the other two. But all three might be set aside..."

"If I play ball."

"We'll see. That's up to the Council, but if it's any comfort, I *am* going to recommend the latter two charges be dropped."

"How generous of you."

This was getting surreal. Something similar *had* happened to more than one of her colleagues. A freelance investigative reporter whom she'd gone to J-school with had actually been detained in this fashion... in another goddamned *country*. Not here.

"Or you could continue behaving disrespectfully," he said, giving her a frown. "And I could just have them throw the book at you instead."

Her anger was rising once more, even though she knew it was likely to get her in worse trouble. "Don't you have judges here in this fucked-up place you call a town? You know, impartial interpreters of the *law*. Or do you just pay lip service to that idea here?"

*Falon, shut up.*

Ford sighed, looking down, then stood, sliding the chair aside and fishing keys out of his pocket. But rather than open the cell, he walked back over to his desk, slipping behind his chair and opening the tall, varnished armoire behind it. He opened the door only enough to retrieve what he needed, frustrating her attempt to peer inside it.

He returned to the cell, another larger set of cuffs swinging in one hand. Her heart rate skyrocketed as he unlocked the door, and she noted this set of restraints wasn't the all-metal style currently binding her wrists cruelly behind her back. These had thick, black cuffs, somewhat larger than standard metal versions. Then the bars slid aside, clanging against the stop — and Ford stood before her.

"You don't... what are you doing?" She forced herself to look up at him, even though it made her feel the subservience of the position, the imbalance of power. He needed to learn though, that she wasn't so easily intimidated.

*Too late for that.*

"You could've cooperated, and maybe even been good enough to have your wrists freed." He sighed, holding the cuffs up. "But instead you're getting these. Maybe you'll make the correct choice next time."

She tried to scramble backward on the bed, but his steel-hard hand clamped down on her thigh, holding her fast. Her feet fluttered, then he fixed her with a baleful glare.

"You kick me and you're going to regret it, Ms. Moore."

Stilling, she tried to swallow down the painful lump in her throat, her heart threatening to pound its way out of her chest. Strangely, a chill ran through her again, her nipples drawing tight, prominent now even through the lace of her brassiere and the too-thin fabric of her shirt.

"Good choice," he muttered, dropping to one knee at the foot of the bed and taking hold of one of her feet. He hiked up her pant leg, cold leather wrapping around her ankle.

"No! Please, you don't—"

"Rule number two, Ms. Moore," he rumbled, not even looking up at her as he bound her other ankle in the thick manacle. "*That* word isn't allowed here. You use it, and it's going to go badly for you."

"What the hell do you mean, it's not allowed here? I'm not a goddamned child!"

"All evidence to the contrary," he remarked with a shake of his head. He rose once more, towering over her, the snugness of the leather making her feel even more helpless than she had before.

"Why...?" She looked up at him again, the darkness in his eyes deepening as he regarded her, the satisfaction plain in their depths. Was this just a game for him? What did he really want?

"The next time you curse — I'm letting that little 'goddamned' retort slide for now — you're going to be even worse off. Do you understand me, Ms. Moore?"

She glared at him, clamping her mouth shut to keep her lower lip from quivering. The sense of panic welling within her was something entirely new to her experience, her complete helplessness more

overwhelming by the second. Freedom held a sweetness she'd never understood — until the moment Ford had deprived her of it. But now he was proving, in very concrete terms, that there were worse things than mere arrest.

Much worse.

The door slid home behind Ford as he exited the cell, a strange relief flooding through her to be momentarily back behind the bars. Alone once more.

For the moment anyway.

“Let's try this again.” Ford took his seat in his chair, as if nothing had happened, his chin resting upon those brawny forearms. “Are you going to cooperate with me?”

For a moment, Falon couldn't speak, her tongue seemingly paralyzed. Then she cleared her throat, willing herself to do what it took. Whatever it took.

“Yes... Sheriff.”

Ford's toothsome smile bespoke the wolf cornering its prey.

“Now, tell me about this source of yours.”

## Chapter 4

Watching Lacey being led down Columbia was as surreal as it was arousing.

Hunter had stood outside Paglianos with the crowd, Troy having silently followed Lacey and her guide inside. He knew his friend was not about to let his beloved wife out of his sight — especially considering what was likely to happen inside the otherwise benign Italian-American restaurant.

Cigarette smoke wafted over from somewhere on his right, and he frowned. Even here in the dream world, he couldn't quite shake the mundane — and the irritating.

He'd have liked to have gone in too, to see what ordeal Lacey might be being put through. But that was Troy's place, his decision to watch over her.

The crowd around him, several dozens, perhaps more than a hundred, stretched down the sidewalk on Columbia, members of said crowd here and there engaged with the poor applicants as they slowly made their way further down their Walk.

One of the women — he couldn't recall her name, but she was the youngest one, slim of hip and bright-eyed, even in her fright — was currently being inspected by a couple seated at one of the many tables outside Paglianos. The young woman had been commanded to bend, quite close to the seated pair, both the man and woman leaning forward to view the naked charms on blatant display, the applicant grimacing as her face flushed beet red.

"Can you believe this shit?" a familiar deep voice said.

Hunter looked to his right. Von.

"I've lost track of the number times I've said or thought it." Hunter chuckled. "No way in *hell* am I complaining though."

Von tipped his head toward the dark maw of the entrance to Paglianos. "Lacey get dragged in there?"

"Troy's in there with her..."

"And you wish you were too." Von's eyes glittered as he grinned. "What's stopping you?"

Hunter didn't answer for a moment, not at all sure he knew what to say. "Seemed the thing to do, to let him make the call."

"You know... there's something you need to understand." Von turned to Hunter then, his expression sobering. "Part of what it takes to make it here, to really... fit in, I guess, is to know what she needs — before she does. You catch my drift?"

"Not really, but I've become used to that since I came to this place." Hunter threw up a hand. "Pretty new, you know, all of this."

"Trust your instincts, Hunter. That's what ninety-nine percent of this place is. Follow them, and you won't go wrong."

"What's the other one percent?"

Von leveled his gaze with Hunter. "Cold hard calculation."

A cell phone ring sounded in the clear midday air, several people shoving their hands into coats or purses. Von dug his out of the back pocket of his faded jeans, one dark brow arched as he stared down at the screen.

“Pissed off client?” Hunter knew well how much time general contractors spent on the phone, often with customers who demanded entirely too much, in ridiculously short amounts of time.

“Worse,” Von muttered, shaking his head, putting the phone to his ear. “Sheriff? What can I do you for?”

Between long moments watching the debauchery taking place all around him, Hunter watched Von, the man’s face growing increasingly redder, the crease in his brow going from a mild furrow to an absolute canyon. Celina had been stopped about fifty feet from the entrance to Pagliano’s, a man and a woman inspecting the stricture of her bonds, the long, pale fingers of the woman lifting one of Celina’s tightly bound breasts to touch the leather straps running underneath them. Von watched this as he talked softly into the phone, his eyes never leaving his lovely wife, though his stare looked a thousand miles away. Finally, Von hung up, his lips a tight line, his eyes narrowing. He turned to Hunter, laying a hand on his shoulder.

“I need you to watch over Celina for me.”

“Von, what do—?”

“Just do it for me. She knows what’s expected of her, but I want someone keeping an eye on her. You’ll know if you need to step in.”

“Have *you* ever had to step in?”

How was he supposed to know when that might be? He suddenly wished he were inside with Lacey. With her, he knew exactly what was required — and he’d enjoy providing it. Keeping watch over another man’s wife — other than Lacey, that is — was something else entirely.

Von looked away, the muscles at his jaw bunching. “Not once.” He patted Hunter’s shoulder. “I gotta go. It’ll be fine.”

“Von, *Jesus*, what’s going on?”

But the man was already walking away. Just before he disappeared into the crowd again, he shot Hunter a glance over his shoulder.

“Need to see the Sheriff. We got trouble.”

## Chapter 5

“I wonder what possesses a girl to volunteer for this,” the cool feminine voice said off to Lacey’s left.

Someone chuckled.

“I suspect *volunteer* is stretching the truth,” a male voice said. “Either way, it’s good for us. Look at the ass on this one. I’m surprised Troy doesn’t smack that twenty-four seven. I know I would.”

A roar of laughter rose, and Lacey looked down despite her blindfold, feeling the heat at her cheeks, her embarrassment no less intense for its comparative anonymity.

It was then that she realized the blindfold might not have been solely intended to debase her. It might well have been a mercy in disguise.

It was the words that got to her the most. The touching soon enough all seemed to blend together, her arousal and shame transforming it into a single, continuous storm of sensation. Fingers slipped deep inside her pussy, sharp nails scratching irritably at her tight anus, while strong hands yawned her buttocks as wide as they could go. All right there on the sidewalk. But the words, some cruel, some kind, broke into her red haze of lust, her mortification flaring as complete strangers — and sometimes others quite the opposite — commented on the creature on display before them.

“Who’s this one?” It was the female again, a voice Lacey didn’t recognize. “We can’t see her eyes. Despite how nice this is”—a soft hand patted her bare mons—“we can’t exactly identify her by her little cunt alone.”

More laughter and catcalls. Either hands or asses were slapped; she couldn’t tell. Had more people gathered around? Her mind, in the darkness, constructed phantom terrors, frights upon frights. All of it amplifying her sense of being reduced to a mute plaything — which only spiraled her arousal higher.

“Lacey Warren. Applicant number eight,” her hated guide intoned, his clipped cadence formal, almost aloof. Could he really be unaffected by all of this? Was he inured to the spectacle she once more wished she could have just a single look at?

“Troy’s wife?” The strange male voice whistled low. “I think I’ll take the next invite to the neighborhood session. I wouldn’t mind seeing her put through her paces.”

This was one of their... neighbors? She searched her memory of the people she’d met thus far since her move to White Valley, trying to match this voice to one of them. But to no avail. This had to be a new person — or someone enjoying messing with Lacey’s mind.

A hand slapped her breast, stinging heat blazing upon her skin at the harsh blow.

“Good to see these tits swinging.”

“That’s all,” the female said, the dismissal clear in her voice. Lacey could almost *see* the woman’s eyes rolling. As much as Lacey might not like Troy enjoying the sight of another naked woman paraded before him, Lacey wondered if she might like to switch places with that woman.

Would she be kind — or as harsh — in her place?

She staggered on, the sounds of slaps, moans, and laughter interspersed all around her as she continued her journey. Another man stopped her a few minutes after she’d been dismissed by the couple.

She'd imagined people lining up to fondle her, to enjoy her helpless, naked state. The confusion and heightened senses engendered by the deprivation of her sight made every sound louder, every slight more cutting, every blow fiercer.

And every pleasure more intense.

What did that mean? Had Troy requested this, knowing her sensory deprivation would have this effect?

"Her nipples look sore."

It was another male, a slight twang to his voice. West Texas, perhaps as a child, the accent mostly submerged over the years.

"She's been a popular attraction," her guide said, pleasure in his voice.

Lacey would have liked to claw his fucking eyes out at that moment.

"I can imagine." A hand clasped her face, turning her head this way and that. "Let's have a look at her then."

The man proceeded to inspect every part of her body, as if she were a draft horse at the county auction. Like all the others, he zeroed in on her breasts, fondling them with a callous harshness that had her whining behind her gag. He smoothed roughened palms down her belly, before patting her mons. He gave her a little slap there, and she jerked, to muted laughter from the crowd.

"Nice, swollen pussy on this one. I wonder..." Her labia were splayed apart, the morning air cool upon the moist tissues.

"What I thought. The filly's dripping. Got a hot one here."

More peals of laughter made her want to curl into a ball, despite the ever present throbbing of her clit.

A clit his fingers exposed next, slicking back her hood.

A soft whistle accompanied this, and the man handling her chuckled. "I'd say part of her is enjoying the Walk. What do you say?" The fingers pressed her flesh still wider. "You ever seen one this big?"

"Not since we got that loaner from the farm in Goldendale," another slightly higher pitched male voice said, drawing closer.

"You mean Kurt's place, right?"

"Yep, you need to pay a visit one of these days. Down the rabbit hole shit, but you'll love it."

"That one had a hood piercing though, right?" the man with the Texas accent said. "She was swollen continuously from that little stud. I think it would drive little Lacey out of her mind if she had something like that to deal with."

Thick fingers pressed up inside her and she drew a sharp breath as they plunged deep, the tips teasing the mouth of her womb.

"She's still tight here. The hands would love a chance to test out this pussy, stretch her out a little. Would you like that, girl?"

She stayed stock still, her heart pounding, hoping the question was rhetorical.

"Answer your betters, Applicant," the guide said, his hard hand smacking her ass.

She tried to say 'yes, sir,' her cruel gag reducing it to mortifying gibberish that had the onlookers laughing again.

"I'll take that as a yes then," West Texas voice said.

Her body turned roughly, those fingers withdrew from her pussy, that same hand clamping upon her shoulder, her juices wet against her skin as she was forced to bend.

"Those thighs look sore too. Poor girl." He touched her buttocks, lifting and pinching each one in turn, then squeezing them gently. "Only a little pink here though. Smart man. The Council fines aren't pretty for Applicants presented with marked asses. These plump little cheeks aren't gonna stay unmarked long once she's put on Display though. I might have to make a return visit once they're staked out."

Those strong hands spun her back around, straightening her. He leaned in close, his breath warm on her cheek. "Need to see if I can convince Troy to loan you out to my farm for a couple days. I'll have this

wet cunt of yours almost as worn out as your ass will be. We don't coddle fillies on my farm. You'll work dawn to dusk — then you'll give your thanks in your pen afterward. Might give your strict Master a few ideas, you know?"

Lacey made a sound she hoped he'd take to be acquiescence, even as she fervently hoped never to set one foot in such a place. Fantasy was one thing, but what she imagined she'd experience at that man's hands was something else.

*So is it fear — or fascination?*

Perhaps it was both, though she didn't know what that might mean. Was complete subjugation something she could actually go through? No, not with a stranger. She knew that much.

But with Troy? With Hunter?

Lacey wasn't sure there was *anything* she wouldn't allow those two men. For this one day, she may be this town's plaything. But for the rest of her days, she knew the truth when it came to those two amazing, terrifying men in her life, those twin poles of anguish and ecstasy.

She was *theirs*. In all things.

Lacey stumbled further along on her journey, with only the cruel grip of her guide to orient her, more slaps, female cries, and deep male voices sounding off to her right.

Her guide led her off the curb then, and she thought perhaps they'd crossed a street, the pavement beneath her heels slightly softer, suggesting asphalt.

Then he stopped her once more, a gust of wind cooling the sweat upon her body, her nipples suddenly like ice.

"You know the stairs before you. Now, start climbing, Applicant."

*Oh God, no.*

She'd heard the stories of how a Walk ended, but when she thought of what lay at the top of the stairs that circled up the small promontory point at the north end of the park, her mouth went dry, her gag sticking to her tongue.

With a loud slap, heat burst upon her ass. "Get moving, or you'll be whipped every step of the way."

A wave of pleased murmuring rippled around her. She still had people watching!

As she took the first faltering step, the heels making each movement a terror, she wondered one thing over and over.

*Where are Troy and Hunter?*

## Chapter 6

The restraint of her ankles was more effective than she'd ever have believed. The feeling of helplessness was so acute, panic threatened to overwhelm her. But she'd managed it.

The fact that she'd stonewalled Ford on his questions helped. It gave her the strength to keep going. He'd see soon enough that he was wasting his time.

She tried to ignore the sinking feeling deep in her belly at the sound of the gentle squeak of the front door opening. Ford glanced at her from behind his desk, then rose, striding out of sight to her left.

Her bitterness flared anew at her inability to see anything other than the little section of the room occupied by Ford's desk.

Rumbling, deep male voices sounded somewhere in the direction Ford had headed, her heart rate increasing by the second. Her acute feeling of loneliness was almost crushing now. In Portland, she had friends — everywhere she went.

Here? The only man she *might* have called a friend was the one who'd bound her hands and feet and thrown her ass in a jail cell.

She looked at the polished tile of the floor, her mind fixating for a moment on why there needed to be a floor drain in the tiny space.

*Get it together, Fal. You can handle this. He's a hick Sheriff. Humor him.*

Two sets of huge boots, one polished to a gleaming black, the other a battered, dirt-crusting gray, appeared in her field of vision, and she snapped her head up.

*Shit. Him again.*

Von and Ford stood silently, regarding her. She remembered his height when she was zooming in with the telephoto. He'd stood taller than almost everyone around him, with the exception of the black-suited goons who seemed everywhere out there that morning as the crowd slowly gathered along the street.

She met Von's gaze, and she suppressed a shiver at the cool calculation she saw in his dark eyes. Hid thick, black goatee accentuated the prominence of his jaw, making his chin look strong enough to split granite. His shoulders were broad and well-muscled, though not quite as heavily as Ford's. The man glanced at the Sheriff from the corner of his eye, his gaze never quite leaving Falon.

"You search her?"

*Search me?*

Her heart was at full gallop now.

"We haven't gotten there yet," Ford muttered, cinching a thumb in the waistband of his snug tan trousers. "We've just been chatting, mostly."

"These fucking reporters... don't trust 'em." Von stepped to the bars, wrapping a huge hand around one of them. "She could be hiding information anywhere."

"Information happens to be how I do my job," she said, managing to keep her voice firm, despite her increasing unease. "In this country, we're allowed to have sources, background, *confidentiality*. Oh, and there's a thing called the Fourth Amendment." She lifted a chin in Ford's direction. "He wants my

sources? He'll have to get a court order — and I'd still rather go to jail than reveal them."

"Seems to me you're already in jail," Von said, dropping to a crouch, drawing his hand down the bar with him. "And spouting off about your Constitutional rights isn't gonna do you much good here, lady. You're better off to cooperate — if you know what's good for you."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Oh, but she knew.

"I'll let you draw your own conclusions." He grinned, his prominent canines evoking the glee of the predator. "I'm sure your imagination's already running wild with it."

She looked to Ford. "Is he police too?" She remembered the truck and the logo. Seemed like construction, but in this town she wouldn't be surprised if the entire police force was moonlighters or volunteers. All except for Ford, that is.

"His name's Von Ellison. He's a friend." Ford shrugged, his lips quirking. "Technically, he's my boss too."

Falon tried to keep her surprise from showing. Weakness or uncertainty was not going to help her here. She locked gazes with the menacing Von. "You're what then? The chief of police? The mayor?"

"Let's just say I'm someone you need to listen to." He leaned his forehead against the bars, looking at her from under strong brows. "So, listen closely. You do whatever my friend here says. *Whatever* he says."

"I don't care wh—"

"Shut that mouth, or we'll shut it for you." Von lifted his head from the gray steel, his eyes narrowed. "What you've done here... it's fucked up a lot of shit. It's fucked up a lot of shit for *you*. If I were you, I'd be thinking less about what my rights are, and more about how well I'm going to behave if I have any hope of getting out of this jail cell any time soon. You got me, miss reporter girl?"

She glared at him, knowing whatever she said would be twisted around and used against her.

"*Got me?*"

"Yes, I've got it!"

Her voice was harsher than she'd intended, her shout echoing in the small space. But her voice was all she had now.

Von stood up, with a mock shake of his head. "I see you haven't learned the proper way to address your betters yet." He looked over at Ford.

*My betters? What the fuck?*

"We're still working on that one," the Sheriff said, with a sly smile. "She'll get there."

"I'd like to be here when you do... but I have to get back." Von frowned, then pointed at Ford. "The sooner we get this over with, the better." Von looked down upon her once more, his long, tanned fingers stroking the hair at his chin. "This is gonna be a fucking mess."

Then without another word, Von strode from the room.

She watched him go, a painful lump growing in her throat. Her sense of helplessness was almost suffocating at that moment, primal fear threatening to swamp her higher thinking entirely.

*Get a hold of yourself. Think.*

Looking down at the floor, Ford leaned against the still-closed cell door, silent for a moment. He glanced over at her, a resigned frown creasing his lips.

"Last chance. You tell me what I want to know, and I'll do everything I can to make this go easy for you." He met Falon's eyes. "Be reasonable. I'm asking for a name."

"You're asking for *everything*." She clenched her jaw, hoping he couldn't see the pounding of the pulse at her throat. "I won't do it. Throw me in jail. It's not changing anything."

He sighed, and she didn't particularly like the dark glee she thought she saw dancing in his eyes for a moment. Did he want her to defy him? Force his hand? Why was he still asking for something he knew she'd never give him?

"Have it your way then." He pulled the keys from his pocket, and her gaze widened, zeroing in on it

as he slipped the metal into the lock.

“What’s happening? Are you going to book me?” She swallowed hard, but her voice didn’t quaver. “I want my lawyer, Ford.”

“You don’t need a lawyer for any of this.” He slid the door back, the steel clanging loudly against the seat, Falon jerking in response.

“Wh-what are...?”

He lifted a finger. “Up. I want you over there.” He cocked a thumb toward the section of the wall that was clad in clean, white tile, a drain in the floor there too. She thought it might have been a shower but she had no clue why one might be installed in the open like that. The only clue that it might be something else entirely was the long vertical steel bar embedded in the wall along one side. She had no trouble at all imagining what that might be used for.

Falon peered through the bars at the tile. “I’m not going over there. Why do I have to go over there?”

“Because you need to be searched.”

\* \* \*

“W-why am I being searched? I’m not a *criminal*, Ford.” She swallowed hard, her throat like a desert. “Just let me go. This is ridiculous!”

“Everyone who gets booked, gets searched. It’s just how it is.” He stepped inside the cell, leaving her a clear path through the door. “The easy way or the hard way. Whichever you choose, it’s happening.”

“Jesus,” she said under her breath. She glared up at him, raising her bound feet.

“No.”

“What the f—hell do you mean, no? Come on, Ford, take these off.” She shook her feet, jiggling the chain connecting the cuffs.

Ford simply shook his head.

Opening her mouth to retort, words suddenly threatened to fail her. Clearing her throat, she glanced back at the tiled area. “How... how am I going to walk... over there?”

“As best you can, I guess.”

“Fucking asshole,” she whispered as she tried to raise herself from the mattress.

“We’ll address that little outburst later, I think.”

“What?”

Ford hauled her up by the upper arm, and dragged her from the cell, the ridiculous ease with which he handled her both frightening and awe-inspiring.

“If you can walk in those, do it.” His voice was cool once more, almost clinical. It sent a chill down her spine to hear it.

All she could manage was a stooped over pivoting from foot to foot, his grip on her arm catching her more than once as she lost her balance with a gasped curse. Her face burned hot as she moved, her bonds humiliating her in a way she couldn’t even explain, this reduction of her person down to abject helplessness even more shocking psychologically than it was physically. Why was he doing this? He was practically twice her size and many times stronger. He had no need to treat her like a dangerous criminal. The tight bonds seemed simply... cruel. Capricious.

A tall, varnished wood cabinet stood against the wall next to the railing, a stout lock on its polished silver handle. She wondered what might be inside, though considering it was a police station, she knew it was probably something as mundane as a rifle or shotgun. Still, why would they have a gun cabinet right there adjacent to the tile?

*Jesus, stop. You’re freaking yourself out.*

She heard Ford’s keys again and looked back at him. “What are you...?”

He turned her so that she faced him, her back to the tiled wall, her feeling of being backed into a corner now much more than figurative.

"I'm unlocking those cuffs, but the ankle chain stays on. Take your top off first, then we'll cuff you again and we can undo those feet." His gaze met hers. "Do exactly as I say and cooperate, Ms. Moore. If you do, this will be over quickly. You won't like what happens if you don't."

"Why can't you just pat me down?" She couldn't believe he was actually going to... strip search her.

*This cannot be happening.*

"All prisoners are searched. A pat down is completely inadequate."

"I'm a goddamned reporter, Ford, not a hardened criminal. This is insane."

"Maybe you should have thought of this when you lied to me and went back on your word. Your actions have consequences. Since you've broken my trust, this is what happens. How am I to be sure you're not recording something right now?"

"Ford, don't be stupid..."

"You said you were an investigative reporter, right? How many stories have we seen filmed with hidden cameras or microphones? You expect me to take you at your word here?" He took a small step closer. "Don't want to be treated like a criminal? Then stop acting like one." He gently chucked her under the chin. "And don't think I didn't notice you aren't addressing me properly."

"You can't... don't you at least have a female officer who can do this? It's not exactly easy taking my clothes off in front of ... you."

He paused a half a second at that.

"Unfortunately, no, I'm all you've got. But if you're worried, I can call Deputy Anders in and he can witness this. You know, to make sure I don't take any liberties."

"No! No... okay, fine." She held up her still bound hands, the prospect of getting free for even a few seconds overriding her mortification at what he was going to make her do.

He released her cuffs in an instant, surprising her by grasping each of her wrists in turn, his fingertips gentle as they traced over the abraded flesh left behind by the embrace of the remorseless steel manacles.

"I'm sorry about this. Once we get you into the leather ones, shouldn't be a problem."

"Leather ones? What are you talking about?"

But he simply met her gaze, a small, sly smile momentarily quirking his lips. "Shirt, Ms. Moore."

The smile caused a little fluttering in her belly, the sensation shocking both for its inappropriateness and its power.

*Just because he's handsome doesn't mean you need to react like a hormonal teenager every time he indulges you with a smile.*

She undid the buttons of her shirt, looking away from him as she slipped it down her arms, the air inside the station somehow seeming to grow cooler as this symbolic shield was lowered, increasing her sense of vulnerability, her helplessness.

And the mortifying fluttering came again, even stronger this time. The thought of him looking upon her naked flesh did horrify her, despite the protection of some modesty afforded her by her bra, but that wasn't all it did. Not by a long shot. She lamented her choice of white lace for the bra this morning, none of this helped by the fact her full cut blue and white striped panties didn't even come close to matching it. But it wasn't as if she expected to be stripping down to her underwear in a police station later that day. No, by this time, she'd planned to be triumphantly speeding her way back toward Portland, with a career-making exposé on her hands.

Ford took her shirt from her, turning it inside out, examining it closely. Satisfied, he folded it and set it down on top of the cabinet.

She hugged her arms around her breasts, even though the gesture did nothing but draw attention to the part of her body she was trying to shield.

"Nope, give me your hands," he said, holding up the cuffs again.

"No, seriously. You don't have to do that. Please... sir."

He smiled at the word, pleasure dancing in the depths of his blue eyes, but he slowly shook his head. "Sorry. Hands."

"Fuck," she muttered, the sound more a whimper than a spoken word.

"Gonna need to do something about that mouth, I think."

"Thanks, Dad."

He glared at her as he cuffed her wrists again, drawing them a notch tighter at her sarcastic retort.

"Actions have consequences here, Ms. Moore."

She looked away, humiliation settling over her again as he reduced her back to a state of complete helplessness.

He said no more though as he dropped to one knee, Falon trying — and failing — not to notice the breadth of his thick shoulders, the tight uniform showing off the powerful, heavy muscles of his back.

"I take these off, and I want you out of those pants. You can still do it with your hands cuffed, so don't bother complaining you can't." He rose, twirling the key ring on a long finger, the ankle cuffs fisted in his other hand. "The faster you obey, the faster we get this over with."

"I...can't believe this." But she undid the button at her waist, skinning the pants down as quickly as she could, crouching as she struggled with extricating her feet from the bunched fabric. She could feel him watching her, the weight of his gaze a palpable thing, weighing her down, pinning her in place. Then she rose, holding her pants out to him. She clenched her thighs together instinctively, hoping this was all he expected.

Again, he inspected the garment at length, paying special attention to the pockets and the still no-doubt warm crotch area. Somehow it made it worse, that knowledge that he could still feel the heat of her body transferred to the fabric he held in his hands.

"Are we done now?" She tried to keep that edge in her voice, even as she avoided making eye contact with him.

"I don't think so."

She snapped her head back toward him. "No...?"

"I want the underwear off too. Wouldn't be the first time devices had been hidden there."

"Absolutely not, Ford." She tried to cross her arms again, thwarted by the cold steel biting into her wrists. She hissed at the hot pain, but kept her eyes on the Sheriff.

*He's bluffing. Please tell me he's bluffing.*

"I've got all day, Ms. Moore. Doesn't mean I want to spend it standing here waiting for you to follow an order." He lowered his chin. "Underwear. Now."

"At least... turn around or something? Please?"

For a horrible moment, she watched him weighing the options, and she feared he might make her do it right there in front of him.

Then he sighed, rolling his eyes. "Panties first, then I hand them back to you."

He turned away, the immense expanse of his back like a giant fortress wall she might otherwise have delighted in taking shelter behind, pressing her soft body against those hard, immovable planes—

*For Christ's sake, what has gotten into you?*

She never would've believed she could take off panties that fast with her wrists bound together, so eager was she to have this over and done with. She constantly peeked toward the door to the office, convinced any moment someone might come traipsing through it, upon which she was absolutely certain she'd drop dead of shame on the spot. Thankfully, no one came, and she silently thanked God she'd worn freshly laundered underwear that day.

Ford however, took his time before handing back her unmentionables. "I want the bra too."

"I—I can't...it's a... the clasp is in the back. Let my hands loose?" She pulled her panties back on as she said it, praying he'd relent.

"No way am I letting your hands and your feet loose at the same time."

He spun around before she could suggest another alternative, and for a moment he watched her, his gaze coursing unhurriedly over her body, the heat at her cheeks somewhere between volcanic and thermonuclear. She looked down, unable to bear it any longer.

Ford crouched down, the thick, dark hair atop his head filling her field of vision as the leather cuffs were once more cinched tight around her ankles, the sound of the chain links clinking together making her cheeks burn anew.

"There," he said, rising to tower above her again. "Nice stripes, by the way."

"Fuck you," she said softly, her voice cracking.

"Maybe I'll just have to take the bra off myself then?"

"No!" She held out her hands. "I'm sorry... it's just. This isn't exactly easy."

"It's not meant to be," he said, removing the steel from her wrists.

"Okay, now turn," she said, a frantic note to her voice.

"No, I think I'll have you turn around this time."

"W-what?"

"Turn toward the corner. You can slip the bra off without me seeing anything, right?"

"I...I guess. Ford, please turn around."

"Or I could just have you take it off right now, as you are?"

Her clenched teeth didn't quite bite off her whine as she slowly pivoted toward the corner, at that moment feeling like a young girl more than ever.

*Making you stand in the corner now? Seriously?*

The tingling heat just beginning at her sex almost made her whimper.

*No!*

Yes, she'd once entertained fantasies of the take-no-shit alpha male making her toe the line, but that was long in her past. She was a modern, grown woman now. She'd outgrown all of those dark, illicit fantasies, those urges she'd never had the courage to admit to anyone. Just a phase, she'd told herself.

Once she'd even have believed it, but at that moment, she was no longer so sure.

Her back to him, she unsnapped the catch, the feel of him watching her in the quiet room seeming to amplify even the smallest sounds, the drumbeat of her heart in her ears, the tiny creak of a floorboard beneath Ford's boots, the faint *tick-tick* of the analog clock high up on the white painted wall behind the Sheriff's tidy desk.

She froze as something brushed against her bottom. It was so faint, she wasn't sure if she'd imagined it.

*Did he just...?*

And what if he had touched her ass? It wasn't as if her pussy hadn't clenched tight at the thought of it, no matter how wrong all of this was.

Taking a deep breath, she pulled the lace from her arms, the movement making her acutely aware of the weight of her now unfettered breasts. She held her bra at her side for him.

He snatched it from her hand, making a low humming behind her as he looked it over for a long moment. Gathering her soft breasts between her arms to keep them from swinging, she waited, sure he was getting more than a good look at her brassiere.

"Okay, you're good," he finally said, draping the lace over her naked shoulder.

"Can I get dressed now?" Falon scrambled to put on her bra again, reaching up for her shirt.

"Not just yet," he said behind her, his big hand closing on her forearm and bringing it back down to her side.

Her heart rate increased as she felt the air pressure change, Ford stepping closer, the proximity of his muscled body like electricity across her exposed skin.

*What the fuck is going on here?*

But part of her knew, and she stayed as still as she could, her breasts heaving, her breathing increasing by the second. What was he going to do to her? Hadn't this gone way beyond a garden variety search?

She wanted to look back at him, to berate him some more for crossing about fifty unspoken lines... but she didn't. Somehow she knew it would break the spell, snap them out of whatever it was happening

at that moment. So she stared at the perfect white tile, wondering inside whether or not she wanted that touch she thought she'd felt to be real, Ford crossing another line her body apparently already had.

*I don't know who's more of a danger to you in this place, Falon — the above-the-law hunky Sheriff, or your out-of-control pussy.*

His heavy hand clasped her bare shoulder and she caught her breath.

"Ford..."

"Stay where you are."

He knelt behind her again, and for a fleeting, crazy moment she wanted to feel those way-too-expressive lips of his pressed to the back of her thigh, imagining what those strong hands felt like clutching her ass tight.

*You're unbelievable.*

The leather cuffs were released from her ankles once more, the chain sliding across the floor as he pulled the manacles free.

"Get dressed, Ms. Moore. I'll be right back." Then she heard his footsteps on the floorboards recede behind her, the sound of a groaning hinge, and the thud of his office door closing behind him.

As she pulled on her pants she tried not to think about what had just happened, how her body had reacted instinctively to him.

*Just nerves.*

"Keep telling yourself that, Fal," she whispered. "You know what that was."

The door swung open as she tucked her shirt back into her pants. Ford stood in the entrance, holding up the keyring. "Looks like I was wrong. It's your lucky day. You're getting out of here after all."

"I— I am? I want to make my phone call."

Relief flooded through her, threatening to turn her muscles into jelly.

"Don't get ahead of yourself," Ford said, striding over to her and slapping the cuffs around her wrists once more. "There won't be any phone calls for now. You've got a date with the Council first."