

DESIRE AT THE LAKE



ERIN SWANN

CHAPTER 1



WAYLON

THURSDAY AFTERNOON, I WALKED INTO THE EAST CLEAR LAKE POLICE STATION—unescorted this time. The place reeked of stale coffee and day-old pizza. A greasy, telltale cardboard box lay folded in one of those short trash cans.

Chief Earl Pollock looked up from his desk. “Benson, thanks for coming in.”

The cordial greeting was something new. If he was playing good cop... I looked around but didn’t see his son Officer Devlin here to play bad cop—something that came naturally to him.

“Sure.” It wasn’t as if I had a choice in the matter. If I’d refused, he’d have sent his son out to *fetch* me.

My family and theirs had hated each other for years, but things had reached a new low with the disappearance of Lee Pollock, the chief’s nephew.

Clearly the Pollocks didn’t think Lee had run off; they thought he was dead. Worse yet, they had decided I had to be the culprit because Lee and I had argued.

It was my third time inside this rickety building in the last week. The previous two times I’d been brought in by Devlin. He was as crooked as they came. More than once, the asswipe had framed my brother, Case, for things he didn’t do.

One of those frame-ups had resulted in Case spending serious time up in

Augusta Correctional. The system had failed Case. When the cops lied and the judge believed them, nothing else mattered. We all knew it had been revenge on Devlin's part—a dispute over a girl. But, knowing and proving were two different things, and Case had paid the price.

"We can get set up in the conference room," Earl said, pointing to the blue door on the left. Earl was no doubt as crooked as Devlin, only smarter, which made him more dangerous.

I'd been behind the blue door before, and *conference room* was shorthand for *interrogation chamber*. But before I made it to the room, the door to the street opened behind me.

Dad stood in the entryway.

"Matt," old Earl said. "I don't recall inviting you."

"I'm not staying," Dad said as he stepped inside.

Shane Watten came in behind him. "I'll be sitting in, Chief."

Watten was the lawyer who'd gotten Case out of his most recent court mess.

The chief tried and failed to hold back a sneer. "A lawyer, huh? What's he hiding?"

"You know better than that, Chief," Watten shot back.

Dad returned to the door. "I'll be seeing you around, Earl."

Watten approached the chief's desk and extended his card.

Old Earl didn't take it. "I know who you are. Let's get started."

Once inside the small interrogation room, my lawyer started a recorder and placed it on the table.

The chief jumped right in. "Do you know where Lee Pollock is?"

"No. Do you?"

Watten glared at me. Message received—cut the backtalk.

Earl ignored my insolence. "Did you aid him in disappearing?"

That was a surprising new question.

"No." It took willpower to keep from asking the chief if he had.

"Do you know If Lee Pollock is alive or dead?"

"No."

"Do you know where his body is?"

"Chief," Watten asked, "have you established that your nephew is deceased?"

"Answer the question," the chief said, looking at me.

When Watten didn't object, I answered. "I hadn't heard he was dead."

"Did you kill him?"

"No, and I still haven't heard he's dead."

"Did you ever have a fight with him?"

"Yes." It wasn't something I could deny, nor something I was ashamed of.

"Why did you fight with him?"

"I didn't start it. He did."

"What was it about?"

The lawyer nodded for me to answer.

"I didn't want him dating my little sister, for obvious reasons."

"Priscilla?"

"She's the only sister I have."

All the Pollocks were sewer trash, and my little sister was just that—my sister. That meant no way was I okay with Lee, or any of them, coming anywhere near her.

"How long have you hated Lee Pollock?"

"I didn't say I did. I just don't want him dating my sister."

The questions went on. *When was the last time I saw him? When he left, which way did he go? Did I know where he planned to go? Had he called me? Had he texted me? Had he emailed me?*

After each question, I looked to my attorney for a nod before answering. Except for the one about helping Lee leave, the questions hadn't changed, and neither had my answers. I didn't know squat about where Lee Pollock had gone. Although, the more time I spent with his uncle, the more obvious it seemed that he likely left to get away from this asshole.

"I've answered all of these before—twice in fact," I said after it became obvious that no new questions were coming my way.

Watten adjusted his bow tie. "Chief, since Mr. Benson has already answered these questions, we should move on to new material."

The chief smirked. "I'm sorry if you feel inconvenienced, but one of our citizens, who happens to be my nephew, is missing. I take that damn seriously."

"Of course you do," Watten said. "But if all we're doing is repeating the same questions over and over again, I think we're done here."

The chief lifted his hand. "Not so fast." His gaze turned to me. "What happened to that old, green truck of yours?"

That question was new. "Some idiot stole it."

"You didn't report it to us," he said.

"I don't live in East Clear Lake," I reminded him. "I reported it to the sheriff." His jurisdiction didn't extend to my side of town.

"Why a week after the fact?" He'd done his research.

"I figured the punk who stole would leave it by the side of the road somewhere. When he didn't, I filed a report."

"Which punk?"

"I don't know—maybe one of your sons." The ass deserved it, and for all I knew, it could have been one of them.

The chief's face reddened and his hand raised for a moment. "Don't you get smart with me, son."

My lawyer's stern look kept me from shouting back that shame would've made me kill myself if I was his son." Instead, I did the opposite. "Sorry. I apologize." I'd never apologized to a Pollock before, and the words made my skin crawl with shame I'd need a shower to wash away.

Watten stood. "If that's it, I think we're done here. And, Chief, if you wish to have another chat with my client, you must arrange it through me."

The chief's jaw ticked. He didn't seem to like being told what he could or couldn't do.

When he didn't object, I got up and followed my lawyer out.

"What do you think?" I asked once the outside door had closed behind us.

Watten didn't respond until we reached his car. He spun. "If you ever do that again, you can find yourself another lawyer."

The anger in his voice surprised me.

"You provide minimal but truthful answers, and never add backtalk. I don't care how much you dislike the man. I don't work for stupid clients who can't control themselves. Are we clear?"

Not many men got me to back up, but Watten had. "Sorry." I also didn't apologize, and now I'd done it twice in a matter of minutes.

Watten got in his car and drove off.

As I buckled into my truck, the question about my other pickup bothered me. What was old Earl fishing for?

I smiled as I pulled out of the parking lot. If Lee had asked to take my truck to get away from his uncle, I would have gladly given it to him, because it also got him away from my sister.

Damn, I wish I'd thought of that.



ANNA

IT WAS A BORING THURSDAY AFTERNOON AT THE FLATFOOT DISTILLERY, WHERE WE MADE hands-down the best flavored whiskeys anywhere.

Without my boss, Lee Pollock, around, I'd run out of things to do. He'd been gone a week, and I'd completed everything he'd asked, plus a few items.

Just before five, Lee's cousin Markus Pollock walked up. "Any word from him yet?"

He could only have been talking about Lee. "No. Not yet." I hadn't heard from my boss since he left, and neither had anybody else.

He'd left work last Wednesday and sent me a late-evening text saying he was starting his swing by our distributors a few days early. It was uncharacteristic, but he'd talked once about catching them unaware to see what he called "the unvarnished truth."

Markus walked into Lee's office and looked around, almost as if he didn't believe my answer—either that, or he was scoping it out as his new office, if the scuttlebutt was correct.

Several versions of the rumor had made the rounds. They varied in where Lee had gone and why. In all but one, my boss wasn't coming back, and Markus would be in charge.

Since I needed this job as much as I needed air, it wasn't mere wishful thinking that made me favor the one where Lee did return. That one went that he'd gone to New York to raise money to buy out the company himself. Knowing their relationship, that one would put Markus on the street—another reason to like it.

I ignored my phone when it vibrated on my desk. Answering it would provoke Markus and earn me another "I don't know why Lee keeps you around."

What Markus didn't understand was that if it weren't for his family connection, a troglodyte like him was more likely than me to be shown the door, which was yet another reason to like the New York rumor.

As he exited Lee's office, he asked the same question he did each day now. "And none of the distributors have seen him?"

"No. Not yet." The first day, I'd wondered if Lee's car had broken down. The

second, I'd wondered if he'd had an accident and ended up in the hospital. The state police had answered both of those for me—nothing to report.

Markus paced back and forth a few times before leaving, mumbling to himself.

After he rounded the corner, I flipped the phone over to find a message from my friend Pris—Priscilla Benson—on the screen. She was Lee's girlfriend, and she and I had talked frequently.

PRIS: Pool night at the Barrel don't forget

With all the focus on finding my boss, the fact that tonight was our weekly pool game had slipped by me. Callie Bush, me, and Pris were the CAP sisters from high school and had kept up our Thursday-night tradition of whooping the Benson boys at pool at The Peanut Barrel ever since.

ME: I'll be there

After missing once last month, I didn't dare skip this one and risk ending up on Pris's shit list.

To be on the safe side, I didn't leave my desk until five-fifteen.

As expected, Markus was downstairs, and he checked his watch when he noticed me.

Asshole.



I HAD BARELY GOTTEN INSIDE THE DOOR OF MY LITTLE APARTMENT BUILDING WHEN THE question came.

Mrs. Crawford had her door open. "My hot water's not working. Is yours?"

"I don't know. I'll have to check." This morning it had been only lukewarm, but that sometimes happened if other people got their showers before me.

"How am I supposed to wash Mr. Ruffles without hot water? You should talk to your boss and get this fixed for all of us."

"I will when he gets back."

"It better be soon," she said before shutting her door. She didn't care that my boss had fallen off the edge of the Earth. But her dog being late for his bath was a big problem.

The negligible rent of my company-provided apartment was the only thing right about this building.

I slid my key into the mailbox. Why did I bother? The only things that ever arrived were the catalogs trying to sell me things I couldn't afford and envelopes that contained bills I could barely afford after my mother's expenses at Happy Hollow retirement home. I closed my eyes and twisted the key.

After a sigh, I opened my eyes and peered in. I was in luck. Only one bill and one catalog. I rolled the envelope inside the catalog and didn't peek. No need to ruin my mood before I got upstairs. Maybe I should go to only checking mail once a week. That would give me six whole days without the possibility of a new bill ruining my mood.

Yesterday it had been the dentist's bill. Replacing a crown wasn't cheap. How was I supposed to know that the label didn't mean *all* of them when it said the olives were pitted? That had cost me two days of pain and a huge bill.

After trudging up the narrow stairs, I keyed open our door and closed it quickly behind me. As far as Misty was concerned, this place was even more hers than mine.

"Misty, girl," I called. She hid somewhere, which was better than bolting past me and out the door. I set down the mail, which revealed the bad news that the envelope was my credit card bill. *Joy, oh joy.* At least since Toby left town last month, the bill would stop having his weekly bar charges on it.

Pris had been right about him from the beginning, but I still gave myself a mental pat on the back for dumping his loser ass. Where he'd gone nobody knew, and nobody cared.

I pulled out my phone, scrolled to the Tile app, and buzzed my cat.

The little tune played from my bedroom, and Misty darted out. She was deaf to my voice, but when I called the Tile I'd clipped to her collar, it vibrated enough to get her attention. She hated the thing, but it had proved its value the last time she'd gotten outside.

Misty rubbed up against my leg, but that only lasted until I walked toward her food dish.

Meow.

I added a scoop of kibble to the dish.

Meow.

I didn't give her any more.

Meow.

ERIN SWANN

She looked at me like I was stupid for not knowing one scoop wasn't enough. "Tough. You get more when you finish that." *Finish* was a relative term. She always left a few pieces behind as inedible.



WAYLON

I DIDN'T HEAR THE ALARM ON MY PHONE UNTIL I FINISHED THE CUT AND SHUT DOWN my saw. The project was coming along, and any other night I'd consider another half hour of cutting or so, given the light I still had. But tonight was pool night at The Peanut Barrel.

I set the chainsaw on the table and removed my safety glasses and ear muffs. Using a chainsaw to turn large pieces of wood and stumps into art might not be classic sculpting, but the concept was the same as Michelangelo saying the piece was already complete. All I had to do was remove the superfluous material to uncover the magnificent creature hiding within.

The high-brow types in the big cities could keep their ceramics, and their sissy oil paints. As far as I was concerned, a real man used real tools, and nothing said *real tool* like a chainsaw.

Inside the house, I cleaned up before taking Mutt out to pee. As usual he took his sweet time marking the yard before I wrangled him back inside.

On a normal night I wouldn't bother changing for The Peanut Barrel, but the girls would be there, and Anna in particular. She had been my kryptonite ever since high school—the unattainable one that dreams were made of. For her, I'd even brush my teeth before heading over.

CHAPTER 2



ANNA

BEFORE LEAVING, I WROTE A CHECK TO HAPPY HOLLOW FOR MOM. THE ENVELOPE went in the outgoing slot on my way to meet the girls. It would almost empty my bank account—almost.

When I got to The Peanut Barrel, I shuffled through the peanut shells on the floor and skipped the bar, where Pris's brother Case and his girlfriend, Jordan, were perched, looking all lovey-dovey.

Pris was already practicing on one of the tables in the back. Since we couldn't reserve a table, she liked to get here early and grab one. She looked better than I expected, given Lee's disappearance.

I would've probably been curled up in a ball somewhere, but Pris was stronger than I was.

She leaned against the table edge. "I take it there's no news?"

She knew I would've called her if there was.

"Sorry. No." I pulled her into a hug. "I'm sorry."

She grabbed me and softened in my grip. "The distributors?"

I'd told her of Lee's message to me. "No. Not yet."

"I'm really worried. It's not like him." She gave a hint of a snuffle and held on tight.

"I know. Me too." I rubbed her back. "Wanna come over and talk after this?" We'd had a big cry session a few days ago, but I sensed she needed more.

"Yeah," she sighed.

"Hey," her brother Case said from behind me. "Shouldn't you be saving the hugs for your brothers?"

Case was the physical therapist in town, and his latest client, turned girlfriend, Jordan, was with him. The two held fruit juices instead of beer bottles.

Pris broke away. "Maybe to console your sorry asses when you lose." She slapped her brother on the back and gave a quick welcome hug to Jordan. "You guys are going down."

Tonight we were playing three of Pris's brothers—Case, Boone, and the reason I came, Waylon.

I picked a cue off the rack and sunk my practice shot in the corner pocket.

Pris slapped me on the back. "You've got the touch tonight. See that, Case? This is going to be a massacre." Pris's rowdy tomboy mask was back in place.

Case snorted. "In your dreams." He put his arm around Jordan.

I felt a pang of envy.

She'd won the lottery, ending up with a guy as nice as Case to share evenings like this with.



WAYLON

THE PARKING LOT OF THE PEANUT BARREL WAS ALMOST FULL WHEN I PULLED UP. Inside, the place was as rowdy as ever for a Thursday night. Peanut shells crunched underfoot as I made my way to the bar, and a few guys yelled out greetings, which I returned.

When I reached the bar, I grabbed a handful of peanuts from the basket and waved Sonya over. "Miller," I told her.

"Case is over with the girls," she said. "Haven't seen Boone yet." She knew the crew for tonight.

Case was the reliable one of my brothers. Boone, on the other hand, never seemed to be on time, as tonight proved.

Sonya returned with my beer, and I took a slug while I waited.

A few minutes later, Boone saw me and waved a hand as soon as he cleared the door. I raised my bottle in return.

"Can't you ever be on time?" I asked when he got close enough to hear.

He tapped his wrist. "Check again. Ten early."

I shook my head. "To be on time, you need to be early enough to *practice*."

"A Miller," he told Sonya as she floated by. "And this clown's paying."

I didn't argue. It had become the price of continuing the game with the girls.

Boone complained that he didn't have the money, but really it was that he didn't like losing. The girls were good enough, and I missed enough shots to keep them ahead most of the time.

The game was a big deal to my sister, and this was my way of repaying her for being the straight-talking pain in the ass I occasionally needed.

"I see Anna's here," he mentioned, with a nod toward the tables.

"Really?" I'd already noticed her. I always noticed her, wherever she was.

Sonya brought his beer.

"Thanks for this." Boone knocked back a swallow. "I think it's time you gave in."

"To what?"

"It's time you asked her out."

I looked the other way. "Who?"

"Don't give me that." He punched me in the shoulder. "Anna."

I punched his shoulder harder—a lot harder. "You can fuck off."

He rubbed his arm. "Shit. I was just pointing out what's obvious to everyfuckingbody."

The glare I sent him backed him away.

A familiar scent wafted my way—honeysuckle.

I turned and there she was, Ella-Mae Forrester.

"I can tell you want to buy me a beer," she purred.

Sonya rolled her eyes.

Ella-Mae was the town's biggest flirt. Tonight, same as always, her big tits were pushed up by some industrial-strength bra into the world's deepest cleavage that she showed off with a low V-neck. She didn't own anything that wasn't cleavage baring—not that I noticed any more than any other guy in town.

Boone left for the table. "I'm going to practice, like you said."

I ignored the comment and took another swig of my beer.

"You smell nice tonight," she said.

"Your radar is malfunctioning," I told her. "I'm only here to play a little pool with my brothers." There had been a time when Ella-Mae interested me, but it had long passed.

She inched closer, and her boob brushed against my arm. "Maybe I'll watch." Her boob stayed pressed against me.

I stood and looked toward the tables.

Anna glanced this way.

I raised a finger to Sonya. "A beer for her." Turning to Ella-Mae I added, "Drink it here."

When I looked back, Anna turned away.

Callie, the third member of Pris's team, sauntered up. "You ready, Sasquatch? Or should I tell Anna you're scared to play us?"

I followed her, keeping my mouth in check.



ANNA

BOONE PICKED A CUE OFF THE WALL AND STUDIED IT, FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER, WHILE Pris sunk two balls in a row.

I moved around the table. "Is it just you two tonight?" From the other side I could look over the table and toward the bar.

Boone discarded three cues before settling on a fourth. "Waylon's getting a beer. He'll be along."

I could see Waylon at the bar. *Getting a beer my ass.* He let that hussy Ella-Mae paste herself all over him as he tipped his beer back. I averted my gaze as soon as he looked this way.

"Watch this one," Pris said.

She hit a bank shot the length of the table but missed the corner pocket.

"Keep that up, Pris, and it'll be a short game," Case told her.

Callie arrived with a nod toward the bar. "I think Sasquatch is scared after last time."

He'd missed the pivotal shot that gave us the win last week.

Waylon obviously heard her as he walked up. "Bullshit, Calla Lilly." He'd made his way from the bar without me noticing.

"Sasquatch, is your date going to join us?" Callie asked.

Waylon wrapped an arm around her waist. "I thought you wanted to be my date tonight."

Why don't I get that treatment?

She elbowed him. "Get real. You stink."

He let her go and sniffed his underarm.

"Gotcha," Callie squealed.

He growled at her—literally growled.

We let the late arrivals take a few shots before racking up the first game.

After two games, we were even, one to one.

After the break of third game, Jordan said, "I'm getting a Flatfoot Orange. Anybody else want refreshments?" She'd already learned that anyone in town who didn't have some of our local whiskey on occasion got the side-eye.

All the others except Case and me raised their hands. Case chose apple juice.

"Wuss," Pris said.

"Health conscious," he corrected her. "I have to set a good example for my clients."

Jordan looked at me.

"A soft-serve cone," I told her. Ice cream seemed like my speed tonight.

We rotated shots between the players according to our rules.



WAYLON

AS SOON AS ANNA STARTED LICKING HER TALL ICE CREAM CONE, MY CONCENTRATION checked out of the building.

Still watching, I emptied my whiskey in a single lift and set the glass down.

"Your turn," Boone said, waking me from my trance.

"Right." I started around the table, surveying the shots. Watching Anna's tongue lick slowly up the sides of the soft vanilla ice cream had turned my mind to

mush, and it took me a slow walk around the table to check the angles and get my head on straight.

“Do we need to enforce a time limit?” Pris asked.

I raised a hand to quiet her and picked my shot.

Leaning over the table, I placed my bridge hand on the felt and lined up my shot. Looking down my cue at the angle, ended up looking straight at Anna beyond the pocket.

As I was ready to release the shot, she licked again, and the sight made me jerk, throwing the shot wide of the mark.

Anna smiled. Was she messing with me, or just happy that my miss helped her team?

“Maybe you should have drunk a little slower,” Boone said.

“And maybe you should shut up,” I shot back.

Anywhere but Anna, I chanted to myself. Look anywhere but at Anna.

Watching the center of the table while the others played grounded me again.

“Hey, Sasquatch, you’re up again,” Callie said.

This time I chose a shot that didn’t go toward Anna.

The angle of the bank wasn’t great, so I checked my alternatives one more time.

“Over here,” Pris said, dragging Anna along the side. “And listen up.” She pulled Anna’s head close.

“Get a move on, Sasquatch.” Naturally Callie hassled me.

Going back to the shot I’d chosen, I closed my eyes for a few seconds to visualize it. Upon opening them again, I found Anna perched right at my aim point, next to my giggling sister.

She seductively drew her tongue around the side of the cone.

In that moment, I lost the angle. All I could see was her tongue on my straining dick.

That’s not happening.

Pris giggled as I lined up the shot, and just before I let it fly, Anna licked up the side of the cone again.

Shit.

Another miss.

Callie giggled. “Can’t handle your whiskey, eh, Sasquatch? Jordan, get him another.”

I saw a way to give us an advantage. “I’ll have three more if each of you girls drinks the same.”

"You're on," Pris said. She was always up for a drinking challenge.

"I'm not sure," Callie said.

I leaned on my cue stick. "Chicken, Calla Lilly?"

Anna's mouth dropped open, but she didn't say anything.

"Not if we double the pot," Callie said.

Bills came out, and Case collected the extra money.

I paid for Boone.

"Flavors?" Jordan asked.

I chose blackberry, Pris went with butterscotch, Callie wanted mint, and Anna decided on strawberry.

The game ended, and we were tied before I got a chance to screw up again after the extra drinks.

"Tie breaker," Pris squealed. She could hold her liquor, but three drinks brought out the wild side in her. "Okay, Case, you wuss." She shook her fist up and down.

Case matched her cadence. "On three. One... two... three..." He shot scissors in their rock, paper, scissors game.

Pris had her fist clenched in rock. "One for me."

Case lost again on the second round, shooting rock, to Pris's paper. "How do you do that?"

Pris giggled. "I'm not tellin'" With best of three, she got to choose the format. "Couples pool," she yelled.

"What's that?" Jordan whispered to Case.

"It's fun," Pris told her.

She wasn't wrong. It always resulted in a lot of laughs and a big crowd of spectators whenever this came up.

People started to move our direction after hearing Pris's announcement.

Tonight I just had to endure my loud, drunk sister draped on my back while we played, or me wrapped around her. One person on top of the other, only two feet out of four on the floor, one hand from each player on the cue stick, and no bridges—not even a hand bridge—were the rules.

"Callie," Boone said.

No surprise there. He always picked her. With the extra drinks tonight, this was going to be hilarious, especially watching him get flustered when he had to reach around drunk Callie's tits.

Last time, she'd even bitten his ear when she was on top.

Case was next, and he always went with Anna. "Pris," he declared.

My mouth went slack.

Holy shit.

I always got Pris—always, absolutely always. But he'd picked Pris, and now I was stuck with Anna.

Case pulled Jordan against his side to kiss her, and I saw the problem. He had to pick our sister.

"Guys, I can't stay," Anna said.

I could breathe again.

"I'll substitute in," Ella-Mae said from the small crowd that had gathered.

"Okay," Pris agreed.

That was worse. Much worse.

CHAPTER 3



ANNA

HOLY CRAP ON A CRACKER, NOW I WAS STUCK BETWEEN SHITTY AND SHITTIER alternatives. I could stay and play with Waylon's hands all over me and mine all over him, or I could leave Waylon with that slut-monster Ella-Mae climbing all over him. Just the thought of Ella-Mae wiggling on him almost made me lose everything I just eaten and drunk.

"You're not in any condition to drive," Jordan pointed out. "None of you are. Case and I can get you guys home after this is over."

"I'll drive her," Rusty offered.

I didn't know Rusty well enough to dislike him, just well enough to know he needed to shower more often.

I checked my watch. "I guess I've got time for another game," I told them.

The disgusted look on bimbo Ella-Mae's face made it all worthwhile. Her eyes shot daggers at me—actually lances, her look was so lethal.

Waylon faced the other way, so I couldn't see his reaction.

"Cool," Pris said. "Game on." She racked the balls.

Another game of rock, paper, scissors resulted in Case getting the break.

Pris jumped on Case's back. "Giddyup, horsey." She pretended to whip her

brother as he moved into position and leaned over the table. I snickered as I watched them try to get themselves positioned so they could make the shot with her right hand and his left, all while not being able to steady the cue with a hand on the table.

They didn't hit the head ball, but we had a break, and miraculously, a ball went in the corner pocket.

The next turn went to Boone and Callie.

She jumped on his back, imitating Pris. "I think I like it up here," she giggled just as they were taking the shot.

Boone's laughter made it go wide.

This is where things got tricky. It was me and Waylon up next.

I tried to hop onto Waylon's back and hold on, but I slipped down to the floor again.

"Penalty shot," Pris yelled ecstatically.

"No way," I complained. "We haven't even gotten started yet."

"Chicken," Callie chided.

I hopped up on Waylon's back again, wrapped my arms around his neck, and my legs around his waist. No way was I getting into the penalty shot position.

"You gotta lock your legs around him like you mean it," Ella-Mae said. "Just think of him doing you up against the wall. That's how tight it's gotta be."

The visual of that liquefied my panties. I locked my ankles around Waylon and squeezed. It became easier when he leaned over the table. The heat of my body on his was distracting as hell, especially in my inebriated state.

Every previous time I'd dreamed of our bodies being this close, it hadn't been with me on his back. But somehow, this was almost as erotic, and my heart thumped against my ribcage from the excitement of having him in my grasp.

I took the back of the pool cue with my right hand and grabbed a fistful of his hair with my left. "You aim," I told him. "I'll just let it slip through my fingers."

He grunted and pulled the stick forward, hitting a perfect shot.

"Way to stroke the wood," Pris said.

As if I wasn't hot enough already, my cheeks burned with the crowd's laughter. Waylon straightened up and I slid down, very conscious of my boobs sliding down his back. At least I hadn't worn a skirt tonight.

The next two shots would be with the men on top.

Callie played it up with a few moans of fake ecstasy as Boone lifted his feet off the floor and put all his weight on her.

The crowd loved it.

Case and Pris were classier about it and made their shot quickly.

When it was our turn, we were stuck with the cue ball in the middle of the table and balls in all directions.

I couldn't lie on the table with Waylon on me the way they had done.

"We have to do this different," he pointed out.

"Uh, duh."

"You face the table and wrap your legs around behind mine. I'll stand and hold you off the table."

"Huh?" I didn't get the drift of his instructions.

He pulled me back three feet from the table. "Bend at the waist, and don't let go of the edge of the table."

I leaned over like I was told.

Suddenly, he lifted me by my hips. "Now wrap your legs around me."

"Think reverse cowgirl," Pris said helpfully.

The mental image of that short-circuited my brain for a second. Then I tangled my legs around behind him, squeezed tight, and I was flying.

He brought an arm under me and lifted. "Now let go of the table."

Only problem was he'd grabbed me by the boob.

This was not the way I'd ever envisioned him touching my boobs. I'd thought about it a lot of times, but for some reason we'd always been facing each other, and more importantly, we'd been alone.

The crowd went nuts with us in this position, like we were going to town doggie-style. I was ready to die from embarrassment, but I was stronger than that. I had to be. At least everyone knew Waylon didn't mean anything by the way he was grabbing me.

"Now, you take the front of the stick," he said. "And let it slide through your fingers."

"Yeah, stroke the wood," Pris said again, resulting in more drunken laughter.

Waylon's hand holding me up, cradling my boob, and his breath hot on my neck as he leaned forward over the table to take the shot had my lady parts boiling, and all my rational brain parts moved to the deep freeze. He sunk the ball and pulled me up and away from the table like I was a feather.

"You can unwrap now," he said as he straightened up.

I unlocked my leg-hold on him, he let me down, and rational thought returned.

“Hey, Jordan, can I get another Flatfoot?” The rational part of my brain knew I needed at least one more to get through this.

Jordan gave me a thumbs up and trotted off.

I also knew that tomorrow, I’d find an image of Waylon’s handprint burned onto my boob from the heat of his touch. It had been that intense.

I chugged the whiskey as soon as Jordan returned, determined to drown my unease in alcohol.

Waylon gave me an odd look. “You okay?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I lied. Actually, I was far from okay. Being held like that by big, strong Waylon had been breathtaking, and I was clearly losing my mind replaying it in my head. It made clear how my subconscious felt about him.

I got a chance to cool off as we watched the other couples each sink a ball.

I pointed to the other side of the table. “Six ball in the side.” I waved to Jordan. “And another.”

Waylon grabbed me as I wobbled on my way to the other side. “No more drinks for you.”

I ignored him. This shot would be easier, because I was on top and just had to hold on. Then I could have another drink and erase the blush from my face.

He stopped at the spot where he wanted to shoot.

From here, his ass looked mighty fine in those tight jeans. When he scrunched down, I jumped up and wrapped myself around him. Piece of cake.

He leaned forward to line things up.

Easy peasy. All I had to do was hold the back end of the stick and let him do the work. This wasn’t as exciting as the last one, but just feeling the heat and strength of him under me was more intoxicating than the booze. Did he feel it too?

He lined up the cue stick and stopped.

“Waylon,” I whispered.

He sneezed.

Not good. I started to slide to the side. *Oh shit.*

He moved an arm back to steady me.

Too late.

I slid off.

“Penalty shot,” Pris yelled.

The crowd chanted, “Penalty shot, penalty shot, penalty shot.”

Waylon raised a hand to silence them. “We got it.”

Now I really needed that drink. I held out my hand toward Jordan, and she obliged.

Waylon's hand caught mine. "You shouldn't."

Even that touch sent a shiver through me. "I have to."

He let go.

The whiskey burned on the way down, but less than the last one.

"You ready?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Does it matter?" There had better not be pictures of this on the internet tomorrow. That was my one wish.

I put my hands on his shoulders.

He lifted me by the ass, and I wrapped around him, facing him, chest to chest, face to face, eyes to eyes. "Ready?"

With my crotch against what was clearly more than a banana in his pocket, I said the only thing I could. "Let's do this." I had a good grip around his neck, and gave him my best smile.

He smiled back, and for a moment the room melted away. It was just him and me, alone on a cloud.

I couldn't take my eyes off his smile. I couldn't see anything else, or hear the crowd.

His lips moved.

I didn't hear anything but the beating of my heart.

His lips moved again. "The stick."

"Right." I nodded.

He held the cold wood along my side where I grabbed it with my left hand, keeping my other arm wrapped around his neck.

To take the penalty shot, I had to hold the stick while he lowered me enough to aim. Then he would pull the stick to hit the cue ball, all while holding me off the table. My part was to be so tightly clamped around him that I didn't touch the felt or any of the balls.

I closed my eyes and hoped for the best.

He leaned us over, and I clamped around him as tightly as I could. With my eyes still closed, I ignored the comments from the crowd and concentrated on the feel of us welded together. The beating of my heart against his chest was impossible to ignore.

A second later he pulled the stick and the crowd erupted, which meant we'd hit the ball and wouldn't have to try the even more embarrassing *super* penalty shot.

For now, the penalty shot was over.

But to me, this meant something else entirely different. After this, I wasn't going to be able to look at Waylon quite the same way ever again—the experience had been that good.

He lifted me up and away from the table.

I let go of the stick and slung my free arm around his neck. "Were we good?" Only after I said them did I realize they weren't the right words.

"You can let go now."

His words were like a cold shower, quenching the heat of my mood.

The game didn't last long after that. I did what I had to do to finish, and then I waited outside for a ride from Case and Jordan.

Waylon stayed inside.