

Ponygirls, a Dog, and a Couple of Cute Fillies

by Bingo

Note: This is a story for adult readers.

Chapter One

Del saw her in the ring, tall, slender, narrow hipped. Her mane of blonde hair was thick and long – he had never seen hair so thick, so blonde. Blonde eyebrows he knew, he couldn't see them from this distance. A profile like no other.

Benjamin was directing her gait. Benjamin's crop helped her keep her spine straight, shoulders back, just a touch of the crop, not a stroke to remind her. At least not now.

He heard a sniffle behind him, turned and went to his charge, hobbled, a damn paint. He wondered why the Colonel always gave him goddamn paints. More trouble than they were worth.

Penny's front hooves were in the hobble, an iron shackle with a center ring. Her collar was held in the ring, chin an inch from her thumbs.

He turned, watched the one in the pen, Benjamin's charge, Misty. The blonde one. He shook his head. Not a goddamned paint.

He prodded Penny with his boot. "Think you can do it now?"

She whinnied. Her tail swished, stroking the back of her thighs.

Why couldn't she be blonde?

He knelt and unlocked the shackle from her wrists, leaving it attached to her neck.

Spontaneous. For some reason the word spontaneous popped in his mind. So he did spontaneous.

"Stand." He rose, stepped back.

Penny as almost as tall as him. Not slender like Misty. Not a blonde dream like Misty.

She tottered back on her heels, the iron shackle jangled from her neck. She faced straight ahead, didn't look at him.

"Step," he said.

She moved her right foot forward.

"Step."

Her left foot came even with her right foot.

"Step." She was doing it all wrong. Bad conformation. Sliding her feet instead of stepping. She leaned forward.

"Step."

Her skin was red where it wasn't covered by the geometric cross hatches of thick black paint. Across her face.

"Step."

Across her body, breasts, tummy, at least that was flat, ass, legs, fingers.

"Step."

All wrong.

"You're doing it all wrong. Look over there. Watch the blonde."

Aw come on, for chrissakes. He took her arms and swiveled her upper body until her legs moved. Her arms were surprisingly slender. He let go. "Watch her, dammit, and learn something."

A tear slowly dripped down her cheek. She squeezed her eyes shut, opened them.

He watched Misty. Benjamin was always quick with the bridle. Misty looked good but he wondered if Benjamin wasn't making a mistake being so quick. Looking good was not important in the long run. He wanted more than looking good which was maybe why the Colonel gave him the paints.

The triangle rang out in from the bunkhouse. Cookie had lunch ready. The noise in the yard changed as the hands got their charges ready. Benjamin led Misty back to the stable. He saw Misty butt Benjamin's back playfully, didn't bother looking around to see if the Colonel saw.

He had more important concerns right now. He took a shackle and led Penny to the corral, told her to stay and went to his kit, the painted wood box by the stable door. He could hear the hands and their charges inside. He rummaged, found the bottle of sunblock and carried it back.

She swayed stiffly as he covered her with the lotion. He didn't say a word; she didn't whinny, fine by him, damn paint. He set the bottle in the dust by his feet, led her by the shackle to the post.

"Kneel," he said.

She'd done this so many times, he didn't need to adjust her position. She'd worn two depressions in the ground where her knees went. He pressed her forward so her chest touched the post, chin on top. He wrapped her arms around the post and the crosspiece and shackled them, left hoof by her right breast, right hoof by her left breast.

He flexed her fingers out so he could check them. Her hooves needed to be painted; they were cracking in the dry dust. He didn't know which was worse, mud or dust.

He gave her shoulder a pat and left her. He was hungry, he couldn't wait to get out of the hot sun, sit down and eat.

He never looked out the bunkhouse window to check on his paints at lunchtime. What happened to them wasn't his concern. Sometimes he heard one of his paints cry out. That's what happened to paints.

He used his biscuit to sop gravy on the plate while he organized his mind. He flipped open the memo book and set down the biscuit. He wasn't sure how many rings he wanted when he set up a place of his own. Next year maybe. He might have enough money then. He wasn't planning on hiring extra help; he didn't know anyone who'd do a proper job.

Two rings maybe. A corral. A stable. Close to the house. He might have enough to only be able to build the stable first, that and the corral. He could live in the stable. Two stalls, tack room, place for feed and the carts. Maybe a second floor for an office and apartment.

He had a piece of land already picked out, not near here. Not near the city. The Colonel had them coming from all over. England, Argentina. All over. Maybe he should learn Spanish, enough for him to get by.

Marge never truly understood his dream. A place of their own. When he finished a job it would be he, not the Colonel, who got the check, the bonus, and the appreciation.

He closed his memo book. He remembered how happy the customer was last year after that particularly long and drawn out job. That was Loosa. He couldn't believe it when they called him

over, showed him his new charge when she first came in. Loosa had paint written all over her. Six months later a complete change had taken place. He hadn't broken her in; he'd transformed her. The tip for that one went straight to the bank and he was a step closer to his dream.

He heard the crunch of tires outside the bunkhouse. The Colonel and his little zip buggy. Goddamn thing was electric so you couldn't hear it until the Colonel was right on top of you.

If he were the Colonel he'd use a cart. Get them started right away. Use them for godsakes. They needed to be doing more than just running circles in the rings.

He checked his watch. Almost time. The Colonel didn't come in here which meant the Colonel got distracted. He heard Penny scream.

Oh well. She wouldn't be good for much until later.

He left the bunkhouse and sure as shooting there was the Colonel and a couple of the hands trying out the paint. He kept in the shade, leaned against the wall and waited. What he wanted to see was Misty, not a goddamned paint getting her ass reamed. He could see Penny's tail in the dust by their feet.

He'd do things differently. Not that the Colonel ran a slack operation. It was tight. But . . . He dug in his jeans pocket for a packet of gum. When he got home sometimes all he wanted to do was open a six pack, put his feet up in front of the TV and be mindless like nothing mattered, not Marge's chattering in the kitchen, not goddamned paints.

That's right Benjamin. Misty's not enough for you; you have to fuck the paint's face.

He couldn't watch any more. He walked over to the washhouse, checked to make sure everything he needed was there. It wasn't of course. He went to the stable and found the spreader bar tossed on a pile of hay. He picked it up, stood by Misty's stall and looked in. Just for a minute.

She lay on her side, still in her bridle. He shook his head. He knew she needed to get used to it but . . . She looked like she was sleeping.

Some came to them shaven, some not. Misty was shaved all over, except for her mane. His paint was shaggy. He liked them that way at first. The shaggier the better. So many knots in the mane the only thing he could do was shave them all over.

It was a process. Not all the hands knew that. There wasn't a book you went by. When it was time for the next step you went there.

He wondered what it would be like if he kept one for a couple of years. He was just getting started when they left, even the ones who'd been his charges for six months or more. A long time. Misty had been here three weeks and look at her. It was a waste in a way. Not so most of the owners would ever know it. They wanted show ponies. He was after the real thing. Six months and Penny and he would just be started.

He carried the spreader bar out the big doors of the stable, past the post. The Colonel was telling war stories to the new hand.

A shame. He carried the spreader bar to the washhouse, set it against the wall near the sink. He spit out his gum into the trashcan. Checked his watch. Fifteen minutes more and then he'd get her for her bath whether they were done with her or not.

Once he caught two kids who'd snuck onto the property. They were scared as hell he'd do something to them. He just led them back to the road, opened the gate and showed them through. "Don't come back," he told them. He smiled then. "Unless you're serious."

Cute little fillies. Such big brown eyes. He wasn't sure how old they were. Thirteen. Fifteen. Twenty-two. Once he reached a certain age they all looked alike. Damned young.

They scampered off. He almost wished he'd catch them sneaking on the property again. Almost.

He wondered if he couldn't take a few free ones, ones like the fillies, and spend some time on them. It'd be a big chance. All that work and no money coming in.

He wondered if the Colonel got offers from girls. Not just approached by owners but by the girls themselves. He wondered once he was set up on his own if he couldn't take one or two on for speculation. Maybe three or four stalls in the stable. Two paying, one or two for speculation. Could he handle it all on his own?

He checked his watch. Time's up.

He left the washhouse. Only one was with Penny. The Colonel had left. The Colonel. It helped him to remember the Colonel was a light colonel, not a full bird. And nothing really serious. Supplies, logistics, something like that. Well away from any front line.

John finished in Penny's throat, holding her head close to him as she bucked, fought for air. John winked at him then let her head go and stood back. She choked as drool and stuff poured out of her open mouth.

He watched Misty in the ring as Penny composed herself. Benjamin didn't really challenge Misty. Just let her run herself dizzy. Still, she looked beautiful. She really did.

He looked down at Penny. Her eyes were averted. The post top was wet with her drool, her cheeks were flushed, her mouth red.

"Good girl," he said.

She exhaled and her eyes watched him as he unlocked the shackle. She didn't face him, just her eyes. He thought he saw the beginnings of a grin on her face. Damn paint.

He drew her up by the shackle connected to her collar. He dropped the iron shackle, hot from the sun, bent, picked up her tail and swished it against his leg to get as much dust out of it as possible.

"Open," he said.

She opened her mouth. Her lips trembled, her whole body trembled slightly. He held the tail plug so she could grip it with her teeth.

He heard a whoosh and turned. Misty stumbled then regained her gait, leaning slightly to the side that had been whipped. Benjamin liked to mark them.

Penny followed him to the washhouse while he wondered if he could arrange with Benjamin . . . just ten minutes. He held the door open for his paint whose eyes watched him as she passed.

He stood her in the spot over the drain. He left the shackles connected to her collar, they needed a wash too, and the tail in her mouth. He turned on the spigot, aimed the hose at her and pulled the trigger.

She fell back a step then returned to her position as the water hit her. He sprayed her all over, watched the paint peel in places from her skin leaving white patches against the open red areas.

"All fours," he said pointing the hose to the floor.

She knelt and fell forward as he walked around her directing the blast of water at stubbornly dirty spots. He released the trigger and dropped the hose to the cement floor.

It was cooler in here, shady. It was dark when they first walked in, now it was lighter as his eyes grew used to it. The open windows let in a breeze from the southeast. In the winter it was damn cold in here, almost ice. His charges weren't so quiet then.

He picked up a bucket filled with soapy water and a brush. He carried the bucket to her, set it on the floor by her left shoulder. Like clockwork. Left shoulder and arm. Face and head. Right shoulder and arm. Back. Right leg and ass cheek. Left leg and ass cheek. A firm scrub up the center of her universe then he made her roll onto her back and he started all over again. Like clockwork.

"Drop it," he said.

She released the tail to fall with a thud and a clatter to the floor. He tossed it to the side. He unfastened the shackles from her collar, carried them to a hook on the wall to dry. He left the key in one of the shackles for the next user. If only everyone . . . Why start on that.

He knelt by her, jeans knees on the wet floor. There was no way he'd stay dry if he did it right. He lifted the scrub brush out of the bucket and tapped the wood back against the bucket rim.

He scrubbed her shoulder and upper arm. Her body moved as he scrubbed her. Most of the paint came off as he cleaned her. He lifted her hoof and scrubbed her nails carefully, between her fingers, then up her arm.

Sometimes he wished there was music. He held her face as he scrubbed her jaw and cheek with the brush. He held her mane out of the way and did her forehead. He used his fingers to clean her ears and around her eyes and mouth. Her eyes were closed because of the soap but she managed to quickly kiss his finger before he got it out of the way.

Other arm, other hoof, then her back and right leg as he crawled around her. He paid particular attention to the center of her universe, first with the brush which made her jump. As if this were the first time and she was the first one. Then he cleaned her carefully with his fingers.

When he was back to the spot he started at he told her to turn over. She rolled onto her back and inched her way to him, spread-eagled.

He stood up, went to the sink and dumped the dirty water into it. He rinsed out the brush, filled the bucket with clean water and added soap. He could just see Misty through the window when she was at the east end of the ring. She wasn't fresh like this morning. It

was hot outside; she was in the sun. She held herself properly but he could see she wasn't lifting her feet as high as she had earlier. He saw her jump as she entered his view. Benjamin must be getting cranky.

He carried the bucket over to Penny, set it down and knelt. He held her mane as he scrubbed her shoulders. He had to use his free hand to hold her skin taut over her breasts as he scrubbed each one. He could almost feel her firm erect nipples as the brush passed over them.

He couldn't allow himself to get bored. A moment's inattention and weeks worth of work would be wasted. He drew his free hand over the edge of her ribcage as he scrubbed her stomach. That she could hold firm for him, not like her breasts which had a mind of their own.

He felt her cunt; it was still slippery. Penny was just that way. Each one of them was different.

He was tired. After he'd rinsed her off he'd get a cup of coffee; a carrot for her. It always surprised him how he'd be mad as hell at them and halfway through the day he'd start liking them.

He carried the bucket to the sink, emptied it and rinsed out the brush. He set the bucket under the sink, the brush on its wood back on the sink's edge. He couldn't see Misty at all out the window even though he waited for several minutes. For some reason the image of Misty's shaved cunt popped into his mind. Long and delicate, not fat and juicy as some. The lips were rounded, not pointed, lush. They promised riches underneath ready to burst forth. He could almost feel it.

He walked back to Penny, picked up the hose. "Stand," he said.

She stood, eyes still closed, rose carefully, knees and fingers leaving the floor as she rose. She held her arms away from her body, feet spread.

He pointed the hose at her and pulled the trigger. As he rinsed her she turned slowly. Some things she knew automatically, others she had to be told and be clumsy as hell at the same time. Like walking.

He wondered when she'd stop her game, or this part of her game. She damn well knew how to walk. Maybe not like Misty but not a bum's shuffle either. He painted her body with the force of the water. It dimpled her skin where it hit. The white gridlines, the red squares. Her soft breasts, the firm flesh of her calves. He turned off the water, coiled the hose, felt her eyes on him. He dropped the

hose to the floor by the spigot, tried to see Misty through the window there but couldn't. All he could see was the new one, John's charge, and someone else; he couldn't keep all their names straight.

He turned to Penny who knelt on the cement floor, hands offering her breasts, mouth open, eyes bright.

"Watch it, sweet cakes." He muttered, "I need a cup of coffee."

Her eyes followed him as he walked past. He gave her shoulder a pat, tried to prepare himself for the bright outdoors. He opened the door, winced, shut the door behind him.

He went to the bunkhouse ignoring the owner's look at his wet clothes. Didn't recognize this one; he must have brought a new girl. The Colonel was telling war stories, making that godawful laugh of his.

He didn't see Misty. Maybe a year more of this, then a place of his own.

He'd get Cookie to quarter an apple for the paint. An apple and a carrot for her while he drank his coffee.

Chapter Two

Del gave a yank on the lead. "Whoa," he said.

Penny halted.

His feet crunched on the crushed gravel bridle trail. Penny held still as he approached, didn't stir as he unfastened the lead from her bridle. He gave a swat to her flank. "Over there."

She wasn't graceful in the heels she was wearing. Her legs shook as she walked to the log bench; she kept her arms straight down, palms flat, fingertips out.

He watched her, shook his head, and went to the bench, coiling the lead as he walked. He sat on the bench, left her standing by his right hand, both facing the trail.

This part of the ranch was wooded. He could hear birds move in the branches overhead. If Penny and he had kept on going they would have come out of the woods and seen grassy rolling hills. The Colonel had cut the sod on one hillside and carved the running white horse just like he had seen in England. Or so the Colonel said.

Del had been told by an old timer when he first started working that the Colonel had hired a landscape architect who had actually come up with the idea. The architect's crew carved the horse and filled the shallow trenches with white chalk. The White Horse of Uffington. The image of the horse and the ranch's name were embroidered on the left pocket, over the heart, of the jackets they were all supposed to wear. He was so touched he kept his jacket in the closet at home.

He didn't want to think about Penny, talk to Penny, whatever. He didn't want to check his watch. The ranch hands were all having dinner. They'd bed their charges then go home, maybe take a girl on a date or work on their car.

He could smell her sweat.

When he finally got home at night Marge wanted to tell, in minute detail, all she'd accomplished around the house all the livelong day and about the story she was working on. What he wanted to do was sit in his chair in front of the TV and just forget about everything.

"Kneel," he said. "Turn sideways to me."

Forget about the Colonel, the ranch, Penny, owners, all of it. The Colonel wanted him to hurry up with Penny. He wanted to . . . He shut his eyes. He listened to her breathing, her teeth on the bit. He didn't want to look at her.

He never knew if what he was doing was just a waste of time or not. A waste of energy. Patience. As he grew older he felt like he had only so much left. The well wasn't bottomless. He almost could see the end. Definitely could on times like these.

He looked at Penny, saw her eyes watching him, drool from the bit forming on the corner of her lips and dripping down her chin.

He'd have to repaint her tomorrow morning, a task that took well over an hour.

She stirred.

He raised his eyes and studied the tree leaves on the other side of the path.

When allowed to speak the charges could only say three words, yes, please and more. It was an okay system, he couldn't come up with anything better right off the top of his head but boy, some of the hands really took advantage of it. Thinking anything goes.

Of course there were limits. His limits of patience and energy. His charges' limits which they hadn't realized were imaginary. Which they had to release, go beyond, so the charges could be where they should be.

Where Penny should be. She was light years from being a pony. Her owner was either a fool or a masochist. Quite a few of the owners were masochists as near as he could see, letting these girls, always a dirty word, girls, run all over them.

Penny champed at her bit, glanced down at her hands open on her thighs, palms up, sloppy as hell. She raised her eyes and stared at him.

There were things he wanted to do but knew he shouldn't. There were things she wanted to do but couldn't and not because he wouldn't let her.

"How about we finish the week and call it quits?" he said. "The Colonel has someone waiting for me. You and I are not getting anywhere. Three more weeks, two months, a year isn't

going to make a bit of difference, will it?" He touched her knee with his boot.

She looked down then up. Her eyes were wide. She slowly shook her head. She tried to speak around the bit.

"Enough of that." He spoke sharply.

She settled back onto her heels, stared straight ahead.

"We'll spend a few days with the cart. We can pretend you're trained. Your owner won't know the difference. What matter if we do?"

She swallowed and lowered her head.

He'd shave her tonight before bedding her down. Shave her and he wouldn't have to look at this mess any more.

Boston popped in his head. He'd never been to Boston, would like to visit some time. Boston. Anything but this damned paint.

He checked the bridle, refastened the lead, and sat back on the bench. It would be dark soon. He liked being out at dusk. All the activity - birds, bugs, even humans scurrying to finish the day. This was his moment to relax.

"Up," he said, rising to his feet.

She stood slowly, carefully. She glanced at him quickly, looked away.

She wasn't bad looking, terrible conformation and ratty mane aside. Once she got used to the bit she wouldn't drool so much. Nice flanks. You could say that about her.

He yawned. "Time to bed you down for the night sweet cakes." He gave the lead a snap, followed her.

Misty's stall was two down from Penny's. He'd take a second there tonight before going home.

He turned her and followed her up the gentle rise then down. There was a hill then they were level for a bit. The charges couldn't pull their carts if the terrain were too rough. Woods, meadow and rolling hills. The Colonel had a fine place. When he started out he'd have only forty acres, a lot of it wooded which was okay though a meadow and a pond would be nice.

Boston. He shook his head, smiled at the first lightning bug for the night. Penny held her fingers straight, splayed, resisted the urge to swat or slap the insects on her. She had that. He'd

never want to break her spirit. Her spirit was what would drive her on.

Once she stopped playing this silly game. He snapped the lead and she picked up pace. She was trying but it was all wrong.

He wasn't a believer in the whip but tonight he was tempted to whip her raw, from head to toe, every bit of her. He wanted to hurt her.

They came out of the woods on a rise overlooking the ranch. The Colonel's house was level with them; the path went by it before going downhill. All the windows were lit, every damn one of them. He was glad he wasn't the person paying the bills.

The Colonel's house was two storied, a mixture of modern and colonial. The broad front had a relatively small, open porch at the large front door. The wood siding was natural, not painted. The pool was at the back, surrounded with shrubs and small trees. Del had seen the back but never up close. The Colonel liked his privacy.

In the front of the house, not too far from the front porch, was Spot's doghouse. Spot was one of the Colonel's hobbies, young, beautiful and heavily tattooed. Every house needed a dog like Spot.

Everything below looked quiet. The stable was lit; the bunkhouse was almost dark. He was hungry, hoped something was left to eat.

Penny stumbled; he snapped the lead. Del hoped they'd get past the Colonel's without Penny getting sidetracked. It was worst when the Colonel was entertaining: a cookout, some friends over for cocktails, an informal brunch.

Damn. Spot saw them. He dropped the lead and went over to stop Spot's barking. Spot looked up at him and grinned as he scratched her behind the ears. "Shush," he said.

Spot growled, grinned again.

"More?" he said.

Spot nodded.

He looked over at Penny standing in a patch of light from the windows. He wanted to shout but knew it was useless.

Spot's paw rubbed his jeans.

"Not now, Spot." He patted her shoulder. "Gotta go."

Spot whimpered, followed him as far as the chain would let her. She kept the chain stretched taut as she whimpered.

He waved his hand down, patting the air by his side, as he walked to Penny. He could see shiny streaks where tears had crossed Penny's cheeks. Her eyes were bright. She tossed her head at him, champed at the bit.

He heard the house door open behind him. "Who is it?" The Colonel's deep voice asked.

He turned. "Del, sir."

"Del? Del and Penny." There was a chuckle. "I should have known."

All he could see was a shape outlined by light in the doorway. Penny rubbed against him.

"Come here, Del. Bring Penny with you."

He picked up the lead and gave a snap. Penny led him to the door. For some reason her gait was perfect. Go figure.

"Come in." The Colonel backed from the door. "Come in."

He unclipped the lead from Penny's bridle and coiled it. He put his hand on the center of her back, her skin was soft and cool, and pressed. As he followed, he saw the Colonel shut the door and proceed them into the study.

There was a large carved plaque of the White Horse above the fireplace. This size he could see the blobs or strokes were definitely shaped like women in a variety of postures. "Kneel," he said.

Penny knelt and bowed her head.

"In a bridle already. Fine. Fine." The Colonel sat on the edge of his huge partner's desk, eighteenth century Cuban mahogany. All the hands learned about the desk the day they were hired. Usually the history of the desk came after a tour of the ranch. Usually the new hand was still in a bit of shock. Naked women, the Colonel's off-color jokes, the bizarre juxtapositions.

The Colonel laid the decanter's lid on the tray, lifted the decanter and poured two glasses. He raised his glass so he could sniff it; let Del serve himself.

Del stepped back to stand by Penny, his glass of brandy held in front of his belt buckle.

The Colonel took a sip, set his glass in the tray, and folded his hands onto the leg bent on the desk. He looked at Penny and smiled. "Are you painting her again tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir."

The Colonel smiled and stood. He took a leather crop from a brass hook on the wall and walked around Penny. He lifted her chin with the crop, grinned. He drew a circle around her right breast, tapped her softly and stepped back. "Good." He paused. "Good. Unbridle her."

Del knelt and unfastened the clasps at the back of her head. He lifted the bridle and bit from Penny, rose and let it hang from his fingers holding the glass of brandy and coiled lead.

"Sit down, Del. Go on. Relax." The Colonel moved slowly around Penny. The Colonel dragged the crop over her back, down her shoulder. "Open," he said.

The Colonel blocked Penny's face from Del. He finished the brandy in one gulp, set the glass on the table by his side.

"Wider," the Colonel said. He spun to Del. "This reminds me of the time when we were in a village. There was this fifteen-year-old, cute, devilishly cute, that one of the men fancied. I told the NCO to bring her to my office. That's good, Penny." He turned back to Del. "Where was I?"

"A young girl in your office, sir." The bridle chain gave a tinkle sound when Del moved his hand.

"On your hands and knees, Penny," the Colonel said. He watched her change position, swung the crop fiercely at her ass. She gave a jerk and a small cry. The Colonel dragged the crop up her crack past her tail. "Do you do it like that, Del?" He hit her again. "Like that, Del?"

Del shook his head. "No, sir."

The Colonel tossed the crop onto the desk. "It shows." He picked up his glass, finished, turned to Del. "Pour you another?"

"No thank you, sir."

The Colonel refilled his glass, sat on the corner of his desk, his foot swinging. He smiled at Penny, turned to Del. "I trust you'll finish this week."

Del shook his head. "She's not ready yet, sir."

"I thought we talked about this earlier, Del." The Colonel swung his shoe to Penny's face. "Lick it." He grinned as he watched her.

"Some things can't be rushed, sir."

"Del. Del. Del." The Colonel rose to his feet, went to his desk chair and sat.

Del sat back in his seat.

"Come here," the Colonel said.

Penny crawled to him, waited as he unfastened his jeans.

Del swung the bridle against his shin, looked over his shoulder at the bookcases filled with a mishmash of books - hardbacks, paperbacks, expensive leather-bound editions with gold tooling alongside luridly colored dust jacketed spines of throw away novels of a half century ago. He heard the Colonel slap Penny's face. Heard the sounds of her pleasing him. Another slap. He turned and saw the Colonel stand and pull Penny to her feet, spin her, and push her face down over the desk. Her tail hit the floor and Del turned back to study the bookshelf.

He listened to the Colonel grunt as the Colonel fucked Penny. He slapped his leg with the bridle, harder this time, wished he had another brandy to drink. He heard Penny moan, glanced and saw the Colonel grasp a handful of her hair and pull back, lifting her head from the desk.

The Colonel finished in her, held her against him as he stared at her back. The Colonel grinned at Del, then fell into his chair and swiveled from side to side. "She's ready, Del. Oh, she's ready." The Colonel stroked her flank. "Finish it."

She raised herself off the desk, stood, ran her eyes quickly past Del as she turned. She knelt and cleaned the Colonel.

Del could see the two marks from the crop on her ass. One of her shoes had come off; her bare foot was twisted to the side and bent onto itself. He struck his leg with the bridle, stood. "Sir, we should go. She needs to be bedded down."

The Colonel shoved her aside, fastened his pants, lifted her chin and held it. He stared at her for a moment and shook his head. "I'm keeping her tonight, Del. She'll be here for you in the morning. Won't you, Penny?" He let go of her chin. The Colonel motioned. "Go on."

Penny turned and crawled to Del. He'd seen this masked look before. He stepped by her, patted her shoulder as he passed. "I should be going."

When he turned back to the room the Colonel was grinning at him, Penny knelt, head bowed. She raised her face, gave him a quick smile and watched him leave.

Del let himself out, stood on the porch wishing he had a flashlight. He walked across the yard, past Spot who still tugged at her chain. He bent and picked up a rock. He threw it as he rose, across the yard, down the hill toward the lights in the stable yard.

He wanted to curse, to kick something. He paused, whispered, "Good girl," to Spot and walked down the bank.

His boots were smooth soled; he was sure he'd take a spill on the dewy grass. He didn't look back at the Colonel's, he didn't look at his watch. The bunkhouse was dark; he'd missed dinner again.

He carried the bridle into the stable, past Misty's stall, to Penny's stall. He opened the latch, went into her stall and sat on the bench.

The stable was quiet; all the hands were gone except for the two night hands who were more guards than anything else. The charges were sleeping or pretending they were sleeping.

He sat not thinking for he didn't know how long. He stirred, rose to his feet and went to the small blackboard. He took a piece of chalk and wrote:

"Shaving.

"Whipping.

"Cart training."

It wasn't too early for the cart. Hell any of them could do it right off, fresh and green and wobbly kneed. What took time was training them so they looked graceful. So they moved with an economy and sureness of motion.

He cleaned the bridle and bit. He dressed the lead and bridle leathers and hung them on their pegs. Further down the wall was his whip. He lifted it off the peg, brushed the dark leather with the rag in his hand, felt the woven structure.

Somehow everything he did felt wrong now. Maybe in the morning he'd feel differently. He doubted it. He hung the whip

back up, took a final look at the stall and left. In the stall next to Penny's was a new charge. He checked the clipboard on the wall. Star was her name. He swore, hung the clipboard back on its nail. He was to do Star, too.

Damn him to hell. He looked into the stall, saw Star was a blonde, dyed blonde with red dots in her hair. She was curled up, didn't stir when he hissed. He could see her cunt rings and a crossed brand on her ass. One who'd been around. She was either extremely good or awfully bad.

The fucking Colonel knew he liked challenges. Damn him.

He stood at Misty's stall door and watched her sleep. The bridle was off and her thick hair surrounded her head with a corona of gold. His eyes followed the curve of her legs around her ass to the gentle dip of her waist. He saw her eyes were open and she was watching him. He touched his brow to her, left the stable.

His truck was parked on the lot on the other side of the bunkhouse. He tried the bunkhouse door but it was locked.

He sat in the old Dodge, stared at the dim night reflection off the sparse chrome and the metal dash. He started her up, a flathead six, all he ever needed. He'd stop at McDonald's for dinner and coffee. He wasn't going to sleep tonight. Why pretend.

Penny and Star. Star and Penny and the fucking Colonel. Then he relaxed. Two of them. If he could do it here, there'd be no problem when he was on his own.

Reager let him out at the gate.

Half hour drive. Not McDonald's. There was a restaurant he'd heard about. He'd always wanted to take Marge there, hadn't gotten a chance yet. He'd see if it was any good. If it was, Marge and he'd go out on Saturday.

He'd always thought the charges learned best by watching each other. Penny could watch Star. Star could observe Penny. Maybe he'd even bed them together. Stay in the stable the first few nights just to be sure there'd be no problems.

Oh, there'd be problems all right, but the hands would just have to get used to it. The twisty country road helped him think. He'd driven it thousands of times. When he first started working out here it was pure country all around. Times had changed. Now it was almost like the suburbs.

No more post for Penny. Or Star. From now on punishment would be between the three of them.

He remembered Misty's eyes watching him. He gets a blonde. Finally. And sure as shooting, she's another goddamned paint.

Chapter Three

Del listened to the alarm and waited for Marge to turn it off. He was thinking and this morning he felt like he thought better with his eyes shut. Finally, after the damn buzzing had driven every thought from his mind he turned over, reached across her and hit the button.

He lay on his back and stared at the ceiling. He heard Marge stir next to him, heard her get off the bed and pad off to the bathroom.

He woke up to the sound of eggs frying in the kitchen. It was almost dawn; the birds were in the midst of their morning chorus. There used to be whippoorwill here years ago. He'd heard their lilting song before the sun came up in the morning, and later, an hour after sunset. He couldn't remember the last time he'd heard a whippoorwill.

His year was broken up in seasons and the names of his charges. Loosa who he trained for six months, just before Brandy and Claire who were quicker. A year like any other. He'd been at the ranch for ten years, no, eleven last spring.

He sat up, rose and went to the bathroom. After taking a piss and splashing cold water on his face he felt better. He put on his robe and went to the kitchen, gave Marge a kiss on the back of her neck, took his plate to the table.

He liked his coffee hot out of the pot like Marge made it, the real stuff, not the crap he got at McDonald's. He used his toast to clean his plate, smiled at Marge when she sat across from him, just toast and coffee for her and her assortment of pills.

"Morning," he said.

"Morning."

"I'll be spending the next few nights in the stable," he said watching her face. Marge and he went back forever, looked like they were going to grow old together. Her face was rounder now, blonde hair beginning to gray. He could still see the cute seventeen-year-old he met after coming home from the Army.

"I'll need some things, I'll make a shopping list."

“Sure,” he said. He watched her take her pills. She wasn’t sick or anything; they both were healthy. She believed in vitamins and herbs.

He took his plate to the sink, rinsed it off and left it on the counter. He poured himself another cup of coffee, took the pot to the table and topped her cup. She smiled at him, went back to her book.

In the shower he thought about Penny and Star and the Colonel who he’d be seeing right off the first of the day. He imagined himself bending Marge over the table, her robe pulled down to her elbows, baring her back, and tossed up over her ass. He imagined fucking her, the table shaking with each thrust, cups bouncing in saucers with a clatter, cutlery falling to the floor.

He imagined Penny’s ass red from a flogging, her tears and the way the muscles in her back rippled afterwards. He rinsed his hair, flung it from his eyes, and let the shower pound his face.

He dried himself off, stepped out of the tub and finished drying himself while he looked in the mirror. Slender, a slight paunch. Not because he was getting fat, he just wasn’t keeping himself trim, didn’t really feel the need to keep himself trim. He worked hard enough as it was.

He combed his hair, brushed his teeth, left his robe hung on the bathroom door, his towel folded and drying on the towel bar. He dressed in black in the bedroom, his uniform. He had favorite shirts; his shirts were all black. Others that weren’t his favorites and he wasn’t quite sure why. Some just fit well, felt nice when he moved. Cuffs weren’t too short, collars weren’t too tight.

He sat at the table and watched Marge as she made out the list. He brought her book closer, saw it was a Dorothy Sayers mystery. Marge finished the list, tore it off the pad.

“Just two nights?” she asked.

“Maybe three. I’ll check in.”

She pushed the list toward him.

“I’ll mow Thursday.”

“Working hard?” She sipped her coffee.

“This week I’ll bust my balls.”

Marge smiled at him, took her book.

"In two weeks they'll have a ranch picnic."

She nodded, set down her cup.

He looked over the list, maybe an hour's shopping. He folded the list and put it in his pocket.

He kissed her neck as she read and left the house.

The Dodge was the perfect place to gather his thoughts. He sometimes wished he had a dog. Not a special dog like Spot, the Colonel's dog, who was a good girl and fun to be with. Just a mongrel, someone who'd enjoy sticking her nose out the window as Del drove and liked having her ears scratched.

When he dropped Marge's groceries off he'd pack a bag with his things. This evening, before dark.

He started the Dodge, gave the dashboard a pat and turned out of the drive.

He parked behind the bunkhouse, left Marge's shopping list on the front seat. Today was going to be messy; he didn't want the list getting wet or lost.

He stopped at the stable first to check on Star. He was early, as usual, could hear the charges stir in their stalls at his steps. He passed Misty's stall without looking, opened the latch to Star's stall and went in.

Star knelt in the corner, facing the center of the space, eyes down. It looked like he had something to work with at least.

He checked her mane for vermin, checked her ears, and raised her chin. Her nose was pierced; a silver ring hung from it almost touching her upper lip. He checked her eyes, opened her mouth. She watched him as he left her and went to the shelf. He brought back a hood and handcuffs. "Stand," he said.

She rose gracefully, offered her wrists.

He dropped the hood over her head and locked it to her collar. He took her hand, pulled her to the pole by the north wall, under the window. He cuffed her to the pole, forced her to kneel.

He finished his examination, wiped his hands on a rag, rose and laid the rag on the shelf.

He left her, latched the stall door and paused to glance in Misty's stall. She lay on the floor, curled, her eyes open and

watching him. He smiled at her, gave her the salute and started out for the Colonel's house.

He could smell breakfast being prepared in the bunkhouse. He'd get a cup of coffee on his way back, Penny in tow unless the Colonel had other plans.

The grass was wet with dew this morning. He stayed on the chipped stone path which circled up the rise. Spot slept by the doghouse, her dish empty.

Spot was heavily tattooed, colorful stuff which ran down her arms and across her back, down her legs, across her front. Her piercings were lost amidst all the color.

He liked Spot, liked borrowing her to take her on rides. It gave the girls a chance to pull a real load – not all the owners were as compact as he was. Spot was affectionate but not overly so. A perfect dog, not a whiny yapper.

He knocked at the Colonel's door, a brass doorknocker shaped like a voluptuous young woman. He waited. The door was thick, heavily paneled and painted black. After a minute he knocked again.

The knocking was finally answered. When the door opened Del heard Spot yip behind him. He went in the house; the elderly housekeeper, Bertha, shut the door behind him.

He was made to wait in the study. The housekeeper brought him coffee and sweet rolls. He relaxed in a big leather chair with an illustrated copy of Pierre Louy's Aphrodite. He didn't know French, made do with the pictures, being careful not to get crumbs on the book.

He heard them, shut the book and laid it on the table. He didn't stand.

Penny knelt by his chair. He touched her shoulder briefly, looked up at the Colonel sitting in his swivel chair behind the big desk. The Colonel held his coffee cup in one hand, saucer in the other as he drank. His burgundy colored robe shimmered with his movements.

"You probably already know about Star, don't you?"

"Yes, sir." Del crossed his legs.

"She's your primary charge now. If you think this one needs more work and you can handle both of them, then okay. I think Penny is ready to go home. I can call her owner right now."

Del shook his head. "She needs more work, sir."

"If you think you can do it, be my guest." The Colonel set his saucer and cup on the desk.

"We'd better be going." Del stood.

"Marge coming to the ranch picnic?"

"Yes, sir."

The Colonel smiled. "Bringing her good potato salad again, I hope."

"I think so, sir."

"Go on. I can see you're eager to get to work."

Del went to the door to the study. "Come," he said.

As Penny rose to her feet, the Colonel said, "Did you ever hear the one about the midget prostitute?"

"I think so, sir."

The Colonel's smile turned into a frown. "If you're so eager, go."

Penny followed Del out of the house, stopped on the path when he left her to go pet Spot. Penny followed him down the circle, stopped when he stopped. He turned, slapped her hard across her face. "No more games," he said. "Hear?"

She didn't raise her hand to her cheek, nodded slowly, blinked back tears.

He hoped he'd loosened a few teeth, damned paint. He turned and she followed him to the stable.

He unlatched her stall door. "Get your things."

She glanced at him, walked past, tears in her eyes. She reached to pick up her blanket; he went by her, took what he needed from the pegs on the wall. She followed him to Star's stall, stopped when she saw Star hooded and cuffed to the post.

"Drop it by hers." He hung up the bridle and lead on a peg, his whip on another. "Follow me."

In her old stall he loaded her arms with rags, saddle soap, comb and brush. Penny followed him as he carried his kit, the large red box. It took several trips to move everything.

He put the bridle on Penny, clipped on the lead and tied it to the post. "Kneel," he said. It took a minute to find his crop; he'd have to make time to organize himself today. He was tired already.

"All fours," he said. "Both of you."

Star was quicker; he tapped her shoulder with the crop. "Good girl." He walked around to Penny. "As for you," he said. He slowly whipped her.

He tossed the crop onto the shelf, was angry with Penny for flinching. He dropped his jeans, knelt behind Star, entered her as Penny sobbed with the bit in her mouth. Star squeezed his cock with her cunt. He knew from the start he was going to like this one. She had some training.

When he was done, he stood and fastened his jeans. He felt better. He found the clipper in the tack room, came back and plugged it in.

He shaved Penny's legs first, what he could reach. Then her cunt. He had her roll over and he finished that part of the job.

Penny was unmarked except for being a paint. He'd do something about that this afternoon. He shaved her arms and her armpits. Her skin was soft and warm. Pliable. She stared at the ceiling as he trimmed her.

Damn, he thought. He'd left her tail at the Colonel's last night. He'd have to stop by sometime to pick it up, preferably when the old bastard wasn't there. No, sir. Yes, sir. Sir stuck in his craw.

"Knees, Penny," he said.

When she was in position he unhooked the lead and coiled it. He unfastened the bridle and removed the bit from her mouth. He hung the bridle and lead on their peg.

He knelt by Penny and grasped a handful of hair and tugged. Her head tilted back exposing her throat. He flicked on the clipper, set it to cut close.

"No more games, hear?" He shook her head. "I don't have the time to waste on you." He shaved her, long strokes removing hanks of hair. Each stroke exposed a two-inch wide swath of bare skin.

The skin over her skull was smooth and thin. He could see blood vessels and the shape of the bone. He shaved her completely then repeated each pass in the opposite direction, from the top of her head down.

He turned off the clipper, rose to his feet and brushed off his pants. Her hair littered the stall floor. He'd have them sweep this afternoon.

He returned the clipper to the tack room, oiled it and set it in its proper place. He grabbed an extra lead and bridle for Star before leaving. He took down the clipboard for Penny and hung it on a nail next to Star's clipboard.

He needed a break. He'd get them settled and then he'd walk around. He felt almost human again. Removing Penny from top priority gave him breathing room. He hadn't realized how much of his space she'd been taking.

He checked his watch. Still time for a ride this morning. He went in the stall, hung up Star's lead and bridle. He removed Star's cuffs and put them on Penny. Star had red circles around her wrists. He unlocked the hood and tossed it onto the shelf. "Kneel," he said.

Star knelt; he turned her so she faced Penny. Penny's tears had almost dried. He sat on a bench and looked at them. He wasn't sure he should be liking Star so much so early. He didn't trust that feeling.

"Star; Penny. Penny; Star. We'll be working together." He paused. "Star was read the rules last night. I'll summarize. No talking unless addressed by a ranch hand, owner or the Colonel. If addressed, you may only say yes, more and please. Repeat that."

"Yes," Star said. "More please." She slowly raised her eyes to his.

So that was why. He'd fix her of that. "Any special dietary needs?"

She stared at him.

"No, then." He rose to his feet, took Star's blanket from the floor and folded it. "I'm going to take a walk around. While I'm gone you two may speak to each other. Speak softly."

He patted Star's shoulder, felt her hair by her ear. He said, "You be a good girl," to Penny and left them.

He checked Misty's stall, he didn't expect to see her there. He left the stable and headed to the wagon shed. He saw Misty in the ring with Benjamin. She stepped nicely.

He leaned against the ring's railing and said to Benjamin, "She's looking pretty good," as they both watched her.

Benjamin nodded. "See you have a new one. The paint gone?"

"The paint's still here. New one's name is Star."

Benjamin smiled, gave a quick sideways glance. "You have your hands full."

"Nothing I can't manage."

Benjamin gave a nod, the faint smile still on his lips as he watched the ring.

Del watched Misty. He liked the way her breasts moved as she stepped. Some of them had breasts that flopped, others had breasts that didn't do a thing, might as well have been two rocks. Misty lifted her knees high. She wore heels that looked to be four inches. She was spectacular. He'd love to have just ten minutes with her but knew he was going to be too busy. Damn paint. "See you," he said.

Benjamin nodded, lifted his hat and wiped his forehead with his arm.

At the wagon shed Del picked out a two-seater and drew it out into the yard. He set the harness in a seat and shut the big wagon shed doors. Of all the buildings the wagon shed was the most rustic looking. The washhouse was a cinderblock building, the bunkhouse a wood frame building sided with bare wood clapboard. The stable had stained rough plywood siding, was long and tall, though nothing was stored in the hayloft. Tall was just for looks.

The wagon shed was weathered board and batten siding with a rusty sheet tin roof. Looked like it had been here for a hundred years. Every building on the ranch was less than twenty years old, built after the Colonel retired from the Air Force.

He pulled the buggy under the shade of the maple so the seats would be cool. It rolled easily, was light. Penny was going to have a workout pulling Star and him. Do her good.

He stopped at the bunkhouse, found out what was for lunch, carried a handful of apple slices to the stable for the girls.

He was supposed to think of them as ponies but that was impossible. No horse ever looked as good as Misty, no horse ever gave him a look as Star had just done. He wondered if putting her out at the post a few lunch times wouldn't cure her. Probably just the opposite.

He'd paint them both this afternoon while the others were broiling in the sun. You'd think they'd learn.

He unlatched the stall door, closed it behind him. Penny and Star were both silent, their eyes followed him as he moved.

He tossed the apple slices on the blanket, "No hands." He sat on the bench and watched them.

Star had pierced labia and clitoral hood. He liked the way she moved; even on her hands and knees she moved like a dancer.

"Kneel," he said when they were done.

He took down Penny's bridle and lead. He stroked her cheek before fitting the bit in her mouth. He fastened the bridle, clipped on the lead, set the lead in her hand. He stood in front of Star, said, "You know what to do."

He watched Misty in the ring through the north window as Star opened his jeans and drew him out. Once he was in her mouth, he held her head as he thrust. She gagged until she found the right angle - he let her adjust her head.

He shut his eyes, tried to pretend this was Misty, not a damn paint. Misty with such thick hair. He could bury his hands in her hair and never touch her head. Not like this one. Star's hair felt sharp and brittle, like it was ready to break off in his hands.

He heard Penny champ at her bit, finished in Star's throat and drew back so she could taste him. He felt her tongue stroke his cock; she kissed the head of his cock before settling him back in place and zipping up his jeans.

He turned and saw Penny's moist eyes watch him. He wanted to . . . He took a breath, went to the shelf and found his crop. He held it in both hands, bending it, feeling its supple spring.

"Stand, Star, and take Penny's lead." He waited. "Stand, Penny."

Both their feet were bare. This would help toughen them up. He unlatched the stall door. "Penny leads."

He led Penny out of the stable into the bright light. It had gotten hot - Penny was going to sweat.

Chapter Four

Del said, "Whoa," and pulled on the reins. Penny lurched to a stop, her chest heaving. He stepped out of the cart and went to her, checking her harness and bridle. "Okay?" he asked.

She nodded not glancing at him. Her chest was covered with foam.

He worried having her out in the sun too much after having her head shaved and he worried about her picking up a stone. He didn't want her lamed. He turned to Star and motioned her out of the buggy. "Over there," he said.

Star walked well, didn't hurry. Her bearing expressed pride in her owner. He wished he'd met them. She waited in the shade of the large maple.

"Over by Star," he said.

Penny pulled the empty cart so that both were in the shade. He could see the muscles in her legs tremble.

He went to the stable and found a bucket which he filled with water. He set it by the stall door, went in for rags and sunblock. He came out with those things and two pairs of handcuffs.

Misty was still doing circles in the ring. Benjamin looked bored. Del went to the ringside, set down the bucket and leaned on the fence rail. Benjamin looked like he needed a nap or something. His eyes were half shut. "She canters well," Del said.

Benjamin gave a brief nod.

"My two over there for ten minutes with Misty."

Benjamin looked to the maple. Penny was bent so her hands were on her thighs. Star stood by the buggy. Benjamin shook his head.

Del gave a smile. "That's okay. I'm happy, too."

Benjamin gave a slight grin, shook his head.

Del watched Misty for a minute longer then left them. Misty was dusty, needed to be hosed down. It was that kind of day. He wasn't upset at Benjamin saying no. He just wanted to wake him up for a moment.

He set the bucket down at Penny's feet. "Come here," he said. Star stood by his side. "Watch what I do."

He unhooked the harness from the belt around Penny's waist, lowered the buggy shafts to the ground. "Just like that," he said. "Don't drop them." He unbuckled the bridle and removed the bit from Penny's mouth.

Penny stood while he did this, her breathing easier now after a few minutes rest. She looked at him and tried to smile, saw his face and turned away.

He handed the bridle to Star. "Unclip the reins and place this and the reins on the buggy seat." He watched her as she walked away from him. She has a nice ass, he thought. He used a wet rag to wipe Penny down. He started at her head and slowly worked toward her feet. "Lift," he said. When he was done with that foot, no damage done, he did the other. Her right foot was tender but she'd be okay. They were going to have a long restful afternoon while he painted them.

He checked his watch. He thought there was time to go to the Colonel's before lunch. Just so he didn't run into the old fart. He wished someone would give the Colonel a joke book for Christmas. Something new for a change would be a relief.

He squeezed out the rag, checked her belt and the straps that went over her shoulders and under her crotch. Wet leather which she had to get used to. Chafing which she had to get used to. He patted her flank. "Good girl."

Penny gave the slightest nod. If he hadn't been looking for it he wouldn't have seen it. Her cheek was still red from his slap this morning.

He took her arm and led her to the side of the buggy. "Kneel," he said. "You, too," he said to Star.

Star knelt by Penny, her back straighter, still proud. He'd see how long that lasted.

He took the handcuffs out of his jeans back pocket. Kneeling beside Penny he cuffed her hands to the buggy wheel. He moved, knelt and did the same to Star. He left them in the shade.

The walk to the Colonel's was pretty. He could see the ranch below, the charges and the hands moving in the rings and corral. The Colonel's zip buggy wasn't parked in front of the house so he figured he was safe. He heard the crunch of tires,

the sound of steps and saw Randi and Sam come out of the woods.

Randi was unbelievable. In just the two weeks she'd been here she'd become the hands' favorite. Randi was voluptuous where Misty was pre-Raphaelite ethereal. Randi was well trained, fast to pick up new skills, whereas his paints were goddamned pains in the asses. Sam was lucky.

They passed him, Randi at a good trot. He waved at Sam. Sam lifted a finger, best he could do.

Spot wagged her fanny when she saw him. He went over and gave her a pat. "Tomorrow, old girl," he said, "I'll tie you behind the buggy and we'll let you run."

Spot gave a yip and nuzzled his crotch.

"Not now. Maybe later this evening."

She whimpered, followed him as far as her chain would permit.

He felt for Spot who never got a chance to see much beyond the length of her chain. He thought it a waste. If Spot were his dog he'd have her down at the stable.

He knocked on the door, let the brass knocker fall with an extra rap. It was going to be hot this afternoon. Hot and humid. Maybe it would rain tomorrow.

The housekeeper opened the door. Her tan and white uniform was always spotless.

"Penny's tail, ma'am."

She shut the door and he waited. He heard the triangle ring below; lunch was ready. He'd get Star's tail from the office later.

The door opened and the housekeeper handed the tail to him.

"Thanks, ma'am."

Bertha never smiled, not in all his years here. She'd never said a word to him. Some of the hands said she'd talked to them, nothing memorable. Just that she did speak. The knocker made a clatter when the door shut.

"Well, that's that I guess," he mumbled.

He waved at Spot, grinned at her antics and went back to the wagon shed where Penny and Star were parked.

He left the buggy and harness where they were. He'd clean everything up this afternoon after a second ride.

He unlocked Penny and Star, pulled the tail out of his pocket and laid it on the seat. "Stand," he said. Penny was stiff, she was slow. He removed the belt and straps from Penny and laid them by her bridle. Star waited, open handcuff hanging from her other wrist. He pulled her hands behind her and cuffed them. He went to the buggy, took the sunblock tube from the seat and brought it to Star. "Open," he said. He placed the tube in her mouth. "Hold it there."

"Now you," he said to Penny.

Penny stood as he cuffed her hands behind her back. Her body gave off heat, more than Star's. He felt her forehead, cool. He placed the tail's plug at her lips and she held it with her teeth. "Good girl," he said. "You both are very good girls."

He led them to their stall, let them drink before making them lie down and cuffing them to each other. He liked the sight of so much woman flesh jumbled up like this. He set the tail and sunblock on the shelf and left for lunch.

Benjamin was the first to ask him why his paint wasn't chained to the post. He couldn't tell how many of the ranch hands asked him during lunch. All he wanted to do was finish his meal in peace, drink his coffee and try to plan the afternoon.

He left the bunkhouse early since they were all bored without his paints providing entertainment. Hell, Benjamin could chain Misty to the post for all he cared. He was too busy for that sort of nonsense.

He stopped at the office but no one could help him with a tail for Star. He'd have to return after one when Anna was back from lunch. He wished he got a full hour.

The walk from the office, the building closest to the gate, passed by the itsy bitsy duck pond. If this were his place he'd have a real, honest to god pond. Cattails, a rowboat, a dock. Everything. Hell, he'd have canals put in and tow paths so the charges could pull boats, not just buggies. But this wasn't his place so he'd have to make do. His place when he started was not going to be even a fraction of this.

He shut the stall door and looked at them. Damn, he didn't even check on Misty. It was like she was far off in the past.

He looked at the crossed brand on Star's ass; he could see her labia piercings from here. Penny's eyes watched him as he stood there.

"Roll on top of Penny," he said as he approached them. He dropped his jeans and knelt behind Star. He spit in his hand and used it to wet his cock. Star was relaxed and open so he slipped right in. He fucked her ass as Penny watched his face. He couldn't tell by her eyes what she was thinking which was just as well. He wanted to hurt her.

The crap she put him through. Star was easier. He bounced on Star's ass. When he was done using her he backed from her and zipped his jeans. He'd have to remember to bring a couple of changes of clothes tonight along with his bedroll.

He uncuffed them, made Star roll off Penny. Star lay on her back, that look in her eyes and the very beginning of a smile on her face. As if she pleased him in some way.

He hooded Star, locked the hood to her collar and then cuffed each wrist to an ankle. He stood and stretched; all this bending was getting to his back. He took the crop from the shelf and carried it over to Penny who lay on her back.

He stood over her, let her watch him. He wondered how long he would have to stand like this before she did something. He had all day.

She released her breath, began to breathe normally. She relaxed, let tension leave her body.

He swung the crop so the flail just brushed her thigh. She didn't flinch. He tossed the crop onto the shelf, got just a glimpse of Misty through the north window. He'd have Penny wear heels later this afternoon.

"On your hands and knees." He went to his kit box and rustled around until he found his lighter and the small brand he had the blacksmith make up for him.

"I'm marking you as mine," he said kneeling in front of her. He showed her the brand - a capital D with two wavy lines going through the upright.

"Turn around," he said. He didn't look at her, was busy heating the brand with the lighter. When she was ready he pulled her to him, his arm wrapped around her pelvis. He held the hot brand to her right ass cheek for two seconds then released her.

He rose to his feet waving the brand to cool it. Penny shifted behind him, was almost done crying. He set the brand on a broken saucer, dropped the lighter in his kit and returned to Penny.

"You'll hold Star for me tomorrow when I do the same to her." He debated whether or not he should praise her. "I don't think Star will do as well as you did."

Penny nodded. She faced away from him; her rear end still shifted.

"That's just a temporary brand. You have to sleep on your left side. Any grit gets in the burn will make a permanent mark. Understand?"

"Yes," she said softly. Her nose sounded like it needed to be blown.

He held his hanky to her face. "Blow," he said. When she was done he folded up the hanky and put it in his pocket.

He left them to get a cup of coffee at the bunkhouse. He relaxed at a table, enjoyed the air-conditioning. Paint Penny, go for a ride, put them up for the night early and leave to do his shopping. Come back, set up his things; he needed to remember to bring an alarm clock. He thought he'd better write it all down.

He found an empty page in his memo book and started his list for things he'd need for the next several days. He'd spent the night before when one of his charges was sick or injured. The charges were more important than the hands though you could never tell it. A day here cost their owners close to a thousand dollars. He knew how much he was making. The Colonel must be raking it in.

He wished there was a place to take a nap. He wasn't like some who could sleep sitting up. All he needed was fifteen minutes.

He finished his coffee and left the bunkhouse. Misty was still doing circles in the ring. Benjamin, he hated to have to say it, was an idiot.

The Colonel was sitting in his zip buggy talking to John. John's charge stood waiting a few feet away. He wanted to tell her to not lock her knees but figured what the hell.

He gave a quarter piece of apple to Penny, allowed her to use her hands, while he got things ready for the paint job.

He found a can of the color he wanted in the tack room, yellow this time, and a nice, clean for a change, round brush. The hands were hell on brushes. He carried the can, brush and a small pail back to the stall.

He stirred the yellow, poured a bit into the pail.

Penny took longer to finish the apple. He made her stand and tied her wrists to the bar that hung from the ceiling. He adjusted the height, tied it off and brought the paint to her.

He always started at the top. That way he didn't drip on anything freshly painted. He'd do her hands and wrists later.

He stood behind her since he didn't want her eyes on him, not now. He drew yellow paint over the white lines on her skin. He worked quickly, liking the contrast her tanned skin made with the paint.

He did as far as her butt then circled her. He'd have to come up with a way so she was held in a frame, could be raised and lowered, turned and rotated, so he didn't have to crawl on the floor or get his back in an uproar.

Stasis popped in his mind. He wondered why nothing like prosperity or happiness just appeared out of the blue. So today's word was stasis. He was pretty sure what it meant. Immobile.

Penny watched him while he painted her arms and her face. She was someone who was always thinking, thought too much for their own good. He didn't think Star was like that, though he wasn't entirely sure. Star was a manipulator. As if her precious ass or cunt meant something. As if by his using her she meant something to him. She was what? He couldn't remember from the sheet on the clipboard. Twenty-two? And owner marks all over her. That said something.

"In your life as property, how many owners have you had, sweet cakes?" he asked Penny. "One?"

"More." She spoke softly.

"Five?" She said nothing.

Whoever the poor fucker was he'd gotten taken.

He set the brush and pail down on the windowsill and watched Misty. He flexed his fingers. They tended to cramp. A whip or crop he could hold all day. But a brush and a few minutes his fingers cramped.

Next time he saw the Colonel he'd ask about Misty. It was crazy having her run in circles all day.

Stasis. Stasis as in he was seriously thinking about chaining Star out on the post tomorrow after branding and painting her.

He carried the paint and brush back to Penny and knelt. Carefully. Last thing he wanted to do was fall over with both his hands occupied.

He diddled Penny's cunt with the wood end of the brush before continuing. He wanted to see if he could get her to do something. She did nothing at all.

He painted her legs. He crawled around to her back and finished her. When he was done he threw the brush into the nearly empty pail and rubbed his fingers.

Penny's brand wasn't covered with paint. The skin was pale and shiny where the hot steel had touched her. It would either blister later today or become raw - he could never tell beforehand. After a week it should be well on the way to healing. Two weeks and there would be a red spot. He'd brand them again as long as they remained with him.

He washed the pail and brush in the sink, made sure the brush was really clean. He'd finish Penny tomorrow. Or not. Right now he needed to deal with Miss Hot Pants here while Penny dried.

He uncuffed Star and led her out of the stall. He cuffed her to the hayloft ladder and left her. She was free for anyone who wanted to use her. Just her lower holes, she was still hooded.

He wondered if he was being arbitrary. Damn right he was being arbitrary.

The walk to the office was pleasant. He didn't need to deal with both of them at once. Just one at a time. Right now he was using Star to help Penny realize he was serious about things.

He rolled up his sleeves. He liked shirts with snaps rather than buttons. He hated to wrestle with clothing. The office was air-conditioned; he relaxed in a chair while Anna found a tail for Star.

The walk back was better than pleasant. It would be just him in the buggy. Penny and he'd go up to the woods, take Spot along. Spot needed the exercise.

Star was cuffed to the ladder, alone, no users. She stood well, like she'd done this before a thousand times. He touched

her back. "You disappointed me, Star. When they are done with you, tell each one, 'More please.' Understand?"

Star's hooded head gave a nod.

He left her, got the paint materials from the stall and put them away in the tack room. Penny's paint was dry. He spit on Penny's tail plug and set it in place.

After untying her he watched her as she put on her heels. She hadn't forgotten the brand when she sat. It must still hurt.

"Ready?" he asked her.

She rose gracefully, looked straight at him.

He waited.

"Yes," she said. Her tongue rested on her lower lip.

"Watch it," he said. He led her out of the stall.

Chapter Five

Del kissed Marge goodbye and carried his bag out to the truck. The cicadas were extremely noisy just after sunset. He set the canvas bag on the seat beside him and relaxed for a moment. No charges, no Colonel, no nothing except cicadas. It was a relief.

He started her up, tapped the dashboard and backed out of the drive. He could see the glow of the TV in one room of his house, the glow of Marge's computer in another.

He stopped at a donut place, locally owned, not one of the chains, and bought a bag for him and the girls.

When he parked his truck behind the bunkhouse he sat for a moment after turning the engine off. He could see the Colonel's house on the hill glow with every light on in the place. There were lamps along the walkways and in front of the buildings down here. He liked it better where night was close.

He carried the bags, donuts and his canvas carry bag, to the stable. Except for lights on the ceiling down the center bay it was dark. The charges should be sleeping.

He took a second to look in Misty's dark stall. He couldn't see much, just the glow of her form and hair. She didn't stir.

He unlatched the door to Star's stall and turned on the light. Star and Penny were cuffed together on the floor. Penny's eyes watched him.

He dropped the bags on the bench and walked over to check her brand. No blisters, just a patch of raw skin, pale still. It would be red tomorrow. He hoped the mark showed well, he could never tell at this point how it would look.

He unlatched the cuffs, removed them and told Star to kneel in the corner.

"Kneel," he said to Penny.

He examined Penny carefully. Her eyes, ears and mouth. He checked her fingers and nails. He checked her cunt, wet as usual, and ass. Her feet were tender. She had a heel blister on her left foot. He patted her shoulder and got up.

He opened the bag of donuts, gave them each one and ate his watching them from the bench. Star's looks at him were

smoldering. Her time cuffed to the ladder hadn't diminished her fire.

"Come here," he said to Star.

She began to rise to her feet. "Crawl," he said.

She came to him with a smile on her lips. Penny ate her donut slowly, didn't look up.

He motioned; she unfastened his pants and took out his cock. He began another donut as she licked him hard.

She watched him as she took him in her mouth then dropped her eyes and did as she was trained.

He watched Penny whose donut was finished. She knelt with her head bowed, hands palm up on her thighs. A good posture for once.

"Turn around," he told Star.

Star glanced at him, smiled and turned on her hands and knees so her ass faced him.

He knelt behind her and used her cunt, a bit loose but still nice, and then finished in her ass. He released her hair, leaned back on his heels.

She turned and lowered her mouth to clean him. She raised her face when she was done and smiled at him.

He slapped her. Penny looked up, then quickly dropped her eyes. "Bring me the crop, Star."

She rose slowly, sauntered provocatively to the shelf and come back with the crop offered to him with both hands.

He stood and fastened his jeans. He took the crop and dropped it in front of Penny as he went to the rope and the bar. He lowered the bar. "Star," he said.

Star came to him, raised her hands and watched his face as he tied her wrists to the bar. "Penny," he said.

Penny turned to them.

"When you whip Star, pay particular attention to here," he slapped her breast, "and here," he slapped the other. He raised the bar and tied off the rope. "At your leisure." He sat on the bench, opened his canvas bag and took out a book.

It must have been fifteen minutes later when he heard Penny stand. He raised his eyes from the book and watched her.

Penny circled Star slowly, tracing every bit of Star's skin with the crop. After a couple of minutes of this, she hit Star's thigh, waited a moment and began to slowly whip her.

He returned to his book, finished the chapter and set it aside. He leaned against the stall wall, stretched out his legs and closed his eyes. Penny's blows, Star's reactions, continued.

It had been a long day. Too long. He needed to work with Star, at least a little, begin training her the walks she would need to learn.

"Harder," he said.

There was a pause, then he could hear the crop as it was swung, the blow, and Star's involuntary reaction, part voice part body. The beating continued.

He wanted to sleep, couldn't just yet. There was still a lot he had to do.

Spot had joined them on their ride this afternoon, leashed to the buggy and following happily along. Sometime he would have to have her lie still, stretched out, so he could study her tattoos. It was almost as if they told a story, maybe several stories or chapters or whatever. He had never seen anything so involved or with such intense colors. He wondered where the Colonel had found her. He could never ask so it didn't matter.

He waited until Penny began to tire before telling her to stop. Star cried, her face red and contorted as she hung from her wrists. Her legs were folded under her.

He held up a donut to Penny. "Come here and sit by me." He made a place for her on the bench.

Penny sat on the bench several inches of space between them. She took the donut without looking at him.

He wasn't quite sure what he would do with Penny. He knew what he was going to do with Star, but not Penny. He considered a night ride. Just around down here, but wasn't sure if Penny was ready for that yet.

He set his bag on the floor, book on top, watched Star compose herself. She stood on her feet taking her weight off her wrists. She tried to turn so she didn't face him but couldn't. She marked well. A paint but a paint with lots of potential.

When Penny was done with her donut he told her to kneel. He got up and walked to Star, carrying the crop with him. He examined her eyes and nose which were running. He checked

her mouth. He felt over her body and checked her cunt, pulling it open, tugging on her labia rings. He felt her ass, gave her ass a friendly slap. "Good girl," he said.

He went to the bench and sat down next to Penny. "Did you enjoy your time at the Colonel's last night?"

She said, "Yes," without raising her eyes.

"Would you like to do that more often?"

"More please." Softly.

"Tonight?"

"Yes."

"Right now?"

"Yes."

"Do you like Star?"

"Yes."

"Do you like me?"

She was quiet. After a moment she raised her head and looked at him. "Yes."

"Do you want to stay here tonight?"

"Please. Yes." She lowered her eyes.

He didn't know what to do with her. "Are you hungry, Star?"

Star nodded, she still kept her eyes lowered.

One who thought too much and one who was shamed by a whipping. Just his luck. He took off his boots, wiggled his toes. He put his boots back on.

"Do you like Penny, Star?"

"Yes," she said quickly.

"Do you like the Colonel?"

"Yes."

She didn't even know who the Colonel was. "Do you like me?"

She smiled but didn't say anything. She raised her eyes and gave him that look she had.

"Would you like to go for a walk?"

"Please," she said.

"Okay," he said. He stood, went to Star and untied her wrists. Her arms fell heavily. "Kneel," he said. He raised the bar, tied it off.

He took the hood off the shelf and dropped it over Penny's head. He locked it to her collar, raised her from the floor by her arm and walked her to the post. "Kneel," he said.

After he cuffed Penny's wrists and ankles to the post he took Star's arm. "Come." She rose from the floor and followed him.

He latched the stall door, went out into the stable yard, Star following.

"Working late tonight, I see."

He saw jerkhead who everyone else called Jerry. "For the next couple of nights."

"Wish I had work like that." Jerry pointed the flashlight beam at Star and came up to them.

"Be my guest."

"You're kidding, right?"

"All fours," Del said stepping away. "She's yours."

Jerry went for the mouth, didn't even have to think about it.

"You won't break her," Del said.

Jerry held Star's head and began to thrust slowly.

Del leaned against the stable and watched them. Jerry was going at it like a man starved. He didn't last long.

After Jerry zipped up, Del said, "Come here a second."

Jerry left Star and the both of them went into the stable.

"See that ladder?" Del said.

"Yes."

"There'll be one there all night. Feel free."

"You're kidding."

"While I'm here working late, next couple of nights. Feel free."

Jerry couldn't thank him enough, the jerkhead. It was okay by him. That solved the Penny problem.

He raised Star to her feet after Jerry left. Jerry could tell he didn't want to talk. Star followed Del on the gravel path up the rise.

When they got close to the Colonel's, Del left the path, keeping out of the light, circling around. He could see Spot had noticed something. He squeezed Star's arm, made her stand still and left her. He gave a soft whistle as he entered the lit area.

Spot gave a jump and ran back and forth wiggling her butt.

"Quiet," he whispered.

Spot nodded.

Del motioned for Star to join them and scratched Spot's ear as Star approached. Del unclipped Spot's chain from her collar and clipped it to Star's. "You're spending the night here," he whispered.

"But . . ." Star said.

Del covered her mouth, moved her to Spot's doghouse. "Here. I'll get you in the morning." He took his hand away.

They were partly in shadow and partly in light from the house. Star looked at him and nodded. She fell to her knees.

He gave her shoulder a pat and walked back to Spot. He was tempted to have Spot bark so the switch would be noticed but figured he shouldn't make it too easy for the Colonel by bringing him a girl every night.

Spot took his hand and licked it. He gave her a pat and she followed him down to the stable.

He kept on thinking man's best friend and if he weren't so tired he'd find a stick to throw for her. The ranch was beautiful in the light of the moon and stars. It looked otherworldly and yet at the same time more substantial than during the daylight. It looked bigger.

He went into the stall and shut the door after Spot. "Over there," he said.

Spot knelt on the blanket; her alert face followed him as he moved.

He tossed her a donut, enjoyed the look on her face. Dogfood must not be that great. One of the fun things about having a dog was spoiling them with people food.

Spot didn't use her paws to hold the donut, she ate it directly from the floor.

He uncuffed Penny from the post, set one handcuff on the bench. He raised her and led her into the main bay of the stable. "You're sleeping out here tonight."

At the ladder he made her kneel. He cuffed her ankle to the ladder.

He couldn't tell what she was thinking because of the hood. Her body was stiff. "Star is taking Spot's place tonight on the hill. Spot's sleeping with me. You're sleeping out here."

Her shoulders fell.

He ran his fingers over her side, under her thigh until he felt her bare cunt. He stroked the outside, then slipped his fingers in the slit. Still wet. He smiled. Lucky Jerry.

He stroked her clit, not to get her off, just so she knew what he could do. "You'll be used tonight. Me and another."

Her body shifted slightly. She leaned into his arm.

He didn't care if she came or not. He stroked her for a minute more than withdrew his hand, set it on her thigh.

She relaxed.

He thought about Star and the Colonel. He wondered if the Colonel had any idea what he was missing.

"You did well today," he said.

"More," she said softly.

"Tomorrow." He stood. "Night."

She bowed her head.

He latched the stall door behind him and sat on the bench. The day was almost over. He took off his boots and rubbed his feet. He picked up the handcuffs and cuffed Spot's paws. He took the lead from the peg on the wall and clipped it to her collar. He tied the other end to the post.

He took his sleeping sack from the canvas bag and unrolled it next to the blanket. The floor was hard but he'd get used to it.

He undressed, left the stall to use the bathroom. He figured he'd use Penny on his three o'clock run. One of the benefits of getting older and not being able to hold it all night.

He turned out the light and lay on his sack. Light from the outside came through the north window. As he relaxed he could hear some of the charges sleeping. He wondered if that was Misty snoring. Maybe her owner wasn't so lucky.

"Come here," he said to Spot.

Spot curled up next to him.

"On your back," he said.

He could hear her stretch out and whimper in anticipation. He'd never leave a dog chained up all day. Never.

He laid his hand on her stomach, felt the bump of her navel stud. He drew his hand across her stomach to her breasts. He tugged a nipple ring until she gasped, then let go. He touched her face with his knuckles, she grabbed his hand and licked each finger, holding it in her mouth, drawing it out slowly.

He pulled his hand from her paws and rolled onto his side. He held her cunt as he ran his tongue over her face feeling the eyebrow stud, the nose ring and the lip rings.

He settled on her, held her cuffed paws over her head as he entered her. Her body writhed under him, rippled and rolled around his cock.

He fucked her slowly, stopping when he needed to rest, beginning again a little faster each time. She started to yip; he took one hand from her paws and held it over her mouth. She arched her back.

When he was ready he came, held still for a moment then settled on her. He released her paws, uncovered her mouth. He rested his cheek against hers.

If his charges didn't demand so much of his time he would have a better . . . what? He didn't know. They were his job and he tried to do the best he could for them but they demanded so much.

Spot was perfectly happy to have him spend the whole night this way but he couldn't sleep on his stomach, never had been able to. He rolled off her.

"I want you to wake me at dawn," he told her.

She gave a yip then pressed as close to him as she could.

He scratched her ear. If there were some way he would but there wasn't. There was no way he could afford to buy her from the Colonel. He just couldn't afford someone like her.

He never played the lottery, never thought it worthwhile. People like him never won the lottery. But sometimes he dreamed of what he'd do if he won.

He'd get a place of his own right off. He loved what he did. Most of the time at least when they weren't goddamned pains in the ass.

It was worth it to see their faces after they'd done it right the first time. Who cared about the owners? The owners were even more a pain in the ass. Always in a rush. Always taking them away before he was finished with them.

He could hear Jerry and Penny. He hoped the poor girl got some sleep tonight. He was instituting a new policy. The stable needed a dog. She'd be it in the morning.

He could tell it bothered her to watch him with Star which was fine. He had used that to push her and she'd done better than ever before.

He held Spot's cunt and settled in for sleep. All he needed was to shut his eyes and imagine the cicadas singing; his mind filled with a wall of sound.

Chapter Six

Del woke up feeling fantastic. Spot was sucking his cock with doggie enthusiasm. He could hear birds chatter away outside. There was just a hint of light in the stall.

He finished in Spot's mouth, relaxed for a second before he had to get up. "Good girl," he whispered.

Spot licked his belly below his navel and nuzzled her head close.

He rolled over and sat up. It was tempting to dawdle but he needed to get Star back so he could work with her this morning. He rose to his feet and went to his bag. He slipped on a clean pair of jeans and left the stall to check on Penny.

Penny slept curled by the ladder. He could see she'd had an accident. He was tempted to reprimand her, push her face in it, but what the hell. He wasn't able to go all night either.

He cleaned up in the washroom – splashed some water on his pits and face and peed. He still felt fantastic. Breakfast in an hour or so, a gallon of hot coffee, eggs sunnyside up, toast, and grits if he could talk Cookie into making them. He couldn't wait.

He left Penny by the ladder. She'd be there all morning, out of his hair.

He finished dressing in the stall. Spot was a good girl in the straw pile, scratched straw over her job and then knelt, waiting patiently. He slipped on his boots, tossed a donut to Spot and ate a bite of the last one before combing his hair. He'd shave later if he felt like it.

He clipped the leash on Spot and they left the stall only to run into Jerry and Reager. Jerry opened his mouth to speak, Del said, "It's okay." He tossed Jerry a key. "When you're done take off her hood and leave it in the stall. She'd like a cup of water if you two can manage it."

"See, I told you," Jerry said. He and Reager made a beeline.

Spot frolicked ahead of him on and off the path, as far as the leash would allow. He loved early mornings like this. It felt like the whole day would go just perfectly. Of course it never did.

Del clipped the chain to Spot's collar, gave her a pat and went to the doghouse. A piece of paper with, "Come see me," was lying inside.

Shit, he thought. What a way to spoil the morning. He rapped the knocker hard on the door, bam bam bam, loud enough to wake the dead. He leaned against one of the posts holding up the porch roof.

The door opened and he followed the housekeeper upstairs. He'd never been upstairs before. In the kitchen, out by the pool, the study, and years ago in the living room for his interview.

The oriental runner up the stairway looked rich. The wrought railing with gold trim looked rich. The paintings on the walls, each with their own little lamp attached to the top of the gilt frames looked rich.

The carpet in the hall was thick. The housekeeper led him past several doors, stopped at one and knocked.

"Yes?"

She opened the door and backed away.

He went in and saw the Colonel sitting up in a huge bed, satin sheets, a blonde headed form next to him, not Star. Long wavy hair. Like an actress or a model.

The Colonel set his cup and saucer on the bedside table and smiled at him. "I trust Spot was sufficient amusement last night."

"Yes, sir." The less said the better though he had his reasons and they were good ones.

"Get Del a chair," the Colonel said flipping up the sheet.

The sleepy-eyed blonde sat up, swung her feet out of bed, and walked past him staring.

Del stared back. She had Misty beat by a mile.

The Colonel picked up his saucer and cup and sipped his coffee not saying a word.

The blonde returned to the room with a chair, set it beside Del and walked slowly back to the Colonel's bed. The Colonel smiled, set his cup and saucer down. Once the blonde was settled beside him the Colonel tossed the sheet over her. "I was surprised last night to find Spot replaced by one of your charges."

"Yes, sir."

"Pleasantly so. You may bring her here tonight."

"Yes, sir."

"Relax, Del. I'm not going to reprimand you."

"Thank you, sir." Del crossed his legs, sat back in the chair.

"I admire your creativity."

"Thank you, sir."

"Sometimes. Sometimes I don't. You already know that."

"Yes, sir."

"Sharon," the Colonel said. "Show Del to the room where Star is staying." He picked up his saucer and cup.

The sleepy blonde sat up, got out of bed and walked across the room to Del. She waited by the chair, resting a hand on the chair back.

Del could smell her and she was so close he could feel the heat of her. More than the heat of her. The hair on her arm was so pale it was almost invisible. "Thank you, sir," he said as he stood.

Sharon walked slowly down the hall. He followed her several paces behind enjoying how her butt moved. Not a mark on her. The Colonel was still able to surprise him.

He followed her down another hall whose walls were painted black. The floor was bare wood. Expensive parquet that was loud when stepped on. She stopped at a door, waited for him to catch up then threw it open.

Del saw Star bound and suspended from a metal rack mounted on the wall. He felt a touch on his leg, turned and Sharon wrinkled her nose at him before walking slowly away.

Damn, he thought. I should have gotten her number. Then he remembered how busy he was, damn paints. He shut the door behind him. "Fancy meeting you here."

Star glowered at him.

"Are you happy?"

"More please," she sneered. She tried to kick her foot.

There was a puddle under her. He bet she was happy as all get out.

It took a couple of minutes to figure out how the ratchet on the hoist worked. He didn't want her coming down too fast.

Maybe he did. He shouldn't want her to come down too fast. She was, after all, expensive property.

He lowered her to the floor. Right on the puddle but that couldn't be helped.

The gloss on the black walls helped. The place had just the right amount of gloom. The bars on the window were a nice touch.

The Colonel wasn't a knot man. These were adequately done but nothing fancy. By the time he was done though, the rope, he and Star were thoroughly covered with piss. She was. Just his hands for him and that was more than enough.

"Kneel," he said. He set the final coil of rope by the others.

Her posture was lousy. "Stiff?" he asked.

"More please," she said staring at him.

He looked around him, didn't see anything he could use, spun and slapped her. "That's for saying 'but' last night."

"I'm not a fucking dog." She held her hand up to her cheek.

He smiled at her. "Oh, you aren't are you? You're a pampered pleasure slave are you?" She started to speak, he held her jaw and said, his face inches from hers, "You've said entirely too much, sweetheart." She began to speak and he shook her. "Not another word. Not yes, more or please. Not fuck you or I'm sorry. Not another word." He gave her a shake and released her. "Understand?"

She stared at him, then her eyes changed, her whole face changed. As if she were an ember. The slightest breath would get her burning bright.

"Sweet," he said. "Stand."

She stood, tottered, and steadied herself.

He picked up the last coil of rope. He tied her wrists together in front and tied them to her collar. He led her by the rope out of the room.

He stopped at the Colonel's room. He knocked on the door, heard yes and went in, Star following. "Thank you, sir. You wanted her again tonight?"

"If you wouldn't mind." The Colonel laid the newspaper on his lap.

"She'll be here, sir." Del couldn't see Sharon in the room.

"Knock this time, Del."

"Yes, sir. The room's a mess."

"It will be taken care of." The Colonel picked up his paper.

Del drew Star out of the room, shut the door. Nothing smelled like old piss. He made sure she followed well behind him.

He let them out the big heavy front door, stopped for a moment to pet Spot. Spot looked like she really enjoyed the outing.

Del made Star walk in front of him as he went on the path down to the stable. "Knees higher. Higher." He jerked the rope. "Higher." He was enjoying himself. He was going to have fun with this one.

When he had her in the stall he made her get on her knees. He'd decided he was going to let her stink until this afternoon.

He took the bridle off the peg and dropped it over her head setting the bit in her mouth. She stared at him, resisted him momentarily then let the bit fully enter her mouth. He buckled the bridle at the back, pushed her down so her tied hands and head were on the floor, her ass in the air.

He was tempted but he didn't want to miss breakfast. He found her tail, spit on the plug and pushed it in. "Stay there," he said.

He left the stall. Penny knelt by the ladder. He unlocked the cuff to her ankle and sent her into the stall. He decided on red paint in the tack room, took down a can. He opened it, brand new and shaken. He poured a small amount in the pail, took the brush and went back to the stall.

Penny knelt on the blanket, eyes down. Her posture was better, he couldn't figure out quite how, didn't wear himself out about it.

He knelt by Star, dipped the brush in the paint and painted a single large word across her back. "Dogmeat." She'd be dry when he got back from breakfast. He cleaned the brush and pail in the sink, left the stall and dropped them off at the tack room before going to the washroom.

He ate breakfast alone. Most of them ate Egg McMuffins or some sort of crap like that on the way to work and it showed. He preferred real food. Cookie did the eggs just right. He

relaxed with his second cup of coffee, tried not to think about paints at all.

He needed to call Marge to see if she needed anything. He missed her voice. She wasn't like Sharon at all but he suspected you didn't live day in day out with someone like Sharon. Besides, when she was seventeen Marge could have shown Sharon a thing or two. And it only got better.

He got a thermos from Cookie, went back to the stable. The charges, all but his it looked like, were getting exercised this morning. Misty was looking great as usual. Randi and Sam were in their own little world in the ring. He saw a new one and asked John who told him she was Stormy. Carl looked like he had his hands full. Debbie and John both looked bored.

He shut the stall door behind him, set the thermos on the shelf. Maybe he'd get the place neatened up while they mucked out the spoiled straw. He dug through his kit for the branding iron then remembered he'd left it on the saucer. He took the branding iron and his lighter to Star and knelt. "Help me hold her down," he said to Penny.

Penny came over; he had her hold Star's shoulders. "She says she's not a fucking a dog." He heated the branding iron with the lighter.

When the branding iron was hot he held it against Star's left butt cheek for several seconds. He didn't really care if this one lasted or not.

He stood waving the iron to cool it. She hadn't let out a sound at all. He admired the iron. It was about eight inches long - tiny, just a toy. It worked which was the important part. He laid it on the saucer.

He made Penny kneel on the blanket while he pulled Star to her knees. She was drooling around the bit and she'd leaked a tear or two. He'd praise her but she'd said those words earlier. He lifted her chin with his fingers. "Do you want to know what I painted on your back?"

She blinked her eyes.

"Dogmeat."

She bit hard on the bit.

He smiled at her. "Penny's going back to the ladder where the hands will fuck her when they want a break. You'll either be

with me working out or on the blanket here in the stall." He let go of her chin. "All four," he said to Penny.

Penny grinned as she dropped down. He had her come closer.

He dropped his jeans and knelt behind Penny. The fuck felt good. He pretended she was Sharon. She was if he kept his eyes shut. When he was done he led Penny back to the ladder and cuffed her ankle.

"Remember," he said. "More please."

She nodded, glanced at him, a sweet grin on her face.

The yellow paint was holding up better than the black. He'd have to remember that.

In the stall he removed the rope from Star.

"Hungry?" he asked as he coiled the rope.

Star nodded.

He left the coil on the floor, poured a cup of coffee from the thermos and got the lead. He clipped the lead to her bridle, gave a snap. "Out we go," he said.

Star walked in front, paused at the large stable doors. He gave the lead a snap; she hesitantly went out into the corral.

Del had her stop next to Benjamin. He saw Benjamin's raised eyebrow, said, "Accidents happen." Benjamin and he watched Misty for a couple of minutes.

"Could I borrow your crop for a minute? I left mine in the stall."

Benjamin held it out.

Del took it, swished it through the air a couple of times then hit Star hard across the ass. He tried the crop a couple of more times, handed it back. "That's nice. Where'd you get it?"

Horsetackco dot com."

"I'll see if I can't get one. Thanks."

Benjamin nodded.

Del watched Misty for a minute more, snapped the lead. "Just keep walking."

He took her out to the field, held the lead with one hand as she did circles. He checked his watch; they'd practice until eleven thirty, then he'd take her back and the girls could muck the stall.

"Back straight," he said. "Straight." He snapped the lead.

Lunch. Call Marge. Take Penny out. Wash them both. He was getting tired. He'd drunk his coffee too fast, had to pee, had too much on his mind. He wasn't right here now like he needed to be."

"Whoa," he said.

He went to her. Why did it have to be so hard? He took her shoulders and turned her. "Watch the blonde, that one in the ring. Hell, watch any of them." He shook Star. "See her?"

She nodded sharply.

He could hear her teeth on the bit. "That's what you want to look like, Dogmeat. Got that?" He shook her.

She nodded, tried to talk.

He shook her. "Take a minute to study them then you can show me what you've learned."

She nodded.

He stepped away. It was hard not to think about how much fun Spot was compared to this paint who was a pain in the ass. He snapped the lead.

As she stepped in the grass he thought about how much fun it would be to go fishing - have a day off, Spot tied off on the truck bed. God, he could really use a day off. A nice pond to fish, not too many people, Spot curled up at his side. Maybe a nibble, maybe not. He didn't care if he caught anything.

He snapped the lead. "Knees high."

She looked okay. Nothing spectacular. "Shoulders back." He watched her. "That's better."

He hadn't realized the Colonel's had so many rooms upstairs. He wondered what was behind each closed door.

"That's better. Knees high now."

He resisted the temptation to glance at his watch. It had been five minutes tops. "Good."

She was halfway decent. She had a lot of pride. He would let Penny whip her before they went out this afternoon. He wanted to see if she'd react the same way.

He could smell Star from here which wasn't helping him any. There wasn't anything to tie her off on and he wasn't sure

if it was safe taking her too close to the stable. Some of the hands had a mean streak.

He snapped the lead. "Faster. Faster still."

Another hour and a half of this and he was going to bust a gut.

"Whoa," he said. He dropped the lead onto the grass.
"Kneel."

He walked up to her. "Dogmeat, if you didn't have that bridle on, I'd tell you to open wide." He unzipped his pants, took his cock out and aimed. Off with the old, on with the new.

When he was done she opened her eyes and looked up at him. She drew her shoulders further back, became even more erect. Her eyes glowed.

He smiled at her. "You're stepping pretty good. With practice you'll become almost as good as the blonde over there."

She didn't blink.

"Up," he said. He took the lead and gave it a snap.

She rose so her whole body was a sinuous curve. She stepped slowly, knees high.

He enjoyed the sight.

Chapter Seven

Del was about worn out. Tomorrow was Friday and everything had to be spic and span because the place would be overrun with owners. Friday, Saturday, things started to return to normal on Sunday afternoon.

Star and Penny had been cleaned top to bottom; he wouldn't repaint them until Monday. He kicked off the high table, landed on his feet, to check to see if they were dry yet.

His boots scratched on the wet cement floor and the sound echoed in the washhouse. He was usually alone in the washhouse on Thursday afternoons; the other hands weren't quite so fastidious with their charges. Penny and Star hung from a reinforced crosstie. Their toes just touched the ground, their ankles in iron stretcher bars, wrists in leather cuffs and chains.

He felt the base of Penny's back, between her butt cheeks and crotch, then he felt Star, including her hair. Penny was dry. He went to the sink by the window and picked up Penny's tail. He hadn't washed their tails since he wanted to braid them dry.

Benjamin had been taking Misty on drives the past few days so Del wasn't expecting to see them out the window but there they were doing circles. She was still beautiful but he was beginning to find her boring. She always looked the same.

He spit on Penny's tail plug, parted her cheeks and pressed the plug in place. Her ass had firmed from all the exercise. He checked the temporary brand; it was healing nicely.

He knelt and braided her tail. He could barely keep his eyes open. He finished Penny's tail and backed away. She smelled so good and her skin – he rose to his feet, patted her ass cheek and walked to the door. Both of them looked good. He gave them a salute, watched their eyes. He'd tie ribbons on their bridles tomorrow. They were a fine looking pair. Paints but their pride showed.

He enjoyed the feel of the sun on his back and shoulders. A cup of coffee, kick his feet up for a few minutes. He heard the crunch of tires behind him and stopped. The Colonel's zip buggy pulled up alongside. "Sir," he said.

"Just the man I wanted to see." The Colonel's hand rested on the top of the steering wheel, fingers relaxed.

Del watched the big gold and diamond ring spin on the Colonel's finger with the help of a thumb.

"I'm having a few friends over this evening. A nice night for a cookout. I want you to bring Star, Penny and one of the other girls up."

Del nodded, "Anyone in particular, sir?"

The Colonel waved at Carl, turned back to him. "Entirely up to you. We'll be done about ten. Be there at seven. Hitch one up to a buggy. These are potential investors." The Colonel winked.

"Yes, sir."

The Colonel drove off in a rush to upset some other poor fool's well-laid plans. Del checked his watch. Three-thirty. He went to the bunkhouse and waited while Cookie packed him a box meal, a thermos and slices of apple and carrot, all in a basket just like an owner.

He dropped the basket off at the washhouse, stuck a baby carrot up Star's twat since he was pissed, and left them. He needed to call Marge and tell her he'd be by shortly to pick up a few things.

When he got back to the washhouse he felt a little better. He'd seen Sam and Randi would be ready at six harnessed and ready to go.

He released Penny first. Her ankles so she could stand, then her wrists. He removed her tail and carried it over to the sink and laid it next to Star's. Penny's eyes never left him as he moved about in the washhouse. He'd hood her back at the stall.

He removed Star's bridle and bit, carried them to the sink and came back with a dry rag. He tied it around her eyes, left and came back with the lead. He folded it up several times, held one end and swung.

Star jerked forward, off her toes then back.

He hit her slowly, hard blows. The carrot popped out, rolled on the floor. Penny knelt and watched him, her lips partly open around the bit.

He carried the lead, coiled, and laid it by the sink. He removed the stretcher bar from Star's ankles and carried it to

lean against the wall. He released Star's wrists and forced her to the floor on her back. He dropped his jeans and knelt between her legs. He leaned forward and entered her as he pulled her blindfold from her head. He watched her eyes as he fucked her.

She grinned at him as he used her, twitched her pelvis from side to side.

Del held her jaw and said to her as he finished, "Spot's a better fuck."

She bucked under him; he squeezed her jaw, shook it and released her. He rose to his knees, drew up his jeans and stood.

Her stare could burn a hole in him if he let it. He went to Penny. "Up," he said.

He left her and went to the sink where he leaned, looking out the window. He had to get all of his soldiers in line before marching.

He went to Star and helped her stand, checked her new brand. It was more blurred than Penny's which was okay. He'd wanted to hurt Star, enjoyed hurting her. She moved stiffly under his fingers, still angry at him.

He dumped the lead, bridle, tails, everything in Star's hands and handed Penny the basket. He led them to the stable, the ranch hand and his motley crew. He made them kneel on the blanket, hooded Penny and cuffed Star. He gave one of Star's nipples a playful tweak, wrote on the blackboard where she could see it, "Star fucks worse than Spot. Needs practice."

If they weren't such pains in the asses he'd tell them they were good girls. Star would let it go to her head. Penny would blush, then give that smile of hers.

Rush. Rush. Rush. He reminded Sam he could use either or both of them and thanked Sam profusely for loaning him Randi.

He sat in his Dodge and wished he'd had coffee earlier. Nap, coffee, a four-week vacation like in Europe. He wanted to go to some place different, maybe a monastery or something. He sometimes felt that if he saw another cunt he'd bust a gasket.

On the drive home he tried to organize a schedule for tomorrow but couldn't. He had a long night ahead of him. He'd have to clean them up afterwards before anyone slept. All three of them. Bodies, tails, equipment. Everything.

He relaxed his grip on the steering wheel, took a deep breath and grinned. He'd get a six pack on the way back. The

Colonel would absolutely flip if he found out; no alcohol (for everyone else) on the ranch was the primary rule.

Marge had his stuff ready, he gave her a hug and a kiss and promised he'd be home tomorrow night. Then off in a rush. He didn't dare check his watch.

He parked the Dodge by the stable, left his stuff inside and went to get his charges. Penny and Star didn't look like they'd been bored.

"Stand," he said. He uncuffed Star and put the cuffs in his pocket. He removed Penny's hood, tossed it onto the shelf. Penny still wore her bridle, he put Star's on. She didn't look quite so mad at him as before. He popped their tails in, grabbed a second set of cuffs and handed Penny the crop. She held it with both hands in front of her belly. He gave Star the basket, remembered the apples and carrots in it, and kicked himself. Couldn't be helped. He attached the leads to their bridles and led them out of the stall.

He thought for a second before shutting the stall door. He had everything, he shut the door and led them out of the stable to the wagon shed.

Randi was waiting, serenely beautiful, harnessed to a buggy and ready to go. "Bless Sam," Del said. He tied the leads to the rear rail, set the basket in a seat, took the crop from Penny and tried to decide how angry he still was. Not that angry.

He sat in the driver's seat and snapped the reins. Randi turned a graceful curve, pulled him around the yard to the path up the hill. He checked his watch, six thirty.

He made Randi stop and watered everyone who needed to go. Just his two. He felt bad while he waited for them, not feeding them earlier. Star and Penny came back onto the gravel path, looked pretty good for a rush job. He'd wished he'd gotten new shoes for them. Hadn't even been thinking of it.

He snapped the reins. Randi easily pulled him up the hill, past the house, past Spot's merry barking, into the woods.

"Whoa," he said. He turned to Penny and Star. "There are apples and carrots in the basket for later. I meant to give them to you earlier. I'm sorry." Out of the corner of his eye he saw Randi turn her head then face forward.

Under the trees it was darker. There was still an hour or more of sunlight but here it seemed later. Fine by him. He was looking forward to a nap.

He got out of the buggy, set the basket on the bench close to the path and said, "All right, Randi. Why don't you turn her around." He took the handcuffs out of his pocket, waited until the girls were even with him and said, "Whoa."

He walked to Penny. "Hands in front." He cuffed her. Star was ready when he turned from Penny. He cuffed Star, looked her in the eye and smiled at her. She stared at him for a minute and looked away.

He got in the buggy, snapped the reins and relaxed as Randi pulled him back toward the Colonel's. Before he forgot, he tossed a key to the handcuffs onto the seat by the crop.

In front of the Colonel's he stopped Randi, had her approach the house slowly, then stop at the door. He wasn't sure those inside had seen him. He could have circled the house a few times, whooping and hollering, but figured the reason the Colonel asked him was because he wouldn't do something like that.

The door opened and the Colonel and his party left the house, the Colonel talked intently with a short older woman, both a few steps behind Sharon. Sharon wore a black dress that looked like it had been dripped on her. Maybe her nipples held it up.

Del counted. The Colonel, Sharon, two couples. He wondered what the Colonel had in mind. He hoped he hadn't overdone it with the handcuffs.

Sharon reached him first. "We meet again."

It had been what? A week. He hadn't expected her to remember him.

"Del," the Colonel said. "Let me introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Waverly and Mr. and Mrs. Bronts."

Del left the buggy, walked around it and shook hands. Mrs. Waverly's eyes were feverishly intent; she kept looking past him at his charges, then Randi on the other side of him. Mr. Bronts had a peculiar smile.

"Del is our most experienced ranch hand. We'd be lost without him." The Colonel saw the crop and grinned as he picked it from the seat.

Del stepped aside to let Mrs. Waverly chat with the girls.

The Colonel swung the crop and his party stopped talking and looked at him. He handed the crop to Mr. Waverly, "Why don't you do that one there?" pointing to Penny. "As I was saying, we'd be lost without Del. He personally oversees every one of our charges, makes sure they receive exactly the right training they need. Like this magnificent creature." The Colonel turned and grinned at them. "Did you ever hear the one about the whore and three nuns?"

There was a whoosh sound, the sound of a crop hitting skin and a cut-off squeal from Penny.

"Oh, I say. Well done, Franklin." The Colonel glanced at him. "Thank you, Del. At ten."

"Yes, sir."

Everyone was crowding around Penny as Mr. Waverly showered blows on her. Del took a last look and turned away, going toward Spot's doghouse. Spot watched him approach wagging her rear.

He unclipped the chain from her collar. He took the leash out of his pocket and clipped it on. She followed him giving soft yips as he walked toward the woods.

"Del," the Colonel shouted.

He turned.

"Thank you for remembering Spot's walk." The Colonel waved and bent to say something to Mrs. Waverly who was examining Randi.

Del gave a wave, led Spot to the path and into the woods. He sat on the bench by the basket; Spot knelt at his feet and whimpered.

He scratched her head, gave a tug on her nose ring and shook his head. Now he really felt bad about not feeding them earlier. He opened the picnic basket and took out the thermos and the box meal. He poured a cup of coffee, said to Spot, "Hot. Hot. Not for dogs." Spot looked up at him.

He shook his head. "Maybe later."

Spot settled at his feet and nibbled on the bits of the sandwich he threw at her. At least she didn't go crazy around people food like some dogs.

He finished his meal, still feeling bad about his charges. He hated it when he wasn't paying attention like that. He liked to believe he was on top of things, that all of his intricate plans were clicking along like clockwork. At moments like this he saw what he was doing was all a shoddy pile of crap. He was just bumbling along, barely making it. An incompetent fuck up. And the Colonel's bullshit to those investors or whoever they were. About how Del this and Del that. The Colonel could barely stand his guts. He'd made that plain enough.

A place of his own. He thought for a second, decided why not, took one of the slices of apple. No more bullshit. He was good at what he did. Maybe tomorrow night he and Marge could go over their accounts, see how much they had. He wouldn't just up and walk away. He'd stay until Penny and Star were done, that long at least.

The bugs sounded nice. He wished he dared a campfire. He checked his watch, tilted it toward light. Only a couple of hours. He hoped he got them back in one piece.

He shut his eyes. The bugs sounded nice. Spot's breathing at his feet sounded nice. If he trusted himself he'd try napping on the bench. But he didn't trust himself.

He poured a cup of coffee and bent, unclipping the leash with one hand. He stood, said, "Let's go for a walk," and crossed the path to the woods on the other side. He went along the edge of the cleared area, liking the way the coffee smelled. Spot rubbed against his leg almost like a cat.

When his coffee was done he turned back to the bench, crossing the path and walking in the cleared area on the bench side. He could hardly see where he was going. He should have brought a flashlight.

He should have done a lot of things.

He sat on the bench, patted the plank seat beside him. "Up, girl." Spot squatted next to him. He slipped two fingers in her cunt, just left them there.

He wished Spot could talk. He'd love to find out who'd trained her. He sometimes wondered what Spot was thinking. She wasn't stupid or crazy. You could see more than a glimmer of intelligence there, not buried deep. You could see more intelligence than in most people.

Spot held his wrist with her paws and moved slowly up and down on his fingers.

"Spot likes that, does she?"

Spot gave a bark, wiggled her rear as she raised and lowered herself.

"Let me have my hand back."

Spot released him, raised herself off his fingers.

He unfastened his jeans, kicked off his boots and pushed his jeans off his legs. Spot moved so she straddled him.

"Cunt," he said.

She lowered herself onto his cock, rocked her ass to fuck him. She used her paws to pull his shirt snaps open, pressed her breasts and stomach against his.

He shut his eyes, relaxing into the sensation. Spot was a much better fuck than Star. When he came he stilled her, held her close to him. She nuzzled his ear, gave it lick, licked his jaw.

Shit, he thought. I forgot my shaving things. Then he remembered Marge putting them in his bag.

Spot stopped when she felt him tense. She laid her cheek against his and rocked her ass slowly.

After who knows who long he decided he'd better check his watch. He held it up to the light, behind Spot's back as she fucked him, her eyes closed. After ten.

"We'd better go back."

She shook her head, thrust hard on him and squeezed his cock with her cunt.

Okay, they wouldn't go just yet. He tried to feel every inch of her. Couldn't understand why the hands weren't in line to be next. Couldn't understand why his suggestion that the stable have a dog got so many blank stares. Sometimes he felt like he was from a different planet.

She growled as she thrust her body into his. She nipped at his neck.

He bent and bit the base of her neck, hard. She leaned back, his teeth still in her, arching her neck up for him, all of it, her chin straight up in the air.

He raked her back with his nails and came hard in her, grunting. Afterwards her back was wet and he couldn't tell if it was sweat or blood. He let go of her neck, dropped his hands to the bench and fell back.

He didn't know how long they were like that, she on top of him, slowly licking his chest, he out of it. Maybe he slept. He made her get off; he fastened his shirt and pulled on his jeans. He stood in his boots, found the leash and clipped it to her collar. He patted her head. "Good girl," he said and they set off back to the Colonel's.

When they were out of the woods, in the open, he could see better with the star and moonlight and the light from the Colonel's house.

Del checked his watch, almost eleven, but it didn't sound like the Colonel and his party were done yet. He could hear shouts, maybe that was Mrs. Waverly shouting. He didn't hear the girls but they all had bits and bridles on.

He walked Spot back to her doghouse, unclipped the leash and fastened the chain to her collar. He rolled the leash up, put it in his pocket and set the basket by the doghouse.

He sat on the ground by the doghouse. Spot settled across him, her paws in his lap. He expected to see them racing by any minute. The Colonel standing on a buggy seat, Franklin next to him waving the crop. Poor Randi pulling hard with double weight. The others and the girls were somewhere, in one of the Colonel's special rooms upstairs, the pool, down in the stable. Somewhere.

He didn't have any strength left. He laid his hand on Spot's head and scratched with his forefinger. He couldn't see claw marks on her back though with the tattoos and the bad light that didn't mean anything.

There was a knock on the doghouse behind them, then steps.

"I thought I might find you here," Sharon said. She stood above him; the dress still looking like it might fall off any moment. She held a glass in her hand, pointed to him with it. "I need you to help me with something." She stepped back.

He looked at Spot, put his hand on Spot's back, and looked up at her.

"If it's him you're worried about, he's with," she paused, "Dogmeat. Is that right? The blonde." She smiled at him. "It won't take long."

Chapter Eight

God, his head felt terrible. Everything all at once: last night, finally his charges' bodies next to his, the hard stable floor, wondering if he really got rid of the beer bottles. If maybe they were still in the washhouse . . . He should have gone home last night and called in sick today.

"That feels awfully nice," he said, "but I need to get moving." He hated for that to stop. "You, too, Penny."

He sat up, glanced at his watch. Seven. It could be worse. What, two hours sleep? He was lucky to be moving.

He put on a clean pair of jeans and went to the washroom. He did his stuff, splashed water, looked at himself in the mirror, and wished he hadn't. Maybe there was aspirin in the glove compartment of the Dodge. He needed to move the truck back anyway to the parking lot.

They knelt side by side on the blanket when he came back to the stall, heads bowed.

"You two figure out, quietly, if you want to stay here in the stall today or if you want to be part of the circus out there. He put on clean socks, his boots and went to the shelf. No aspirin there. Maybe his kit. He put on his shirt, snapped the cuffs, and rummaged through the box that held everything he ever needed. No aspirin. He tucked in the shirttails, found his keys, turned and looked at Penny and Star. They hadn't moved except to stare at him. He wondered if Spot told them about Sharon.

He left them, got in his green Dodge truck parked by the stable and moved it to the parking lot. He gave the dash an extra pat before leaving and went to the bunkhouse. He needed coffee and maybe Cookie had some aspirin. He wished he knew where he'd left the basket so he could return it. Cookie would understand.

He carried a thermos to the stable along with a bag of danish for him and fruit for his charges. He remembered the four of them in the washhouse last night: Star, Penny, Randi and him. He'd given them each a beer, a big no no, but what the hell. He figured they deserved it.

Ten o'clock the Colonel said. It wasn't until after three and that's because he'd had enough and rounded them up on his own.

He checked on Randi in the stall across from Stormy, Carl's charge. Randi was still asleep. Sam was lucky to have Randi. He went to Star's stall, didn't even check on Misty.

Still kneeling, staring; it was spooky. Star had that look in her eyes and Penny had a little of it too. He wondered what that little pervert Franklin had done to her.

He sat on the bench, poured himself a coffee, took a danish out of the bag and tossed the bag to them. It lay on the floor by Penny's knee. For chrissakes. They were spooking him. "Decide anything?"

They didn't move. Did that mean a no?

"Still thinking about it?" He bit into the danish and began to relax. Ranch hands were arriving, getting ready to prepare for the busy day. "Go on. Eat."

He washed the danish down with coffee, poured another cup. He was going to have to go off somewhere and have a nap. Maybe there was a special room at the Colonel's.

He hoped he didn't run into the Colonel today. Still not moving. "Okay, sweet cakes. Both of you. I'm not up to twenty questions. All right?"

He might as well be talking to a pair of sphinxes. "Want me to decide?"

He swished the coffee around in the plastic thermos cup. He ate a danish and watched them.

Sometimes he was so damned tired. It was like he was in something thick that sapped all his energy. Just keeping his eyes open was an effort.

"How'd it go last night?"

He turned and shook his head. "Sam, it was the craziest thing I ever saw. I didn't get them back to the stable until around five. Randi is going to be pooped. Be easy on her."

"The one with the spots in her mane. Could I borrow her for fifteen minutes?"

"Sure. Be my guest." He rose, set his cup on the shelf. "Come on, Star." He touched her and she rose. Her skin felt warm. Del hoped she didn't eat Sam alive.

"Star's her name?"

Del nodded and winked at him. "Have fun. Take as long as you need."

Sam left with Star who stared over her shoulder at Del. The girls were scaring him. He shut the stall door, latched it and sat on the bench. He hoped the aspirin kicked in soon.

"Penny, I want you to eat something." He glanced at his watch. Later than he thought. Things wouldn't get busy until after eleven. "I mean it." He grabbed his shaving kit and left for the washroom.

He took his time. He talked to Tucker, trying not to listen to Sam and Star in the next stall. Stu's Anna was looking good today. Her mane was braided and body had a nice sheen. It looked like Stu had rouged her nipples.

New shoes. He wanted to get them new shoes. He'd go to the office after nine. He washed the lather off after shaving. He looked almost human.

He dropped his shaving kit in his bag, zipped up the bag and stowed it under the bench. Penny hadn't moved. The paper bag with apple slices hadn't moved. He was too busy for this.

He took the bridle off the peg. The leather was almost dry. He set the bit in Penny's mouth, adjusted the bridle, and fastened it. Her hair was coming back. Just a soft fuzz. He kind of liked it that way. He rubbed her head, went to the shelf and started to neaten it. "Muck the stall," he said.

He rolled his eyes. He was too busy for this. He turned, pulled Penny up, and pushed her against the wall. "Stay there," he said. He came back with handcuffs, decided not. He'd use rope.

He pulled her to the floor under the bar. "Lie down," he said. He lowered the bar, tied it off on the wall and selected two hanks of rope from his kit.

He tied one of her wrists to an ankle, then the other wrist to the other ankle. He slipped the bar out of the slings that held it, slipped the bar through the roped limbs. He wiped his forehead. It was going to be hot today.

He slipped the slings over the ends of the bar and lifted it. Penny wasn't off the floor but her arms and legs were. She didn't look comfortable at all. He left her and finished his work

neatening the shelf. Sam must be enjoying Star. Sam could keep her all day if he wanted.

He rolled up the blanket and stashed it under the bench. He swept up the spoiled straw with a broom and rake, left the stall to get a wheelbarrow.

He had to hunt all over to find the barrow. Someone had left it out by the pile of spoilt straw. One of the hands hauled the muck every few weeks to use on his garden. It takes all kinds but he just couldn't imagine growing something he'd eat in shit.

He stopped for a second at Misty's stall. Misty looked good. Benjamin was brushing her hair, didn't seem like he was much minding the chore. "I was wondering if you'd be interested in taking one of my charges off my hands. For fifteen minutes, longer if you like."

Benjamin thought about it.

"I'm not interested in Misty. I've just had it up to here with charges."

"There's a blue pill you can take," Benjamin said.

"Never been a problem. Interested?"

"Not really."

"That's okay. I'm feeling the same today." He pushed the barrow into Star's stall, dropped the handles and began filling it.

He liked this kind of work. It was fulfilling. He felt like he accomplished something. He dumped the straw, stretched. He looked up toward the Colonel's but couldn't really see anything. He brought the wheelbarrow back to the stable, filled it with clean straw and carted it to the stall. Several hands were watching over the door into Sam's stall.

The stalls always smelled nice with fresh straw. He took the barrow out, parked it where it belonged.

He went back to his stall, knelt by Penny. Her eyes followed him.

"Penny," he said. "Interested in eating? No? Well, okay." He stood, lowered the bar, untied her and made her rise. He took longer coils of rope from the kit and led Penny out of the stall. Sam was bringing Star back. "Finished?"

Sam nodded and smiled.

"Everything okay?"

Sam released Star's arm. "Sure."

"Good. Why don't you put her in her stall for me? Tell the hands it is a free for all until I get back." He glanced at his watch. "Oh, until nine thirty. I'm going to get breakfast."

Sam grinned, shoved Star into the stall, and gave a rebel yell.

Del heard a slap from the stall, led Penny out of the stable. That was the most enthusiasm he'd seen Sam show for quite a while.

He led Penny to the shady side of the large maple by the wagon shed. The shed's doors were open and several carts had been pulled out. He pushed Penny against the tree. "Stay there," he said.

Penny's eyes followed him as he pulled her arms around the tree trunk and tied her wrists, then further up, her arms. He wrapped the rope around Penny and the tree at her waist.

It was a sloppy job but he didn't really care. He tied her ankles to a loop on the second coil that went several times around the tree.

A really sloppy job. He left her.

Del relaxed in the bunkhouse with two of Cookie's fantastic fried eggs and toast. More coffee. Cookie's radio played in the background. He shut his eyes and leaned back afterwards. He kept on thinking tomorrow. Tomorrow. He had to get through today first.

He gave up after a while, checked his watch. Nearly ten. He gave his dirty dishes to Cookie, ignored Penny the best he could. He'd forgotten her goddamned tail. He walked slowly to the stable. Just about everyone was out with their charges. All eager to get heatstroke.

The stable was quiet; he went to the stall. Star was on her hands and knees crying quietly. He shut the door, sat on the bench. "Have a good time?"

"More please," she said. Her crying stopped like that.

"That good, hunh?" He crossed his legs.

"Yes." She wiggled her ass. "More please."

If he weren't so tired he'd whip the crap out of her. "So you're enjoying your stay here at the White Horse?"

"Yes," she said.

"Like the Colonel?"

"More please. Please. More."

"He was out in the corral. Should I get him?"

"Yes. More." She turned to look at him. "More please."

Star's eyes widened.

"I was hoping to find you here," Sharon said.

He turned. Sharon smiled, her arms folded at the top of the stall door. She pulled the latch, pulled the door to her, stepped inside.

He stood. He wanted to squeeze something, he uncurled his fingers. She looked good in tan. Her riding breeches and blouse looked brand new. Shiny new boots, a conch belt. She looked nice.

Sharon leaned against the door as it shut. She glanced for a moment at Star on the floor, shifted her gaze to him. "I'd like to go on a picnic."

He didn't move. Her blouse looked like if she took a breath all the buttons would pop. Three had popped already. What was it about blondes? Misty. Star here. Sharon here.

"Ron said I could get a lunch and a cart and someone to drive me."

"More please," Star said softly.

He looked down at her. "Kneel," he said.

Star turned and looked at him, slowly rolled her body into a kneeling position.

"Impressive," Sharon said. "I think I want the other one though."

He gave up. "Just a minute, ma'am."

"Miss," Sharon said. She smiled sweetly.

"Miss."

He took Star's bridle down from the wall and set the bit in her mouth. Her face was streaked with red where someone had slapped her. Her eyes burned. He fastened the bridle. He took two red ribbons from his kit and tied them to the bridle, one on each side of the bit. He smudged her cheek with his thumb, got up and pulled down her tail from the wall. "Forward," he said.

She rose off her heels. He pushed the plug in place and got another red ribbon to tie at the base of the tail.

"May I?" Sharon said approaching him. She walked behind Star and him.

He rose, went to the wall and took down Penny's tail, a crop, and three ribbons from the kit. He knelt by Star, looked up at Sharon. "I'll be out in a minute. I have to give her her instructions."

Sharon brushed past him, left the stall door open.

"Star," he said. "If you want to sleep you can. I envy you. Back." He rose, ran his finger down her nose, across her cheek, down her chin and dropped to between her breasts. He touched her nipple, pressed so the soft skin indented, turned and left.

Sharon waited for him in the shade by the big stable doors. She walked at his side as he went to the tree by the wagon shed. When she saw Penny she said, "How creative."

It was impossible to tell by the tone of her voice if she mocked him or not.

He untied Penny, coiled the ropes and led Penny to the wagon shed. He wanted to hit something, let the rope coils slap his leg.

He chose the black two seater, laid the rope and things on the seat. He went in the shed, found the harness he wanted, carried it out.

He tied the ribbons to Penny's bridle, inserted the plug for the tail. The braid looked nice against her piebald skin. He adjusted the belt, set the straps over her shoulders. Penny never looked up once she saw Sharon. He gave a shoulder a squeeze, adjusted the lower straps that passed under her crotch. Once he had the straps set right under her tail so they split evenly to meet the belt, he tied a ribbon at the base.

He drew Penny to the cart and hooked the shafts to the belt. "Good girl," he said.

He dropped the rope coils into the space behind the seat.

"Ready?" Sharon asked.

"After you, miss."

She was graceful climbing into the seat. He joined her, took up the reins and gave a snap.

"We need our lunches. Remember?"

"Yes, miss." He pulled on the reins to make Penny turn.
"She's still inexperienced."

"What do horses eat?"

He stopped Penny at the bunkhouse. "Apples, carrots,
grain."

"Get her something, too."

"Yes, miss."

"I didn't bring a hat. Pull us into the shade over there."
Sharon pointed to the large maple by the wagon shed.

Penny farted.

He snapped the reins, glanced at Sharon. Her eyes were
bright, lips partly open. He saw into her blouse, looked away.
He parked the cart in the shade. "I'll be back in a moment."

"No hurry," she said.

He wondered if he should take her at her word. She had the
crop in her hand, was flicking it into her other palm. She turned
to him and smiled as he got out.

She didn't wear perfume, didn't need to. He found his head
was finally beginning to clear when he entered the bunkhouse.

He told Cookie what he wanted; Cookie had the baskets
ready. There had been a call from the Colonel's earlier. He had
Cookie quarter an apple and put a quart of water in a basket.
When the basket was opened he saw a bottle of wine and other
fancy stuff that didn't get put in ranch hand's baskets.

He carried the two baskets, both heavy, to the cart, set them
behind the seats. "Miss," he said. "I'll walk beside until we get
up the hill."

"You mean I'll have to drive?"

"Just take the reins. She'll do okay."

Sharon laid the crop on her lap. "I'm not sure about this."

"I'll walk alongside. She's inexperienced, not used to
pulling two."

"You're not saying I'm heavy, are you?"

"No, miss."

"You'll have to show me."

"Yes, miss." He sat beside her. He took the reins from her,
her hand brushing his, and snapped the reins. "Like that, miss."

Before the path rose, he stopped the cart. "I'd better, miss."

"If you must."

He held the hook on the right side of Penny's belt and walked beside her up the path. Halfway to the top he heard the crunch of tires behind him.

"There you are, Del. And Penny, too. Sharon." The Colonel tipped his cowboy hat to them. "Off on a picnic. Good. Good." He beamed at them, looked over his shoulder down at the stable.

Penny lurched backward.

"Put the brake on, miss." Del stepped to the cart, pulled the brake. "That's the brake, miss."

"You didn't show me, Del."

"I'm sorry, miss." Del turned back toward the Colonel.

"Driving lessons and a picnic." The Colonel smiled. "I'd better get back down there. It's going to be a busy day." The Colonel turned the zip buggy making a large arc around the front of the cart. "Oh, Del." The Colonel stopped the zip buggy. "Where's Star?"

"In her stall, sir."

"Good. Just checking. Thanks, Del. Have a good picnic, dear." The Colonel zoomed downhill.

"He's a wonderful man," Sharon said. "Isn't he, Del?"

"Yes, miss." He joined Penny. "Release the brake when you're ready."

Penny struggled to get the cart moving on the slope. By the time they were at the top of the hill her sides were heaving and her breathing was loud.

"I'll walk a little longer, miss."

"She's not that strong, is she?"

"It's hard work, miss. It takes time to develop the skill and muscle."

"She's not that strong is she, Del?"

"She's okay, miss. In another month she'll be trotting up hills."

"You refuse to answer me." Sharon snapped the reins and Penny walked faster.

"Miss. She's strong."

"Then get in the cart, Del."

"At the house, miss. I want to get Spot so she can join us."

"Am I part of your menagerie?"

"Spot needs the exercise, miss."

"Miss just needs to be said every once in a while, Del."

He nodded.

"Am I part of your menagerie, Del? You have a bad habit of not answering my questions."

"No, miss. You're human. They aren't."

"Do you have a particular affection for beasts? Is here close enough?"

"Perfect."

"I wish you'd look at me when we talk."

He turned to her. She watched him intently, her nostrils flaring as she breathed.

"And I wish you'd answer my question, Del. Do you have a particular affection for beasts?"

"No, ma'am."

"Miss," she snapped. "I'm not sure where that puts me." She picked up the crop. "Get the damn dog if you must."

He tied Spot to the back bar of the cart and climbed in beside Sharon. She handed him the reins, faced ahead. Her cheeks were flushed.

He gave the reins a snap.

"Find somewhere private."

Spot gave a bark. Penny pissed a hard fast stream. He gave the reins another snap. The cart lurched and slowly headed toward the woods.

Chapter Nine

Del thought it was extremely strange to have been doing those things to Sharon while Spot and Penny watched. It was hard enough in the plain day to day to know what Penny thought. With Spot it didn't really matter because she was a dog, but Penny wasn't quite a pony yet. Not by a long way.

And if the mind of Penny was obscure, then Sharon was a steel wall he never thought he would pass through.

Obviously bored. Obviously enjoying this bit of slumming. Obviously something – maybe intrigued. Maybe she was pretending she was intrigued for some reason he could never fathom.

Her fingers played with the hairs on his chest. Both Spot and Penny knelt a few feet away facing them.

Sharon looked great in tan. That was the perfect color, only last night that thing she wore was deepest purple, purple so dark it was black. That was the perfect color too. Sharon looked unbelievably fantastic out of tan (or deepest purple in the darkest shadows of the Colonel's yard).

"We should go back soon, miss," he said.

She slapped his chest and rolled away from him.

He glanced over at Spot who grinned at him. He sat up, searched for his clothes. They were scattered all over the place. He put on his jeans; going past Penny he touched her shoulder. He sat on the grass and put on his socks and boots.

He looked across the clearing at the large trees that surrounded him. The grass was littered with twigs and leaves. Summer was almost over. Things were turning brown. He got up, walked to the buggy and carried the picnic baskets to where Sharon lay. He opened the wine, filled two glasses. He poured water into dishes for Penny and Spot and set out Penny's apple slices.

Spot went to her water and noisily drank. Her tattooed back was fascinating to watch. Penny ignored him, the water and apples.

Sharon had curled upon herself. He placed a wineglass by her head, returned to the baskets and brought out their meal.

He broke part of his into clumps and placed the food on a bit of scrap paper for Spot.

"Miss," he said.

"You can be so aggravating," she said.

"Sorry, miss."

She sat up, drained her glass of wine, and handed him the glass to pour another. "Before we leave I want to see you . . . whatever. With one of those." She pointed to Spot and Penny.

He shook his head. The food on his plate looked cold and dead.

"Oh, I think you will."

Fractious popped into his head. He wanted to be home, to have a night with Marge. He wanted to be sane.

"Spot, fetch the crop," he said. He put the plate on the grass. He sipped the wine – it was too acid for him. He poured a glass of water.

He could hear Spot flounder about in the buggy. "Here. I'll get it," he said.

"Ron always speaks so well of you." She turned her body toward him. "I wonder why?"

"I wonder why, too, miss." He stood, went to the buggy. He reached past Spot, picked up the leather crop and tapped Spot's butt with it lightly. "Back with us, Spot," he said.

He stood behind Penny, touched the back of her head. Her fuzz was dry now. Earlier, when he took off the bridle it had been wet with sweat. He pushed her lightly. "All fours," he said.

Spot knelt by them.

He raised the crop high then abruptly swung it, slowly, until it hit Penny's ass. He brought the crop back slowly to prepare it to fall. "Come here," he said to Sharon. "Yes, you." He swung the crop slowly, hit Penny, and raised the crop. "All fours like Penny."

He used the crop to touch Penny's body, traced her skin from head to toe. "You too, Spot." He touched Penny's back with his fingers. "Both of you nose to nose with Penny."

He left Penny's side and stood away from them watching the three of them. "Miss, you asked if I have a particular

affection for beasts. I can't tell the difference from here. Not now, Spot."

He stood behind Sharon, touched her rear with the crop. He swung it hard. She yelped, twisted away from him, prepared to jump up, relaxed on the grass, knees up by her face, hands behind her. He smiled at her, went and picked up her clothing, dumped it in a picnic basket and carried the basket to the buggy. He carried back rope, dropped it at her feet.

"Don't you ever do that again, Del. I mean it."

"Miss." He left her, picked up his shirt and put it on. He returned with her glass of wine. He handed it to her, stepped back. "Finish it."

She smiled up at him, lowered her legs, finished the glass then threw the empty glass at him. "You wouldn't dare, Del."

"Dare what, miss?"

She began to stand.

"Kneel."

She pushed off from the grass with her fingers, stood.

He gripped both fists, pushed them behind her back, and held her wrists with one hand. He pushed down. "Kneel."

She shook her head, tried to turn away when he kissed her. She kicked out; he let go of her hands, stepped back. "Miss. We should be going back."

"I want to watch you fuck the dog, Del."

"Miss, I quit at six tonight. If I don't leave until seven, that's all right. Happens all the time."

"The dog, Del."

"But tonight I'm going home and Marge and I will relax for a while before going to bed."

"Marge one too?"

"Miss," Del said. He swung the crop. She tried to protect her thighs with her hands, bent and twisted with her hands out. He stopped the motion of the blow, slid the crop past her and tapped her rear.

Sharon flung herself at him; he dropped her, held her to the ground. She twisted and fought as he sat on her, holding her hands above her head.

"Bring me the bridle, Spot," he said.

He wrapped her wrists with the rope. She relaxed, lay still under him. He climbed off her, lifted her by her arm to kneel. "Lower your hands," he said. "You'll learn."

She didn't speak. Her eyes had a little of Star's fire, her nostrils flared, her cheeks were red.

Spot dropped the bridle at his feet.

"Open," he said. "Wider." He set the bit in Sharon's mouth, drew the bridle over her head and fastened it. Del went behind her, pushed her head forward. "All fours," he said.

She resisted for a moment then fell to her hands.

He picked up the crop and gave her five medium blows.

She started to stand; he pushed her down, knelt beside her, holding the bridle as she tried to pull away. "Miss, we wouldn't be here if you weren't interested, didn't want to know what it felt like even if you want to pretend different. Spot is better trained, Penny is much more than halfway there and you're just starting out. Nod for yes, shake your head for no." He waited, releasing her bridle.

She nodded slowly.

"Miss. You want me to fuck Spot?"

She didn't move for a moment, then shook her head.

"Penny?"

Sharon shook her head no. She looked at him, then dropped her gaze.

"Spot?" He touched Sharon's back with the crop.

She froze.

"Penny?" He drew the crop across her stomach and over her breasts.

She nodded, gasped as he explored her cunt with his fingers.

"Did you want to be an animal, miss? A dog, maybe a pony?"

She tried to speak, turned to look at him over her shoulder.

"Or maybe just a human girl. Is that what you want to be?"

She didn't move her head.

"Maybe I should tie you to the bench we passed by the bridle path. Just leave you."

She shook her head.

"Or I can harness you to the buggy and you can take us home."

She shook her head so hard her whole body shook.

"There is a post in the corral I chain my charges to. While they are there anyone can use them in any way they wish."

She shook her head, mumbled around her bit.

"I can leave you tied up at the Colonel's. I think he'd appreciate the joke."

She didn't move.

He stood, kicked off his boots, pushed down his jeans. He pulled on the bridle. "Kneel."

She pushed off the ground with her tied hands, fell back onto her legs. She slowly knelt. Her eyes questioned him.

"You are going to pull the buggy to the stable. If you are good I'll chain you to the post. If you are bad I'll chain you to the post. I'll leave a note at the Colonel's telling where he can find you."

She shook her head slowly back and forth.

He picked up the crop, touched her breasts with it, and tapped under her chin. "I'll mark you first so he'll know how you've been used by me." He struck a breast.

She fell backwards; he lay on top of her. "Maybe you are the beast I'm to fuck, miss."

She relaxed. Her eyes stared at him.

He climbed off. "Penny," he said.

He fucked Penny while Penny was on her hands and knees over Sharon. He pulled out of Penny and finished on Sharon's face and chest.

Sharon stared at him when he stood over her. Her eyes were dark and deep. She swallowed, the bit moved in her mouth. She blinked and looked away, her bound hands shifted nervously.

Del took Penny's arm and led her to the buggy. Penny was fluid in her motions, supple. He harnessed her, taking care to get the straps right. She stood erect between the buggy poles, not looking at him.

He picked up Penny's tail from where it lay by Sharon and brought it back to Penny, placing the plug end between her teeth.

He let Spot finish cleaning Sharon and then took Spot to the buggy and tied her behind it. He returned to Sharon and stood looking down. "Figure out what you are, miss?"

She tried to speak, shook her head.

He pulled her up, led her to the buggy. "Two feet or four feet? Two feet?"

She shook her head, dropped to her knees, staring up at him, holding out her tied hands.

He untied her hands, used the rope to tie her bridle to the back of the buggy. Spot rubbed against her. Sharon looked up at him, her eyes large and moist.

Sharon's chest and face were shiny with slowly drying wet; partly him, partly Spot, partly her drool. He smiled at her and left the three girls. He picked up the mess in the clearing, dropped everything in the basket, and carried the crop with him to the buggy seat.

He clipped the reins to Penny's collar, got in the buggy and gave the reins a snap. Penny pulled the buggy until he stopped it before entering the path. He set down the reins, turned to Sharon. "I'd like to take you down to the stable. We need a stable dog." Spot gave a bark. "I can promise you that every day I'll be one of them who uses you." Spot licked Sharon's face.

"Your choice when we drop off Spot at the Colonel's. I'm serious, Sharon." He turned back to Penny who was watching them over her shoulder. He gave the reins a snap.

It was a nice drive to the Colonel's. They went slowly, didn't meet anyone.

He stopped the cart, got out and untied Spot. He took Spot to the doghouse and clipped on the chain. He got the picnic baskets from the buggy and carried them to Spot's doghouse. He put the people food that he didn't think would upset her system in Spot's bowl, carried the baskets to the front porch. He scratched Spot's ear, told her, "Good girl," and went back to the buggy.

Sharon knelt.

"The stable?"

She looked at him, her eyes pleading. She shook her head and started to cry.

"There, there," he said, untying her. "You're a good girl." He led her to the front porch. "Kneel."

She dropped to her knees making a long sound around the bit repeatedly like she was begging. She gave up, reached to remove the bridle.

He knocked her hands away. "That's not for you to remove." He knelt, cupping her chin. "Whether we go out tomorrow is up to you. You can tell me what you want, but you can't tell me what to do." He released her chin, rose and gave the knocker a loud rap. When the housekeeper answered the door he told her, "The missus suffered an accident. My apologies to the Colonel." He left the porch, drawing his fingers across Sharon's shoulder past the hand that was reaching up to hold him.

He got into the buggy, gave the reins a snap and let Penny take an easy pace to the stable. It was late enough so that there weren't many around.

He put up the buggy in the wagon shed, hung up the harness after cleaning it. Penny stood outside the big doors facing the corral, tail in her mouth.

Del led Penny to the stable, his crop in his other hand. He was famished. Penny must be famished.

The stall was empty which he more or less expected. It wasn't fair to Star and he wasn't sure it had been an equal trade.

"Drop it and kneel," he said.

He left the tail on the bench and went to the bunkhouse to get Penny's dinner. He brought back pails for her and Star and filled their troughs.

Penny was a mess. Dusty, dirty, her shoes falling apart, unkempt fuzz on her head. He brushed her and that was all. Washing her this late didn't make any sense.

He sat on the bench and watched her eat. He told her she had done well, both she and Star had done well, and that she was a good girl.

It was dark out the north window. When Penny was done he made her kneel on the blanket. He knelt by her. "Tell Star what I said. Quietly." He touched her shoulder. "Sleep well. I'll be here early to wash and get you ready for Saturday."

Penny dropped her head, she turned her head sideways so her eye watched him.

He patted her arm, left the stall, thought for a moment, and went back. He erased the thing about Star needing practice and started his list.

“Shoes.

“Wash them.

“New bridle, clean tail.”

He left her. She was already curled on the floor. He saw that Misty was gone. Benjamin had a new charge. He checked the clipboard. Natalie. A pretty one. He left the stable. He'd miss Misty. If she'd been his he would have worked her a lot harder for a lot longer.

He was pissed as hell at them this morning and now he missed them both. He saw buggy lights approach, stepped out of the way. Debbie pulling someone, not John. An owner, he guessed.

He started the Dodge, waited for a moment, and backed her out. He liked old trucks because they were substantial but felt almost as light as air compared to the newer trucks.

He got a sandwich on the way home, was dying for a beer but he was too tired tonight until he was home. He pulled into his drive; only two lights were on in the whole house. Marge was waiting up for him in their bedroom and there was a light on in the kitchen.

He got himself a beer from the refrigerator, twisted off the cap and took a drink. It tasted so good he almost finished it in one gulp.

He left his boots in the kitchen and walked quietly back to the bedroom. Marge was sitting up in bed reading, looked beautiful. “You look beautiful.”

She peered at him above her reading glasses, laid the book down on its open pages. “Hard day?”

He wasn't sure if it was hard or not. He was plain exhausted but it wasn't the fatigue of working in a mine shoveling coal all day. “So so.” He sat on the bed by her feet.

Marge put her bookmark in, closed the book and set it by the lamp.

“What's the alarm set for?”

"Six."

"It had better be five." He stood. "Back in a minute."

"Take your time." Marge smiled at him.

He finished in the bathroom, put the empty beer bottle in the trash basket and went back to the bedroom.

He undressed, placing all his clothes in the hamper. Marge held the covers open for him; the sheets felt marvelous and cool and soft. Not as soft as woman flesh but just as inviting.

Marge took off her glasses and they kissed. She left the light on. They liked to watch each other when making love.

Del relaxed half on, half off her, enjoyed the way she felt.

After a few minutes she became aggressive, rolling over him, looking down at him. He felt her lick a line from his chin to his navel. He was afraid if he shut his eyes he'd fall asleep. He couldn't entirely suppress the images that flooded his mind. Of the way Sharon looked last night in that impossible dress. Of Spot. Of orifices and tits and smooth skin over muscled bodies. Of heat and moisture and Sharon's eyes this evening.

He held the wrought headboard and arched his back as Marge used her throat on his cock, moving incredibly rapidly, joining this minute with past moments. Everything all jumbled up in one sensation.

He fell asleep just seconds after coming.

Chapter Ten

Del unharnessed Star and Penny from the buggy. They did better in tandem than he ever thought they might. Star was stronger but Penny would match her soon. He was glad to be out of the mayhem down at the ranch.

He took off their bridles and other gear, patted their fannies and told them he'd have water and treats for them in just a minute.

He picked up the single shaft of the buggy and turned it around to ready it for going back. The clearing wasn't that large and this was the easiest way.

Penny and Star stood at the edge of the clearing staring into the woods, their fingers loosely intertwined. Del set their bowls near the blanket and went back to the buggy for water. He heard a noise and turned around. Sharon entered the clearing and waited.

He'd wondered what would happen. The Colonel stopped him yesterday and handed him Penny's bridle that he'd left on Sharon. The Colonel chatted for a few moments and then took off in his zip buggy. Chatted but said nothing.

Then in late afternoon the Colonel and Sharon stopped at the stall. More chatting, Sharon watching him with an intensity that made Del want to laugh out loud for some strange reason.

He had holed up in the stall with Penny and Star most of the day yesterday. Took them to the washhouse to get them clean. Gave them both rubdowns, brushed Star's mane, shaved Penny from top to bottom, painted their hooves. Then in the afternoon he took them for their exercise and to get new shoes in the office.

They watched the other charges, hands and owners and maybe Penny and Star picked up something from that. This was their best day by far; both were in good form. Star's physicality made picking up the body skills she needed easy. Penny had progressed so much in the past two weeks that maybe she'd be ready to go home in a couple of weeks more.

He left the water jug by the full bowl and went up to Sharon. Penny and Star left them, went to the center of the clearing for water and nibbles.

"I looked for you yesterday," she said.

"We stayed down at the ranch, miss."

"That explains it then, doesn't it." Sharon's smile was crooked.

"Pretty much, miss."

"I need you to tell me what to do, Del."

"Don't fall in love with me, miss."

"You know what I mean." Her eyes never left his face.

He looked down, saw her fingers were nervous. "Take off your clothes and kneel on the blanket."

She gave a quick smile, began to unbutton her shirt.

He left her, went to the buggy and brought a basket which he laid beside the blanket. He sat on the edge of the blanket, knees up, and went through the basket.

Penny and Star knelt on the blanket; he could tell their eyes never left him.

He poured coffee into the plastic thermos cap and smelled the aroma. He closed the thermos and set it by the basket. Cookie had made biscuits today. His was filled with apple and cheese. He set them on a napkin.

In a couple of months it would be autumn. Cool nights. If it was sunny, warm days. Leaves would start to fall. Autumn made the charges frisky. It was easier to pull a buggy when the weather was brisk. It was easier to want to walk or do some other exercise all day.

He took a bite of his biscuit, felt Sharon settle behind him. The coffee was good and strong like he liked it. He finished chewing. "What do you want, miss?"

"I don't know, I . . ."

"Pony or dog?"

"Dog."

"Are you sure?"

"No." She paused. "No, I'm not sure."

"Dogs can't talk." He finished his biscuit. After a couple of minutes he said, "If I take you down to the stable you won't be able to say no, miss."

"I can't do that, Del. You know that. Afternoons here, like this."

"We'll see."

"I need your assurance, Del."

"There are no assurances, miss. If you want assurances get dressed and go back to the Colonel's."

"There are no assurances there either. I . . ."

"Maybe you should be a pony, miss. Wealthy owner. Beautiful buggy to pull. Warm stall." He heard her shift. "Lie down over there," he pointed, "on your face."

"I . . ."

"You heard me, miss." He watched her walk slowly to the spot he'd pointed to. She glanced over her shoulder at him, lay face down.

He finished his coffee. He didn't have a clear idea of what he'd do next. That didn't matter really. If he tried to do things according to plans or rules or schedules everything became a big mess.

He screwed the cap onto the thermos. He went to the buggy, in passing touched Star's shoulder. This must be confusing to them. If Sharon weren't the Colonel's girlfriend or whatever she was he'd tell her to go to hell. He'd told many an owner to get fucked over the years. Sometimes it just needed to be said.

He carried the coils of rope back to Sharon and dropped them beside her. He took off his shirt. To do this right she needed a collar and a hood. She should be in one of the fancy rooms at the Colonel's, upstairs, the ones with bars on the windows.

He knelt and drew his shirt under her face, tied the sleeves at the back of her head. He took a short coil of rope and tied her hands and arms so that they crossed her back. Left hand to right arm, right hand to left arm, elbows bent, forming a square of sorts or a box.

The longer coil he drew out and folded the strands so they were two feet long. He made a large knot at one end, wished he'd brought his crop. He tried the whip on his leg. Heavy.

"Star," he said. He held up the whip.

Star took the rope, looked at him. Her fire had changed. He wasn't sure if it was something the Colonel had done or not. She'd been different since Friday morning.

"Hit her between here," he drew his fingers across the lower half of her buttocks, "and here." His fingers crossed Sharon's middle thigh.

He watched Star, suggested she kneel. She did.

Star's nose ring swung and jumped with every blow.

When he thought Sharon had had enough he stopped Star, took the whip. He removed his clothes and knelt behind Sharon. He pulled her to her knees; her face and chest were still on the grass. He entered Sharon, thrust holding her hips. She didn't move at all to aid or resist him.

When he was done with her, he pushed her forward, got up and left her. He sat on the blanket, Penny and Star behind him, silent.

He poured a cup of coffee, lay on his side, watching Sharon. After a while he said to Star, "Beat her again."

Star whipped Sharon. He turned and saw Penny watching Star, her lips slightly open, tongue against her teeth. She glanced at him, returned her gaze to Star.

When it was time, he took the whip from Star, sent her back to Penny. He untied Sharon, turned her over, and made her grip her elbows under her knees, shaping her into a ball. He tied her, wrists to elbows. He spread her feet, touched her cunt. Her pubic hair was black like her eyebrows. He used his fingers on her until he was tired of it and left her.

He lay down on the blanket and napped for a bit.

When he woke he lay looking at the leaves overhead against the bluest sky possible. There was a very slight breeze so they barely moved at all.

He took turns fucking Penny and Star, moving from one to the other. He didn't come. He left them on all fours and walked to Sharon holding his hard cock, fingers at the base. He pulled her up onto his knees, put as much of his cock in her as he could and rolled over her, her knees and legs on his shoulders. He finished in her, left her and lay down on the blanket.

"You can both sleep," he told Penny and Star. They curled around one another. Star's shaven cunt was red, still red from her use two days before. Her cunt was rounder, pointier. He could see the edges of her inner lips poke through the slit.

If there were some way he'd harness Penny and Star, ride out of here. Go to Alaska or Costa Rica. He wondered what

they'd charge him with when they caught him. Grand theft, kidnapping or horse stealing. The last was a hanging crime. He didn't know how he could steal something he'd made but that was the way things were set up and there wasn't much he could do about it.

He stood, put on his jeans and walked to where Sharon lay. He took an ankle and dragged her across the grass and leaned her against Penny. Penny's eyes opened, she looked at him. Penny made that smile he hadn't seen for a few days, and she shut her eyes.

He took an apple out of the basket and ate it while he thought about his place. He'd want some spot like this where he could get away from everything. Marge and he had this automatically somehow. They could live piled on top of each other and they each had their privacy. Here at the ranch he had few moments of privacy in spite of the space around him. He didn't know if it was because of work or what.

He checked his watch; he'd let them have another half-hour. Cookie had given him special grain treats for the girls; he was saving the nibbles for before they went back to the ranch.

He lay on his side watching them sleep. So much woman flesh, he wanted to dive in, and if he weren't lazy he would. He wished he'd brought Spot. She'd enjoy this, lying in a fleshy pile, licking Sharon clean, and exploring the bushes that fringed the clearing.

Spot hadn't been at her doghouse when they'd gone by. The Colonel was entertaining; he could hear music from the back where the pool was. Del was surprised that Sharon had been able to come here. Was amazed that she wanted to.

He tossed the apple core across the clearing into the woods, got up and put on his socks and boots. He dragged Sharon away from Penny and Star, rolled her onto her side and unknotted his shirt. He stood while shaking out his shirt then put it on leaving the tails outside his pants.

He carried the basket back to the buggy leaving the nibbles on the blanket for the girls. He stood at the edge of the clearing and let his mind clear.

He heard a sound, turned, and saw the Colonel's zip buggy enter the clearing. The Colonel parked by Del's buggy and waved him over.

Del walked past the girls, all were awake and watching him. "Kneel," he said.

"Just checking," the Colonel said.

"Yes, sir."

"How are they doing?"

"They work well in tandem, sir."

"Good. Taking a break, I see."

"I was planning on heading back shortly, sir."

"No matter." The Colonel pointed to Sharon. "A side interest?"

"Not sure yet, sir."

"May I?"

"Be my guest, sir."

The Colonel got out of the electric golf cart and went over to them. He gave Star's head an affectionate pat, turned to Del.

"Loosa's owner was asking about you."

"She here, sir?"

"She called. She has another, wanted to see if you were available."

"Penny will take another week or two, sir."

"You were right, Del." The Colonel held Penny's head to his crotch. "You were right and I was wrong." The Colonel let go of Penny's head. "This time, at least."

"Thank you, sir."

The Colonel stood over Sharon. "This one have a name yet, Del?"

"Missy, sir."

"Not very original, Del. No fire to it, nothing to spark the imagination."

"Sorry, sir."

The Colonel poked Sharon with his boot. Sharon stared at him. The Colonel turned to Del. "I've had an offer today for Spot, Del. Told them I'd think about it overnight."

Del nodded, he had a freight train passing through his body. It was hard to hold on.

"Forty thousand. I'd be a fool to say no."

Del nodded slowly. Forty thousand.

"I know you like Spot. If you wanted to make a counter offer, I'd need a cashier's check tomorrow morning. I can't just rent her or let you take a mortgage. It wouldn't be fair to Spot. Or me."

"Of course, sir."

"Want to think about it?"

Del threw caution to the winds. "Forty-one thousand, sir?"

"Sold." The Colonel grinned. "You could stop at the bank on your way to work."

"Yes, sir."

"So two weeks before you can take on another."

"Four to be safe, sir, but I think two."

"I'll tell her four. She wants you to be the one to train this new girl." The Colonel prodded Sharon. "What were you going to be doing with this one?"

"Piss on her, sir."

"Really, Del?"

Del nodded.

"Could I?"

"Of course, sir." Del stepped back as the Colonel unzipped. In a moment the Colonel's piss was covering Sharon. The Colonel grinned at him, waved his hand. Del unzipped his pants, pissed on Sharon's face. Her body jumped when the second stream hit.

"I'll need to replace Spot, you know."

"I'll keep my eyes open, sir."

"Any possibilities?"

"I don't know, sir. We're at the exploratory stages. She's not sure what she is yet."

"Fascinating, Del."

"Shall I load her onto your golf cart for you, sir?"

"I'd rather not, Del." The Colonel stood by Penny, fondled her head. "Bring her by later."

Del gave a nod.

"Clean her up first."

"Of course, sir."

The Colonel smiled. "That was quite a present you left me Friday. Oh, don't worry. I like presents." The Colonel nodded toward Sharon. "I wasn't expecting her to . . ."

Del didn't say anything. He was almost liking the Colonel now.

"Well. I'd better go," The Colonel said. He released Penny's head, began the walk to his zip buggy.

"Sir, would it be okay to bring Spot to work?"

"Any time you want, Del." The Colonel stopped and turned. "You needn't always be so formal, Del. This isn't the military."

Del nodded, walked alongside the Colonel to the cart.

"So, tomorrow morning a check for forty-two thousand."

"I thought it was to be forty-one thousand." Del paused. "Sir."

"So it was." The Colonel grinned. "So it was." The Colonel sat in his cart seat. "When you clean her up, Del. Missy." The Colonel waved his hand toward Sharon. "I'd rather not have it be a free for all with the hands if you know what I mean."

"Yes, sir."

"Maybe not make it so obvious that you . . ."

"Of course, sir. Is there a hose at your house I could use?"

"I hadn't thought of that. That's perfect, Del. Take her out by the pool. Bertha will have the cleaning materials ready for you." The Colonel nodded toward Penny and Star. "They are looking good."

"Thank you, sir."

The Colonel raised his fingers on the steering wheel, turned the lever and took off the brake. He closed his fingers after passing Del, turned sharply, and left the clearing.

Del stood for a moment, tried to clear his head. He went to Star and Penny and patted their shoulders. "Good girls," he said. Penny didn't smile, looked pensive.

He stood over Sharon who stared at him. He knelt and untied her. She fell open, winced. He rubbed her arms and legs, laid her out on her back.

He went and gathered her clothes, brought them and dropped them on the grass by her. "Kneel," he said.

Sharon rose to her knees, bowed her head.

"Hands like theirs," he said. He placed her hands on her thighs, palm up. "Not tense." He uncurled her fingers. "Back straight." He pressed his palm in the center of her back, used his other hand to push her onto it. "Shoulders back."

She looked godawful, worse than Penny in the beginning.

Del used Sharon's clothes to wipe her. She moved stiffly as he rubbed. She began to speak, he said, "When you are with me you can respond with three words. Yes, more and please." He tossed her soiled clothes in front of her. "If you come to me tomorrow, I will assume you are serious. I will put a collar on you so I will have something to lead you by or to lock a hood to. Four hours in the afternoon is all I can spend with you. Here, at the Colonel's or at the stable."

She began to speak. He gripped her chin. "Yes, more or please or any of those words in combination. Nothing else. If you can't say those words you have nothing to say."

She turned her face to look at him, licked her lips anxiously, and gave a crooked smile.

He turned to Penny and Star. "Do you want me to fuck Missy?"

Star gave a grin. "More please." She glanced at Penny.

Penny raised her eyes to his. "Yes," she said.

"All fours," he said. He crawled behind Sharon, dropped his jeans. He sank his cock in her, waited. He leaned forward, grabbed a fist full of her hair and pulled it back. His other hand held her hip. "When I say turn, you'll spin around." He began fucking Sharon. "You are not a pleasure slave. You will either be a dog or a pony. I will fuck you because I'm angry with you or because I'm pleased with you. You are not to come." He punctuated each word with a thrust. "Your body is mine to use as I see fit. Or not to use. You have no say, cannot beg or plead." He jerked her head back, released her hair. "Turn," he said.

She spun; he pushed his cock into her mouth, grabbed a handful of hair and pulled her onto him.

When he was done, he released her hair, stood. She looked up at him, red-faced, eyes wet, not the beautiful woman he first saw. "Understand?"

"Yes," she said. "More please."

He slapped her.

“More please.” Her eyes begged him.

He smiled “There are nibbles on the blanket, enough for all three of you.” He turned and watched to see if she would use her hands. His palm stung. He wiped it on his pants leg.

Chapter Eleven

Del took Marge out to their favorite place to eat. He was tired, worn out from the week, but had news to celebrate, was bursting to tell Marge but had wanted to wait until dessert. Dessert was ordered; Marge was smiling at him.

Stranberger's was a family restaurant, run by the same family for close to fifty years. Good food, chatty waitresses, coffee almost as good as Cookie or Marge made. Glorious junk on the walls. 1950s toy guns and their holsters in one room. Blues posters in another, racing paraphernalia on the walls of the small bar – a sundae and milkshake kind of bar.

"You remember me talking about Spot?"

"The Colonel's dog? Yes, though I don't think I've ever met her."

"That's the one. Someone wanted to buy Spot; the Colonel let me make an offer. I'm buying her for forty-one thousand tomorrow."

She sat back, made room for her apple pie alamode. "That's a lot of money, Del."

He got the same, picked up his fork. "I know. It will put us behind maybe two years."

Marge nodded, swallowed. "It's your decision, Del. It's your plan and if you want to sidetrack it . . . Are you sure?"

Del pushed his pie aside and leaned toward her. "I can wait two years more. It won't be easy. Easier with Spot around. But I know it won't be easy."

Marge smiled at him. "What if I don't like her?"

Del pulled his plate back, cut a piece of pie and dipped it into the soft ice cream.

"Well?"

Del took his time chewing, swallowed. "Marge. I know this might be a way for the Colonel to keep me working with him."

"Well?"

"And I was thinking, maybe we should travel some. We've been saving up for years and maybe we should take a little of that money and enjoy ourselves."

"What if I don't like her?"

"I'll build a nice tall fence around the backyard. Her doghouse will be out there, she doesn't need to be inside at all."

"Except if the weather is cold. If she gets sick. Or if you are in the mood for puppy love."

"Spot won't get under foot."

"I'm not said much about what you do, Del."

"I appreciate that, Marge. It hasn't been easy for you."

"Do you realize that you have no idea how easy, or not, it has been?"

He finished his pie. "Want to go for a walk soon?"

She shook her head. "Let's go home."

Del drank his coffee, pushed the plate away, moved the cup and saucer before him. "I know it won't be easy having Spot around."

"How old is she?"

He shrugged. "Twenty-two? Her papers may tell. She doesn't talk."

"Just growl and woof."

He was going to add and wiggle her tail but thought maybe now wasn't the best time to mention tails. "Yip and whimper. She's not a loud dog."

"Paper trained?"

He exhaled. "I don't know that either. She . . ."

"She'll be inside our house and you're not sure she's paper trained?"

"I know, I . . ."

"Just what does she do, Del?"

Fuck and suck. He probably shouldn't bring that up right now either. "She's companionable. I'll take her to work with me. She's fun to go on walks with. She's fun to just sit around with."

"How big of a doghouse were you planning to build? Big enough for the two of you?" Marge smiled at the waitress.

"That was wonderful, dear."

He took out his wallet and left a tip, picked up the check and stood. "Sure you don't want to go for a walk?"

She joined him. "Well?"

He paid the check, took a couple of mints with his change. He held the truck door open for Marge, went around the truck and sat in the driver's seat. He started up the flathead six, gave the dashboard a pat, backed out of the space. "There are things about this I haven't thought out, Marge. I didn't know about it until this afternoon."

"What do we do when we have guests over?"

"I could leave her at the ranch."

"Where do we board her if we go on one of your little trips?"

"I've no idea, Marge. What do you think we should do?"

She was quiet for several minutes. She shifted in her seat, looked to her right out the window. "I know you screw them when you're at the ranch. I don't have to see that. I don't want to have to watch you screw this dog."

"I know that, Marge. If Spot doesn't work out, I'll sell her. Find a good home for her. I don't think the money will be wasted."

"Do you love her?"

He turned off the truck in the drive. "I love being with her. I never . . ."

Marge left the truck.

He followed her into the house. "Want a beer?"

"Please."

He went into the living room with two beers, gave Marge one. He sat next to her on the couch. "Look, Marge. I sprung this on you and I'm sorry but it was sprung on me. I don't know the answer to many of the things you've asked me. Yes, I fuck my charges at work. There is usually not a lot of feeling involved in it. Sometimes there is but I don't wallow in it. I like Spot, enjoy being with her, think she's special. I never thought I would own her. I think maybe the Colonel is doing what he can so I'll stay with him longer. I don't plan on staying forever but I do enjoy what I do even if I don't like my job."

He touched her knee. "The Colonel wanted to know if you were going to bring your potato salad to the picnic."

Marge kicked off her shoes, drew her legs under her on the couch. She set her beer on the knee of her slacks. "The picnic is Wednesday? I'll give you a list tomorrow of things to get."

Del took a drink of beer.

"Del, do you ever think of what you are doing to those girls?"

He set the empty beer on the floor. "Tell me when you want another. Think of it how? Do I realize what I'm doing? Or do I worry about how others might look at what I'm doing?"

"You know what I mean, Del." She gave him a tight-lipped smile.

"Okay, Marge. We've had this discussion before. Am I evil? I don't think so. Am I sure? I'm not, so I spend some time, not a lot, but some time thinking about the problem of good and evil and me in the whole wide world."

"Well?"

"Not particularly evil. That doesn't mean I think I'm good. I try to be but I'm not most of the time."

"And?"

"Are we going to get back to Spot soon?"

"Eventually." Marge placed the beer bottle back on her knee.

"I do the best I can. What can I say? I know I'm making mistakes. I know that the world is not black and white and I know what I'm doing probably comes into the darker area of gray."

She winked at him, set her beer on the floor. "I'm ready."

"Back in a minute." He walked into the kitchen, left his boots by the back door and got two beers out of the refrigerator. He put several warm beers in to chill. "Want a snack or anything?"

"No, I'm all right."

He carried the beers to the couch, handed her one. "I do the best I can. Try to do better the next day."

"Anything you should tell me about work?"

"Sharon, the Colonel's girlfriend, has become a . . . I don't know what to call it. She's not sure what she is."

"Lover?"

"Not on my part. She's not sure if she's a dog or a pony. That's one way to think of it. She may just be a way for the Colonel to divert me. Like Spot."

"Pretty?"

"One of the most beautiful women I've seen."

She turned away from him. "You realize you hurt me sometimes."

"Do you want me to tell the Colonel no, I don't want Spot after all?"

She shook her head, turned to him. "I can't control you, don't want to."

"I appreciate that."

"Appreciate this. How many of the ranch hands have wives? How many will be at the picnic?"

"One. You know that."

"Does that tell you something?"

"Should it?"

"It should. So she's beautiful?"

"Yes." He leaned on the couch arm, watched her.

"Does the Colonel know?"

"We pissed on her together." He watched her face him, get off the couch and leave the room. "Well, that's that," he mumbled. He sat on the couch, shut his eyes and tried to remember how it had been in the Army. Too much like right now. He needed to take a piss. He stood, finished the beer, picked up the empties and carried them into the kitchen.

He turned out the light, left on the living room light and went into the bathroom. The mirror made him look more tired than he was. He pissed sitting down since he needed his hands to prop up his chin.

The bedroom light was off when he went in. Marge was under the covers. He turned off the hall light and joined her in bed. She didn't move.

"Look, Marge. I never know how much you want to know about what I do at work. We pissed on her. I wiped her off afterwards using her clothes, expensive stuff. Ralph Lauren. There's more you probably don't want to know. That's the day me. When I'm here, I don't do that stuff." He paused.

"Somehow when I talk about it I sound like a gangster or something. I'm sorry."

"When you bring Spot here," Marge said facing away from him, "you'll be bringing your day stuff here."

"I hadn't thought about it that way."

"I know. I know you like Spot, want to keep her. If she's here I'll be watching you two . . . Understand?"

"I'm sorry, Marge. I never meant to hurt you."

"I know that too." She was quiet for a couple of minutes, said, "Turn on the light."

He sat up, turned on the light.

Marge sat up. "Okay, let's talk about Spot. Forty-one thousand dollars plus the fence plus the doghouse."

"Plus I'll need a carrier I can strap or bolt to the bed of the truck."

"There'll be more. Food."

"Dog food, canned and dry. I don't think she's too particular."

"That's it?" Marge gave a look at him. "Just dog food?"

"She likes people food but she shouldn't have too much as some people food upsets her stomach."

"People food."

He nodded.

"Do you realize what you're saying?"

"Do you know what it is like to have someone like Sharon?"

"The beautiful one."

"Hell, most of them are beautiful. Do you know what it is like to have someone like her want me to do certain things you don't really want me to talk too much about to her or to treat her in certain ways, again ditto? Can you imagine?"

"Del, back to Spot."

"She's a dog in every way but one. She doesn't want to be a dog all she needs to do is get off her four paws, walk on two, and leave. That simple."

"So she's not forced . . ."

"We'll have to decide if we want to chain her up or put her in a pen. I'd leave her free but they are your flowers and she is a dog."

"What about her . . . excrement?"

"I can bury it or I can flush it. She doesn't roll in it, if that's what you mean."

Marge played with the sheet for a minute. "She doesn't talk?"

"I've never heard her say a word."

"What does she do all day?"

"Lie around, sniff things, drink from her water bowl, lie in the sun or shade, nap, masturbate. She gets pretty bored at the Colonel's."

"Until you come along."

"Most of the time she's just there for a ride, she trots behind the buggy with a huge grin on her face."

But some of the times you are . . ."

"We are." He put his hand on hers. "Outside of you she's the best of anyone I've ever . . ."

"And you love her."

"I can never sit and talk with her like I'm doing now."

"But you love her?"

"I guess you could say so. Not like I love you. I mean it. If I have to choose between the two of you I'd choose you over her."

"I don't believe you." She squeezed his hand. "Get Spot. If there is a problem I'll let you know."

"You'll like her."

She smiled at him. "I know I will. I'll see her, half my age, beautiful, the other woman my husband loves, lying out in the backyard naked. She'll be naked, won't she?"

"Naked."

"Of course I'll like her."

"Give it a chance. Who knows? Maybe you will."

"I don't want to watch you screw her."

"You won't have to see that."

"But you will?"

"I'd be lying if I said I wouldn't."

She let out a breath.

"I'll, we'll own her. She'd be upset if I didn't use her. We didn't use her."

“I could use her?”

He gave a nod.

“That wouldn’t upset you?”

“Why should it?”

“I don’t know. I find it hard to imagine myself carrying on an affair with my husband’s dog.”

“Our dog.”

“That sounds better?”

“Just try to shift your perspective just a bit.”

“If I didn’t love you.”

“I’m sorry it’s not easier for you.”

“It’s not been all bad.”

“You have time to write. How is the story going?”

“I’m at a spot where I need to spend some time working things through.”

“Are you serious?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m at a spot . . .”

She grinned. “I finished the first draft yesterday. I’m doing my checks then I’ll print it out and drop it into a drawer to hide away for six months or so.”

“What did the agent say about the other one?”

“She thinks she can sell it. It’s going to take time finding the right house.”

“Two more years.”

“I’m trying to do my part,” she said.

“And if Spot doesn’t work out, we’ll find another home for her.” He kissed her. “Should I turn out the light?”

“Turn out the light.” She went under the covers.

He turned out the light and joined her. She snuggled up against him, placed her hand on his chest.

The windows in the bedroom, there were three, let light shine on the bed and their faces. Most of the light was from the moon and stars. A small portion of the light came from the all night light on a telephone pole by the neighbor’s garage.

He watched her face, kissed her and touched her cheek.

She smiled at him. There was a sparkle of light on her eye.

They made love slowly for them, took their time this once. Usually they were more efficient, practiced old lovers in their likes and dislikes.

He wanted to show her how different this was, she was, from the others earlier today. She still gave him a thrill no other had ever given him. She thought because she was older and the others were younger they had her beat. Because of the way they looked and how their bodies looked and felt. He wanted to show her she was wrong.

He thrust slowly, felt her body rub his body as he moved. He lifted up from a kiss and enjoyed the feel of her breasts on his chest. He wanted to take her hands and hold them against the headboard but knew he couldn't. He tried to show her in a different way. He thrust slowly.

He wanted to do things to her to show her that her body was special because it was his. He wanted to make her cry out. He thrust slowly.

He kissed her, came in her feeling each pump and spurt and her body around him. Sometimes, when she didn't come like just now, he remained in her until he was hard again. Tonight he rolled off, used his fingers to bring her off, let her know he wanted to do this for her.

He remembered the cunts his fingers had been in today, Penny's, Star's and Sharon's, as individual as their faces. He wondered if some day Marge might not shave hers for him.

She came.

He held her for a moment then climbed on. This time he'd be faster, harder. Just on the edge of what she would tolerate, maybe push a little further than that.

They rolled against each other until he came a second time. He was sure she'd come twice more. Not as strongly as the first time. She never did.

They lay together, fell asleep in each other's arms.

Del woke, he always woke in the middle of the night now, and went off to the bathroom. He sat and thought for a bit before retiring to the bed. He'd never thought he would ever be an owner. He'd brutally squashed any fantasies about that. He couldn't afford the misdirection such thoughts created. He had his job to do.

He rejoined Marge in bed, turned onto his side away from her. She already faced away from him. Their two backs touched.

The covers felt nice against his chin. Not like Penny and Star in the stall who only had a blanket to sleep on and each other. But not that different.

Chapter Twelve

Del sat in the study and waited for the Colonel to come downstairs. The cashier's check was in an envelope; he'd laid it on the desk afraid he'd mangle it.

Penny and Star had both been kneeling side by side when he checked on them when he first got to the ranch. He left some apple quarters and hurried up to the Colonel's only to wait.

He looked at the mantle clock, past ten, decided he'd look at the Colonel's bookshelves. Eventually he heard the Colonel enter, he turned and went back to stand by the chair he'd been waiting in.

"Sorry, Del. I had business to finish upstairs." The Colonel sat, picked up the envelope. "Sit, Del."

"Yes, sir." He sat in the chair.

The Colonel opened the envelope, took out the check and grinned, looked over at Del and continued smiling. "I'm glad she's going to you, Del." He dropped the check in the drawer. "There are some papers to sign, Anna at the office can notarize them for us." The Colonel stood.

Del stood, followed the Colonel, his fingers twitchy. He still wasn't sure this was the best idea. He'd been so sure yesterday.

Del sat beside the Colonel in the zip buggy. The Colonel handed a large envelope to him. "Her papers." The Colonel sped off toward the office, the squat tires of the golf cart crunching on the gravel. The Colonel didn't use the brake going down the hill; the cart picked up speed.

"There was this couple," the Colonel said, grinning at Del.

Oh, no, Del thought.

"They had run into money problems and then the husband lost his job. They were facing financial ruin. The husband went out every day looking for work and found nothing." The Colonel waved at John and Debbie in the ring. "I don't see Penny or Star out here."

"They're in the stall waiting for me, sir." The envelope of papers rattled in his hands.

"I see." The Colonel paused. "That night, in bed, the wife said, 'I know what I can do. I can become a prostitute.'

“ ‘But dear, you’re almost fifty. I don’t think it’ll work.’

“ ‘Nevertheless, I’ll go out tomorrow and see. Expect me home late tomorrow night.’

“The husband didn’t want to say anything to her but he was sure she’d be disappointed. Nice day, isn’t it?”

“Beautiful day, sir.”

“When we get back I have something I want to talk to you about. A proposition.” The Colonel paused. “Where was I?”

“She’d be disappointed, sir.”

“Del, you are an owner now. You don’t need to say sir all the time.”

Del nodded.

“The husband spent a fruitless day looking, came back and the house was dark. He made a sandwich, watched TV, his wife never appeared. Finally he went to bed, despairing. They were about to lose everything.

“His wife woke him in the middle of the night by turning on the lights. She waved a fist full of money in his face. ‘See what I made being a whore.’

“He sat up in bed and she dumped the bills and pennies into his hands. He counted and it came to thirty-seven dollars and fourteen pennies. ‘Why the pennies?’ he asked.

“She stared at him. ‘They were all pennies.’ “ The Colonel began laughing.

Del cringed. The Colonel was doing that laugh right in his ear.

“They were all pennies, Del. Get it? All were pennies.” The Colonel slapped Del’s arm. “That’s a new one.”

“I could tell, sir.”

The Colonel parked in front of the office.

Anna notarized their signatures on the documents and made a set of copies for the Colonel’s files. Del kept the originals.

Del rode all the way back to the Colonel’s thinking, I’ve done it. I really did it. He wiped his palm on his jeans. He saw Spot by her doghouse and waved. He wasn’t sure if she knew what was happening. He hadn’t had a chance to talk to her yet.

Spot ran toward them as far as the chain would permit and barked happily, wiggling her rear.

The Colonel smiled broadly at Del. "Nothing in the world like it, is there, Del?"

Del shook his head. He couldn't believe it. He waved again at Spot.

"I have that proposition for you, but I can see you have other things on your mind. Go on. We'll touch base later."

Del looked at the Colonel. "Thank you, sir."

"Thank you, Del. Not all owners are quite so prompt. Ask Anna."

Del left the zip buggy, walked to Spot and knelt. She grinned at him, put her paw on his thigh. He scratched her behind the ear, touched the stud on her eyebrow. "Did the Colonel talk to you, Spot?"

She barked at him and grinned.

He guessed not. "I've just bought you, Spot." He thought he could see something pass through her eyes. "You're going down to the stable with me, you're going home with me tonight."

She raised her head and licked his hand.

"You'll have to be a good dog at home. No messing the floors, no chewing stuff. Understand? My wife isn't sure she likes dogs so you must try especially hard to make a good impression. You can romp and frolic when you're at work with me here."

He stood. "Ready?"

He unclipped the chain; she jumped on him and nearly knocked him over. "Down," he said.

She sat back on her heels grinning at him.

He rolled up the chain as he walked to the doghouse. He set it inside, went back to Spot and clipped his leash on her.

Spot heeled well, followed him down to the stable only jerking on the leash once when she had to pee. He waited as she did her chore, told her, "Good girl," thinking they'd stop at that pet superstore at the mall this evening and get a carrier. She needed supplies: bowls, chew toys, and dogfood. He was so happy he'd be tempted to spend a million. He'd have to watch himself.

He'd never seriously thought about an ownership mark. He had his brand but that was a temporary thing useful in training. Brands were nice for ponies but dogs were different. He'd get tags made for her collar and perhaps a special tattoo. That could wait until Marge was sure one way or the other. If Spot could stay, when Spot could stay, he'd have her tattooed, maybe on her inner lip or ear.

He was so busy with his thoughts he was surprised to find himself ready to unlatch the stall door. He went in, Spot followed. Spot immediately wanted to sniff everything. "Down," he said, pointing to the floor by the bench.

Penny and Star watched him as he sat on the bench and patted Spot. "Lie down," he said to Spot. Spot curled at his feet.

Star's nostrils flared as she watched him and Spot. Her fire wasn't damped down like it had been the past couple of days. Penny's mouth was slightly open. Her gaze wasn't centered on his face but lower.

Del checked his watch, just about noon. He stood, put the envelope with Spot's papers behind the kit. "I'm going to lunch," he said. "We'll go for a ride when I get back. It is okay to rest and to talk to Spot, quietly, if you want. I own her now."

Penny's eyes raised to his then dropped to the floor.

He left them, got to the bunkhouse before everyone else. He made a shopping list in his memo book while he ate. He closed his book, then stopped as he began to put it into his pocket. He opened the memo book and added one more item: doggy bed. Then he thought of another: champagne.

He harnessed Penny and Star in tandem for the buggy. They looked beautiful in their high heels, matching brands, erect stance, straight shoulders drawn back, chins up. He tied Spot's leash to the rear bar and off they went.

He had Penny and Star do a circle of the ranch buildings, round the office, stable, rings and corral. Around the bunkhouse and washhouse, past the wagon shed where Sam was preparing Randi for a ride.

After that circuit they rode to the top of the hill, past the Colonel's house into the woods. He had them take him through the woods, into the rolling hills.

He relaxed in his seat, enjoyed how they stepped, perfectly in unison, how their bodies glistened with sweat.

They returned to the woods and he had them go to the clearing they used. After they stopped he heard Spot panting behind him. He turned to her, smiled at the look on her face, turned back to Penny and Star. "You're good girls," he said. "All of you are good girls."

Spot barked. Penny and Star relaxed.

He unharnessed his charges, gave their fannies a slap and they sauntered off. He unclipped Spot's leash. "Stay in the clearing," he said.

Spot wiggled her ass and trotted off to squat by a bush.

He got the blanket out and set it in the center of the clearing. He put bowls down and filled them with water. Spot immediately went to hers and drank noisily.

He sat on the blanket and unscrewed the thermos cap. He filled the plastic cup with coffee, screwed the cap back on.

"Don't I get any?" Sharon said behind him.

He didn't turn, picked up the cup, set down the thermos.

"Mr. Hardguy," she said sitting next to him. "Don't you ever say hi?"

"Howdy, miss." Penny and Star knelt side by side at the edge of the clearing, both watching him. Spot curled up near them.

"Look at me, Del."

He would rather not, but he did. She was stunning. Long hair loose around her face, red silk blouse unbuttoned down to there. Black pleated skirt and Roman sandals. She set a small purse by her side. No jewelry, not even earrings. She smiled at him and touched his leg. "I came, Del."

"Not as you were told."

"Not exactly as I was told. I agree." She held out her hand. "The coffee. May I?"

He handed her the cup, watched her take a sip. Her hands, she held the cup with both, shook slightly. She looked at him as she drank.

She passed the cup back to him. "Nice day, isn't it?"

"Beautiful, miss."

"Grand things can take place on days like this. Or idle dreams are dreamt lazily." Her mouth remained partly open after the last word.

Del realized Sharon's cheeks were flushed. She wore no makeup. Her lips were pale. "Why are you here, miss?"

"You want me to give up so much, Del. You want me to give up everything. What do I get in return?"

He exhaled, turned to watch Penny and Star. A week ago, two weeks ago? When he was spending the night in the stall. He'd woken up; Penny knelt by his head looking down at him. He could barely make out her shape by the light of the north window.

"I love you," she whispered.

He slapped her, pulled her arm down bringing her head close. He said in her ear, "I'm not your owner. Your love means nothing to me. If I fell in love with every charge I had I'd go crazy." He pushed her. "Go back to bed, Penny."

He could see her moist eyes look at him as she rose. She had a smile on her face, turned away and lay down next to Star. He rolled over from them and shut his eyes.

He'd go crazy if he loved them and it was worse than hell when their owners brought them back for a visit.

"I can't answer that, miss. I wish I could but I can't. What I do isn't a transaction. I have less than you after I've taken everything."

She was quiet for several minutes.

He handed her the coffee cup. She took it, drank and handed it back.

"Ron told me you've bought Spot."

"This morning."

"How much?"

"Forty-one thousand."

"That's a lot."

"Yes it is."

"Do you think you got a bargain?"

He handed her the cup; she took it, drank and held it. "I think he gave her to me."

"What does she get?"

"You sound like my wife, Marge." He took the empty cup and filled it from the thermos.

"She knows what you do?"

"She has an idea. She doesn't want to know the particulars."

Sharon took the cup, held it. "You and she get along?"

"So far so good. Spot is pushing it."

"The money bother her?"

"How much, not really. Otherwise, yes."

"Unhunh." She passed the cup back. "Look at me, Del."

He turned slowly after taking a drink. Sharon stared at him, still flushed. He could see a tremor above one eye, wondered if she felt it.

"If I decide I can't go on, you'll let me leave?"

He watched her face and nodded. "You'd be as free as they are."

"Is that free?"

"I'm not keeping them here. If they want they can talk to Anna and she will make arrangements."

"But is that free?"

"Hell if I know, miss." He tossed the coffee onto the grass and screwed the cup onto the thermos.

"Del, you aggravated me when you didn't answer my questions. You aggravate me when you do."

"Just lucky, miss. Is this discussion going anywhere? I'm busy."

"What's next on your to do list? Fuck one of them." Her finger flicked out.

"Thought crossed my mind." He paused. "Miss." He began to stand.

"Sit down."

He sat, looked off into the woods. He heard her open her purse, close it.

"Here," she said. She tapped his arm.

He felt the collar drop into his lap; he fingered the cold steel.

"Before you put it on me, you should read this." She laid an envelope in his lap.

He saw the white horse logo in the upper left-hand corner, silver foil embossed with engraved lettering underneath. The flap wasn't glued. There were several sheets of paper. He unfolded them, saw the Colonel's personal stationary.

"Del,

"Sharon is yours to make of what you will. If she is a dog as good as Spot, I'll buy her from you for a good deal more.

"Ron Lightly, Lt Col, USAF, Ret"

He studied the next sheets which were a resume and her vita. He folded them and put them back in the envelope. He set the envelope so it leaned on the thermos. It took two tries. He fingered the collar. "Any health conditions I should know of."

"I'm allergic to dog hair."

"That's good to know. Nothing else?"

"Clean bill of health."

"Anything scare you?"

"Everything scares me, Del."

He looked up at Penny and Star. Penny gave a slight nod. Spot scratched her ear and went back to sleep.

"The Colonel isn't making you do this?"

"Look at me, Del."

He turned to her. He saw the mark where a tear had gone down one cheek. "No one is making me do anything. I just don't know what to do. You have to tell me." She gave a crooked smile. "Please tell me."

"Go over there and take off your clothes. Fold them carefully, put them in the back of the buggy. Your purse, too."

She smiled at him. "Thank you." She stood, took her purse and went to the spot he had showed her. She undressed slowly, slowly folded her clothes as if this was the last time she'd ever do that. She carried the folded clothes and her purse to the buggy. After putting them in the back she waited.

He got up, walked to her, took her arm and led her to the blanket. "Kneel," he said.

She knelt, forgot completely what he'd told her yesterday. Sometimes the smart ones weren't so smart.

"Hands on your thighs. Remember?"

She blushed, put her hands on her thighs, palm up, fingers tightly curled; the fingers trembled. She looked up at him.

He knelt beside her. "Stomach in, shoulders back."

She jerked as if hit, glanced away from him and did what he told her.

"Look at me," he said.

She turned abruptly.

"Anything else you want to say before I put this on?"

"Ron suggested a more appropriate name."

"You'll be Missy for a while. To help remind you of your origins."

Her eyes dropped and rose to be level with his.

"Does being stable dog frighten you?"

"Yes." She added quickly. "But I'll do it if that's what you want me to do."

"It won't happen right away. It takes a lot of hard work to be a dog. Shoulders back."

"Sorry."

He wasn't sure how to respond to sorry. Sorry only means they'll do it again. "You'll be my assistant except for when I'm training you. You'll remember my training and practice while you are my assistant."

She nodded.

"While you are my assistant you may respond or address me respectfully. Otherwise you'll only be able to say yes or no."

"Thank you." She paused.

"Just that much is satisfactory. Hold still." He closed the collar and locked it. "Missy."

She stared at him.

He wondered if she expected a magical transformation. He took the leash out of his back pocket, held it to her. "Leash Spot and bring her to me."

She took the leash, stood and went to Spot.

He rose to his knees, watched Star and Penny.

Spot knelt in front of him.

"Stay," he said. He checked her ears and turned her lips to see if there were any marks. There were none. He touched her lower lip. "My mark will go here, Spot."

She barked, licked his fingers.

"Turn around, Spot."

Spot spun, wiggled her ass at him.

"Prepare me, Missy," he said.

She dropped the leash as she knelt.

"Who said you could let go of the . . ."

"Sorry," she said as she grabbed the leash.

"Go on."

She looked up at him as she opened his pants and held his cock.

He felt like tying her to a tree and whacking her with a branch. The things he had to go through. He knocked her hand away, rose and plunged into Spot's warm cunt.

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