
HIS SCANDALOUS LOVE

Cuffs & Spurs, Book One

ANYA SUMMERS



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
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Chapter 1

There was hot, and then there was the fourth level of hell that was the middle of July in Wyoming.

Heat rose off the distant fields in iridescent waves, turning the customarily verdant green fields of grass into pale shades tinted with brown.

They needed rain.

Carter lifted his Stetson and swiped a forearm across his brow as he stared at the bright blue, cloudless sky. Sweat slicked his form and slid down his back. It was barely noon and the temperature had already shot into triple digits. He, Herb Henderson, his cantankerous foreman, and Kyle Renner, his young, college age ranch hand, were working as fast as the heat would allow to keep the horses cool. Each day since summer had roared in with sky high heat in June, it had been a grueling race to keep Carter's prized herd from expiring from heatstroke.

Due to the heat, Carter had postponed the breeding schedule for some of his mares to the following year. There was nothing for it. His ranch could sustain the loss in production of a new herd to cull and sell. What he couldn't do was replace his horses should the heat become too much. So the men worked to keep

them hydrated. As it had been a hell of a dry summer, it had been a bit like trying to piss out a forest fire. A steady wind blew plumes of dust and dirt across his ranch, the Double J, just outside of Jackson Hole.

The Double J sprawled over a thousand acres in a basin of the Gros Ventre Valley. The meadows were surrounded by sharp spears of granite of the mountain known as the sleeping Indian. Carter had been born here. He'd grown up on this land, learned the value of things and become a man here. It was home.

Yet he could only pray they would see relief soon in the form of rain, otherwise the risk of forest fires increased. And that was a nightmare he didn't even want to contemplate, let alone face. Although the chance for it, what with the evening lightning and lack of precipitation they'd experienced this past week, dangled precariously as a more distinct possibility with each day that passed with no rain.

Luckily, they had a misting system in the stalls running round the clock, along with giant fans circulating the air, helping to keep the horses cool. His two prize stallions, an ebony thoroughbred, Odin, and a mahogany colored Arabian, King Tut, were being downright finicky in the scorching temperatures. King Tut wouldn't drink his water and Carter had to install a salt block in his stall. Odin preferred water with added electrolytes.

As it was, Carter currently had ninety-six horses on his ranch and under his care. Doctor Josh Barrett, the local vet, had already been by that morning to treat a few of Carter's pregnant mares. While they'd finished their breeding for the year early, due to the heatwave, Odin and King Tut had each covered six mares. So while it wasn't a full stock of pregnant mares, he still had to watch them closely, with the heat spike catapulting them from merely hot into the fiery pits of hell fourth of July weekend. The blasted weather showed no signs of letting up.

The Double J was Carter's life. He enjoyed it. Lived and breathed the ranch day in and day out. Loved training the

offspring of his mares into the finest trail horses in the Northwest. And yet, he'd been walking around with a hole in his chest since the previous August.

He'd not found her.

As much as he'd promised himself that he would track Jenna down, it was like she had disappeared off the planet. He'd even toyed with the idea of hiring a private investigator to locate her. But there was a part of Carter that wondered, now that almost a year had passed—eleven months and one week to be exact—since he had first set foot on the tiny strip of an island in the Bahamas, whether he was being obstinate and downright idiotic. If Jenna wanted to be found by anyone from the island, she would have left a way to be reached. Jared, the owner of the Pleasure Island Resort, had assured Carter that he'd not been in contact with her, and that perhaps it was best if Carter let her go.

And wasn't that just the problem?

Jenna had rocked his world. The feisty submissive had wormed her way past his hard-fought defenses and had set up residence inside his soul. He dreamed about her. Woke up in the dead of night reaching for her. Carter used to joke about Doms who became whipped and would cave to their submissive's every desire.

It was karma, perhaps. Because now the fucking joke was on him.

He'd been living a half-life, cursing himself that he'd failed to take action after their week together on the island. That he had waited too long to contact her afterwards. He'd tried to be a gentleman. And, he admitted to himself, he'd let his ego get in the way. Because he would forever regret that he hadn't hauled her to the fucking plane with him and carted her back here to his ranch. He knew now that he should have gone all caveman, tied her up if he'd had to, and even gagged her if necessary to get her on the damn plane.

Because now she was lost to him, and Carter had no idea how to move past it. Past her.

“I’m back from my lunch break,” Herb said, breaking Carter out of his maudlin and rather depressing thoughts. “You should go take yours. My Dottie has put together some brisket sandwiches and her famous potato salad.”

“I will in a minute. Just need to check on Daisy and Morningstar,” Carter replied. If he buried himself in his work, he tended to get a reprieve from thinking about Jenna. It was the only time he did. The nights were the worst.

“Carter, the horses aren’t the only ones who need a break from the heat. Now, go on with you. Kyle and I can take care of those two mares without any assistance from you. What we can’t do is run this place if you drop dead of heatstroke,” Herb challenged. The craggy bastard might be in his mid-fifties, but he was still a powerfully built man. His old-school handlebar mustache was almost completely gray, and the weathered lines upon his face bespoke of his life working outdoors. He was a deep in the bone cowboy, part of an era of men who were passing into legend. Herb did things the way they’d been done for a hundred years or more, and rarely embraced any type of technology.

“You do realize I’m the boss.”

“Boy, I’ve known you since before you had your first woman. Now get. Kyle and I have got it covered. When you come back we’ll talk about hiring some more help,” Herb chewed out with his hands on his hips.

Realizing that Herb wouldn’t let it go without a fight, Carter tipped his hat and said, “I’ll be back shortly. More help? Really?”

“Another hand or two wouldn’t hurt. ‘Sides, I hear Kyle might take off for the big city in the fall. Eat your lunch. Take your time and we’ll talk when you get back. Besides, it looks like you’ve got company.” Herb nodded toward the main house.

Carter swiveled his gaze and, sure enough, a black souped-up pickup truck was pulling into the drive and parking. He knew the

vehicle well. With a nod at Herb, he strode out of the stables and up the path to the main house.

The ranch was located in the Gros Ventre Valley, surrounded by unforgettable views of the Teton mountains. The main house had been modified from its earliest beginnings. Carter's great grandfather, Jedediah Jones, had purchased this land back in 1901. The original cabin he'd built still existed and had been turned into a home for Carter's foreman, Herb, and his wife Dottie some years back. It had been his father who had built the main house, and crafted it into a bit of a showplace. Carter certainly didn't need the twenty some odd extra bedrooms when it was just him. Although, when perspective buyers came to the ranch, it demonstrated the work he did and added an elegance that people tended to like. The exterior of the house gave the appearance that it was a large wooden cabin, the logs a smooth, golden pecan color, and when the sunlight illuminated it, it tended to bring out golds and oranges that made it seem like it was on fire. But that was where any similarity to a real log cabin ended.

Large double pane windows graced the estate with premium views of the mountain range. Inside was modernly appointed with honey colored pinewood floors, soaring vaulted ceilings, and all the furniture and décor held a Western flare. He'd updated the kitchen in the last few years. Although Carter's favorite room—besides his personal dungeon, which hadn't seen any action lately—was the indoor pool and hot tub.

Leaning against his pickup, his arms crossed over his chest, waiting for Carter, stood Spencer Collins. Spencer was one of his best friends. They'd gone to high school together. Founded the BDSM Club Cuffs & Spurs together. Spencer ran their club night and day in Jackson Hole for the group. Cuffs & Spurs wouldn't be possible without Spencer guiding the helm. The rest of the members had ranches, tourist attractions, and other businesses to manage. But Spencer made certain everything ran

smoothly for the members and that those in the area who were in the lifestyle had a place to attend.

Spencer gave him a sardonic grin as he approached. While Carter was covered in dirt and grime from working in the elements in the stables and paddocks, Spencer appeared fresh and clean in his spotless jeans and crisp lemon linen dress shirt.

“Look what the cat dragged in. What can I do you for, Spencer? Good to see you, man,” Carter said, shaking his hand.

“Fuck, it’s hot. Thank heavens I work in an air-conditioned space,” Spencer muttered and returned the handshake.

“That just means you’re a pansy,” Carter teased. It was a long running joke that Spencer wasn’t a real cowboy, and only wore the black Stetson to attract submissives, considering he was one of the few members whose life and job wasn’t outdoors.

“Please, motherfucker, I did two tours in Iraq. I’m anything but soft and you know it.” Spencer snorted. His large frame rippled with the full bearing of a Master. Those tours had honed his best friend, made him hard, and he bore scars, both internal and external.

Carter offered a wry grin. “Just yanking your chain. Why don’t you come inside and cool off? I was just about to grab some lunch. You’re welcome to join me.”

“Dottie’s cooking?” Spencer asked.

“Of course. Do you really think I have the time or the inclination to stand over a stove?”

“Lead the way,” Spencer said with a nod toward the back door before he trailed Carter up the back steps to the porch.

Carter wiped his boots on the outside mat before he opened the back door and stepped inside the washroom. Cool air that would have made penguins feel at home blasted him. Carter sighed at the relief. Hot damn, but it was hotter than the blazes outside. The washroom—or mudroom—was the size of an extra-large walk in closet, and was a place he could store his boots and outdoor supplies when they were covered in too much

filth to cart through the house. There was also a top of the line washer and dryer, which Dottie had rumbling away. The woman was always cleaning something. In addition, there was an industrial sink where he could wash the dirt and grime from his hands, and occasionally his face, if warranted.

“Oh, Mister Carter and Mister Spencer, come have a seat at the table. I’ll fix you both up a plate,” Dottie Henderson said, bustling about the kitchen and dining area beyond. The kitchen exuded warmth and was one of the parts of the house Carter had put his stamp on. The ceiling was crème colored, with exposed wooden beams in the same honey colored wood as the floors. The extensive cabinetry was a shade deeper in color than the floors and housed just about every gadget known to man—for the kitchen, at least. It was his gift and something of a bribe for Dottie to keep her here. The industrial size stainless steel range would make a five-star chef weep tears of joy. And the refrigerator was also industrial size, which made it easier to overstock, since at times in the winter, roads became impassable.

They had a storage room in the basement as well, with deep freezers and extra shelf space for dry goods.

But it was the killer scents wafting in the air that made his mouth water. Without Dottie, he’d likely starve or live off microwavable dinners. She kept him fed and his house clean. The woman was worth her weight in pure gold. And her cooking was some of the finest in the county. Her chili had won the blue ribbon at the county fair three years running.

“Thank you, Dottie,” Carter said, washing his hands in the sink and putting his hat on the nearby hook inside the door.

Spencer did the same. Dottie was a stickler when it came to proper manners, but for her cooking, it was worth it. She was still an attractive woman, her dark hair streaked with silver strands and always pulled back away from her expressive face in a long braid. A little plump in the hips and thigh region, and a good foot and a half shorter than he, she’d been cooking and cleaning for the Jones

family going on twenty years. And since Carter's mom had passed a few years back, she'd taken on the role of surrogate mother.

As much as he owned the place, it was Dottie and her husband who ran him most of the time. He preferred to keep her happy because while she rarely showed any type of temper, she had no compunction about beating him over the head with a wooden spoon if she thought he was out of line. He and Spencer each took a seat at the large oak table, which was a shade darker than the gleaming honey floors. Dottie brought two plates and set them down before them.

"Dottie, you've outdone yourself as always. Tell me what I have to do to get you to come work for me," Spencer said, glancing at the loaded plate and licking his lips in anticipation. On the porcelain white plate was a beef brisket sandwich on thick slices of Texas toast, a mound of potato salad, and baked cinnamon apples for good measure.

Carter felt his own stomach growl in eager delight.

Dottie flushed, "Now, Mister Spencer, you know I wouldn't leave Mister Carter for all the money in the world."

Carter gave him a bemused smile at the first bite of potato salad. Spencer knew he'd have to fight Carter practically to the death for Dottie, because no way would he allow the woman to leave. Not when she cooked like a fucking dream.

"That's too bad," Spencer said and took a bite of the beef brisket sandwich, then emitted a muffled groan.

Dottie returned to the table and set down two tall glasses filled with sweet iced tea, and then a pitcher so they could refill it. "I'll just leave you boys to your lunch. Those sheets won't clean themselves."

"Thank you, Dottie. It's excellent as always," Carter said around a mouthful of brisket sandwich.

"Love you, Dottie," Spencer said, also eating his meal with relish. If there was one thing Spencer loved, it was food. He

might go through submissives like he changed his underwear, but he appreciated good food more than most. Carter believed it was the two tours in Iraq and eight years in the army that had done it. But that was his opinion.

“So, what’s up? You don’t normally leave Jackson Hole unless its poker night,” Carter said, studying his friend.

Nothing but crumbs remained of Spencer’s sandwich, and now he was plowing through the homemade potato salad. Still holding his fork, he swallowed and said, “Me and the boys are concerned. The knuckleheads elected that I come speak with you.”

“About?” Carter questioned, his body tight and rigid in his seat. They’d discussed him. What the fuck for?

Spencer cocked his head, his black eyes unwavering as he said, “Dude, you haven’t been to the club in almost a year. That’s a record, especially for you. And I know for damn sure you don’t have any of the subs coming out to the ranch. That bunch couldn’t keep a secret to save lives, as lovely and entertaining as they are.”

“I’ve had a particularly busy year with the ranch. Just because I’m not attending the club, doesn’t mean I’m celibate,” Carter said, folding his arms across his chest—even though that was precisely what he’d become.

After a long draught of iced tea, Spencer replied, seeming to choose his words carefully. “Normally, I would buy that and not press you. But you forget, I know you. And you haven’t been the same since your visit to Pleasure Island last August. I know there was a sub—”

“Careful,” Carter uttered, his voice deadly serious. He did not want to rehash the island or talk about Jenna with anyone. Not when the mere thought of her made his heart ache.

“Fuck that. You’ve been moping for almost a year. You searched for her and couldn’t find her. It’s time you moved on.

I'm saying this not out of spite but because I'm genuinely concerned," Spencer said.

Carter grimaced and traced the line of a bead of moisture on his glass before he replied, "Look, I know I haven't gone to the club lately. I will. I just—hell, Spencer, it's the same old subs there. I realize your concern and while I appreciate it—"

"Just come, tonight even. It will do you some good to get out of the house for a night. You're not a recluse but this past year you sure as shit have been acting like one."

Had he? Deep down he knew Spencer was right. Carter needed to move on and forget about the past. Jenna was lost to him, forever. As bitter a pill as it was to swallow, short of hiring a private investigator to track her down, there was nothing he could do about it. He'd been standing still, letting life move on around him while his heart bled into the ground at the loss. And Jenna obviously didn't want to be found—at least not by him—because if she did, she would be here.

"Fine. I'll come this evening. So you and the rest of the idiot brigade will get off my case," Carter agreed and shook his head. The thought of attending the club was about as appealing as watching paint dry, but he'd suffer through it.

"And the sub from the island?" Spencer urged, with a black slash of an eyebrow cocked.

"Give it a rest, will you? I'll think about it, but no more talk of her. I shouldn't have told you about her in the first place and wouldn't have if not for the tequila that night. But for now, I have horses that need to be taken care of in the stables," Carter said, shoving his chair back and standing up from the table, effectively ending the conversation in his mind. He grabbed his plate and glass and placed them in the sink for Dottie. If he so much as tried to put them in the dishwasher, he caught hell from her so he'd stopped doing it ages ago. That woman was scary when she was angry, and would feed him something horrid like tripe if he didn't follow her orders. Carter realized the irony in a Dom like

him taking orders from his housekeeper, but some things were better left alone.

He turned to find Spencer was behind him with his plate and cup. “Look, I’m not trying to piss you off, Carter. We’ve all been concerned for a while now. I’m not trying to lessen the impact of what you felt for the sub but it’s over. It’s been over for a while, and the only way you’re going to heal is by moving on. Best way to do that is to fuck her out of your system.”

“Save the Dom crap for a sub who needs it. May I remind you that I’m the founder of our little club?” Carter snapped, anger swirling in his chest.

“Yeah, well, start fucking acting like it instead of moping and growing more callouses,” Spencer said, setting his stuff in the sink and heading toward the door.

“I told you I would come tonight,” Carter growled to Spencer’s retreating back.

“See that you do,” Spencer said. “It’s Friday, the place should be hopping. And if you don’t, come Sunday, the boys and I will ream you out on poker night.”

“Get out of here before I change my mind,” Carter snapped, putting his hat back on his head and following Spencer out the back door.

“I’m going,” Spencer said, giving him a friendly middle finger salute as he climbed in his Dodge ram.

Ass.

He shook his head as Spencer drove down the lane, kicking up dust.

Was his friend right? Had Carter become a recluse in an effort to avoid the truth? As much as Spencer was his brother from another mother, he hated when the bastard was right.

Because there was truth in his friend’s words—he was right. Jenna was gone from Carter’s life. He’d searched for her and hadn’t been able to track her down. It was like she’d vanished. Even Jared was no help.

Had it all been a mirage? That was the question that woke him up at night. Had the emotion and the feelings he'd seen in her eyes, that he'd felt in her touch, been nothing but a fantasy? And why had she chosen to stay on the island? Why, after everything that had happened between them, had she walked away from him? And how had he been too blind to see it coming?