

Let Me In

By

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# Chapter One

"Let me in," he growled, sounding for all he was worth like the big bad wolf.

"No." Miranda could see him in her mind, standing there in a horribly expensive designer three piece suit or he could just as easily be in a pair of disreputable jeans along with cowboy boots that were practically worn to the nub from the hazards of ranching, a tee shirt that strained across that athletic, muscular chest of his and a hat that was in at least as bad condition as his boots. Either would fit his body obscenely well, cupping every curve, drawing her attention to where she knew she shouldn't be looking – his ass and the bulge that none of his pants could ever seem to quite conceal – which, in fact they tended to highlight instead. And she knew the impressive truth of what lay behind that perpetually straining zipper, and also knew how he could have made her cum a million times without ever touching her – amazing endowment completely aside.

This man was dangerous, with a capital DANGEROUS. He didn't need the enormous equipment he'd been born with. He'd been blessed with a dirty mind and even dirtier pairs of both lips and hands, but it had been his voice that had gotten her. He had always known exactly what to say to her to make her melt into her panties like butter on hot pavement. "Miranda."

There was no way he could see what she was doing, was there? She wondered, but for only a second. She pressed her body against the door as if it were he, leaning her head against what would have been his upper stomach and chest – he was that much taller than she was. She knew how the hard, long length of him felt against her, knew how those well muscled arms would close around her, knew how small he made her feel in comparison to him but at the same time making her feel safer than she ever had in her life. Completely safe from anything out there, anyway. From him she'd always had precious little protection – not that she'd really ever wanted or needed any, until now.

"I'm not going to ask again, little girl."

Those words, in that slightly chiding tone had her literally arching her hips against the door, as if in doing so she would conjure the feel of his familiar hardness pressing

back, insistently, against her flat tummy. She wanted him and she would have bet he could smell her scent even from behind the door.

"Go away, Mace. I don't want to see you," she said quietly, proud of just how steady it came out, no sign of quavering despite the way the rest of her was shaking. And she didn't hang around to argue with him about it, either, forcing herself to push away from the door she was using as a surrogate for him and wandering slowly back into the kitchen where she'd been fixing herself dinner to pick up the knife again and begin to chop celery for the casserole she was making.

Long moments later, she felt a prickling on the back of her neck and turned around to find him lounging casually against the kitchen wall, looking entirely unrepentant at having broken into and entered her apartment. "Mace! I clearly told you that I didn't want to see you!" She tried to yell, but yelling had never been her thing, nor had anger in general, and it ended up sounding more like she was whining.

He just stood there, grinning unrepentantly and dragging his eyes up and down her petite form in the small pink and white cotton belly shirt she was wearing along with a pair of daisy dukes – none of which she would ever have worn if she thought that she was going to actually be seeing anyone today – *especially* him. His look was so blatantly hungry that she had to stop herself from taking a step back, which would only have served to trap her even more effectively than he had already. There was only one way out of the kitchen, and that was past him.

Hands on her hips, Miranda glared at him. "You do realize that I could call the cops on you, don't you?"

His eyebrow went up, but that annoying grin was still there. "You could, if you could get past me to get to a phone."

He was right, damn him; her land line was in the living room, next to her favorite chair, as was her cell since she was charging it. Damn it – she hated it when he was right!

"And then there's the fact that I've known Sheriff Hawkins since we were in grade school together, and I make a very large annual contribution to the P.A.L., to say nothing of the fact that I'm his first son's godfather, *and* I sit on the city council that decides whether or not he remains the sheriff of our good town."

Randa rolled her eyes at him, desperately wishing he would just go away, feeling her body already responding – against her will – to his closeness, knowing full well that he could see the way her nipples had peaked beneath the thin cotton material of her top. Why, oh why, hadn't she worn a blasted bra? At least she could console herself with the fact that he couldn't possibly know just how wet her panties were. At least not for certain, although she was pretty sure that he suspected as much, because they always were around him.

He wasn't done challenging her threat, though. "Lastly, I think you've forgotten that, five years ago or so, you gave me a set of keys to your place, in what was apparently a weak moment, when you were feeling particularly charitable towards me. One that I'm betting you're regretting right about now. Or maybe a better choice of words is that you've blocked it out because you don't find it convenient or pleasant to remember at the moment," he taunted as she watched him expectantly. Then held up his thumb and index finger, from which dangled a set of spare keys on a lanyard that she recognized because she had made it when she'd gone through a beading phase years ago.

"Fuck me." Miranda sighed under her breath.

That grin just got bigger and happier at her unfortunate choice of words. "That was the general idea, Randa, although for some reason you seem surprisingly reluctant to do something you know is going to end with you screaming my name at the top of your lungs while your pussy contracts helplessly around my fingers and in my mouth." He pushed himself away from the wall, taking up that much more of the precious little space in her small kitchen. "Although I can't say as I understand why you wouldn't want me to do that to you, myself." Several octaves lower he crooned, "And you know damned well that I can and will do everything I just said I would."

Despite the fact that her body had spasmed at his words and the husky tone with which he had delivered them, she kept her face a careful blank and put her hand out. "Give me the keys, Mace."

They still hung there enticingly. "You're welcome to try to acquire them from me at any time, Miranda." He took what was, for him, a small step towards her. "Please, honey, come and try to take these away from me? I promise I'll make that part of things

very easy on you – although I can promise you that the rest of what's going to happen from there is going to be very, very hot and hard – on you and in you."

She withdrew her hand, visions of what it would cost to replace her locks dancing in her head, knowing that even if she was able to somehow get the ones he had in his hand, that didn't mean that he hadn't made other copies.

It was hard enough to do battle with him in general, but she was having to fight herself, too, as always, whenever he was anywhere near the vicinity. It was all she could do to keep her eyes on the worn linoleum beneath her bare feet, trying to stop herself from letting her eyes travel lazily from the tips of his worn boots – he'd proven her second guess about what he was wearing to be true – up. She wanted to see those impossibly long denim covered legs, heavily muscled calves and broad, hard thighs, past the obscene way the fabric clung to and thus outlined his impressive manhood, over what she knew was a taut, flat belly, across those clearly delineated pecs and shoulders so broad they had even the pliable cotton fabric straining to contain them. She was shuddering to hold herself in check even before she got to his neck and face in her mind. Crossing her arms defensively over her chest, she leaned back against the counter in a move that she should have known he would have taken as the kind of surrender her mind didn't want it to be, but that her body demanded.

In two steps he was standing in front of her, dwarfing her as he always had. Although, the dramatic differences in their sizes had only ever made her feel protected and safe around him, never threatened in any way, despite the acutely intimate nature of their relationship. He wasn't even touching her yet. Not that she didn't know that that was what he wanted. It was what he'd *always* wanted from her, and had been more than willing to pay her for – in one way or the other – if she would have agreed to it. She knew that, if she had but said the word, he would have kept her in a fashion to which she would have liked to have become accustomed. In return, he wouldn't have been at her just on the occasional weekend when he could break free from business or the ranch, but as close to twenty-four/seven as he could have arranged it around his workaholic tendencies.

Mace stood there, staring down at her, wondering what was going through that pretty brain of hers as she stood there, visibly trembling. He knew – as surely as he knew that if he slipped his fingers down the front of those tiny shorts of hers to split those soft

feminine folds they would come back dripping wet – it wasn't from fear. It wasn't like her to be cowed by him in any way. Even though he took every possible excuse to tan her behind. Never letting circumstances or his feelings for her get in the way of meting out discipline that could become quite harsh at times. She had never once cringed away from his touch or, indeed, seemed in the least submissive to him, really. One of the things he liked best about Miranda LaVoie was that, despite the pleasantly unexpected nature of their relationship, she insisted on meeting him on a level playing field. She was at least as independent and stubborn as he was. Although, he wasn't at all sure that it was her usual nature, but rather something she was forcing herself to do in order not to be hurt again, requiring it of herself so that it might become second nature. The only time he could truly call her his submissive was when he had driven her past the point of being able to struggle against his will, as well as her own, when his lips and tongue and cock had eradicated every coherent thought from her mind but that she was his to do with as he pleased.

And his ultimate pleasure was – almost always – her own.

His hand came up to cup her chin in the gentlest of touches, forcing her to look up at him. He liked the desire he could already see burning strongly in those strikingly beautiful eyes that were nearly Elizabeth Taylor violet. But he didn't like the tension or the tentativeness he also saw there. That was new and unwelcome, as far as he was concerned.

He knew that he had overstepped his bounds with her; not that there had ever been any that were fixed between them, really. Despite the bravado she always presented to him – forcing herself to never back down, never shy away from him – he had known that she was – emotionally and psychologically – as skittish as a feral filly when they'd first gotten together. His intuition, which was almost always dead on accurate, had told him that someone had treated her very badly in her past. But despite his somewhat less than gentle poking into that situation, she had never confided in him exactly what had happened. That was probably a good thing that kept him out of jail, because if she had told him and it was as bad as he thought it might be, he'd have to kill the son of a bitch, no questions asked.



But they'd had this strange, wonderful relationship for quite a while now, and the shadows he'd seen in her eyes when he'd first taken her had faded completely, he'd thought. Although now he was staring into evidence that contradicted that belief, knowing that he had inadvertently been the cause of her turmoil.

Thankfully, there had been only the occasional upset between them. Neither one of them was really thrilled with the idea of backing down. It – and how busy he had been – had kept them separated for these past ten days, and he knew that she was just stubborn enough to let it keep them apart until he capitulated.

Only that wasn't going to happen. Oh, he might well let her think that she'd won to a certain extent, but he would know the truth. If he could get her to agree to a more formalized relationship, then he would count it as a victory, even if he had to give in – just this once – on this relatively small matter.

Only one other thing had ever come between them like this before in their eight-year history together. He had very nearly lost her because he'd been stupid and arrogant and macho and had pushed for something that she didn't want, pushing her away from him in the process. Mace wasn't willing to let this cause a permanent rift between them, especially since it was such a stupid, superficial thing. But it did point out a problem area in their relationship, such as it was, and he'd come over here today intent on rectifying the entire situation, to his advantage, of course. He planned to make sure that their roles – which had always been rather loosely characterized because that was the way she seemed most comfortable – became much better defined. Which was likely going to keep that haunted look on her face for a while, at least until he could get things ironed out between them. If she had been any other woman, he probably wouldn't have bothered, but Miranda was worth pretty much any effort to him, although he certainly couldn't be sure that the same was true for her. She seemed entirely too willing to give him up if it meant that she could keep her blasted independence.

For someone who was – at least in the most casual sense of the word – supposed to be his submissive, she was the least clingy, most cantankerous woman he'd ever handled. She challenged him at every turn – especially when they were new – landing herself perpetually over his lap. It used to begin, nearly every time they were together, with her there, or bent over the back of the couch, or the edge of the bed or a straight

backed chair in the middle of the living room. He'd have to tame her before he could take her, every time. And even then – exhausted, with her still stinging bottom pressed into the mattress, she would fight him until she was exhausted from it, until he overpowered her and made her his, by his – and her – own raw, passionate declarations, over the objection of her mind but with the complete consent of her body.

Luckily, he enjoyed the challenge that she represented, especially since she seemed to thrive under his attentions; the ecstasy as well as the agony that he brought to her. "You are one gorgeous girl, Miranda Kiley LaVoie," he breathed, and he was easily close enough that she could smell the coffee – black, two sugars – on his breath as he did so.

Her eyebrow went up and he didn't like to see that she was biting her lip tentatively. "Even with short hair?"