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Pamela
Labud



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UNBRIDLED

RIDE A COWBOY 3

Ride A Cowboy 3:

Unbridled

By

Pamela Labud

Ride a Cowboy 3: Unbridled by Pamela Labud

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Unbridled

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Dedication

For Bill, my own true hero

Chapter One

Avery, Texas, 1881

“Smug bastard,” Lily Barnett cursed, her parasol at a tilt over her shoulder. The sun hovered low in the afternoon sky while she sat in her buggy at the very edge of the newly dug ravine that now connected her creek to the MacReynold land. As had been their agreement, the last two weeks, in exchange for water rights, Wade MacReynold had met his part of the bargain. For each week’s worth of water she’d granted him, he’d spent a night pleasuring her.

Lily licked her lips as she watched him work. With his shirt off, his tanned skin shining and his muscles flexing, he continued to fortify the trench that kept his cattle alive. By all appearances, he was just another rancher serious about his business. To Lily, however, he was pure cane candy on a stick.

On the surface, it had seemed a sound business deal at the time. In fact, Lily had thought herself quite clever since she was the one being serviced by the stud, instead of the other way around. For a former prostitute who now ran a brothel, the arrangement was quite the coup.

But, something had happened at their last meeting. She’d gone from simply enjoying sex with Wade to downright craving it. Too late, she

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realized that screwing Wade was akin to getting hooked on laudanum. The sex had been all smooth and sweet in the beginning, but now her wanting him had become an itch she couldn't scratch. All sorts of riotous things were going on in her body. The memory of his kisses burned her skin where he'd touched her, which was pretty much every inch of her body. Every time she dozed she slipped into a dream about the two of them together, their limbs entwined together, their skin hot and damp. At odd times she could swear the heady scent of lavender and leather still hung in the air reminding her of their last night together.

Why, even the very thought of Wade naked and beside her, sent a rush of desire so powerful it went straight through to her core, a rush of emotion so strong that it stole the breath from her chest and stirred the aching need between her legs. Her condition was getting worse by the minute.

The last six days had been pure torture.

Finally, Wade stopped working, put down his shovel, and pulled the canteen from his belt. Wearing a possum-eating grin, he nodded at her and then proceeded to take a long, deep swallow. Transfixed, she watched the muscles of his neck work up and down with each mouthful. Then, once he'd had his fill, he raised the vessel higher and poured a generous amount over his head, face, and shoulders.

Lily nearly died on the spot.

Tossing the canteen, he smiled back at her.

"Morning, Miz Barnett," he said in a slow drawl.

"Mr. MacReynolds," she said, tight lipped and short.

"A mighty fine day, isn't it?" he asked, motioning to the afternoon sky that was full of pinks and blues and wisps of clouds fading in the distance.

Lily glanced skyward and shrugged. "It is." Of course she didn't care about the weather. The truth was she wasn't able to take her eyes off of him. His hard muscled body beckoned her, and Lily struggled to keep from jumping off of her buggy seat and ripping those tight denims right off of his body.

Wade obviously sensed her intentions. As she watched, a very

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noticeable bulge appeared in his pants. When he shifted his stance, a blatant attempt to entice her even more, her heart almost stopped. All sorts of images ran through her mind. Wade on top of her. Wade behind her. Wade inside of her...

Lily almost fell off of her seat.

Damned cowboy, she cursed.

"Miz Barnett, you look a mite discombobulated. Is anything wrong?"

Lily swallowed. She wanted to yell to him that he was wrong! Wrong for her. Wrong to be in her bed. Wrong to be in her life. But she took the cowardly way out and just plain lied.

"Nothing. I just came to see how my new business venture was doing."

His gaze wandered up and down her, sizing her up no doubt. "He's doing just fine. In fact, if you're lucky, you might see a little extra return on your investments tonight. He reached down and hung his right thumb just over his belt buckle, dragging the fabric low enough so she could see the top of his pubic hair line. Again he shifted his stance, cocking his hips in such a manner that his erection seemed to grow even bigger.

Lily nearly fainted.

"Of course. I'll see you tonight then?"

"Yes ma'am." He turned and, bending over giving her full view of his ass, picked up his shovel and went back to work.

Lily couldn't watch any more. She grabbed her buggy whip, gave her horse smack on its hindquarters, and set off back to the brothel at high speed.

Wade waited until he was sure she was gone then looked back over his shoulder. He couldn't help but smile. Lily was the cutest damn thing when her temper was up. He was glad to see her as bothered as he had been. More than glad. Satisfied.

After their second time together she had surely put a hex on him. Although he'd gotten up each morning and spent his days working the ranch, Lily had never left him. She consumed his thoughts in the same

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way a plague of locusts devour an Illinois cornfield. At night, he could hardly get through an hour's sleep without visions of her nestled up beside him and her arms wrapped around him, while he explored every damn inch of her tantalizing body.

Glancing back, he watched the cloud of dust settle where her wagon had been. He could have sworn her scent of lavender and musk still hung on the air. It could have been his imagination but, even now, he could swear she was just a hairsbreadth away from him.

Off in the distance a rumble sounded. The ground shook beneath him, and he felt the thunderous energy vibrate all the way through to his bones.

Turning around he saw a stampede of wild mustangs roaring across the flatlands in the distance. They cut a swath against the horizon, truly a sight to behold. Grace and beauty, the animals roared through life without a care for anything but the next moment, the next breath, the next heartbeat.

Wade knew Lily must have been that free once. In his mind's eye he imagined how beautiful she must have been before bad circumstances had gotten a hold on her. Wild and beautiful and unbridled. Nothing could have stopped her then. And damned if he didn't want her to be that person again.

Two years before, in prison for a bank robbery he hadn't committed, he'd been taught a hard lesson in life. Because of that, he was pretty certain he'd never have much to offer a woman. Before Lily, he'd decided that as soon as his cattle were sold, he would sell the ranch and pay his restitution. He'd never been one to plan for the future because he'd been too busy getting through the shit that was the present.

The only difference in his life now was his arrangement with Lily, and as soon as the end of September came, once he took his herd to market, that would be it. Their arrangement would be over, and with no reason to stay, he would have to move on. His plan had been to hire on as a ranch hand somewhere, and hope his employers wouldn't ask too many questions about his past.

Being with Lily made him want to set down roots and spend the

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rest of his life in her bed. Hell, he would be happy to continue their weekly meetings until the end of his days. Of course, to be honest, he doubted he could continue only seeing her once a week. Damn it all. With her gone, he was a man lost in the desert and dying for a tiny sip of water. A sweet, cool taste of Lily. That was what he thirsted for.

“Well, hell,” he said, maybe he wasn’t going to ever get out of the wilderness his life had turned into, but at least he could enjoy a little bit of solace where he could find it. Being with Lily gave his soul ease, and more and more he found himself wanting to return the favor. The more time that passed, the more he was certain that Lily was destined to be his. And you don’t fuck with destiny.

* * * * *

After the longest day she’d ever spent, Lily welcomed the sunset. It had been an unusually hot day, even for West Texas in August. Or maybe it was just the growing excitement she felt every time she thought of Wade and what they would be doing tonight. Now, sitting before her dressing table, getting ready for her visit with Wade, she was so hot and aroused that she swore she could see the steam rising from her skin.

That wasn’t the worst of it. As much as she wanted him, she dreaded knowing that come daylight he’d be gone again and she’d be left with another six days without him in her life, in her bed.

But, it wasn’t just the sex. Something about Wade made her want to do more. To be more. To be a better person, even.

She’d been forced into prostitution at a very young age, and in the years since she’d never been ashamed of what she’d done to survive. There had been plenty of other women around with high morals and empty pockets. They wasted their lives cleaning and sewing, scrubbing floors and cooking, and so on. Giving every minute of their existence for the chance to be rescued by a man of good moral standing who would do the honorable thing and care for them the rest of their lives.

Pah! Lily was smarter than that. She knew that men took what they wanted anyway, so what was the harm in being nice to them if it got her

something in return?

Sure, Lily was no different from any other woman. She wanted to fall in love. Who didn't? But good men were few and far between, and just because a man married a woman didn't mean he'd love her and take care of her. To Lily's way of thinking, marriage was a contract that only benefited the man. A married woman traded her freedom for food, safety, and the chance at having children. If she was lucky, her husband wouldn't come home drunk on corn whiskey and beat her to half to death on a regular basis.

If a woman wasn't lucky, she put up with the beatings and hoped he'd fall under a wagon full of explosives or have some other accident before he beat her to death. Of course, then she'd face starvation again without a man to keep her. She'd probably also have a whole passel of young'uns hanging on her skirts starving along with her.

Lily cursed as she tied back her hair for the tenth time in an hour. The damned muggy night was making her curls go all wild, and no matter what she did they sprang out, giving her an appearance of a porcupine in heat.

"I love it when you wear your hair down, Lily."

Lily jumped to her feet. Whirling around she saw Wade emerge from the shadows.

"What are you doing here? How did you get in?"

Wade smiled. "I climbed up the trellis outside your balcony."

"You cur! Get out this minute."

He stepped closer. "What if I don't want to leave?" Before Lily could answer, he closed the distance between them. Pulling her into his arms, he kissed her long and hard.

Lily was sure she ought to have him thrown out of the house, maybe even off the balcony. Yes. That's exactly what she would do, as soon as he was done kissing her. And after her breath came back.

But his kisses were as sweet as honey, and she couldn't turn away from him. Trembling, she felt as if he would devour her at any moment—or die trying.

At last he pulled away, both of them gasping for air.

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“Easy does it, Lily, or you’ll be the end of us both.”

Dizzy, weak, and hungry to touch him even more, Lily trembled. “I don’t know – I mean, you have to leave. I’m not ready.” She stepped back a pace and out of his arms. “You’re not ready.”

He smiled at her, and damned if he didn’t wear that same smug grin as if it were the battle of Gettysburg and he’d just taken the flag. “Oh, I’m ready, all right.” He put his hands on his hips and glanced down at the bulging erection in his denims. “I’ve bathed and shaved, and even put on a clean shirt.” He stepped closer until she could feel his every breath on her skin. “And, Lily...”

“What?”

“I’m not wearing any underdrawers.”

“Oh.” The breath went plain out of her. Retreating two more steps she collided with the four-poster bed. Her mouth went dry.

“You know what I’m going to do?”

Lily shook her head no although, if the way the flood of desire surged through her was any indication, she had a pretty good idea.

“I’m going to take you right this minute. I’m going to lay you down, pull off that pretty robe, spread those luscious legs, and have my fill of sweet Lily lovin.”

“Wait,” she said, anticipation twisting around her spine, a coiling spring so tight she thought her backbone might break from the force of it. “This isn’t how it’s done. I’m the one who calls the shots, here, cowboy.” Sure, she’d drummed up a great deal of false bravado in her tone. She had to. Otherwise, he would run roughshod right over her.

“You made a deal with me, Lily, and so far I think I’ve kept up my part of the bargain. One week of water in exchange for one night of pleasure, that’s what you said. That is good as far as it goes, but pleasure, Lily, real pleasure is risky. It’s exciting and enjoyable and something I can’t give you if you won’t let me.”

“I’ve been letting you.”

He shook his head. “Not really. You’ve been keeping me at arm’s length, only letting go so much. You have to throw down those petticoats and let me in. Pleasure, real pleasure is about abandoning inhibitions.