

The Trouble with Packer
By Beth Williamson

Wyoming, 1875

Life for a cowboy tends to twist and buck something fierce. A cowboy learns quickly to never expect anything but the unexpected.

Packer was playing poker down at the Blue Diamond Saloon as he usually did on Friday nights after payday. He couldn't help but see Tracey as soon as she walked in, no, not walked in, *burst* in. A beautiful redhead in a dirty hole like this didn't happen every day, especially one dressed in jeans and chaps with a Stetson pulled low on her forehead and a blue bandanna around her slender neck.

The sounds of the tinny piano, the deep voices of the cowhands around him, and the raucous laughter faded. All he heard was his breath rasping and his heart beating. He tasted the rotgut on his tongue that he'd just slung back. He felt the weight of his Colts on his thighs. He smelled the stale whiskey and chaw on the rough wooden floor.

Tracey's sharp eyes were blazing fire. He could almost see the heat in the cool December air. Seemed like Lady Luck was about to kick his ass.

His hands tightened on the cards, but otherwise, he kept his reaction deep down inside where the dust gathered. No one must know she was his weakness. They would use her to control him. Or punish him. Either way, there'd be a whole lot of trouble. Packer hated trouble, but sometimes there wasn't a choice.

She looked around until she spotted him. As she stalked toward the table, people moved out of her way like the parting of the Red Sea. The look in her eyes would probably make a lesser man wet himself.

Packer Elliott was not that kind of man.

He was hard because he had to be. Orphaned at the age of eight, Packer lived on the streets of Cheyenne until he was sixteen and was big enough to work the range. If you were quiet enough, folks talked around you all the time. Packer got quite a bit of information that way. Information that was worth a lot to some. He only had himself to look out for, so he took chances others might not take. Until her.

Tracey slammed into his life like a little red-headed tornado, all full of fire and vinegar, and hot, sweet honey. Before he knew it, all he could think about was her. He daydreamed about her soft skin when he should've been listening. He fantasized about the smell of her hair when he should've been collecting his money. The people he dealt with were growing suspicious. He had to throw them off the scent somehow. This was his opportunity.

When she reached his table, he stopped her cold by standing and throwing his cards on the table with a sharp flick of his wrist. As the ace of clubs floated down toward the dusty floor, he met her steaming gaze with an icy blue one of his own.

"Just what the hell do you want?" he growled.

*

The trouble with Packer was that he didn't have any limits. He simply pushed his way around the world as he wanted to, no matter what or who stood in his way. Tracey decided enough was enough. This latest bit with Margaret with the big breasts was the end of the line for Tracey Carroll.

Originally from Michigan, Tracey had moved to Wyoming with her father when he took

a job teaching school for children at the biggest ranch outside of Cheyenne, the Rusty Spur. She had grown up amongst cattle and horses – they were in her blood. When she was old enough, she begged Mr. Wilson, the owner of the Rusty Spur, to hire her as a wrangler. He, of course, refused.

Tracey didn't accept the refusal.

Two years later, he finally gave in and she was a full-fledged wrangler on the ranch. She was good too. Really good. Until Packer distracted her.

He came into her life like a stampede, hard and fast with a lot of dust and confusion. When the dust finally settled, she found herself fascinated by him. Aloof, enigmatic, with intense blue eyes, he was unlike any of the cowboys she'd known. Oh, some of them were stand-offish, but none like this. It was like staring at a jar of peppermints without a penny. She wanted some.

She didn't know exactly what it was about Packer that appealed to her. His black hair was long enough to brush his collar. His eyes were blue or grey, depending on his mood. His full lips were framed by a dark mustache. He was tall, but not huge. His gait was rangy, a long-legged stride that caught her eye the moment she'd seen him. He had the presence of a man used to his skin, comfortable with the world around him. Like a big cat.

It started as an experiment. How close she could get to him before he shooed her away. She got much closer than she'd ever thought. Close enough to kiss... close enough to touch... close enough to get stupid over him. It was distracting to the point that she was making mistakes in her job. Mistakes that could cost her an appendage or two or perhaps even her life.

Tracey was not that stupid. She had given herself a mental slap and tried to concentrate on her job. But it was as if she couldn't help herself. The more she tried to stay away from him, the closer she wanted to be to him. He was addictive to her heart and her body. Dammit all to hell, she had done something really asinine and fallen in love with him. A drifter. She knew better. Well, her head knew better, but her heart was as ornery as an old bull.

Then she found out Packer was sparking with that slut Margaret. She rode down to the Blue Diamond as fast as her sorrel gelding, Blaze, could carry her, so angry she could chew a nail in half. She was dirty, furious, and ready to kick Packer's nicely formed ass.

Then he looked at her like nothing had ever happened between them and cussed at her in front of all the regulars at the Blue Diamond. Now her back was really up.

"You forgot something at the bunkhouse, Packer," she spat. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out the scented note she'd found under his pillow (she was *not* snooping) and tossed it down after the ace.

His eyes flicked briefly to the paper then back to hers. In their blue depths, she thought she saw a glimmer of regret, but it was gone as quickly as it had arrived.

"It ain't mine."

Tracey gritted her teeth together. The letter only started out '*My darling Packer*' – no it wasn't his! How silly of her to make a mistake like that.

"Pick it up and leave." He said in a low voice.

"Make me." Tracey stuck her chin up in the air and widened her stance. No wilting miss, she was strong and agile, even if she didn't stand much higher than five foot two inches. She had to be strong to wrestle calves and lasso steers.

"Wilson don't like you coming down here on Fridays and you know it."

Oh, so that was his tactic. Make her think she was in trouble.

"Who's gonna tell him?"

"Me."

Tracey sucked in a breath. "You wouldn't."

"Yes, I would. Get the hell out of here, girl." His tone was menacing, but he didn't scare her. It just made her that much angrier.

"Then I'll have to tell Wilson about—"

She never finished her sentence. Packer scooped up the letter and had her arm in a vice grip. He dragged her out of the saloon so fast, her boots barely touched the ground. His hand was firm, but it wasn't hurting her. She stood beside her horse in seconds and Packer threw her up on saddle.

Packer was so tall, his head was at her shoulder, and his brown Stetson nearly touched her jacket.

He looked up at her with his unreadable eyes. "Go home, Tracey."

Tracey narrowed her gaze. "No."

His lips tightened. "Go home. Now."

She leaned down and looked at him fully under the brim of his hat. "Not without you. Packer, I... what's going on?"

He looked behind him. In a loud voice he said, "If you won't go by yourself, Tracey, I'll make sure you get back to the Rusty Spur. I don't want Wilson chapping my ass about it."

Tracey saw Ben Wilson and Avery Taylor standing at the door with big grins on their faces. Ben tipped his hat to her and laughed when she stuck out her tongue. They were both wranglers on the Rusty Spur and had helped initiate her years ago. Now they treated her like another cowpoke. That included laughing when she was in trouble. She was just one of the men.

Packer grabbed her reins and walked her gelding over to his quarterhorse. Within moments, they were headed down the street. She saw Packer survey the front of the saloon as they passed by. Curious. Ben was still standing there watching.

Tracey kept her silence until they were miles out of town. It was going to take an hour to get back to the ranch and she was determined to get the truth out of Packer. It was dusk and the sky was painted by a broad brush of orange and pink. They were near the line shack at southeast edge of the Rusty Spur. The temperature was dropping and their breaths blew out like little clouds.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on?" she asked.

"No."

Not much annoyed Tracey more than not knowing the truth. "Why did you have a letter from Margaret?"

"I told you it wasn't mine."

"Bullshit!" Cursing tended to pop out when she was annoyed, even worse when she got angry. Her Irish temper got the best of her.

"You're not going to leave this alone, are you?" She could almost hear his teeth grinding together.

"No."

Tracey watched him in surprise as he turned suddenly and headed toward the line shack. The sound of the horse's hooves echoed off the rocks on the hills nearby. When he arrived, he jumped off the horse and secured his horse beneath the lean-to beside the shack.

Tracey kneed her gelding and started after him. She didn't know what Packer was doing, but she wasn't about to go back to the ranch without him. She always followed her heart and nowadays it always led her straight to him.

*

Packer was pissed. Tracey pushed his buttons like no other woman – for better or worse. It was passion pure and simple. If he wasn't thinking about getting her under him naked, he was thinking about strangling her.

He knew she'd follow him and he wasn't disappointed. He was squatting in front of the fireplace laying the starter wood down when the door opened. As he pulled a match from his pocket, she slammed the door. He lit the match and started the fire.

“What the hell are you doing, Packer?”

He finished lighting the fire and could practically feel her seething behind him. Let her wait. She might have just ruined six month's worth of work. He would punish her for that... using every trick he knew.

When Packer stood, she was looking mighty put out. Her arms were folded across her waist, which pushed her more than ample bosom up like a bountiful plate of treats. She was tapping her booted foot, and her lips were pursed in a way that made it look like she'd been sucking lemons.

Whoa, better not think about sucking... yet.

Lord, Jesus, this woman had him tied into knots. He could already feel himself hardening in his denims. They were growing tight enough to cut off the blood supply. She squeezed her arms a bit tighter, and the plump push of her breasts was the final straw.

Before she could protest, she was wrapped in his arms, flush against him. Deliciously soft and supple like a cat. He swooped his mouth down on hers. The moment his lips touched hers, the resulting heat was enough to scorch.

Her breasts pushed into his chest and he could feel the hard points of her nipples. He wanted to touch them, lick them, and bite them. He captured her moan as it escaped into his mouth.

“Packer...”

“Tracey, I need you, sugar. Please say yes.”

Her hips swayed pushing his swollen member into her belly. He gritted his teeth against the pleasure that ricocheted through him. They had only kissed and touched, never taken that final step to consummate their union. But oh God, he wanted to... needed to. Tracey was in his blood. There was no fighting it. She was meant to be his.

*

Tracey's head was whirling, her stomach was twirling, and her mons was throbbing. Packer had never taken their relationship past kissing and touching, but now... Now he wanted more. Did she? Was she ready to give Packer what he wanted?

It wasn't a question to be answered, because it didn't really need to be asked. She was already his. When he stalked toward her like a dark panther, a shiver danced up her spine. She knew, way down deep inside, that tonight was the night. She would truly be his in body and soul.

Any worries or concerns she had before she walked into the cabin flew away like dandelion fluff on a summer breeze. Now was her time with Packer.

He unbuttoned her shirt and removed it with her chemise in one swift movement. The cool air of the cabin contrasted with the heat of her skin sending shivers down her body. His blue eyes were nearly completely black as his eyes dilated drinking in the sight of her bare breasts.

“Incredible.” He whispered as he reached out to cup them. As his callused thumbs swept back and forth across her nipples, her knees grew weaker and her drawers grew wetter.

“Packer, I...”

When his mouth closed over one nipple, Tracey lost all ability to even think. She just let

herself feel. The roughness of his tongue, the scrape of his whiskers, and the jolt of his teeth on her sensitive skin heightened her senses. She watched him lave and suckle her with fascination. His tongue was hot and wet and felt incredible. She wanted more.

His strong arms swept her up and he kissed her deeply as he walked toward the small bed in the corner of the cabin. He set her on her feet, then ripped off his shirt to lay on the rough wool blanket. His eyes never left hers. She couldn't stop looking at his chest. It was covered with the same raven hair that spilled down his shoulders, wide with bronzed skin stretched over muscle and sinew. Scars dotted here and there on that beautiful skin. She reached out and traced them with her finger.

When she glanced into his eyes, he smiled. "Yes or no?"

She pulled off her trousers and drawers, and lay down on the bed, her heart thumping like a drum in her chest. Let it never be said that Tracey was afraid to take what she wanted. Packer shucked his pants faster than she could follow and finally, finally, he was naked against her. Chest to chest, leg to leg, lips to lips.

Heart to heart.

His hands traveled up and down her body, touching and teasing, teaching her what it meant to be with a man. His cock was hard against her hip. She should be afraid of it, but she wasn't. She was excited and she wanted *more*. His hand landed between her legs and began to caress her nubbin of pleasure until she was even wetter than before.

"Now, Packer, please." She was surprised to hear herself beg, but damn it all, she needed him. Packer slowly lowered himself onto her body and parted her legs. His body was warm, no hot. She felt every hair and callus on his body rub against her and she arched into him.

Inch by inch, he entered. They fit together like a key in a lock. *Snick*. Stroke by stroke, he drove her insane, making her pant and beg for more. By the time he was settled deep inside, Tracey knew she would spend the rest of her life with Packer. Nothing would ever be this perfect.

He taught her how to love, how to touch and tease, and how to step off the edge and fly. They flew together on a wave of pure ecstasy, their mouths fused, their hearts beating as one. Packer's forehead pressed into hers as their breaths mingled.

"Jesus."

Tracey smiled. "Nope. Tracey."

He grinned and slid off her onto the bed. He tucked her under his arm and Tracey was not surprised that she fit like a glove. Her hand wandered around his chest, learning the feel and texture of the man she fell in love with.

"I never expected to find a woman like you, Tracey," he said. "I've been alone most of my life."

Tracey kissed his shoulder. "You don't have to be alone anymore." She could hear his heart beating beneath her ear.

Packer hugged her and kissed the top of her head. "Good. I think I like you right where you are. I hope you never leave."

She grinned and hugged him back.

"You probably want to know about Margaret."

Well, that wasn't what she wanted to hear, but now that she had, Tracey's doubts came flooding back.

"I wasn't doing anything with her but getting information." He tipped her chin up to look into her eyes. "You are the only woman I've touched since I've been at the Rusty Spur."

The depths of his eyes revealed only truth. Tracey's heart lightened as she accepted the fact that she believed him.

"So what's going on then? Why did she write you a note?"

He sighed and ran a hand down his face. "Let's get dressed and head back to the ranch. I need you to meet someone."

After a silent ride to the Rusty Spur, they dismounted, and walked into the ranch house together. Tracey felt a little odd holding his hand, but at the same time, it felt right. The size of the ranch house always intimidated her. Mr. Wilson did very well for himself. The carpet in the foyer was thicker than a loaf of bread and the lamps all sparkled with crystal.

They walked in and Mrs. Morris, the housekeeper, said hello and pointed to the parlor. Tracey's stomach was doing flips by the time they walked in the room. Inside she found Mr. Wilson and a stranger. Packer nodded to him and he nodded back. There was something going on and Tracey didn't know what, but she sure as hell was going to find out.

Mr. Wilson was in his forties with a muscular build and sandy blonde hair. His sharp brown eyes were lined by years spent in the sun. His mouth was in a tight, white line and his hands rested impatiently on his hips, not too far from the pistols that rode there.

The stranger was dressed all in black, from his hat to his boots. His vest was crackled black leather that had obviously seen many years. His hair was a dark red color, sharply contrasting with the black. His green eyes regarded both of them with no emotion.

"So, Packer, want to tell me why this Marshal is sniffing up my ass?" Mr. Wilson asked. *Marshal?* The stranger was a Marshal?

"My name's Rafe. Packer is working for me. Has been for two years now." The man said. Tracey couldn't keep her mouth shut. "What do you mean he's working for you?"

The Marshal looked at her briefly, but then moved his gaze to Packer. "She yours?"

Now that nearly made her kick him, until she heard Packer's response.

"Yep, she's mine. She's gonna stay that way too."

Marshal nodded. "I figured one day you'd find a filly you liked. She looks like a spirited one. Be sure to tame her right."

Packer grabbed Tracey's arm before she could hit the other man. *Arrogant bastard!* Packer's eyes warned her to control her temper. Tracey took a deep breath and tried to focus on the conversation and find out what she needed to know.

The Marshal looked back at Mr. Wilson. "Packer was arrested two years ago for selling ranch supplies that didn't rightly belong to him. I was the one that arrested him. I saw an opportunity to take a criminal and turn him into something we could use."

"A mole." Mr. Wilson stated flatly.

"Something like that. Packer blends in nicely. No one suspects him of working for the law."

Tracey's stomach did a flip, then a flop. Packer was working for a Marshal. He was also a criminal. Did it matter that he was a reformed criminal working for the law? No, it didn't matter. She wanted to stay with him no matter if it was Packer's Gang or Packer's Silver Star.

"Why are you on the Rusty Spur?" Mr. Wilson demanded.

"Rustling. There were herds of cattle brought to market over the past year that didn't quite match each other's brands if you know what I mean. We tracked them back to this area, and your ranch seemed to be the starting point. Packer here listened and learned a lot."

Tracey frowned. "From Margaret?"

Packer winked at her and gave her a crooked smile. "You'd be surprised what ex-lovers will tell you. I learned a lot from others too."

"So who's behind it?" she asked.

"Ben Wilson." Packer said without flinching.

Tracey's mouth dropped open. Impossible. Ben had worked on the Rusty Spur for at least five years. Nice man, always had a nod and a smile for her.

"Are you sure?" Mr. Wilson asked.

"Yes, we're sure and now we have the evidence to arrest him. I came to you Mr. Wilson to let you know what we were doing and why. You gonna give us any trouble?" The Marshal's gaze was as cold as well water in January. His hand crept toward the big pistol that rode his hip.

Mr. Wilson took a deep breath then let it out. "Hard to believe it's Ben, but I won't stand in your way."

Packer turned to Tracey. "Stay here and wait for me."

It was hard to let him leave knowing there was danger, but she hoped it would be over fast.

"Yes, I'll be here."

Packer looked at the Marshal with hard eyes. "Does this make us square?"

The Marshal nodded and his gaze flicked to Tracey. "Yes, I think it does. It'll be hard to lose you though. Sure you don't want to carry a Silver Star full time?"

Packer's blue gaze touched hers and she felt her heart turn into a puddle of mush in her chest. "I told you no before. I meant it. I expect I'll be moving on soon."

Did that mean he wanted a life with her? Or that he was leaving the Rusty Spur after all this was over?

She didn't know and she damn sure wanted to. In fact, she truly wanted to spend the rest of her days with Packer. They fit together just right. She wanted him for a lifetime not for a moment.

As Packer leaned in to kiss her, Tracey breathed in his unique scent and felt her heart trip. The trouble with Packer was he took too damn long to get to her lips.

Turns out that Ben gave them more trouble than expected. Trouble in the way of guns and bullets. Tracey had nearly worn a hole in the carpet of Mr. Wilson's parlor before they got back.

Someone was being carried. Carried by four men with arms dangling and blood dripping. Tracey could see them through the window and hoped like hell it wasn't Packer being carried. She sprinted out of the room and ran outside into the soft darkness.

Her heart was beating so hard, she could taste it in the back of her throat. Her boots slammed into the dirt as she tried to reach the bunkhouse before the crowd that had gathered.

Please God, please, let it not be Packer.

She tried to push her way through the men, but they wouldn't budge.

"Dammit, move it Buster! Who is it? Who's hurt?"

"Don't be looking girl, you don't need to see," a stubborn cowpoke said, then shut the door to the bunkhouse in her face. She stood there, gasping for breath, hoping that stupid man she loved hadn't gotten himself shot.

"Sugar, what are you doing out here in the cold without your coat?"

Packer's deep voice vibrated through her chest and a sob burst from her throat. Tracey turned and found him behind her, his shirt bloody and dirt smudges on his face. He never looked

so wonderful. She threw her arms around his neck and held on tightly.

“Oh, thank God!” She kissed him for all she was worth. The combination of the frigid night air and his hot lips had her squirming against him.

She broke the kiss and took a much needed breath. Her body was wracked with so many emotions at once, she needed to put her feet on the earth for a minute. “Packer, you scared me! What happened?”

“Ben had a few guns on his side. Opened fire on us. Wilson got hit pretty bad. The boys just brought him into the bunkhouse.” Packer said, his eyes were hard and colder than she’d ever seen them. “It was an ambush, plain and simple. Lucky for us, he didn’t know me and Rafe were gonna be there.”

He shook his head and looked off into the distance. “We stopped him, but not before they hit a few of us.”

“What about Ben?”

The coldness in his eyes grew icy. “He’s being turned away by St. Peter about now.”

Tracey swallowed and said a silent prayer for the man. He may have been a thief, but everyone deserved a bit of heavenly grace.

“I was afraid something happened to you.”

His eyes glittered as his hand cupped her cheek. The leather was cool against her skin.

“Would you care if something happened to me, sugar?” His breath puffed out against her face like a dragon.

“Yes, dammit,” she said as she pressed herself against him. “I love you, you stubborn cowboy.”

He inhaled sharply, then he descended on her with a swoop. His mouth opened wide and his tongue invaded. She was instantly swept away into a world where only the two of them existed. She felt his erection nudge her jeans and her body responded with a resounding throb.

“Are you gonna marry that girl or should I arrest you?”

Tracey let go of Packer long enough to scowl at the marshal standing behind them with a smirk on his face. Pompous ass.

“I’m gonna marry her,” he said softly. Tracey’s gaze swung to his and she saw a marriage proposal shining in his deep blue eyes. “If she’ll have me.”

Tracey licked her lips and tasted all that was Packer. She smiled with everything that was in her heart. “She’ll have you.”

“Hey, Tracey!” yelled Buster from the bunkhouse. “Wilson’s asking for you.”

“What do you think he wants?” Tracey glanced at Packer and he looked as perplexed as she was sure she did.

“Damned if I know.”

They headed toward the bunkhouse, Tracey’s heart growing heavier with each step. Wilson could be dying. The man who gave her a chance at the one thing she loved to do best – be a cowpoke. It was the same grief she felt when her father passed on last year. Something bad was going to happen.

There was an air of sickness in the bunkhouse, an air of impending death. Every one of the cowboys wore a long face. The old bunkhouse cook, Ezekial, was using his doctoring schools on Wilson. He was laid out on one of the cots, bloody towels and clothing scattered around the scuffed wooden floor around him.

“Hurry up then, girlie. He ain’t got all right. Get your little fanny over here.” Ezekial

spoke to her without turning.

Packer put his hand at the small of Tracey's back and urged her toward the bed. Death and dying ain't much fun for anybody. Tracey was no stranger to it, but she still hesitated as anyone would.

"Go on, sugar. I'm right behind you."

Tracey approached the bed and kneeled down opposite Ezekial. His tired eyes looked up at her and nodded.

"About time. Wilson, you old codger, the girl is here."

Wilson opened his brown eyes and Tracey saw acres of pain swimming in them.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson," she said. "I--"

He cut her off. "I don't have much time, Tracey girl. I wanted to tell you that you were like the daughter I never had. Your Pa was so proud of you. He asked me..." He stopped to take a rattling breath. "To take care of you. So I'm gonna. If'n it's my time tonight, you will own the Rusty Spur."

If Tracey was expecting anything, it wasn't that. He left his ranch to *her*?

"What are you talking about?" she sputtered. "You're not going anywhere."

He coughed and rasped again. "Just so's you know. You'll be a rich woman."

"That's enough talking now. Shoo now, girl." Ezekial waved her away.

Tracey stood and hugged her arms to her body, shivering. Wilson gestured to Packer and he leaned down so the older man could whisper in his ear. Tracey couldn't hear what he said. She let Packer lead her through the crowd and back outside. The cold air slapped her back into reality and she blinked until her voice came back to her.

"Is he going to die, Packer?"

His arm settled around her shivering shoulder. "Nah, it's bad, but I don't think it's that bad. He should be okay. He's a tough cuss."

"I never wanted his ranch. I only wanted to work it," Tracey said. Her body felt as numb as her heart.

Packer took off his coat and wrapped it around her shoulders. His scent wafted up from the sheepskin lining and she snuggled into it, grateful for the warmth.

"Where are we going?" Tracey asked when she realized he was headed for the house.

"Wilson told me to put you in the house for the night, to take care of you."

Tracey's heart thumped loudly. "He asked you to take care of me?"

"Yep."

The trouble with Packer was that getting information out of him was like herding cats.

"Packer!" she stopped and punched his arm. He winced and she realized the blood on his shirt was his. "Were you hit?"

"Just a graze. It's fine. I bandaged it before I got back." His hand covered the spot where she'd punched him. "Damn, girl, you sure do pack a wallop for such a little bit of a thing."

Tracey grinned. "Thank you kindly. Now, what else did Wilson say?"

Packer led her up the front steps and into the house. Mrs. Morris was gone, likely for medical supplies for Ezekial. There was a lamp lit on the hall table and Packer picked it up, heading toward the stairs.

"He told me to have the wedding in the parlor."

So much had happened in the last few hours, she had a hard time absorbing it all.

"How did he know?"

They stopped at the door to one of the bedrooms. "I asked him last week."

Packer's blue eyes were unreadable in the lamplight, but they were glimmering with heat.
"Asked him what?"

He shoved her in the room, set the lamp the dresser, and closed the door. The sound of the key in the lock made her jump.

"Jesus Christ on crutches Tracey! I love you. I've loved you since the second I saw you. I asked Wilson last week if I could marry you and he said yes! I was trying to wrap up the rustling investigation before I asked you, but then you butted your freckled nose where it didn't belong and got yourself mixed up in it." Packer didn't raise his voice, but he made the hairs on her arm stand up and her nipples harden to the point of pain.

"Now, Miss Tracey Carroll, as soon as we can get the preacher out here, you'll be my wife. Is that okay with you?"

She nodded, fascinated as he stalked toward her like the big cat he was. The shadows danced around him and the darkness seemed to welcome him.

Tracey opened her arms and waited for him to join her, tamping down her impatience to touch him. The trouble with Packer was, he took too long to get naked.

THE END