**Chapter 1**

*They say everyone knows everything in a small town. Till you need the information.*

“Oh. My. God. Nita, there they are.” Terri fanned herself with her hand, her cheeks pink, and sparkling blue eyes open wide.

“Tell me. Don’t leave anything out. I have to live vicariously through you these days.”

“No, you don’t, girl. You choose to.” Walking to the glass front mini water cooler, she pulled a bottle of water from the bottom shelf. Twisting the cap, she motioned with her head to the front window.

Following closely behind her bestie, they stood staring down Main Street in the direction Terri pointed. Having just walked out of the Brass Rail Saloon, the best place for chicken in this town, walked two tall, dark, handsome men. Their tall, lanky frames were clad in jeans and black polo shirts with gold embroidery over the left breast.

“Oh, be still my heart. Those two men are the highlight of my day. But, if I rode them like I wanted to, I’d break them in two.” She slapped her ample thighs and turned from the window. “We don’t have any men in town for me. Large and in charge, that’s what I need.”

Sitting at the front desk, she flipped the page of the appointment book and smiled as she saw the appointment slots full for the next three days. Haircuts, perms, colors, and many of her weekly style clients. The “blue hairs” as they were called—little older ladies whose white hair was usually rinsed with a purple blue toner to keep it from looking brassy. Business had been good this year. It was about time. She’d been busting hump for five danged years.

Terri leaned over the tall front of the reception desk and straightened the cookie jar Nita always had full of homemade cookies. Moving the cup of brightly-colored, flower-topped pens to the other side of the desk, she fluffed the petals and rearranged the colors so the bouquet was symmetrical.

“We’ve been busy for months now. I don’t mind telling you my bank account has never been healthier. But I’m so tired every night after work, I don’t have the energy to spend it. “

She laughed. “I know what you mean, Terri. My ass has been dragging, too. I thought when all the kids had graduated and moved on, I’d have the time of my life. But, shit, it’s all I can do to roll my big ass out of bed each morning and bake fresh cookies and get here on time.”

“You know you could have the bakery deliver fresh cookies every day like you used to. Now, of all times, you can afford it.”

“I know, but I want to do it. I can’t explain why. It’s something personal and special I do for each of my clients.”

“You do personal and special things by making them look amazing when they walk out of here, Nita.”

Terri turned to glance out the window again. “Lordy, but they are fine.”

“Quit your dreamin’. Stevie Jorgenson has Sam all wrapped up, and Levi and Sage are together. That means they aren’t interested in either of us. Sadly, no one here is. Town’s too small and we aren’t.” She gave Terri the look from the side of her eyes, reminding her of their stature. Good golly, how many times had she been called fat? Huge? Walrus? Hippo? On and on. It was one thing when her husband was alive; he’d loved her the way she was, but now that he was gone, the loneliness and harsh words haunted her. In her mind, she’d made peace with living out the remainder of her days alone. Waiting for her three kids to give her grandbabies and baking her goodies. But sometimes, the loneliness wrapped itself around her.

“Stop calling yourself fat.”

The bell above the door rang out signaling a guest. “Hey there, Roberta. Ready to get gorgeous?” Terri walked toward her styling chair as her new client followed.

Smiling, Nita watched Terri and Shelly, the only two gals who worked at her salon, chat with their clients. Both of them were smiling and so darn good at making guests feel special and unique. She was living her dream here.

Now if she could just get her son, Dax, on the straight and narrow. That boy had been nothing but trouble from the day of his father’s funeral through today. She was at a loss on how to fix him. She’d worn a path from her door to the principal’s office, and after he’d graduated three years ago, it was to the police station. It was a sad situation that she knew all the cops and sheriff’s officers in town and not because they all came to have their hair done.

The ringing of her phone startled her from her thoughts. “Nita’s House of Style.”

Hearing her contractor, Chet, on the other end of the phone, she reached for her remodel notebook, opened it to the facial room pages and explained what she was missing in the room. She hoped this construction would be over soon, then she could get on with her life and continue dreaming about some sexy cowboy sauntering into her salon and not which faucet she wanted on the sink.