

A close-up photograph of a man wearing a straw cowboy hat with a beaded band and a blue and white plaid shirt. He is looking down, and his hand is near his face. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

THERE'S NO  
SAFER PLACE  
THAN IN THE  
ARMS OF A  
COWBOY.

**COWBOY**  
*sanctuary*  
MICHELLE HUGHES

**Cowboy Sanctuary**  
The Dixon Ranch

Michelle Hughes

Kindle Press

Copyright © 2016 by Tears of Crimson.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

Tears of Crimson Publishing  
27687 AL Hwy 22  
Verbena, AL 36091  
[www.tearsofcrimson.com](http://www.tearsofcrimson.com)

Publisher’s Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author’s imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

**Ordering Information:**

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the “Special Sales Department” at the address above.

Cowboy Sanctuary/ Michelle Hughes  
ISBN-13: 978-1539138044  
ISBN-10: 1539138046

# Prologue

## ***Brock***

*18 Months Ago*

“You better watch your hide with that one. She looks ready to take you on a quick ride, then drag you to the altar before you know what hit ya.” My baby brother had the worst possible taste in women, not that the gorgeous gal looking our way wasn’t something to behold. She had that unusual character mix of sassy and innocent that made any cowboy worth his salt willing to take a second look.

“If it’s a ride she wants, then I’m just the man for the job.” Ranger was about as cocky as it gets when it came to his self-image, and young women didn’t stand a chance against his charms. How he’d remained single this long surprised the hell out of me and my older brother. Every daddy in town was ready to kick his ass for taking advantage of their daughters.

“That city girl is probably out here slumming anyway. Leave the boy to his fun.” Travis, the oldest of the Dixon clan, was usually the most conservative. Hearing him offer encouragement was enough to shut my mouth as the young beauty swung her hips seductively as she walked up to our table. Ranger gave him a pointed look, telling him to mind his manners, and I had to admit the little lady was sure something to look at.

“Which one of you boys is Brock Dixon?” My pants grew a little tighter as she squeezed those full lips into a pout, giving each of us a look hot enough to cause a barn fire.

“That’d be me, darlin’.” I tipped the brim of my Stetson and gave her a big smile, and the one that lit her face almost took my breath away. I didn’t have a clue what this girl wanted with me, but I was willing to find out. She could warm my bed any night of the week and twice on Sundays. So much for my warning to my baby brother.

"I was told you were the best horse breeder in Texas, and I'd like to talk business." Ranger looked like I'd just kicked his dog, and Travis was smiling broadly at his disappointment. Sibling rivalry was something we'd never really outgrown, even though we'd all take a bullet for one another.

"You heard right. I usually don't talk business when I'm hanging out at a club, though." We didn't get much downtime running the ranch, but I might be willing to make an exception if she played her cards straight. "Tell you what. Why don't you pull up a chair and have a few drinks with us, and we can mix a little work and pleasure?" Her bluer-than-sky eyes looked me over, and she seemed to find my offer appealing since she sat down primly. We had a bottle of whiskey and empty shot glasses sitting on the table. She earned some points when she poured herself one and drank it down like a champ.

"Hell, girl, you done won over my heart." Ranger liked a woman who could keep up with him, and she was probably a better fit for him than for me, but I was feeling a little territorial. He poured her another shot and I grabbed it, slamming it down my throat before she had a chance to reach it. Her soft, musical laughter made it hard to sit without adjusting my jeans, and I knew it was my bed she was landing in tonight.

"Ah hell, it's gonna be one of those nights." Travis waved over the waitress and ordered a Coke, realizing he'd just become the designated driver as Ranger drank his own shot, trying to prove he could drink me under the table. At twenty-four he was out of luck at this game. I'd been doing it four years longer, and after a few more he was looking a little green around the gills. Our little city girl seemed unfazed, and she'd been drinking her weight of the potent brew. I was impressed!

Somewhere during our drinking game, she mentioned that she was looking to breed a quarter horse to run in the Kentucky Derby. I'd had the good fortune to breed a horse from one of the most famous racers of them all, thanks to a friend who'd had a winner in the Derby, and I knew why this lovely young lady had sought my company. I told her my stud fee was \$100,000, and she didn't bat an eye. Most folks knew I didn't come cheap, but I produced champions.

After a bottle of Jack, we were all two sheets to the wind except Travis, who told me his babysitting duties were coming to an end. Little Miss City Girl, who I'd learned was Danielle Stallings from Chicago, asked to crash at my place and talk more in the morning. Who was I to turn her down? Travis was also the town's sheriff, outside of being a partner in the ranch, and all the way home he reminded me that taking advantage of an inebriated woman was nothing but trouble.

Instead of heeding that advice, I talked him into dropping me off at my place, and he gave me the long talk about using the right head before we got out of the truck. Ranger might have put up a fight about me taking home the girl of his dreams, but he was passed out in the backseat, snoring. "I'll check in on y'all before work tomorrow," Travis said.

Those were the last words I remembered hearing before waking up with the sexy brunette naked in my bed the next morning.

My head felt like I'd been rammed by a bull when I finally managed to open my eyes, but looking at the most perfect body I'd ever seen had me ready for round two, and she was more than willing to give me an encounter I wouldn't soon forget. It wasn't until much later that I

remembered I'd forgotten to glove up. That was something I never did. Safe sex was more than about preventing unwanted children. There was too much shit out there to make it worth the risk.

"I know it's a little late to ask, but are you covered?" She seemed a little offended at my words but nodded and groaned. I could only assume her head felt as heavy as mine did after all that whiskey we'd consumed.

"Why don't I round up some coffee and see if we can clear this fog?" She managed a halfhearted smile, and I thought she was the most delectable woman I'd ever seen, even after a night of partying with the Dixon boys.

"That sounds good. Can I use your shower and maybe have something to put on?" I was glad she was a morning person, even with a hangover. I was usually up wrangling cows or horses, depending on what the day held, but I knew the foreman could handle things until I arrived. Frank was one of the most loyal men we had, and he'd worked this land almost as long as I had. My pops had hired him when I was still a teenager.

With her sexy body sliding out of my bed wearing nothing but what the good Lord gave her, I almost decided on round three but figured we could both use a little break. "Of course you can. It's through there." I pointed to the right. "Anything in my closet is yours. I'll throw together some breakfast, and we can wash your things while we're waiting."

She swung those perfect hips as she walked off to my bathroom, making me long to join her, but I still had work to do today. Pulling on a pair of sweats, I walked downstairs to brew coffee and put together bacon, eggs, and toast. Nothing better for a hangover than something to fill your belly. She came back down looking precious in nothing but my T-shirt, and instantly I wanted her again.

"Where's your washing machine?" Without taking my eyes off her, I pointed to the room off the kitchen, and she grinned like she knew how beautiful she was. I loved that confidence! "I'll be right back." Sure enough, she was back with me in less than five minutes, sliding up on a stool at the breakfast counter.

Fixing her a plate and then pouring a cup of coffee, I asked if she wanted cream and sugar. It felt like we were playing house, and to be honest, I kind of liked it. "They don't grow them like you in Chicago," she said. Her smile beamed, and long locks of damp hair clung to her shoulders in dark ringlets. "Just sugar."

"I'm gonna take that as a complement, darlin'. Give me a few minutes to get my head on straight, and I'll show you exactly how we show a lady a good time in Texas." With a wink, I handed over the sugar bowl and spoon and fixed my plate to join her. Eating with her was nice because she didn't babble like most women, and the silence was comfortable.

"So how soon can I bring my mare down?" I wasn't even thinking about breeding anything yet, but taking her for a ride was doable. Still, I had a business to run.

"As soon as she's in season. I'm not taking in others right now since I'm working on training riders for the rodeo for the next few months." That topic seemed to fascinate her, and I explained how I'd ridden myself until a nasty spill off a bull last year ended that career. I'd broken only seven ribs and cracked an ankle, but my mom was still getting over a heart attack—unrelated to my spill—and I'd made a promise not to ride that way again. Truth be

known I was falling out of love with the sport and enjoyed being here on the ranch more than riding the circuit.

“She should be going into heat any day now so I’ll bring her down this week.” Her eyes were something I could stare into forever, and I nodded my agreement.

“You do that. Have you watched a horse breed before?” I knew many people were fascinated with the process but it was pretty much second nature to me.

“No. White Lilly is the first horse I’ve owned. The stable that houses her suggested that I bring her to you because she has a great bloodline.” I wanted to say I bet she had one too, but I wasn’t sure if she’d take that out of context. She smelled incredible, even though it was my shampoo she’d used. Something about her scent came through even with the masculine fragrance.

She sat while I cleared up our dishes, and then we talked until her clothes were finished. There was something about this girl that intrigued me, but I couldn’t put my finger on what it was other than her gorgeous looks. I was ready to take her upstairs to continue exploring, but my brother showed up, banging on the door. He was decked out in his uniform, so I guessed Ranger was taking over the cattle today, which meant I’d have to lend a hand.

Danielle raced upstairs to change clothes—a shame, considering how fine she looked in mine—and I got the dressing down of a lifetime from Travis. “Tell me you didn’t take advantage of that girl.” He was in one of his moods, and I wasn’t feeling very generous myself.

“Whatever happened here is between the two of us. What’s got you in such a foul mood?” He was usually the crankier one of the three of us, but today his foul mood was kicked up a notch.

“Something about that girl don’t sit right with me. You’d do well to send her packing.” For my brother to say that about a lady was out of character and hit me in all the wrong ways.

“You ain’t known her more than a minute. Maybe you should stop judging people.” If I hadn’t been infatuated with the little brunette, I might have taken his advice. He was very good at his job, and that meant reading people. “Besides, I’m gonna be doing some business with her, and we could all use a little extra income to do some work out here.”

“Business is one thing. I’m telling you she’s hiding something.” He stopped talking, but only because Danielle had walked back downstairs looking all citified again. I missed her wearing my shirt.

“I really need to get my car and start back on the road. My sister is expecting me home today.” She looked a little upset, and I hoped she hadn’t heard my brother’s words. He was being even grouchier than usual and wasn’t at the top of my favorite list today.

“I can drive you into town since it’s on my way,” Travis said. He was definitely in rare form, and I glared at him.

“I’ll take her. Wouldn’t want you going out of your way to help someone out.” Truth was I needed to get out in the field, but his attitude wasn’t something she needed to put up with.

“What you need to do is help Ranger get those cows in before the storm sets in tonight. We can’t afford any losses.” Travis’s comment was rude and demeaning, and if Danielle hadn’t been present we’d have probably come to blows over it. His attitude was starting to get my dander up.

“That’s fine. I’ll see you Friday,” Danielle said. She didn’t seem to have picked up on his temper since she walked over, kissed my cheek, and smiled. “I’m looking forward to working with you.”

The way Travis glared my way, I wasn’t sure I wanted her anywhere near him, but he was right. I had a long day ahead of me and needed to remember where my loyalties were.

“I can’t wait either, darlin’.” Walking over to the kitchen table, I picked up a business card for the ranch and scribbled my cell phone number on the back. “Call me if you need anything before then, and thank you for last night.” I whispered the latter in her ear, and her grin widened. Watching her walk away made me anticipate her coming back. I was looking forward to enjoying her while we did a little breeding on the side. Breeding her horse, that is, because while I was ready for a family of my own, my folks would never forgive me if I had a kid out of wedlock. Another reason I kept my sex life in check.

\*\*\*

By the time Friday came around, I’d been counting the hours until Danielle returned. She had a real beauty in Lilly, who stood sixteen hands stall. The muscles over her hips and thighs were powerful. She was definitely a prime piece of horseflesh, and I was interested in seeing the foal White Lightning and her line would produce. Rubbing my hands down her legs, I inspected her tendons. This was going to be one spectacular breeding.

“That’s turning me on. Tell me, do you treat your women as well as your horses?” Danielle’s laughter brought my attention back to her, and I smirked. She was a mighty fine ride herself, and I was glad to show her how well I could break her in.

“Darlin’, I think you’ll find I’m even better with women. Let’s get your girl in the stall next to my stud and see if we can get them worked up, and I’ll try and give you a little attention.” She hooked her arm in mine and pressed against me, making me wonder who was leading this seduction.

My field hand walked up, and Danielle didn’t bother putting space between us. She didn’t seem to have a problem with anyone knowing what her intentions were. I had Paul guide her horse out of the trailer into the air-conditioned barn, and we followed behind. There was no doubt Lilly was in season, and White Lightning was interested. Of course, he was always willing. I think that’s one of the reasons me and that horse got along so well. We thought alike.

“I got all those papers you faxed over, so everything looks good. I’d like to get them together this morning and then again later tonight, then repeat that same process for the next few days to increase our chances,” I said. “That OK with you?”

“I don’t know. Will you be able to keep me satisfied while my baby is getting it on?” This woman! I swear, I liked her spunk. Her grin was seductive, and when she reached her hand out to cup my ass, which was covered unfortunately by jeans, I wasn’t sure who was more ready for a little action. White Lightning was raring up in his stall, but I was harder than a bed of nails.

“Keep talking that way, and I’ll have you bending over a gate.” Remembering we weren’t alone, I took a few steps back to get myself under control. Her laughter wasn’t helping my testosterone level because I had some serious ideas about how to have her groaning underneath me.



“All right, boys, lead out that little lady and get her ready,” I instructed. We used a custom-made leather leg strap to keep the handlers safe. Four of my most trained boys were standing on the mats we’d installed in the shed to stop any slipping from happening. Danielle’s stable had introduced her to a teaser horse prior to coming here, and those documents, along with her horse’s health, were all good indications that this should go as smooth as silk. I’d had the vet out earlier this month for a routine visit, so I knew my stud was ready to perform.

“That thing around her leg, it won’t hurt her, right?” I was glad she was concerned about her baby. That showed she wasn’t just using her and gave a hint of her character.

“We’ll take it off as soon as she’s mounted. All we want it for is to make sure she doesn’t kick one of the handlers and cause serious injury,” I replied. Getting my stallion ready took a little more preparation. He was ready to go native, and I told her to step back until the boys and I had him dressed in a lead rope and ready for action. After asking Danielle to wait until he was safely in the breeding shed, I mounted the horse bareback and led him in before dismounting. This was the tricky part. He reared up on his hind legs, as expected, and we waited until Lilly saw him. Fortunately, she seemed calm after seeing him, and we were able to lead White Lighting over then.

Watching a horse breed was a rather quick process, lasting less than a few minutes. This one went off without a hitch. I wasn’t so sure what all the fuss was about the act to outsiders, but they seemed to find it sexy. Personally, getting on and off that way wasn’t much of a turn on to me, but to each their own. Walking the horses back in separately, I was happy to say we’d had an easier time than I’d thought with the maiden mare.

I dismissed the handlers to work on other jobs, leaving me and the sexy city girl alone in the barn. I wasn’t prepared when she threw herself into my arms, wrapping her legs around my waist and begging for a little rodeo of her own. “That was so incredibly hot. I want you to take me that way,” Danielle breathed.

If that didn’t make me stand at attention, I’m not sure what would! “Good thing you’re wearing a skirt, then, darlin’. Slide off those panties and bend over, and I’ll make it last longer than what you just saw.” Chuckling as she slid down my body and did exactly what I asked, I pulled down my jeans and underwear before walking over and using my mouth and tongue on her silky pink flesh to make sure she was ready for me. None of that was needed. She was so wet I could have taken her without any foreplay, but it wasn’t my style.

“Better hold on tight,” I warned. Danielle bent over and gripped the bars of one of the stalls as I slid into her gripping heat with one forceful thrust. Her gasp made me slow my action, but she wasn’t having any of that.

“Take me like you mean it, cowboy!” I didn’t need to be told twice. I slammed into her welcoming body, and her feet lifted off the floor as I rode her until she screamed out my name in pleasure. I followed behind quickly, not sure what it was about this woman that made me more animal than human.

Over the next three days we saw more action than the horses did, and I thought I was falling for this wild filly, who seemed almost obsessed with getting off. I hated watching Danielle leave, but if there’s one thing I understood, it was commitment, and she had a job to get back to. She promised to call when the results were in from her vet, and I was hoping her

mare hadn't been impregnated. I was looking forward to another visit. Unfortunately, that never happened. Not only that, she never paid the breeder's fee, and I was out a hundred grand.

I could have sued, but I chalked it up to being stupid for not getting paid up-front. Travis was madder than a tick that I refused to file charges. It didn't matter that I explained I'd gotten paid with some of the greatest sex of my life. After leaving several dozen messages for Danielle, I gave up hope that she'd do the right thing. For weeks my brothers didn't talk to me unless it involved work. Their loss.

## ***Dana***

*5 Months Ago*

"I swear this little man gets bigger every time I see him." Holding my nephew in my arms made me long for a child of my own, but it wasn't my time yet. I made goofy faces at the baby while my twin put down her diaper bag and grabbed a cup of coffee. I could tell instantly something was wrong with my sister.

Call it twin intuition or whatever, but I knew when she was in pain, even if we were hundreds of miles apart. Danielle was my best friend, but I hated the person she was becoming since marrying that slimeball Derrick Stallings. I tried to keep my opinion to myself most of the time when it came to Derrick because my sister had so much stress trying to be mommy to this little angel. Derrick was crap as a father and husband, and I knew Danielle didn't need to be reminded.

"What's he done this time?" Hopefully something that would land him in jail, I thought. The man really was a blight on society and needed to be locked away permanently. How she stayed with him, I had no idea.

"We can talk about that later. I need to tell you something, and you're not going to like it." For Danielle to even preface her explanation with something like that terrified me. Danielle had always been the wilder of the two of us. I kept my nose stuck in a book. I never judged her. I gave an opinion, yes, but she came first.

"Why don't we get Jeremy into his playpen while I grab a coffee. This sounds like I may need one." After blowing raspberries on the baby's tummy, I looked up at Danielle with a more serious expression. I worried about her constantly lately. She'd lost too much weight and looked like she wasn't sleeping at all.

She set up the playpen, and I put Jeremy in it, regretful even though it had been my idea. I loved every minute I got to spend with him, and lately that wasn't a lot. Derrick was such an ass that he'd become possessive, even when Danielle was here. Grabbing a cup, I joined her back in the living room while Jeremy played blissfully with his toys.

"Derrick's not his father." Of all the things she could have blurted out, that was the last thing I expected to hear.

"What?" I spoke the word loudly, scaring the little man. His face pouted up, and I forced myself to make a silly expression again to make him smile. My twin sister and I told each

other everything, or so I thought, so hearing something this huge was like being stabbed in the heart by my favorite person in the world.

"I never said anything because I wasn't sure until recently, and there's a time in my life I'd rather forget. I know you're pissed but I need you to be understanding right now. I'm scared, Dana, really scared."

My sister had done some incredibly stupid things before, and I'd stood by her side for every one of them, so this wouldn't be any different, but still! "How are you sure now?" I'd never thought Jeremy had any of Derrick's features, but he was a baby so that could be excused.

"I guess maybe I've always known, but I also knew that Derrick would leave me if Jeremy wasn't his. I know it's crazy, but I love Derrick, even though he can be a horrible person, you know?" Of course I knew. Derrick was into all kinds of illegal things that he got away with. I hated that Danielle was mixed up in any of it.

"Who did you sleep with?" If it was one of Derrick's friends, I was seriously going to be nauseated. Danielle had told me they were into some seedy things, and even though she promised to never get involved, she knew they were dealing drugs on the side. It went against everything I believed in, but Danielle was my sister. I couldn't turn Derrick in without getting her involved.

She told me the horrifying story of some horse breeder in Texas Derrick had set her up with to breed her mare. Pulling out her phone, Danielle showed me his picture and said how he'd been one of the sexiest men she'd ever met. She'd stiffed him on the breeding fee, which was exorbitant in my opinion, but that wasn't really the point. I could see in her eyes that her remorse was real, but that poor man! He was a beautiful one at that, but that didn't matter!

"Are you sure Jeremy is his and not Derrick's?" There were a million questions going through my mind but that one was most prominent.

"I have decided to leave Derrick, Dana. I knew if Jeremy was his, he'd fight me for custody, so I had a test done. He's definitely not Derrick's, and Brock is the only other man I slept with." I believed her after she explained how she'd tricked Derrick into doing a DNA swab for some ancestry test she wanted for Jeremy, but it brought up more concerns.

"Did he tell you to sleep with this man?" I was going to kill the bastard if he was pimping out my sister. I wouldn't put it past him.

"I was only supposed to flirt with him. Get him to really fall for me. I couldn't help myself, sis. Brock was everything Derrick wasn't. Sweet, compassionate, and I think he was really falling for me. He had this beautiful ranch too. I even thought about leaving Derrick and moving down there."

My sympathy went toward Brock, especially when she told me that Derrick had sent her down to breed Lilly with the intention of never paying Brock for his services. I didn't understand Danielle's fascination with horses, but I knew they'd pulled in a quarter of a million dollars selling that foal because of its bloodline. "Tell me you're leaving him," I said. I couldn't yet discuss how horrible I thought what she'd done was, not without being condescending. I knew Derrick was changing everything about Danielle, and this was more proof. The sister I grew up with would never hurt another person this way.

“Yes. I have to be careful, though. He’s been acting really crazy lately, and honestly, I’m afraid.” Jeremy started demanding attention, so I picked him up and played with him so Danielle could continue. “He’ll never let me leave. I told him we needed some time apart, and he said that was fine, that as long as I leave the kid with him, I can go wherever I want.”

We both knew Derrick didn’t give a damn about Jeremy, so it was an emotional card to keep Danielle where he thought she belonged. “Now that you know he’s not the father, just pack your things and move in with me,” I said. “We’ll get you a lawyer and a restraining order, if need be.” To me, it was that simple.

“I need a few more months to get things together for me and little man. I don’t think I want to stay in the city.” Her words depressed me, but I fought hard not to show it. Having her and my nephew away from me was going to suck. I would be graduating next month and was looking forward to having some time off with them before finding a job.

“If that’s what you feel you need to do, then I’m behind you. Maybe we can all go together?” I hated leaving our family home, but being with family was the most important thing, and there were jobs in business all over the world.

“You’d do that for us? I wouldn’t ask you to leave because I know this is our home, but I would love to have you with me!” Danielle pulled me into a hug, and Jeremy squealed in delight at being the center of our affection.

“Of course I would. Besides, the house is paid for. We can always come back later if we’re not happy somewhere else.” Anything to get her and my nephew away from that loser!

“I’m going to start looking for places, then.” She walked over to her purse and pulled out an envelope. “I need you to keep this for me. It’s the results of the test. I can’t afford for him to find it.” I didn’t like this at all. If she felt unsafe, then I wasn’t going to relax until she was.

“How are you going to do this?” I asked. I had no idea what kind of planning she was doing except for finding a new home for all of us.

“I have an appointment with a lawyer in a few hours. I was hoping you could watch Jeremy until I get back. He should be able to tell me the easiest way to take care of everything.” She looked so uncertain that it really broke my heart. I knew Danielle loved Derrick, but obviously she’d had enough. Proud that she was doing what was best for her and Jeremy, I nodded quickly. I never thought she’d leave the jerk!

We enjoyed our time together, deciding not to talk about the nastiness of what was going to happen, and I tried to cheer her up. I enjoyed every minute with little man after Danielle left for her appointment, and hated when she showed up to take him home later. With optimism in my heart, I hoped this would be a new beginning for her. I wanted my sister back!

**Don’t let the adventure end here. Purchase your order of Cowboy Sanctuary today:**

<http://amzn.to/2iJQ7FA>