



## **Running Away to Home**

*A Torquere Press Single Shot by Chris Owen*

When Hound told the Boss he was leaving, the man just nodded and thanked him for the two weeks' notice.

"Most either just don't show up or tell me the night before that they're movin' on. That's how I know the good from the bad when it's time to rehire." The Boss smiled at him and said, "Not that I needed you to give me notice to know that you'll always be welcome back, Kevin. Let me know if you're ever in need of work, ya hear?"

Hound smiled and nodded, happy that he was appreciated. He'd really liked working this spread, had spent a good year here. He was going to miss the land and the men, was going to miss Lego nights and Elias bitching about...well, about everything.

He didn't tell the others until one night at supper, when Jake finally asked him what was wrong.

"Nothing," he said, staring at his plate. Then he made the mistake of looking up and meeting blue eyes and Jake was looking at him all worried, and that just wasn't right. "I'm leaving," he admitted.

Elias looked at him and didn't say anything for a long moment, letting Jake ask the question.

"Where're you going?" Jake still sounded concerned, but he didn't look so worried; his posture had eased a bit and he was eating again.

"North," he said. He picked at his food for a couple of minutes and told them that his brother's painting and sculpting was taking off, that Alex needed his help. "Gonna go up and help build his studio. Stay until winter and see if I like it up there. If it's too cold, or I hate it, I'll just head back down the coast, maybe see Florida or something."

Jake nodded. "Couldn't get me off this land, but yeah, I can see trying something new. Good to be near your family, too."

Elias agreed with that, anyway. "Family can be a damn good thing, Hound. Besides, not like you have ties here. Good to see some of the country before you settle down."

Tornado didn't say a word.

After supper Hound went up to the stable to feed the horses, and he wasn't surprised to turn around and see Tor standing in the doorway watching him. He just nodded at Tor and finished what he was

doing, hoping Tor would go away. But of course the stubborn bastard merely stood there, watching. Finally, Hound sat down on a tack box and waited.

Tor walked over and sat down next to him, not touching, not looking at him. They both stared straight ahead, watching the sunset framed by the barn doors.

"You're gonna hate it up north," Tor said, his voice low and sure.

Hound nodded. "Yeah. That's why I'm not going there. I'm heading west, looking at southern California."

Tor glanced at him. "So why the bullshit?"

Hound stared at the floor, fingers lacing together and gripping each other, knuckles turning white. "Had to say something, didn't I? Give them a reason that sorta made sense; they wouldn't buy me just getting the itch to wander."

Tor nodded but didn't say anything; he just waited.

"Couldn't tell him the truth, could I?" Hound whispered.

"No. He'd get upset, think he'd been hurting you all this time without even knowing. He'd want to make it better, and he can't." Tor sounded very sure.

Hound glanced at him out of the corner of his eye. Tor was still looking ahead, watching the sunset.

"How long have you known?"

Tor glanced at him and smiled a little. He shrugged and said, "Couple of months, give or take a week or so. Been waiting to see how you were gonna play it. Got to admit, didn't see you leaving being the way you were gonna go."

"Hurts too much to stay."

Tor nodded, and this time his look was full of sympathy. "I get that. It's gotta be rough."

Hound was suddenly seized by a horrible thought. "Oh God, *he* doesn't know, does he?"

"Taggart? Fuck, no." Tor laughed then, an honest sound of amusement. "That man is completely oblivious most of the time. I had to get naked and shove my tongue down his throat before he clued in. So, unless you've been dragging him out in rainstorms-" Tor raised an eyebrow and Hound just about fell off the tack box, shaking his head so hard.

Tor relented. "No. He doesn't know. I'll not be telling him either."

They sat for a long time, watched the sun fading away.

"What's it like?" Hound asked quietly.

Tor looked at him again, eyes dark and searching. "Don't torture yourself."

"I want to know." He did. More than anything.

Tor sighed. "Fuck." He was silent for so long that Hound was sure he wasn't going to say anything more, then he started to talk, still watching the sky's colors. "Being with Jake is like spring and summer together. Everything is new and growing, and full of life and hope. Like the rain is always gentle and needed, and the little tiny start of green is sure to be something wonderful and strong by the time it's done growing. The storms are powerful and sometimes scary, but you know that they're gonna end and then there's gonna be rainbows and birds and fresh sweet grass. There's heat and passion and long days that leave you exhausted and dead, but the nights are cool and refreshing, and through it all he's right there, being just what I need."

Tor didn't look at him again, just got up and left the barn. Hound knew that no matter how much he thought he loved Jake, he had nothing on Tor, and it was a good thing he was leaving. It almost hurt to be near them.

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Leaving was both harder and easier than Hound expected. Harder, because he'd hoped to just wander off and not have to face any of them. No, that was a lie. He didn't want to face Jake, and he knew it. Easier, because no one made a fuss -- they just walked him out to the truck so Elias could drive him to town.

The Boss gave him a bonus, said it was incentive for him to come back. That made Hound feel guilty; no way he was coming back. Elias offered to drive him to the bus, which was kind, and even Kip showed up, coming over from his new house to say farewell and take care.

Jake grinned at him and offered his hand, so Hound made himself smile back and take it. Couldn't do anything but, though he was scared shitless that he'd do something and then Jake would know. But it went okay, even if it did leave him feeling shaky and sick to his stomach.

Tor leaned in the open window of the truck door and looked him in the eye. "Hope you find what you need," he said, and Hound nodded at him, not sure how to tell the man everything he wanted to. He figured Tor already knew, and really, the only thing to say was 'Thanks for not kicking my ass for falling for your man'. He said, "See ya around," instead.

Elias drove him into town and waited around until the bus got there. He had a ticket to Little Rock, so Elias didn't say anything about him not going north like he'd said. All Elias did was shake his hand and pat him on the back.

"Take care of yourself. Send us a card if you get the chance, let us know how you're doin'."

"Will. Take care, Elias, and thanks."

That was it. He got on the bus and stared out the window all the way to Little Rock, trying his damndest not to think of Jake and failing miserably.

He reckoned he was a damn fool. He was more than ten years younger than Jake and had never even been interested in a guy before. Jake was with Tor when Hound had first met him; he'd never had any illusions about that. He hadn't harbored any false hopes, either; he knew commitment when he saw it, knew it before Tor did, if what had happened was any indication. Tor had taken off, but Hound knew he'd be back.

Hadn't even cared about Jake then. No, that was another lie. He'd cared, but not like he did later. He liked the man fine, same as he'd liked Kip and Elias and Tor. That was another thing. He'd always liked Tor, had never wished him gone, had always known that there was no one more suited to Jake than Tor. Certainly not himself.

But he'd fallen anyway. Had known it when he saw the marks on Jake's wrists and figured out how they'd gotten there. Had known it when he'd gone to clean stalls and saw the bales in the empty stall and wanted to fight something, thinking about Tor tying Jake down. Never mind that Jake obviously wanted it. It hadn't been him.

He'd gone back to his room shaking that day. He felt like an utter idiot, completely taken unaware. He'd never thought about Jake like that, not in a sexual way. Why would he? He wasn't gay. And yet, seeing the bales, knowing that it was leather cutting into Jake's wrists and that...damn.

He'd lain down on his bed, mortified beyond all belief that he was even thinking about such a thing, about what his friend would look like tied up like that, cock hard and wanting, what it would be like to kiss him, to touch him, to feel him. It was the most invasive fantasy he'd ever had about anyone and he couldn't get rid of it, couldn't get rid of his own erection by willing it away. He'd bitten his lip and forced himself not to touch his cock, not to indulge himself by shredding Jake and Tor's privacy, and he'd come anyway, just thinking about it.

He'd avoided them for days after that.

Then all the shit with Jake's brother had happened and he'd watched Jake handle it; that was when he knew he loved him. He waited a long time for that to go away, to mellow back into admiration and respect. It hadn't, and through it all there was Tor. Hound had never stopped liking Tor, never resented him or anything. But he couldn't stay. It hurt too much and he was losing himself, bit by bit. He wanted a piece of happiness for himself and he didn't think that would happen if he was still on the ranch.

It was time to go, and so he went.

When he got off the bus in Little Rock, he went straight to the ticket window and bought a one-way ticket to Santa Monica. It was a long trip and he slept most of the way, coming awake in groggy fits and starts to see that the faces around him had changed and that it was time to get off the bus and stretch his legs for a bit. He didn't talk to the people on the bus; everyone had a story to tell and he was still too close to the center of his own. He bought sandwiches that tasted of cardboard and drank too much pop, then fell asleep again, waiting to see the sun and the ocean.

When he got off the bus in California, he was disappointed that he couldn't smell the ocean right away. All he could smell was diesel and piss, and he had to force himself to remember that he was still standing in a bus station, and yeah it was gross, but if he'd just go out the door he'd be able to find the damn Pacific and then he could see it for himself.

His legs were stiff and he was utterly exhausted for all the sleep he'd had, but he walked and walked, duffle over his shoulder, until he reached the beach, and then he walked some more, along the sand. He walked until he found a place that wasn't littered with people or dogs or crap, and he dropped his bag in the sand and he just stared.

It was so fucking big. It was windy and sunny and he could hear people laughing and screaming and there were gulls screeching and the air was thick with salt and something he didn't have a name

for, and coconut oil. He sat on the sand, leaning on his duffle, and fell asleep listening to the waves roll in.

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Hound spent two weeks in California. The first three days he spent on the beach or not far from it. He had some money saved up, and the bonus the Boss had given him meant that he didn't need to look for work right away. He found a room in a cheap motel a few blocks from the water and stashed his stuff, then made his way back the beach dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, determined to even out his tan. White legs were just not the thing to be sporting in California.

He walked. He sat and watched the waves and looked at all the people. At night he changed into jeans and sat on a bench, watching the sun set over the Pacific. He spent most of his time feeling like he was utterly outside of himself, unable to focus on one single thing for more than a couple of minutes at a time.

He watched the ocean, listened to it. He had been impressed by its sheer size from the first moment, but the more he watched it the more uncomfortable he got. It was flat and moving, and even though he knew it was full of life it was so far removed from what he'd always known that it looked dead to him. An endless expanse of water. It was just so fucking huge.

He didn't go swimming.

He was watching the sun settle low on the horizon on the third day when a girl sat down next to him on the bench. He was sitting back, his legs pulled up to his chest, just looking out over the ocean. He'd wrapped his arms around his knees and part of his mind was thinking it was too damn hot to sit like this, but the rest of him was really feeling like being drawn up close into a small ball was right.

He didn't even glance at the girl until she said hi. He suddenly realized that she was sitting there *because* he was, and not just 'cause there was an empty spot on the bench. He opened his mouth to



say something back to her and had to clear his throat. He hadn't said more than a few sentences out loud in four days.

"Hi," he finally managed, not terribly surprised at how flat his voice sounded.

"I've been watching you," she said. "For two days. You wanna talk about it?"

Hound looked at her, startled not so much by the offer but more by the fact that he had no idea where she'd come from. He'd been on the same stretch of beach almost constantly and he had no recollection of anyone. He looked around and tried to see if any of the people looked remotely familiar and came up blank.

"You have?" he asked carefully.

She nodded, her shy smile falling away. "You've been walking and staring and just looking blank. Thought you might want a break from the thinking."

He looked back at the water. It was too big. He had no idea what he'd been thinking about for the last three days. He couldn't recall a single idea, or a plan, or even a day dream. He remembered picturing the fields and pastures over the water, he remembered standing up to go feed the horses and sitting down again feeling like an idiot. He remembered thinking about Jake and Tor and Lego, and sounds from the back of the house, and a scream from the river bed.

The girl was staring at him.

He looked at her again, this time to actually see her. She was about twenty, he thought, brown hair back in a ponytail and brown eyes, too. She wasn't the prettiest girl on the beach, wasn't as pretty as Missy even, but she had a lovely mouth and really nice legs. She was wearing shorts and a big loose shirt and sandals.

He smiled at her. "Hey."

She grinned back and relaxed a little. "Hey. So, wanna talk about it?"

"Not really," he said, still smiling at her.

"Okay. Where're you from?" She looked out at the water and settled back on the bench.

"Arkansas. You?"

"Just from here."

They looked out together for a bit, not saying anything.

"It's amazing, isn't it?" she asked in a low voice.

Hound shrugged. "It's...awesome." He didn't want to tell this Californian girl that her ocean scared the crap out of him, that it was too wide and empty and dead looking.

"It sounds nice," she said, not looking at him. "But it can be terrifying, too."

He nodded.

A little later she moved closer to him. "So. Girl trouble?"

He had to grin. "No. Not girl trouble."

"Good," she said, and then she leaned over and kissed him gently, just brushing her mouth over his.

He slid an arm over her shoulders and kissed her back, just as gently. She tasted of lemonade and bubble gum, innocent flavors that didn't sit well with a girl who would be kissing a stranger from Arkansas. He wondered what he tasted like in her mouth.

They sat there for a long time kissing softly. He swung her legs up, across his lap and she leaned into him. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Does it matter?"

"No. Are you going to do anything more than kiss me?"

"No."

"Okay."

When it was dark, Hound walked her to her car and she left. He went to his motel room and fell asleep late, tasting something that was too sweet to be good for him.

In the morning, he checked out and did a tour of used car lots, finally buying a used Suzuki bike that looked like it had a few months' hard use left in it. He got a new helmet and a leather coat and headed up the coast, riding alongside the ocean for as long as he could before he had to move inland.

Hound toured a little in California because he thought he should; it seemed a waste to come all that way and not see the major spots. He went to LA for a couple of days, but noise and the color of the air drove him out, feeling more than a little cheated. LA wasn't grand and glamorous at all; it was crowded and violent and rushed and yellow.

He went to San Francisco, which was better; however, his stay there convinced him that he most certainly wasn't going to be a city boy. Ever.

He took his bike north, and two weeks after leaving the ranch he found himself at a truck stop, miles from the ocean, drinking his third cup of coffee in an hour. At that rate he'd be stopping to piss every few miles, so he sat tight and ate a big slice of pie. The waitress started to look at him

funny, so he went out to the parking lot and sat on a huge rock next to his bike and forced himself to think.

He still thought about Jake all the time. He was still numb, and sad, and for some reason he had actually believed that just leaving the ranch was going to make everything better. He looked at the pay phone and had to fight the urge to call. It got easier when he decided he didn't know if he wanted to talk to Jake or Tor.

He wondered what the hell he was doing. Touring cities for what reason? He was a cowboy; he didn't belong here on the coast, near so many lights and too many people. He wasn't going back to Arkansas, wasn't about to head back to the land yet. But he didn't belong here, and he wasn't sure anymore if running was a good idea. Hard to run when you take everything with you.

He did a quick check of his funds and figured he had two weeks before he needed to find work, but sooner would be better. Maybe working would give him something to do besides torture himself with memories of blue-grey eyes that only saw someone else.

Eventually he went into the bathroom and took care of the coffee problem and then he hit the road again, heading for Oregon as fast as he could get there.

It only took him four days to find work, doing day labor for a small construction company. It wasn't great, and he didn't like it much, but it paid better than tending bar and he managed to save up some money in a few weeks.

The guys he worked with were okay. They asked him lots of questions about stuff he liked—horses and ranching—and he found his humor starting to come back. He went out with them on Friday nights, only having two or three drinks because of the cost, and he started to feel...better.

One of the guys finally asked him why he'd left Arkansas if he loved it so much, and he froze for a second. Someone else saw the look on his face and slapped him on the back. "Love fucking sucks, Hound. Keep movin', keep workin', and give it time." The others laughed and made assorted jokes

about getting laid helping, too, and variety being the spice of life, and fucking curing love...he stopped listening after a while.

When he was alone in his cheap room that night he tried to be objective. He'd been gone from the ranch for six weeks and things seemed to be easing up; he was working and talking and having a bit of fun again. He still loved Jake, and hell, maybe he always would. But maybe he was ready to let go a bit and be less *in love* with him.

The next day was Saturday and he woke up late, feeling lazy. He had his usual morning erection, and for the first time in more than two months he let his hand drift to his balls. He'd started to hate jerking off—hated that his imagination always sent him places he didn't belong. This time he just felt, touching himself with care at first, concentrating on the physical sensations. He let himself use his hands and fingers, let the sound of his own breathing and his own touch get him off. He came with a cry, joy mingled with the release. His body was his this time.

He took a shower and went for a walk, getting back to the motel about mid-afternoon. He could feel summer starting to slip away, and he decided it was time to head out again, get out of Oregon before he wound up working construction all winter. He wanted to be somewhere warmer before late autumn, and it looked like the bike still had a few more miles to go. He called his boss and gave notice, promising himself that he'd take a look at Nevada next. Another week and he'd go see the desert. And then, just 'cause he could, he took another shower and brought himself off again.

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The desert was flat and dry and hot, just like it was supposed to be. Hound loved it. Where the ocean had been cold and seemingly dead, the desert had animals and plants and nowhere near the amount of noise. He rode all the way down to Vegas and took a look around, thought he could like it better than LA. He got propositioned by four hookers in an hour, though, and he left as quietly as he'd arrived.

He swung northeast this time, wondering vaguely what this zigzag pattern said about him. He spent some time thinking about himself as he rode through the desert, not having much else to do except stop fairly frequently to let the engine cool down. He thought he might actually have to stop when he reached the mountains and let the poor bike die. He was doing his best, but the Suzuki could really only be called one by its ancestry, he'd replaced so many parts.

So he camped and rode and stopped in tiny towns that weren't so much towns as places where people happened to live close to each other, and he thought about stuff, tried to figure out who he was. He wondered if it was just because he was twenty-four and that was the thing to do—go on a journey of discovery. He didn't mind if it was; he was grateful he had the chance to do it and not be tied to something he hated instead.

He smiled a little at the thought he might be as crooked as his path. He'd been doing a little bit of careful exploration of his sexuality as he traveled -- careful in that he was doing it all by himself. He'd discovered quickly that he shouldn't think about girls while driving very fast on a motor bike, and that had been reassuring. When he had gotten that settled in his mind he decided that it might be time to look at the other side of the coin as well.

He wouldn't think about Jake, and it was getting less difficult to put the man from his mind. What he needed to do, he decided, was think about someone as physically different from Jake as he could.

It wasn't that challenging, really. Someone with dark hair and eyes. Shorter than Jake, even a bit shorter than himself. Slim hiped and lean, olive skin and small dark nipples. Strong legs, and smooth hands; very little body hair, just smooth, smooth skin, unless you count the hair around his—

Hound pulled over to the side of the road, intensely thankful that he was in the middle of the desert, and waited until his breathing had slowed to normal. He took his helmet off and ran a hand through his hair, looking up at the sky, bluer than it had any right to be.

"Guess that answers that question."

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Hound meandered around Nevada for a couple more days, moving steadily north east, toward the mountains. Summer was wearing on, but he was far enough south that he didn't mind at all; the intense heat had faded just enough, and the sun was gentling in the late afternoons. The foothills of the Rockies beckoned him and he went willingly, thinking that it might be nice to see some of Utah before dipping south again into Arizona. He didn't want to be too far north—he had no interest in Salt Lake City or that area—just enough that he could let the bike play out in the hills for a few days, see what it was like.

He liked the mountains just fine. He wondered idly if his new-found passion for the desert and the hills was a reaction to his distaste of the ocean but decided it didn't matter either way. He was just liking what he was seeing, and that was the point, wasn't it? He had to think about it for a few minutes before realizing that no, in fact the point was to get away from the ranch, and it seemed that he'd managed that somewhere along the way. Now he was truly just riding, looking at the world. It felt good.

He pulled over to the side of the road and turned off the bike. He looked around and listened to the birds for a few minutes, then walked a little bit to stretch his legs. Gone from the ranch for two months and he felt like he was a world away from there. That didn't seem right somehow, like he was getting away too fast, that Jake shouldn't be so easy to move past.

He shook head and looked to the sky again. What the hell did he want? He left so he could get away from Jake, so he could stop feeling sick and sad and lonely. Now he wasn't sad, he didn't want to puke when he thought about the man, and hell, he wasn't really even lonely, just alone. And alone was okay. So how come he felt guilty about feeling better too fast?

"You, Hound," he said aloud, "are sick in the head. Just put the past behind you, get on the fucking bike, and get moving."

He rode for a few more hours, taking twists and turns carefully, heading higher and higher into the trees. He loved the smell of the place after the dust of the desert, and he loved the shadows that were lengthening on the road in front of him. He pulled in at a motel for the night and slept deeply, the window wide open so he could smell the cedars outside.

The next day he headed south and turned off the main highway onto a two-lane secondary road. It twisted and turned more than the state roads did, and that's what he wanted. He liked leaning into the curves and he liked having to adjust his speed every once in a while. It was more exciting than the desert, where all he really could do was go faster and faster; here it was slower and slower. He wasn't an idiot, he didn't play games on the turns or the hills. He just like the concentration.

He was heading down a gentle hill and eyeing the next one when he noticed it. The slight hesitation in the brakes that made him pay more attention on the next turn. He took to controlling his speed entirely by the throttle and gearing down, testing the brakes every half hour or so when he had a straight stretch to play on. They weren't dangerous yet, but they could be if he was going to stay in the mountains for long. He started looking for somewhere to stop for the night.

The shadows were just starting to lengthen when he came around a bend in the road and saw a gas station that had two service bays just ahead of him. If nothing else, he could take a good look at the brake cables before going any further, as well as find out where the nearest motel was. He wasn't completely put off by the thought of camping out, but he was kind of hoping for a really cheap room with hot water and a TV.

He pulled into the station and killed the engine, looking around for a minute before climbing off the bike. He was about halfway down the side of the slope, and it looked like there was a small town ahead of him. Very small. He figured that if the collection of buildings rated a four way stop sign at the crossroads it would be something; there certainly wouldn't be a traffic light. If there was a motel he'd be happy, and if there was a diner he'd be over the moon.



Behind the station and up the hill a bit was a big old farmhouse with a lane coming down and disappearing behind the bays. Most likely the owner, he thought as he looked at the painted sign. Worn and tired red letters on a chipped white background spelled out *Del's*. There were three gas pumps out front and a small office to the side. Hound could see bottles of oil and shelves of fan belts behind the cash register. What he didn't see was any people.

He left his helmet on the bike and wandered over, listening for anything from the bays. One of the doors was up, showing a Jeep up on jacks, so he banged on the other one with a closed fist and called out, "Hey, anyone around?"

"Shit!" The curse was followed by a clang and the sound of wheels on cement as a man a few years older than himself appeared out from under the Jeep. "Sorry, was kinda lost under here. Can you hold on a sec?"

Hound grinned down at the greasy mechanic and said, "Sure. No rush at all."

The guy nodded and pushed off with his boots, sliding under the Jeep again. Hound stood and watched for a minute and then looked around, deciding that skinny legs in coveralls sticking out from under a vehicle weren't that exciting. He peered into the other bay, but whatever was in there was hidden under a tarp. Had to be a fucking boat though, the car was huge. He could see fins and tried to guess the year by their size. He was still pondering when the guy slid out again.

"Hey, not to be rude, but do you know your basic way around an engine?" the mechanic asked him.

Hound turned around again and nodded. "Yeah. Can't fix anything with a computer chip, but I can find my way. Why?"

White teeth gleamed up at him, the man's smile like a sunbeam at twilight. "Thank Christ. Just need you to check the oil level, if you don't mind. Got a leak here that I can't find."

Hound grinned back at him and moved into the work area, grabbing a couple of sheets of paper towel. He checked the oil quickly and studied the dipstick before shoving it home again. "You're down about halfway," he said to the work boots.

"Yeah, figured," the guy in the boots said as he crossed his ankles. The voice was smooth and deep, kind of rumbling but not growling. Hound hadn't heard anything like it before. He was used to voices hoarse from dust, or smooth like velvet—and yeah, not going to think about Jake anymore—and the combination was interesting.

There was another clank from under the jeep and then the voice swore a couple of times. "Do me another favor?" he finally asked.

Hound scuffed his boots and smiled to himself. "Yeah?"

"Grab the flippin' light on the bench and shine it under here? I need more light on the left-hand side."

Hound got the light and moved to the right, shining the light up under the jeep.

"Thanks."

Hound chuckled. No one under a car ever got left and right directions correct. If they did, it threw the whole 'helper/helpee' system out of whack.

"There you are, you son of a—" the voice muttered. One more noise, this one more of a crunch, and then the feet were pulling the rest of the skinny body out again. "Thanks," the guy said.

Hound reached out a hand and pulled the guy to his feet. "Not a problem." He had time to notice that they were exactly the same height, meeting eye to eye, before the man was handing him more paper towel.

"Got ya all greasy. Sorry." He had brown eyes, leaning toward hazel.

Hound took the paper towel and wiped off his hands. "S'okay."

They walked to the front of the bay and the mechanic turned to him. "Now then, what can I do for you?"

Hound smiled and looked at the ground. "Nothin' actually. Was just going to let you know that I was letting my bike cool down and then I gotta check the brakes. But maybe you could tell me how far to a motel, that'd be a fine help."

The guy blinked and then laughed. "Cool. Yeah, that's fine. Give you a hand if you want; what are you riding?"

They walked out toward the bike. "Supposed to be a Suzuki, but trust me, it's a hybrid. Whatever fits is on that thing. Just don't want to kill myself before it up and dies on me."

The man nodded and pushed a hand through his dark hair. He looked at his hand and cursed, giving Hound a look that said 'Yeah, I always manage to grease my hair, shut up,' and looked the bike over. He glanced up at Hound a couple of times and then finally stood up and asked, "How much of this did you do?"

Hound shrugged. "Not all. Bought it used about two months ago and have been riding it pretty steady since then. Most of the cooling system went in the desert and I've had to fix the timing a couple of times since I left California, but the body work was all done when I bought it."

"Where you been?" the guy asked in a friendly voice, still looking at the bike.

"Started in Santa Monica about nine weeks ago, rode up into Oregon, stayed there for a month, went down to Vegas, around the desert and crossed into Utah yesterday or the day before." Hound thought it sounded very impressive out loud like that.

The mechanic did too, apparently. "Cool. Where you headed next?"

Hound shrugged. "Not sure, gonna need to stop fairly soon and work for a bit. Eventually I'll go to New Mexico, I think, and maybe Texas. But not for a while." Texas was too close to home. Maybe next year.

The mechanic bit his lip and looked up at the house for a second. When he looked back at Hound his eyes were sharp and curious, but Hound didn't think he was wondering so much about *him* as he was about...something.

"Let's see what you think about this," he said and led Hound back into the bays, going to the behemoth under the sheet. He didn't take the sheet off, just reached under it and lifted the hood so Hound could see the engine, and then stepped back.

Hound looked at it and then the mechanic. "It's new. I mean, not brand new, but it's not original."

The guy nodded. "Yeah, I had to drop it in 'cause the old one wouldn't burn unleaded. It was shot anyway. But the timing's fucked and I want this baby to purr."

Hound looked at him. "And you can't adjust the timing?"

That got a belly laugh. "Of course I can. I want you to do it, though."

Hound stared at him, no idea why he was supposed to play with the timing on this beast—whatever it was—but willing to help out. "Turn it over then, let me hear."

That earned him a quick grin. He waited for a second and nearly jumped out of his skin as the engine roared to life. Fucking thing was loud before it settled down. He listened for a few seconds and adjusted the timing and listened again. It took him a couple of tries, but when he was satisfied the car was purring. Like a lion, not a tabby, but purring nonetheless.

"Beautiful." The voice came from behind him and he turned around to face the mechanic, grinning. The man moved around the car and turned it off, silence falling nicely. "Wanna see her?"

Hound nodded.

"Know what she is?" The man was teasing him, one hand on the tarp, not pulling it back yet.

"Nope. Fins aren't big enough to be from the fifties, or at least the mid-fifties. I'm going with a Ford, most likely late forties, from the length, and the fact you've dropped a Ford engine in there, but I can't get any closer than that. Oh! And it's a convertible. Can see the roof supports through the tarp. Soft top."

The mechanic blinked at him and nodded his head. "Cool." Then he pulled back the tarp and Hound whistled.

Midnight Cherry paint, cream leather interior, original trim, four-speed stick shift. "1948 Ford Galaxy convertible. Very nice." Hound walked around the car, admiring its lines. "You restore it?"

"Yep. Took me three years." The man's voice was full of pride, and Hound thought he'd earned the right.

"It's gorgeous," Hound said honestly. He was still admiring it when he heard a car pull up outside and the man beside him swear under his breath.

"Cover her for me, will ya?" he said as he moved away.

Hound jumped a little, startled out of the happy car-loving space his mind had gone, and pulled the tarp up. He made sure the car was nicely under wraps and wandered back outside, thinking he better see to his brakes and find out where he could bed down for the night.

When he went outside, the mechanic was leaning over the open door of a blue Neon, talking to a pretty blonde. Hound's first thought was girlfriend, but as he walked past them to get to his bike he could see the mechanic's eyes flicker toward him with something close to pleading in them. He wondered what he was supposed to do, and the man motioned him over.

The girl looked up at him in surprise. "You didn't say you had a customer in, Del. You should have told me; I wouldn't sit here gabbing at you if you have work to do, you know that." She smiled at Hound and said, "I'm sorry. Del's a little too polite to tell me to go away."

Hound smiled at her; she seemed nice enough, even if Del did look like he'd rather be back under the jeep trying to find an oil leak. "It's okay. I'm just going to take a look at my brakes and see what's what. Then I'll be out of his hair."

He turned to walk away again, but she said, "Where are you from? Don't get many strangers through here."

Hound knew the opening of a chatty woman when he heard one and settled himself back on his heels. This could take awhile.

"From Arkansas. Decided that the main roads were good enough, but you get to see more on the side roads. Got nowhere to be in a hurry, so I'm just wandering through the mountains for a time."

She smiled at him. "Must be nice to have the time and money to do that. I'd love to just take off sometime, go see the east coast and maybe go to Vermont one fall." She talked for a bit more, about leaves and such, and Hound gave Del a friendly glare as the mechanic slipped away and went back to looking at Hound's bike. Traitor.

Hound answered her questions for a few more minutes, and then Del wandered back. "Daisy, you best get to Miss Edith's. She'll be wanting her supper soon." It wasn't an order; the tone was more like the one Elias had used when Kip had lost track of time and was in danger of getting to Beth's later than he'd said.

She blinked and looked at her watch. "Oh, God." She smiled at Hound and said, "It's been nice talking to you—?"

Hound heard that pause which was the universal invitation to introduce oneself and opened his mouth to say 'Hound'. He really did. But in that split second he heard his own voice from the day before, telling him to leave the past behind.

"I'm Kevin," he said with a smile.

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Kevin waved to Daisy as she drove away and shook his head. This had to be the weirdest place he'd ever stopped. Usually he could count on a friendly smile and a little bit of chat about where he was from, but this place... Lord above. Getting tested on simple mechanics, chatting up a pretty girl so another guy could avoid her, Del loving on his bike like it was something special when he knew it was just about to die dead on him... and he was still just standing in one spot, watching Daisy's taillights go around the bend in the road.

"Kevin." Del's voice made him jump, pulling him back to reality pretty damn fast. Smooth voice, one he needed to think about. Later. He turned to his bike and saw that Del was taking a close look at the brake lines, not looking too happy.

"Hey," Kevin said as he walked back to the bike. He crouched down on the side opposite Del. "Daisy seems nice," he said with a grin.

Del made a face and went back to looking at the brake lines. "She's all right."

Kevin raised an eyebrow, deliberately exaggerating his look of interest into something like Jerry Springer about to delve deeply into some poor bastard's childhood full of circus freaks and exotic

pets who had been reclaimed by the government and that's why he was married to a transgendered petty thief. "So she's what? A cousin? Ex-wife overcome with guilt? Sister?"

Del looked at him, eyes wide then narrowing for a moment before he threw back his head and laughed. "Lord, no. Not an ex of any kind—oh God, that would be really awful—never get any kind of peace then. No, it's worse than all that." He gave Kevin another quick grin and stood up, then walked back toward the bays, Kevin following along. "I chose her, if you can believe that. Daisy's my best friend, has been ever since we were about four years old. She's a real mother hen to me, though. Can't seem to keep out of my business and she's always checkin' up on me. You'll see tomorrow. Twenty dollars says she's around here at least three times before supper."

Kevin stopped walking and blinked a couple of times. "Tomorrow?"

Del turned around and stared at him, thinking for a moment. A slow flush rose on his face. "Damn. Had that part of the conversation in my head didn't I? Daisy says I do that 'cause I'm alone too much, that I need to start talking to myself out loud so everyone can know what they're saying to me. I think she just wants me to look silly in front of...well, everyone. Doesn't matter though, 'cause you're looking at me like I've lost my mind, so I'm just gonna go in here and have a sit for awhile, and you can decide if you want to hear about what I was thinking or if you're just going to head out now and try to get to Cedar City before your brakes die." The last part was said as Del disappeared out of sight, moving fast.

Kevin blinked again and started to laugh. He figured that anyone who could babble that well was worth listening to; he'd heard some interesting things come out when people's nerves got the best of them and had given away lots himself. As a seasoned babbler and chatter box he knew a fellow talker when he met one, even if it did seem to take something embarrassing to wake the man up to his potential.

Kevin followed Del into the bay and looked around. Gone. He went through the side door into the cash office and found Del sitting behind the counter, rummaging around in a box on the bottom shelf.



"Takes talent to do that," Kevin offered as he leaned on the counter and watched. "When I get going like that I actually have to keep talking until I tell my entire life story or someone does me the kindness of smacking me upside the head. And I'm having a hard time figuring out how you talking to me in your head is a bad thing, other than me not actually knowing what we're going to do tomorrow. Fill me in?"

Del looked up at him, his face still red but with laughter in his eyes. "Daisy took off with my smokes. She does that."

Kevin nodded sympathetically. "Yeah. Best friends—can't stand it when you try to kill yourself slowly. Damn her, anyway."

"Oh, shut up," Del said with a grin. "Not like three cigarettes a year will kill me."

"God, they will if they come from the same pack. Christ, they'd be so dry your fingers would be in flames just from holding onto the damn thing. Easier just to tell me what you're thinking."

Del stood up and rolled his eyes. "Yeah, yeah." He gestured out the main door toward the motorcycle. "Looked at your bike."

Kevin nodded. "It's tired out, I know. But she's got a few miles left before she quits." He looked out at the bike and then back at Del. "The brakes fucked?"

"No, not completely." Del ran his hand through his hair. "Damn," he said mildly when he realized he'd greased his hair yet again. He rocked back on his heels and looked at Kevin. "Brakes are needing a bit of work, yeah. But you're good for a bit, as long as you don't take any chances. If I were you, I'd take care of it soon—either do it now or get out of the mountains as soon as you can and strip the bike down. Can't be riding around up here with brakes soft as that."

"Yeah, I know. Not in a real rush to leave the mountains, so time to overhaul it, I guess." Kevin was doing another mental adjustment to his wallet, and it wasn't looking so good. He'd have time to strip down the bike and get it all nice and tight for a good run and have to stop somewhere and work a stretch. Or, he could just head to Arizona and pray he hit the desert before the brakes really gave it up. He was still weighing options when he realized Del was talking to him.

"...the bays. So if you tear it down we can rebuild and—shit, I'm talking to myself aren't I?"

"Yeah, but at least it's out loud," Kevin said with a grin. "Sorry. Was adding up what it'll cost to strip it down. Even if I do it all myself I'll need help rebuilding it, and between parts and labor I'm not sure I can do it right now."

"That's what I'm saying. Do it here, take a week or whatever and scatter parts all over one of the bays. I'll move the Ford up to the barn, and we can work on the bike here. If you need parts, I'll make some calls and see what I can do."

Kevin thought about it for about two seconds before seeing how good a deal it was for him and what a lousy deal it was for Del. "Can't pay you for your time, and I'll be taking up your space—"

"I'll just help out when I have the time. No charge. You pay for parts, and if you're going to get all hung up on it, you can work around here for a bit. Can't let you do inspections, 'cause you're not a mechanic, but you can do what you can, even if you just want to pump gas and do oil changes. Or if you want, you can work on my cars, or you can work in the barn instead of in the bay, though I'd prefer if you worked on the bike down here because the tools are here and—" Del was starting to babble again.

"Why?" Kevin interrupted.

Del blinked. "Why what?"

Kevin blinked. "Why do you want me to stay?"

Del's face cleared. "Oh! 'Cause you knew what the Ford was. 'Cause you work on your bike, don't just ride around like you're wild and free. 'Cause I want to hear about Arkansas. Okay, maybe not that last one so much. But...well. Maybe Daisy's right. Maybe I spend too much time alone."

Kevin nodded. "Okay."

"Yeah?" Del sounded surprised and pleased.

"Yeah." Kevin figured he just sounded pleased.

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Kevin had a feeling that he was going to be grinning all night. Del had given him directions to the motel—'go straight down the road and when you hit the end of the S curve go straight, can't miss it'—and he was pleased to find a small café in the building. The directions were correct in that when he hit the end of the curve he went straight and was in the parking lot of the motel; if he hadn't been paying attention to the signs and the speed limit, he would have wound up actually in the building. He shook his head as he pulled up outside the office and wondered how many near misses there were in winter. The motel was literally dead ahead if you didn't follow the course of the road.

"Oh, we just close down the last few units at the first sign of ice," the owner said when Kevin asked him about it.

"You're serious?" Kevin asked, not sure if the man was pulling his leg or not. He got a slow grin in return and still didn't know if the man was telling him the truth or not. He'd ask Del in the morning.

He got a sandwich from the café and went to his room. He lay back on the bed watching TV for a bit, but he realized he hadn't been paying any attention for at least an hour and he still had that silly grin on as he shook his head again. And let his grin grow even bigger.

Kevin hadn't felt any sort of connection to anybody since leaving the ranch. He'd kissed that girl back in Santa Monica, but that hadn't been anything at all; he'd known that at the time. He'd liked the guys he'd worked with in Oregon, but now, three weeks or so later, he couldn't really remember their names.

Del was funny, in a good way, and he was really good looking, in an underfed, loose-limbed way that was exotic to Kevin, who was used to cowboy muscles and beer bellies. Kevin even liked the way Del talked; it was comforting to see someone string words together without a set stopping place, to see someone get as flustered as he himself often felt.

Then there was Daisy. Kevin wished he'd seen more of her, gotten to see if the rest of her lived up to the promise of pretty blue eyes and smooth blonde hair. She had creamy skin scattered with freckles and a wide smile. When she'd been talking about wanting to go north for an autumn, her eyes had gotten far away and dreamy, and...and he hadn't been paying any attention. He'd been trying to see Del out of the corner of his eye.

The stupid grin was back. Kevin stripped down and got into bed, leaving the TV on for light, the sound off. He reckoned the next week or so was going to be real interesting.

He wasn't surprised to wake up in the middle of the night with sticky sheets. He could still feel the throb in his cock, still feel the tremble of release. He waited a moment until he was sure he could stand up and then went to the bathroom to wash himself. He stripped the bed and curled up in a spare blanket, going back to sleep with the silly grin still in place. He hadn't had a wet dream in years. He figured maybe tomorrow night he'd just stroke off instead. Or maybe as well. Depended on how he and Del got along.

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It didn't take long for the locals to find out there was someone new up at Del's. Daisy was there by ten, bringing a thermos of coffee and a basket of fresh muffins. Del rolled his eyes and disappeared under the hood of a Dodge. Kevin pulled up a chair and had a nice cup of coffee and bit of a chat.

"You going to stay long?" Daisy asked, looking at him through her eyelashes.

"For a bit," he answered, unable to stop himself from glancing in Del's direction. "He's gonna help me get the bike in shape, and I'm going to help out here -- pump gas and such."

Daisy glanced in Del's direction as well. "Uh huh." She handed Kevin a muffin and another cup of coffee, smiling a little. Well, kind of smirking actually, and Kevin knew he was blushing, but couldn't seem to stop.

Daisy stayed for about an hour, talking easily with him while Del worked on the car and threw in comments now and again. Kevin was happy and comfortable, just throwing out questions about the town and the people and getting a lesson about local history in return. He loved that kind of thing; it made him feel good to know that there were still places where everyone knew everyone else, where family and community mattered.

Del and Daisy told him about the garage, which had been Del's father's, and how Del's momma had died when Del was a little guy, just a toddler. About how Del's daddy had taken him into the garage every day and how Miss Mabel or Miss Edith would come up and sit and watch to make sure he didn't get hurt, and how Del's daddy wouldn't let them take his little boy away every day. He wanted to raise him, he just needed someone to keep him safe.

Daisy told him how her own mother took to dropping her off at the garage some days so she could play with Del—that was before they were even old enough for school—and how Miss Mabel would take them up to the house in the afternoons and let them help cook supper for Del's daddy. It sounded like they had grown up with a lot of people who loved them, and when Kevin said so they just nodded in agreement.

Del's father had died just after they were out of high school, and now the whole thing was Del's alone, no other blood relatives to help out. "But I sure as hell have family," Del said with a smile at Daisy.

Daisy had smiled back at him and then looked hard at Kevin. "We take care of each other."

Kevin nodded and finished his coffee. She'd made her point.

He walked back to the motel that evening, pleading a need to shower and sleep. Fact was, there was no way he'd be able to spend another hour with Del without embarrassing himself by pushing the man into a wall and asking for a lesson on how to make a man scream.

So he went to his room and stroked off, thinking about Del's smile and his voice and trying to imagine him naked. After he had some supper he took a bath and jerked off again, this time trying to imagine kissing Del, feeling that lanky body moving against him; he bit his lip hard enough to draw blood that time, but at least he didn't cry out loud enough to let everyone know what he was doing.

He still woke up with sticky sheets.

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On the second day, people started arriving to see who this cowboy was, and Kevin found himself spending more time talking to people than working on the bike. At this rate, he was going to be there all winter. He tried to find a down side there and could only come up with the fact that he hadn't enough money to pay for his room that long.

Everyone was very polite, and the conversations were pretty quick and predictable. He'd tell them he was from Arkansas, that he'd worked on a ranch and was just out seeing a bit of the country for a while before heading home to settle down. Some of the men looked wistfully at the bike, some of them seemed a little confused about why he'd leave a place he loved, and others would just nod and

pay for their gas, making it clear that they weren't really interested in him as anything other than something new to be seen at least once.

The women, on the other hand... well. The ones who were 'of an age' as Kevin's own mother had said in reference to people over fifty, were very nice, if a little abrupt in their questions. "Who are you?" and "So, you'll be moving on when your bike is fixed?" and "Oh, yes, we like it here very much, it is a friendly place." Some of the younger set flirted a little, and that was fine, too. Kevin knew that it was innocent and fun, and hell, he liked to flirt. But when the big Lincoln rolled up and the woman driving got out and walked right to him, he knew that this was the woman he had to impress. She had the bearing of a person who knew her status in the community and took it very seriously.

Kevin heard Del swear softly behind him and had time to realize the oath was a prayer before his upbringing took over.

"So, you're Del's new help," the woman declared as she drew near. She was in her fifties, he guessed, solid and compact; if he were home he would have taken her for a Boss's wife, someone who was in charge.

He smiled warmly. He loved talking to women like this, absolutely loved it. He felt safest when he knew his place, and with this woman he knew what he was—an interloper to be inspected and either approved or disapproved. The only way to win at this game was to be himself. Dishonesty or trying to play up to her through flattery would be death.

"Hi," he said, standing to meet her eyes. "I'm Kevin. Del's letting me help out here in exchange for his own help with my motorcycle."

She nodded sharply and glanced at Del. "You taking care of yourself?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Mabel. Though it would be easier if you'd send me another batch of molasses cookies."

She rolled her eyes and grinned, her face folding into well worn laugh lines. "Pup. Behave yourself, and ask nicely." Kevin knew that a batch of molasses cookies would be in her oven half an hour after she returned home.

She turned her eyes back to him. "You know much about cars?"

"Not really, ma'am," he replied. "I worked on the vehicles on the ranch some, and my daddy let me work on his old car, but I'm just a cowboy really. Del's showing me some things when he has the time."

"Well, that's good of him. You'll not be working on the cars then? Just doing the other work around here?"

"Yes, ma'am. Just help out where I can and stay out of the way the rest of the time. My momma always told me to be a help and not a hindrance, and I've found that momma was almost always right."

She laughed. "Mommamas usually are. What does she think about you gallivanting all over? She must want you home where you belong."

Kevin bit his lip and looked at the ground for a second. "Momma, well, she's gone, ma'am. Just me and my brother now, and he's up north, following his dream. Momma wanted us to do what makes us happy, and to do what we're good at. I'm still trying to find out what that is."

She looked at him with compassion, but didn't offer the overly solicitous sympathies he dreaded getting from strangers. "You not eager to return to ranching then?"

"Well," he said carefully, "I was good at it, and I miss the work. But I'm not sure that being a cowboy is what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm learning stuff here, and maybe that's what I'm meant to do right about now. Maybe if I was as good at ranching as I hear you are at baking I'd feel different."



She raised an eyebrow. "Who's been talkin' about me?" she asked, giving Del a teasing look.

"Daisy and Del raved for ages yesterday about your lemon pie," Kevin offered, letting a little pleading into his voice.

She blinked and then gave in to a belly laugh. "You're a sneaky one, aren't you? Fine then. Molasses cookies and lemon pie." She walked back to her car and opened the door. "Get back to work, the both of you. I'll send them up with someone later."

She drove off and Kevin grinned at Del, who just shook his head and said, "You're far too good at that. You do know that you were just adopted, don't you?"

Kevin just grinned at him and walked to his bike. Things were going just fine.

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Things were calmer the next day, in that they had fewer people dropping by to check out Kevin's story, but Kevin was far from calm. He was reaching the point where it would have been so easy to just get on his bike and ride away from Del so he didn't have to decide what to do or how to do it...he was a nervous, horny wreck. He stood over his bike, which was pretty well stripped down to a million tiny parts by this point, and wondered if he could make it through another day without coming onto the man.

"Hey, want to show you something," Del said from behind him. Kevin's mind skittered off somewhere for a moment, and he had to close his eyes and breathe deeply to calm himself down. God, he was such a mess.

He followed Del out of the garage and up toward the house, but they headed to the right instead of left. They were going to the barn, which would have been great except Kevin was in such a state he

thought about stables and stalls, which brought the image of hay bales and marked up wrists...he thought he may have whimpered, and Del was staring at him.

Kevin flushed and looked back down at the garage, hoping someone would drive up so he could run away.

Del just opened up the big barn doors and stepped back. "Take a look. I'll be down there when you're done." Then he turned and walked away, tossing Kevin one of those brighter-than-anything smiles.

Kevin watched Del walk away and forced himself to go into the barn. He really just wanted to watch Del walk. He absently noted that he seemed to be traveling down that one track again and again. Then even the thought of Del's ass was forced from his brain as he surveyed the interior of the barn.

Six chassis lined up on the far wall, all in need of massive amounts of body work and most likely equally impressive amounts of mechanical work. He wasn't sure, but they all looked like they were pre-1960; he didn't know enough about cars to tell for sure. There were two convertibles, a sporty little thing that was mostly curves and head lights, a sedan, and a station wagon. All begging to be restored and loved and petted and oh...this could be so very much fun.

He looked at the cars, opened doors, popped hoods, even crawled under the wagon for a bit, though he wasn't sure exactly what he was looking at. All he knew was that he had a lick of excitement starting a fire in his gut, and for the first time in days he was hard for something other than Del.

Del. Oh Christ, Del's cars, and why did he show this to Kevin unless he wanted help to restore them? Just to see what Kevin would think? The man knew Kevin wasn't a mechanic, just someone who kind of liked to mess around. But then, he'd never thought he would get so wound up about a wreck of car before and here he was, practically caressing the hood of the station wagon.

He walked back down to the garage and noticed the sun was low in the sky; it was later than he'd thought, well past the time he'd been running off to the motel to hide. He went in and leaned against the workbench, watching Del finish up with a rust pitted Chevy.

Del didn't say anything when he was done, just quirked an eyebrow at him and leaned on the car.

"Looks like you have your fun cut out for you," Kevin said mildly. "Gonna take you a lot of time and money to restore those cars."

Del nodded. "Time and money I have."

Kevin didn't have anything to say to that. Del moved away and started closing the shop up for the night. "C'mon up to the house," he said. "Have a beer." He didn't wait for an answer, just lead the way out, and they walked up the lane in silence.

They were sitting on the porch watching the sun sink behind the ridge when Del asked him why he'd left Arkansas. Kevin sighed and looked at the sky, all pink and orange, like it had been when he had watched the sun set with Tor just before he'd run.

"Fell in love with someone I'd never be with, someone I wasn't *supposed* to be with. Hurt too much to stay, be so near and so much on the outside. So I left." He looked over at Del, who nodded like he knew what Kevin meant.

"You were that sure it wouldn't work out for you? You had to leave the state?" Del asked carefully.

Kevin laughed. "Good Lord. Don't think there's a man on the planet more unavailable to me than Jake. Jake and Tor...fuck. They were perfect for each other and there was no way I was ever supposed to be with him and I just outed myself didn't I?" Blind panic had taken hold, and stopping the flow of words was not going to be easy. "Jake, he never knew, but Tor did. He was right nice about it, made me see that it wasn't my fault, but yeah, Jake wasn't ever going to want me, and that was okay, because he had Tor, and all that mattered really was that Jake was happy, really honest-

to-fuck happy. I wasn't, couldn't be if I stayed; I mean, hell, I lived with them, heard them, saw them, and so I had to leave, and it's better now, 'cause I can think about him without feeling bad and I really can't stop talking so you better say something, please—"

Del leaned over and kissed him. Immediately, several things happened, but the first was that Kevin shut up. He had a brief moment of utter shock, quickly followed by another burst of blind panic, and ultimately settled on something which, if asked, he would only have been able to describe as "blank mind."

Del's mouth was on his and the only part of them touching was their lips. It wasn't the best kiss Kevin had ever had, but he figured that was because he wasn't participating. So he kissed Del back. Just lips, no tongue, and – fuck -- it didn't matter, because he was hard enough to pound nails, just from this. It was sweet and gentle and unlike anything he'd ever experienced. Del's breath tasted of beer and he needed a shave and he smelled like grease and oil and gasoline and he was warm and Kevin was pretty sure one of them just moaned and yeah, *now* it was the best kiss ever.

Del pulled back and they stared at each other.

"Sorry—"

"Wow—"

Silence.

"You're sorry?"

"Wow?"

More silence. Kevin kind of wondered how sorry Del really was, what with the silly grin he was wearing and everything. "Uh, maybe..."

"Maybe what?" Del asked, his eyes hot and bright as he shifted his weight in his chair.

Kevin let his tongue trace his lower lip. "Maybe we could try that ag—"

He was interrupted by car horns honking and the phone ringing in the house. Both men jumped up, heading in opposite directions, like they were caught doing...well, what they had been doing. Del went into the house to answer the phone, and Kevin stood wide-eyed at the railing, watching four cars speed up the dirt lane from the garage, each one sounding its horn. Jesus. It was just one kiss.

Daisy pulled up first, followed by Miss Mabel, who had someone else in her car, and then two other cars stopped beside them, driven by people he'd met but couldn't remember what their names were.

"Kevin!" Daisy screamed, even though he was only twenty feet from her. "Thank God you're okay. We didn't know where you were, and we couldn't see you and you've always been there by now and oh, Lord, I thought you were under it all somewhere, and here you are. Where's Del?" By the time she'd asked about Del she'd made it onto the porch and had her arms around Kevin in a death grip. He could feel her trembling.

"I'm okay," he said, confused. "Shhh, calm down. What happened?" He tried to soothe her, using the voice he'd always used on the horses when they were skittish. He looked to Miss Mabel over Daisy's shoulder and saw relief in her eyes, behind her show of impatience at Daisy's hysterics.

"Lord, child, leave the man be. He's here and that's all we need to know right now. Get Del and let's get down there, lend a hand getting that idiot's trailer out of the wreckage."

Del came out of the house looking worried, his car keys in his hand. He hugged Daisy quickly and asked, "Anyone hurt?"

"Not so far as I know," she said into his chest. "Now that we know where Kevin is, anyway."

He let her go and took off down the steps. "C'mon Kevin. Got work to do."

Everyone piled into their cars and Kevin ran after Del toward the garage and the modified pickup he used as a tow truck. "What happened?" he asked as they followed the line of cars down the road.

"Some damn fool didn't have his trailer chained properly, I think. Couldn't really tell through all the babble about the motel being hit. I think someone missed the curve, or took the corner too fast, or something. Anyway, the hotel got rammed and it looks like you're out a room. Which would be why Daisy was so upset, thinkin' you got smooshed."

Kevin blinked at him. "My room is gone?"

Del glanced at him and nodded. "Apparently." He pointed ahead of them. "Take a look."

Kevin's room wasn't really gone, they found on closer inspection, it just had a broken window and a tent trailer in it. The family who owned the trailer was pretty upset, as was Mr. Harrel, the owner of the motel. Del pulled the trailer out, with help from Kevin and several other men, and they got it ready to tow up to the garage so he could take a look at the axels and undercarriage. When they got the trailer out, damage to the exterior wall was revealed and it was obvious to everyone that Kevin was indeed out of a room.

"Well, that's easy to take care of," Daisy said. "He can come home with me."

Every man in the area took a step back, including Kevin, as Miss Mabel and the other woman from her car, who turned out to be Miss Edith, descended on Daisy. It was quickly made clear that *that* wasn't going to happen, and any self-respecting woman wouldn't be seen to make such an offer to a young man. Daisy was suitably chastised and her cheeks were flaming by the time Miss Edith was through.

"However," Miss Mabel concluded, "we do need a place for the lad, and I think it's perfectly clear where he should be, don't you agree, Del?"

Del looked up from where he was securing the trailer and stared. "What? Where?"

Kevin knew Del wasn't dumb; it only made sense that he'd stay in the big house behind the garage; it wasn't like Del had limited space, and shit, Kevin was working there and didn't even have his bike to get back and forth. So that meant Del was panicked. Which was okay, 'cause the thought of staying alone in the house with Del was making Kevin panic, too. A kiss was one thing, and yeah, he wanted to do that again, but oh, God, if he was sleeping in the same house, where would he jack off? There had to be rules about that sort of thing, and he was so not ready to just leap into bed with the man. Well, okay, parts of him were, but Kevin tried very hard to live his life with a lick of sense and just... oh hell. He decided to think about it later.

Once everyone around them decided that Kevin was going to stay in his spare room, all Del could do was make sure the trailer was secure and head back to the garage, with Kevin riding with him in the cab of the truck.

"This isn't really the way I saw this playing out tonight," Del said, not looking at him.

"You had a plan?" Kevin blurted.

"No, not as such," Del admitted.

"Well, I'm willing to buy you not paying people to trash my room so I have to stay with you," Kevin said with a grin. He was rewarded with a laugh, and they spent the rest of the quick drive in easy silence.

When they got the garage, Del went to work on the trailer, talking to the owner about a lot of things that Kevin didn't really understand. Kevin wandered around for an hour or so and finally went up the house to make them all something to eat, feeling a little odd about rummaging about in Del's kitchen. After he delivered sandwiches and some quick pasta to the crowd at the garage, he asked Del if it would okay if he went back up to the house and just watched TV for a while, as he wasn't

much help with the work that needed doing. Del told him where to find things he might need and said he would be a while.

"Don't bother waiting up for me," he said, meeting Kevin's eyes. "There's a guest room made up at the end of the hall; it's a little girly, though -- Daisy did the redecorating."

Kevin nodded, knowing that Del was really saying he wasn't going to rush things and that they could figure out where they stood at another time.

Kevin did wait up, until after midnight, but finally took himself off to bed when he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. He hoped that being exhausted would keep him from embarrassing himself during the night. He didn't hear Del come in.

When he woke up, sunlight was streaming in through the white lace curtains and the house was silent. He made his way to the bathroom and got into the shower, waking up slowly under the hot spray. By the time he was done he was awake, refreshed, and feeling pretty damn relaxed. Almost ready to face Del.

It wasn't until he was dried off and naked in the bathroom that he remembered they'd left all his stuff in the motel room. He found an unopened toothbrush and brushed his teeth, but he was sadly out of ideas about what to do about clothes. The ones he'd worn the day before were dirty, streaked with grease and dirt, and, quite frankly, they smelled bad. He sighed and wrapped a towel around his waist. He opened the bathroom door and smelled coffee. Oh, good, Del was up. This could be interesting.

He made his way down to the kitchen and stood in the doorway for a moment, unable to take another step on weak knees. Del was leaning on the kitchen counter, legs out in front of him, ankles crossed. He was drinking a cup of coffee and looking out the window, lit up in the morning sun, looking gorgeous and only half awake.



Del was wearing boxer shorts, and that was all. Kevin's general impression that Del was skinny vanished at the sight of all that naked skin, tight over lean muscles. His abdomen was sculpted, his legs long and hard, his shoulders broader than Kevin had thought. He was beautiful. And he was turning to look at Kevin.

Kevin swallowed hard, not sure what to do with his hands. He felt flustered, knew he was blushing, and knew that if he didn't get out of there in less than five seconds Del would be perfectly aware of how his state of undress was affecting Kevin.

"I... uh... I don't have any clothes," he stammered, unable to move or stop staring.

"Jesus," Del said, nearly dropping his coffee mug. He was staring, too, and Kevin suddenly thought that things were about to get a lot more interesting than he'd bargained for.

Del turned and carefully put his mug on the counter. "I think I have something for you—I mean, I have pants you could get into—I—oh, fuck." Del was blushing, too, a nice red flush that started on his chest and worked its way up, and he hung his head for a second before looking at Kevin again. "Shit. Kevin. Do you have any idea..." He started toward him and Kevin's brain stuttered a little, taking in Del's erection, feeling his own against the towel.

Del moved closer, biting at his lip. "Tell me to stop. Now, Kevin. 'Cause I'm going to kiss you, and if you don't tell me right now to stop I don't know if I'll be able to." He was almost to Kevin, his eyes dilated, his voice getting hoarse.

Kevin reminded himself to breathe.

"Tell me to stop if you don't want me to kiss you," Del said again, and Kevin stepped forward, not sure how his legs knew what to do.

Del's hands were around his waist and Kevin's arms slid around to Del's back and then they were pressed tightly together, mouths hungry and rough. Kevin opened his mouth wide to the kiss and

Del pushed in, tongue sliding and thrusting and playing with his own. He could feel Del's hands at the small of his back, pulling him closer; he could feel Del's back muscles flex under his hands, and Kevin moaned softly into the kiss.

It was unlike anything he'd ever experienced before. Del's mouth was hot and eager, not soft and gentle like the girls he'd been with. There was fire here, and power; the rasp of stubble and the strength of rough fingers on his skin made his head spin. Del's hands were in his hair now, holding his head as Del continued to fuck Kevin's mouth with his tongue, and Kevin's hips were thrusting into Del's with no help from his brain at all.

He could feel the heat of the man's erection through the towel and boxer shorts. Fuck, Del was hard and wanting, and Kevin couldn't control himself anymore than he could answer tax questions. His own cock was hard and throbbing; his balls were starting to ache. He needed more, needed now and oh, yes, like that, pushed back into the wall and Del's hands on his ass, trying to get the towel out of the way, sounds that might have been words spilling into the kisses. They moved together fast and hard and then Del bit lightly at his neck and Kevin groaned, his hips jerking as he came.

Del's hands slowed for a moment and he licked Kevin's neck. "Did you just—?"

Kevin flushed. "Yeah, I've never done this—"

He didn't get a chance to finish the thought before Del rocked hard into him, his eyes rolling back. Kevin could actually feel the man's cock pulse as he shot, and then they were both shaking, holding each other up in the kitchen, kisses softer now.

"Well, Goddamn," Del said.

"Uh huh." Kevin's heart was pounding, and one of them was making happy "oh, that was nice" noises, and Kevin thought it might be him. He didn't really care, as long as Del kept his hands where they were on his ass and kept nibbling at his neck like that. Except he stopped.

"Did you just say that you've never done this before?"

"Uh, did I say something?" Kevin tried to think. He'd felt like he was going to burst into flame, he'd jerked in Del's arms and come hard, and he'd... "Oh, that. Yeah. Never done this." He ran his hand back up Del's back and did some neck nibbling of his own. Del's skin tasted nice, sort of salty and smoky, and really warm.

"What do you mean—oh, that feels good—never?" Del's hands were moving, too, still on his ass, still trying to get the towel out of the way without actually pulling away enough for that to be possible. Plus, it was sort of sticky now, and Kevin figured he'd have to clean himself up with it anyway.

Kevin licked a path along Del's collarbone. "Never, like...never been with a guy, never kissed a guy, never done anything with a guy. Outside of my head, anyway."

Del pulled away out of his arms, looking really upset.

"What?" Kevin was confused. "There's a rule somewhere about first times? I know I'm new to this but—"

Del shook his head and kissed him again, but didn't lean in as close. "Shut up. No, there's no rules. Just wish I'd known, it should have been special. Not a great memory for you, you know? Just push you into a wall and rub off on you."

Kevin felt his cock twitch. "I kinda liked that part."

Del looked at him and blinked, then his eyes got kind of funny, sort of dark and fiery. "Yeah?" Oh, and hey, an answering twitch from the other side of the towel.

"Yeah." The deep kisses that made Kevin's knees want to give out were back, and Del was where he belonged, full length pressed against Kevin, hands holding them together. Kevin moaned again and heard Del moan in reply before, once more, Del was gone.

This time Del shook his head and stepped back. "Not gonna do this in the kitchen. We're sticky and messy and you're far too fucking sexy to just rub off on." With that, Del took his hand and led him back upstairs. Kevin went as easily as he could, but his brain was misfiring, and he kept wanting to lean on the walls, or lick Del's back or just fall over.

They went into the bathroom and Del turned the shower on. "Step one is rinse off."

Kevin grinned. "What's step two?"

"Crawling into my bed so I can treat you right." Del stripped off his boxers and stepped into the shower. "Coming?"

"Almost." As a matter of fact, Kevin was feeling a little poleaxed. First, Del had said he was sexy, which wasn't something Kevin was used to hearing at all, and then he was just so matter of fact about wanting to...to...Kevin's brain went skittering off and he gave up entirely, dropping the towel onto the floor and getting into the shower for the second time that morning.

They washed quickly, soap and water taking care of the parts that needed to be soaped and rinsed, and Del washed his hair, not wasting any time. Kevin stood on the edge of the spray, just looking at Del, and trying not to blush. He was about to get very acquainted with this body; it might be a good idea not to be shy. But he'd never actually studied a naked man before, and not one he wanted to kiss and hold and touch. Del was lean and lanky with sharp hip bones and a sculpted upper body. He was smooth and strong, and Kevin watched the shampoo slide down his chest as Del rinsed his hair. They were both hard again, and Kevin wanted so badly to reach out and touch Del, to explore every part he could reach.

Del looked at him, eyes raking up and down his body, and Kevin felt his cock jump. God, he was going to start to hurt if he got any harder. Del reached back and turned off the water.

"Gotta get dried off," Del said, his voice strained. "If I wasn't going to let this happen in the kitchen, I'm sure as hell not going to do it in the tub."

Getting dried off took a bit of time and was more difficult than it should have been. Kevin kept staring, and he was sort of waiting for Del to change his mind, to suddenly realize who he was -- not some stunning man who could make Del fly, just a cowboy who had no experience and a tendency to blush. Del kept getting distracted, apparently by water drops on Kevin's chest that had to be brushed away with his fingertips or the corner of the towel, and then they were kissing again, Del against the door this time, their hands and fingers tangled together as Kevin held Del's arms up near his head.

"Oh, shit," Del gasped. "Kevin. Stop, we really have to get out of here. Want you in my bed. Please."

Kevin could only groan and lean his head on Del's, their foreheads pressed together. "Oh, God. Are you sure?"

"Sure? Jesus. I'm supposed to ask you that, I think. Hell, yes, I'm sure."

Kevin let him go and stepped back. They both took a deep breath, and then Del led the way into his room.

Del's room was yellow and white, everything pale and clean and warm, sunlight spilling in the window through white lace curtains like the ones in the room Kevin had slept in. The bed was unmade, white cotton sheets flipped back over a patchwork quilt. Kevin thought that the bed was the scariest, most wonderful thing he had ever seen.

He only had a moment to think about it, though, and then he was being kissed again, his knees giving out on him. Fuck, but Del's mouth made him boneless and shuddery and so Goddamn hard. He found himself being pressed back onto the bed and thought it wasn't so scary anymore, and hey, weren't they lucky it was there or they'd have been falling onto the floor, and then his brain just sort of turned off altogether and he just went with it.

Del was kissing his mouth, hands easing over his body, touching and stroking and smoothing and gliding. No one had ever touched Kevin like this, like they wanted to know everything about him; no one had ever been so focused on his skin before. He suddenly felt sorry for every girl he'd ever slept with; he'd never taken this kind of time to caress and explore. His skin was tingling, little shocks following Del's fingers along his sides and across his chest and down his belly to—

"Oh, fuck, yes!"

Del chuckled and left sucking kisses on his chest, his hand wrapped around Kevin's cock, stroking firmly. "Like that?"

"Oh, yeah. Find me a guy who doesn't."

"Good point. How about this?" Del's head went lower, and Kevin's brain short circuited as a stubbled chin grazed his inner thigh and Del started to lick and suck at his balls.

"Ahh..." was the best he could manage as his legs fell open. Oh, this was definitely something he liked. And the stubble left no doubt that it was a guy doing it.

Del was making happy noises; at least Kevin was pretty sure he wasn't the only one moaning and whimpering. Then Del shifted a bit and there was a hard prick, hot and heavy, against his thigh and it just felt even better.

Kevin was writhing on the sheets, lost in sensation. The heat of Del's mouth and the hands that wouldn't be still were sending him higher and higher, and even the heat from the sun across the bed

was like an added touch. The *sheets* were turning him on, and he couldn't be still even if his life depended on it.

Del crawled up his body, almost lying on top of him, and kissed him as his arm reached across the bed to the nightstand. His cock was hard on Kevin's belly, leaving a wet trail, and there wasn't much chance of resisting the impulse to touch it. Kevin didn't even bother trying.

Del had to break the kiss and stretch further so Kevin twisted a little, forcing his hand between them to tentatively touch his first prick that wasn't his own. He was rewarded with a gasp and Del froze, except for the little leap and throb his cock gave up as a gift.

Kevin pressed his advantage and rolled them over, his hand becoming a bit more aggressive as he sought to find out what Del liked. He figured he'd found out when he swept his thumb over the tip and Del cried out, his hips pushing up. With a happy grin, Kevin did it again and bent his head to explore Del's chest with his tongue.

"Oh, God. You're sure you've never done this?"

"Pretty sure."

"Okay. You're doing—oh, fuck, harder—fine."

Kevin laughed and teased a hard nipple with his tongue before grazing it with his teeth, his hand still getting used to the soft skin of Del's cock and the way it felt in his hand.

"Better stop," Del said, his breathing even more ragged than before. "Gonna come if you keep that up."

"That's the point, isn't it?" Kevin asked, not stopping.

"Not yet. Please, I want to—" Del stopped talking suddenly and Kevin looked up at him. Del was biting his lip and suddenly looking unsure of himself.

"What?" Now Kevin was unsure. He'd thought that they were having a good time, and Lord knew he really want to keep going.

"Just—suddenly realized I never asked you how far you wanted to go with this."

Kevin blinked and moved back up Del's body, this time lying on top instead of being underneath. He ground his hips into Del's, enjoying the way their cocks slid together. "Don't be backing down on me now, Del. Want you."

Del shook his head. "Not what I meant. Do you want me in you? You want to do me? Want me to go down on you? Sixty-nine? Your call. We got time to try 'em all, just need to know what to do first."

Oh. Kevin blinked again and tried to get his brain to reengage. He stopped thrusting into Del, hoping that would help. "Uh...oh, fuck, that's a lot of choices. You got condoms?"

"Lots. And lots. Daisy keeps hoping I'll get lucky, so she drops them off every couple of months."

"Can we not talk about girls right now?"

Del laughed and kissed him again. "Sure." The kiss got hungrier and Kevin found himself thrusting again, once more in danger of coming just from rubbing off. But now he knew what he wanted.

"Want you in me," he said quietly.

"Oh, fuck." Del shuddered and froze, holding his breath.



Kevin froze, too, waiting. When there wasn't a sudden explosion of wet heat between them, he started to breathe again.

"Like that idea?"

"Oh, dear God. Just about had to suck you off by default." Del was still breathing heavily and Kevin rolled off him, just to be safe.

"What's easiest? Hands and knees?"

Del nodded, his eyes wide and dark. "Yeah. If it hurts bad, tell me and I'll back off."

Kevin nodded and kissed him again, hard and fast, before getting into position. Then there was a warm hand on his back and Del kissed the nape of his neck. He heard a snap and then Del's fingers were stroking over his balls, teasing him. He moaned and arched his back.

"God, Kevin. You're so fucking hot. Ready?"

Kevin just nodded and then there was a finger sliding over the skin behind his balls and up his crack, circling his entrance. He sucked in air when Del pushed into him. It didn't hurt, but it took some getting used to, and he fought off the urge to push back. After a moment Del started to slide the finger, in and out, nice and easy, and it got easier, better.

He relaxed and went with it, the sensation different and becoming good, Del's other hand on his back comforting, and the occasional kiss reassuring. He started moving his hips, more experimentally than anything else, and Del asked if he was ready for more.

The second finger stung. It took longer to get used to, but he wasn't in pain, though he was starting to wonder when it would start to feel really good. Then Del did the thing he'd always wondered about—crooked a finger inside him—and it got *really* good.

"Oh..."

"Yeah."

Del did it again and Kevin moaned, his head dropping and his body relaxing around those wonderful fingers that were alternating between scissoring to stretch him and brushing against that magic, wonderful, beautiful spot that was setting lights to dancing behind his eyes.

"Okay, this might hurt a bit," Del warned, and then there were three. And it did hurt. But within moments Del was touching his gland and Kevin was willing to forgive him, as long as he didn't stop doing that.

He was feeling tender and a bit sore, and he frankly doubted that Del's cock would actually fit; he'd touched it, he knew how big it was. But the pain was receding and he was willing to try. Del thrust his fingers a few more times and eased them out altogether and Kevin felt a little empty and a little glad when the pain went away almost entirely. He heard the crinkle of the condom wrapper, and then he felt the head of Del's prick nudging at him and he waited, trying not to hold his breath.

"Kevin, keep breathing, and if it hurts, for God's sake tell me." Del kissed his back again, one hand still there, the other MIA. Kevin figured it was currently around Del's cock, guiding him, and that particular image made him hungry again. He made a mental note to see if mutual jacking off could be added to the menu.

There was sharp pain and he gasped, but before the breath was fully drawn the pain had faded a little and it was okay. He concentrated on breathing while Del pushed into him, filling him.

"Oh, God," he whispered.

"You okay?" Del's voice was tight.

He nodded and Del moved again, and then there were hips against his butt and Del was deep inside him.

"Oh, shit. So tight, Kevin. So Goddamn tight and hot," Del said, his voice full of need and hunger. His hands were on Kevin's hips and they stayed like that for a moment or two until Kevin couldn't take it anymore and he pushed his hips back.

"Oh, fuck," Del hissed. One of his hands slid around Kevin's hip to his cock and started stroking him lightly. "Gonna move now."

Kevin's brain had mostly been back in place; enough to start second guessing, at any rate. He knew that the pain would be there this time, and he knew that it would be less next time. What he didn't really expect was that Del's cock would find that magic spot so Goddamn soon and that it would make everything go shiny and bright and good this time. But he sure was glad it did.

Del's hand was firm on his prick, stroking him off in time with the slow thrusts that were setting off the fireworks in his head, and Kevin heard himself moaning again. It was good. It would be better but for now it was good and oh, hell, if Del kept hitting his gland like that it would be better this time, too.

"Del—oh, shit. Gonna be fast."

"Good?" Del was panting and his hips were speeding up.

"Fuck, yes. Please—"

Del groaned and the hand still on his hip gripped him tighter and the thrusts grew shallow and fast.

"Oh, God. Tight, so fucking tight—"

"Gonna come, oh, God—"

Del's thumb brushed over the head of his cock again and he thrust into Kevin's ass and that was it. Kevin cried out and came hard, hips jerking as he shot onto the white sheets.

"Oh, fuck, yeah!"

He could feel Del throbbing in him and that, more than anything, made him think that this was something they were going to do again. And again. After they had a nap and a pot of coffee.

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Kevin woke up from a short nap, all curled around Del, his head resting on Del's belly. He smiled a little as he opened one eye to see exactly where he was -- just in the right place to snuggle a little more and maybe lick warm skin. If he turned his head just the right way, he could actually stick his tongue into Del's belly button.

Del squeaked when Kevin did exactly that. Kevin grinned and did it again.

"Hey, you," Del said softly, one hand running through Kevin's hair. "How're you doing?"

"I'm fine," Kevin said, surprised. He licked a little lower, watching with fascination as Del's cock twitched and started to fill. He licked again and moved his head an inch or so lower.

"I didn't—you're not—I didn't hurt you, did I?" Del said in a rush.

"Nah. I'm fine. Little tender, maybe, but I'm good." Kevin dismissed the topic and licked the tip of Del's semi-hard cock and grinned when Del moaned. Del's hand tightened and relaxed in his hair as he moved lower still, his mouth easing over Del's prick.

"Oh, God," Del whispered. "Yeah, oh..."

Kevin thought Del might have said some other stuff; he wasn't really paying attention. He was absolutely fascinated with what he was doing -- how amazing it was to feel Del's cock filling and growing in his mouth, how soft the skin was, how unbelievable good Del smelled. He shifted, putting his hands on Del's hips, and started to suck and lick and play. He had no idea if he was doing it right but he was having a ball, and by the sounds Del was making, soft and then louder, he was doing okay.

Del was twisting and shifting, his hips thrusting slightly, and Kevin looked up at him, looked into his eyes, and just about died. He'd never seen anyone like this, eyes glazed and hungry, overlaid with tenderness and longing. He winked and sucked a little harder, teased the head of Del's cock with his tongue. Del moaned and let his head fall back on the pillow.

"Kevin..."

Kevin just sucked a little harder, hands squeezing Del's hips rhythmically. Del's hands were tangled in his hair and then gone, and Del was trying to get him to stop, or slow down, or something.

"What?" Kevin demanded, exasperation and lust making his brain a little non-functional.

Del didn't say anything, just shoved lube and condoms at him and let his head fall back again.

"Oh! Sorry." Kevin was pretty sure he was blushing.

"Don't be, just...oh, shit, yeah, that."

"Uh, Del?" Blushing be damned, he needed help. "Officially out of my depth here. Let me know if I screw up?"

Del just groaned and pushed against his hand, his legs starting to tremble.

Kevin blinked and said, "Okay, then, Going on instinct here." Kevin decided that if his brain was going on vacation, he needed to do this as simply as he could. He could try for creative later, when he'd figured out the basics. Step one, lube. Step two, condom. Oh, oh. Choices to make. He'd really been enjoying what he was doing, and there didn't seem to be much chance of getting anything sensible out of Del right then, so he figured he'd just go with it. Condom on Del, slicked fingers, and back to business.

"Jesus!" Del gasped and Kevin laughed, his mouth tight around Del's cock. Del made another encouraging noise so he made another rumbling sound and Del arched, pushing further into his throat. "Yeah, like that."

He teased at Del's balls for a second and then just went for it, pushing gently against his hole and sliding in and oh, holy Christ, Del just about flew apart, sound pouring out of him, swearing and begging and moaning; Kevin thought he might just come himself, rubbing on the sheets. He moved his finger, looking for something he'd never even tried to imagine the feeling of, and he guessed he found it when Del screamed and came, his cock pulsing in Kevin's mouth, hips jerking and hands clenching.

Fucking amazing.

Kevin stayed where he was until Del stopped shuddering quite so hard and then kissed a path up to his mouth. "You okay?"

"Oh, fuck," was about all Del seemed capable of saying.

Kevin grinned, sliding his fingers out of Del's body. Del whimpered and Kevin froze. "Shit, did I hurt—"

"Feel empty. Fuck me?"

Kevin gasped and nodded, reaching for another rubber. "Really?"

"Really. God, I want you." Del's eyes were huge and dark, his lips swollen from kissing and biting, and Kevin was starting to tremble himself. Del was just too good to be believed, his legs wrapping around Kevin's waist like that, his eyes looking right at him, his hand guiding Kevin's cock right to where he wanted it.

"Del—"

"S'okay. Just push."

Kevin did. "Oh, my God."

"Yeah."

They moved slowly and then faster, rhythms building and then falling apart before beginning again. Kevin couldn't stop looking at Del's eyes.

"Tight," he whispered. "No one ever felt like this."

Del blinked slowly, eyes glazing over. "Nope. No one ever felt like this before."

Kevin leaned forward and kissed him, and Del arched his back again, heat spraying between them. Kevin had time to wonder when the hell Del had gotten rid of the other rubber and then he was coming, this climax taking him by surprise as it washed over him.

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Daisy was smiling at him all the time, and it was about to drive Kevin nuts. He wasn't sure how much she'd figured out, though he was kind of thinking all of it, and he was waiting for Del's lead on the matter. In the meantime, she kept arriving at the garage and the house unexpectedly.

Oh yeah. She knew.

For two weeks there had been nothing in Kevin's mind other than Del or the bike, and he really only thought about the bike when he was actually looking at it. Del was just as bad, making mornings an adventure of bed, showers, is there time for breakfast or can we...? Del started to walk around with condoms in his pockets. They had lube in the kitchen and under the couch. They both grinned a lot and Daisy smiled at them.

Then there was work itself. Kevin would work on his bike and pump gas, Del would be under whatever car or truck he was working on, and all was well. But if Del was leaning over, looking under the hood of a car? Kevin decided it was Del's fault for just being Del and felt very little remorse about attacking the man right there in the shop.

One day they got lucky and it rained, so Del pulled the bay doors down turned the radio up and they worked. Kevin had the bike almost back together, was just waiting on some parts on order, and he turned around to see Del staring at him, eyes dark, tongue tracing his lips.

"Uh, Del?"

"Come here."

Kevin stood up and found himself leaning against the front of the pickup Del was working on, Del on his knees sucking him off fast and hot. He was just about to blow when they heard a voice calling Del from the office, and that did it. Kevin shot hard, biting his lip until it bled. Del was up and gone in a moment, adjusting himself as he went, and Kevin's mind reeled. He'd had no idea that getting caught, almost being seen, was such a turn on for him.

Del barely had time to squeak when he came back into the bay, Kevin had him bent over so fast. He held on to the front of the same pickup and gasped out his need while Kevin took him from behind, whispering filth into his ear until they both cried out and came, praying the radio was loud enough that a casual passerby wouldn't stop to investigate the racket.



A couple of nights later, they were sitting on the couch listening to the TV when the news came on. They made out during the actual news, but when the human interest stuff came on, Kevin sat up suddenly and pointed to the TV. "Hey, that's the auction my old Boss takes his cattle to."

Del blinked a few times then pushed himself up. "Yeah? See anyone you know?" he teased as the camera panned over the crowd.

Kevin grinned. "Twit. No, but I can tell you who's there. Boss, of course. Jake goes, so Tor'll be there. Elias, most likely. Don't know if any of the day hands would go, but Kip might if Bobby didn't go. I expect Bobby stayed home, seeing as how he's got a family and all. But the rest of them are there somewhere, roaming around and working and having a ball." He grinned happily and moved closer to Del.

"You miss it?" Del asked softly.

"Nope," he said, suddenly realizing it was true. "Not really. I miss parts of it, but in more of a 'hey, that was kind of fun' way than an 'I want to be back on the ranch' way. Does that make sense?"

"Not really," Del said. His eyes were troubled as he stood up to turn off the TV. "Bed?"

Kevin sat for a moment. "What's wrong?" he asked, not sure if he really wanted to know, or if he had the right to even ask.

"Nothin', just wondering...hell. The parts for your bike will be here tomorrow. Can get it good to go in a couple of days." He looked downright miserable now.

"Yeah," Kevin said slowly. "Bike'll be fine. And?"

"And then there won't be a need for you to keep stayin' on." Del wouldn't look at him—had, in fact, turned to go up the stairs.

"You want me to go?" Hurt and anger slammed into Kevin, and he stood up, ready to run away to...he didn't know where.

"No, that's what I'm trying to say." Del said, not turning around. "You can, and I can't stop you." His voice had dropped to a near whisper.

"You don't think you're worth me staying for?" Kevin was losing his equilibrium, the conversation was taking so many turns.

"Don't want to make you stay if you'd rather be somewhere else."

"You idiot. You can't make me stay, you can only make me go. And just 'cause I miss horses and riding and the smell of hay doesn't mean that I don't like working on the bike or want to learn about the cars or that I don't love you."

There was dead silence.

"Oh, shit." Kevin literally bit his tongue and turned, walked to the door, had his hand on the knob before Del managed to get to him, pulling him back and wrapping his arms around him.

"You love me?"

Kevin sighed. "Of course I do. You couldn't tell?"

Del grinned and pulled him closer. "Could you tell I love you?"

Kevin couldn't help but grin back, his agitation and fear fading as fast as his blood was flowing south. "Maybe we should talk more."

"Uh huh. With kissing."

An hour later, Kevin rolled over on the kitchen floor and groaned. "Damn, we need to get softer flooring."

"You can pick it out."

End