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Old Town New
by BA Tortuga

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Chapter One

The rental agent was his fifth grade teacher's cousin. It was plain she didn't remember him, and Harlan Quinn was grateful for small favors. He'd had enough of wide-eyed amazement, turned up noses, and slanted looks to last him a lifetime.

The house sat on a small cul-de-sac that hadn't been there when Quinn left Hotchkiss, Colorado, and it looked clean and quiet and just the ticket to keep him away from most of the folks he was related to. That was good enough for him. He turned to face the frosted-haired lady. What was her name? Miz Harris.

"I'll take it."

"Oh, but don't you want to see the backyard, or the..."

"I'll take it," he cut her off. "Can we go sign the papers?"

"Oh, well, yes. Back at the office." Her cheeks flushed and her mouth pursed all up and Quinn almost laughed. She was pissy at him for not playing by the polite rules, and she looked just like her cousin the teacher, who would get the same look when she caught him in the bathroom smoking a cigarette.

"Good."

He motioned for her to precede him and they went out, her just shutting the door behind her, him carefully making sure it was locked. The town wasn't that fucking small anymore.

They'd just gotten out to the curb when a car pulled into the drive of the house across the street, and Miz Harris

clapped her hands. "Oh, excellent, you can come meet one of your neighbors."

She stood on tiptoe, waving wildly as a man got out of the car. "Oh, Danny! Danny! Wait for us; I want you to meet your new neighbor."

"Yes, ma'am." She got a nod and the man moved to open his trunk, so Quinn only got a glimpse of thin legs in jeans, ball cap pulled down to shade the man's face.

Quinn rolled his eyes, figuring this was his punishment for being in a hurry, but he waited as patiently as he could, shifting from foot to foot.

Miz Harris drew the other guy over, his hands full of groceries. "Danny, this is our new sheriff and your new neighbor. Sheriff Quinn, this is one of our middle school teachers, Danny Avers."

The eyes behind the wire-framed glasses went wide, searched his face. "I ... Good afternoon, Sheriff. Welcome to the neighborhood."

It was like a kick in the gut, taking him back some eighteen years to his senior year in high school. That face had barely changed at all, was just a little thinner with a few more lines. He didn't want to do this in front of Miz Harris, though. Not one bit. So he just held out his hand. "Pleased, Mr. Avers."

Dan's hand was smooth, warm, the shake firm.

He felt his own hand start to sweat, and pulled back as casually as he could, wiping it on his jeans where they wouldn't see. "I'll look forward to seeing you around. Miz

Harris, if you don't mind, I need to get back to the office, ASAP."

Dan nodded, already turned away, moving toward a little, plain, neat house.

His gait was a little off, a little odd, and Miz Harris nodded toward Dan as he disappeared. "He's a dear, sweet man. Was in a wicked evil car wreck oh ... sixteen-seventeen years ago. He was the only one of a bunch of kids that made it, though. Careflighted him into Grand Junction, and six years later? He's applying to teach at the school and taking care of his sick daddy."

Well, there you go. That just summed up a life in a hundred words or less. Only if you knew Dan, you knew that surviving your friends in an accident, and your dad getting sick, would both be devastating events. Crushing. Quinn watched him go, then resolutely turned to the car to head back and sign papers so he could get back to his job. Dan wasn't his business anymore. The sheriff's department was, and it was time he got down to it.

Apples in the fruit bowl. Lettuce in the crisper. Turkey. Provolone. Milk. Orange juice.

Popcorn and ramen and Cheerios and coffee in the pantry. Paper towels in the laundry room.

Fold up the plastic sacks and put them under the sink and look outside at the little house with the 'For Rent' sign.

Christ.

Harlan Quinn.

Coming home a cop.

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Dan chuckled out loud, shook his head. Who'da thunk it? Hell, they'd been in more trouble together in nine months than most guys had their whole lives. Had to have taken something to turn him around. Quinn was probably straight now, too.

Wife.

Four kids.

Dog named Sparky.

He started laughing, and if the sound was a little wild, a little skewed, no one could hear it.

What were the odds?

Half his life he'd fought to erase the person he'd been, make up for the shit he'd done. Then who shows up?

Shit.

Of course, he hadn't seen any recognition in those grey eyes, so maybe Quinn didn't remember, maybe he'd been forgettable, just another warm body.

Dan shook his head and closed the blinds. He poured water into the coffeepot and stretched.

There must be a storm coming in. He ached.

Chapter Two

The diner was still there, and so was the Chocolate Cow Dairy Shop. Quinn wondered idly if it still had the best ice cream in town. He didn't go there, passing both of them by in favor of the new Arby's on the outskirts of town before heading home.

Fuck, he was tired.

Give him a full fucking caseload back in Denver any day. He grabbed his bag of five for five-ninety-five roast beefs and got out of the car, frowning at the sagging privacy fence that forced him to keep the dog in the house until he could get it fixed.

Quinn snorted. That was what he got for not looking at the backyard.

Some movement caught his eye across the street, and Quinn turned just in time to see Dan across the way, turning on the sprinklers to water the yard. Before he could even analyze what he was thinking, Quinn was off, walking across the way to meet Dan at his front door.

"Dan. Hi."

Dan blinked and looked up, eyes losing their green behind the tinted lenses. "Hey. You ... you settled in?"

"Getting there. Still don't have too much furniture." God, this was excruciating. Why had he gone over? "I just ... I wanted to say hi, now old Miz Harris isn't around. Tell you I was sorry for the way I acted the other day. She just didn't remember me and I didn't want her to."

"No big deal." Dan chuckled, shook his head. "You look a lot different; I'm not surprised she didn't recognize you."

"You look the same. More streamlined." He stood there, feeling awkward as heck, which was not a feeling he was used to these days. "You eaten? I got plenty."

"I made a salad. There's enough to share, if you want to put yours with mine." Dan opened the front door, tilted his head. "Come on in."

"Yeah. That would be great." He'd come home and let Rags out at lunch time, so the mutt could wait. Quinn wandered in, looking around curiously as Dan closed the door behind them.

The place was neat as a pin, done in greens and tans, full bookshelves lining the walls. "Our houses are set up all the same way. The kitchen's in here. I don't have a formal dining."

That was the truth; where he'd have a table, Dan had more shelves, more books, and a desk with school papers on it.

"The coffee table will work." He could understand it. He didn't entertain much himself back home and didn't imagine he would here. "You living alone?"

"There's a little breakfast table in here." Sure enough, there was a tall glass table, one stool at it, the other in the corner. "Yeah, there's just me. Have a seat."

The kitchen was cream and reds, clean and peaceful. "I have ranch and Italian dressing."

"Italian is good." He set the sandwiches and fries on the table and got the other stool, wondering at the unreality of it.

Quinn sat, watching Dan move, watching the tiny hitch in his walk.

"Cool." Two plates, two forks, two napkins, one bottle of dressing. "I have tea and Coke and milk. Oh, and orange juice."

"Tea is good." Coke at this time of the day just kept him awake at night, and these days he had enough to do that. "So you're a teacher?"

"Yeah. American History up until the Civil war. Eighth grade." He got a half-smile. "If you hear the name Mr. Avers, you'll hear someone bitching about a history project right after."

"Cool." The five hundred and one questions he wanted to ask teetered on his tongue and he swallowed them down with the tea before pulling out the sandwiches and handing one over, along with half the curly fries.

Dan ate quietly, eyes on his plate. "Are you enjoying your job?"

"Well, I'm just starting. And it's ... Well. I'm not the most popular of folks." Hell, yesterday his car had a flat tire when he left the office. And not a natural one.

"Oh. Yeah, some of these folks have long memories. Give them time, they'll come around."

"You think?" He finally gave up on picking at his salad and put his elbows on the table. "You look good."

"I look like what I am, a middle-aged teacher." Dan chuckled, went to get more tea. "And yeah, they forgave me, and you didn't kill any of their kin."

"I'd wager you didn't either. Miz Harris told me it was an accident." Whatever had happened it had put starch in Dan's back and lines around his mouth. And it put a ball of worry in Quinn's gut. Still cared after all these years, it looked like.

"Ancient history." His glass was filled, then Dan's was. "So did you end up having grand adventures? I always wondered."

He snorted. Suddenly the food was way more interesting. "Depends on what you mean by adventure, I guess. I sure did do a lot of stupid stuff."

"Didn't we all? Looks like you fixed shit, though."

Had he? "I guess. I sure never did expect to go into police work." God, being with Dan brought back all sorts of memories. Dan had been the one bright spot in a rotten upbringing.

"It isn't the career path I'd have put my money on for you, no." Dan stood again. "I have ice cream. You want?"

"Sure." Ice cream was always good. Made things better just by being cold and creamy. He stood and helped put the salad plates away, wrapped up the remaining two sandwiches.

"There's chocolate chip and strawberry."

He grinned. "You got any cookies to make sandwiches?" They'd always loved making ice cream sandwiches.

Dan pinked and smiled, chuckling. "Only if you have twenty minutes for the cookies in a tube to bake."

"I wouldn't want to keep you, Dan." He wanted to stay and talk, but he had no idea what to say. "In case you have papers or something."

Dan nodded. "I'm just planning on reading, really. Let me get you your ice cream."

"I got no plans but to take the monster for a walk and feed him eventually." Rags was good company. Not too demanding, never asked questions. Quinn sighed.

"This is awkward, huh?" Dan grabbed two bowls, two spoons.

"It is. I'm sorry, Dan. I didn't even think. I just saw you and came on over." He'd thought about Dan a lot over the years. Especially when he got lonely.

"It's okay. We're neighbors, yeah?" Dan pulled out the ice cream, scooped some out. "So, tell me about yourself, what you've been doing."

"Well, I've been working in Denver these last few years. Was in L.A. for a bit, but it's harsh there. And when this job came up someone convinced me to take it."

Pushed him into it more like. Damn Sam anyway.

"L.A.? Wow. I've never been. Is the ocean pretty?"

"It is. It's vast." He grinned, remembering how he'd missed the mountains. And the sheer number of people had intimidated him. "It's a hard row to hoe, though, so I moved back this way."

"I bet." He got handed his bowl. "It sounds like you've been busy. That's cool."

"Yeah." Strawberry. Dan remembered. "Sit with me, will you? You're fluttering."

"Fluttering? I don't..." Dan sort of pinked, brought the second bowl over and sat. "At least not much."

"Sorry. You don't. It just makes me nervous to think you hate looking at me." He wanted to see those eyes. Wanted to take in every detail of Dan's face, just in case the man decided this was too hard to ever do again. "So, you obviously went to college?"

"Hate looking at you?" Dan blinked, shook his head. "You haven't looked in a mirror lately, huh? And yeah, I went to Western State after I got done at the hospital."

He hadn't looked in the mirror a lot, no. Vanity had gotten him in enough trouble, thank you.

"The hospital? Sounds like you spent a good bit of time. I noticed you limp a bit."

"Eighteen months, all in all. I got tore up pretty good." Dan looked down, mouth twisting. "The limp's only bad-bad in the winter, if it gets toward damp."

"Sorry." Fuck, that was an expression he didn't want to see. "Sorry, I didn't know."

"Oh. Well. You'll hear. Katy Edwards, Bobby Sherridan, Enrique Garcia, Liz Farr, Little Ricky McDougal, and Sammy Vaughn—all of them died and you'll hear about it. There's even a big-assed memorial out there where it happened."

Holy fuck. He wanted to ask, but he knew what it was like to dredge up the past; heaven knew he'd had enough of it the last few days. Impulsively, he reached out and touched Dan's hand. "I'm sorry."

Dan nodded, hand turning over, touching him back. "Yeah. I am, too, but like I said, ancient history."

"Yeah." There was a lot of that around these days. Dan's fingers felt good on his hand, their palms sliding together. It almost gave him hope.

They sat there a little while, ice cream melting, quiet and still in a way they'd never been before, ever.

Finally, he squeezed Dan's hand and got up, taking his dish to the sink. "I need to go feed Rags. Do you want help with the washing up?"

"No. I got it. Thanks for sharing your dinner, Quinn. It was good to catch up. Real good."

"Thanks for sharing the ice cream." He grinned, shaking his head at how formal they were. "I ... maybe we can do it again."

"Any time, just knock. I'll be here." Dan took his glasses off, cleaned them.

He nodded, clapped Dan on the shoulder after the glasses went back on. "I'll see you around, neighbor."

"Yeah. Have a good one."

"Yeah." He left the house and tried hard not to look back. Wouldn't do any good. Dan had closed the door behind him and the click sounded awfully final.

He could only hope he was wrong.***

Dan finished the Sunday paper and folded it up, brushing the crumbs from breakfast into the trash.

He'd done the crossword, the jumble, read everything, clipped the bits that he'd need for next year's kids. Ate his toast, drank two pots of coffee.

Fuck, he was so ready to get back to work.

Dan took the paper out to the garbage, squinting at the sunshine.

It had turned off hot last week, like it usually did in western Colorado near the end of May, and it was bright and warm. There was music playing, something rockabilly, and when he looked for the source he found Quinn out in front washing his truck. With his shirt off.

Sweet Lord. He stood and looked for half a second before he realized what he was doing. Shit. The man had grown up nice.

"H ... hey, Quinn."

Quinn turned and squinted at him across the way, a smile breaking out just about the time a huge dog starting barking insanely loud and running right at him.

"Rags! Get your ass back here." The dog stopped, wagged and ran back to Quinn. And Quinn smiled wider. "Hey, Dan."

He looked at the dog, grinned. Good God, that was the ugliest beast he'd ever seen.

"Rags, huh? He minds good."

"He's a good boy. He looks like one of those rag wearing clowns, doesn't he?" Quinn bent, scratching the mutt's ears. "I found him in a drug house in Denver. He was half starved and beaten bloody, and all he could do when I took him to the shelter was wag and lick me and just be so happy to be out of there. When they put him up for adoption? I had to have him."

"Oh, poor pup. Does he bite?" Drug house. Christ. Scary.

"Nope. Never has as far as I know. They're so much more trusting than we are. Come on and meet him. Might as well,

as he gets out every so often and you might meet him out and about."

He nodded, held one hand out. "Hey, Rags. Nice to meet you."

The dog bounced right over and started slobbering on his arm, tail whomping his legs.

He started laughing, wrinkling his nose at the drool. "Good Lord, you're a beast, aren't you?"

"Yeah. The worst he can do is beat you to death with his tail." Quinn looked at him, tilted his head. "You out of school now?"

"Yeah, 'til the middle of August." He nodded. "Nine whole weeks of nothing."

"Oh. A man of leisure." Quinn grinned, patted his thigh, and Rags went running to him. "Well, if you want to do something sometime, I do have Sundays and Mondays mostly off."

"Cool. Things easing up at work?" He moved to lean against Quinn's garage.

"Yeah. A bit. I'm getting settled, I guess, and they've decided they can't budge me, get me to leave." That smile turned wry. "They did try."

"Yeah? If it helps, I haven't heard a bit of bitching up at the school." He winked. "And some of those girls? Made gossips."

"I bet. Some things never change." Quinn bent to pick up the hose and Dan could see a tattoo on Quinn's left shoulder, in the shape of a thunderbird. God, that had been Quinn's

first car, an old Thunderbird that had needed a lot of work. Quinn had loved the Indian legends back then

Oh, fuck. He sighed, fingers balling into fists to keep them from touching. "No shit. You know MayDell Waters? She still volunteers up there."

"Yeah? I thought she'd be dead by now."

"Nope. She's ninety-two and still making those butt-ugly quilts for the PTA."

"Lord." Quinn grinned, turned, and shot him right in the face with the hose.

He stumbled back, shocked, and tripped over the row of bricks along the drive, going down hard enough to rattle his bones.

Wow. Wet and klutzy. He was a keeper.

"Oh, damn, Dan. Shit. I'm sorry." Quinn was right there, pushing Rags away and helping him up. "I misjudged that angle pretty bad. Are you all right?"

"Yeah. I'm wash-and-wear." His cheeks were blazing, glasses spotted, and his shirt was soaked. Yep. Just fine.

Old Miss Barnes looked out her screen door. "Danny Avers? You're too old to be horsing around out there."

"Yes, ma'am." Oh, good Lord.

"Fuck." The curse was vicious, but low, and Quinn looked over his shoulder, a brittle smile appearing. "Well, now, Miss Barnes, he was helping me and the dog tripped him. Are you gonna call an ambulance or can I just take him in and patch him up?"

"I'll just go in and get cleaned up, Quinn. Have a good one." He headed toward his house as quick as he could, feeling like the world's biggest hopalong fool.

He heard another curse, and the music shut off. Not fifteen seconds after he closed his door, there was knocking at it.

He closed his eyes, hands shaking a little bit. Christ. Come on, asshole, let him know you're fine so he can go back to washing his truck and you can take a hot shower.

He got the door open, trying to find a smile. "I'm okay."

Quinn looked him over, those gray eyes serious as a heart attack. "I don't believe it. Let me in or she'll be out there staring at us again."

"I..." He opened the door, damn near stumbling again as he backed up. Damn it. "Come in. I'm okay. Really."

Quinn slipped in and closed the door behind him, hands coming up to rest on Dan's shoulders as Quinn looked him over. "Sorry, Dan. I didn't mean to hit you right with it like that."

"I know. Just an accident. What it is that we used to say, 'no blood, no foul'?"

"Yeah. So why are you so shook up?"

"Because I don't fall in a heap everyday, I guess." Hell, he hadn't had a real fall in years. He was so careful where he stepped.

"I guess. Dan. I ... are you? I mean. Oh, hell. Never mind." Quinn shook his head, backed off, expression just shutting down.

"I'm sorry." He didn't know what to do, what to say, more than that. He turned and headed for the bathroom, for a

towel. He passed the kitchen, the office. It was all so normal. So weird. "You want a cup of coffee?"

"Sure, that would be ... I'll get it." He could hear Quinn moving around, could hear cabinets opening and closing.

He went into the bathroom, shut the door. He stripped off the wet T-shirt, dried himself off, eyes closed the entire time, making himself breathe deep and slow.

By the time he was back into dry clothes, the muscle relaxant was working, easing his ache and his nerves, making it easier to head back to the kitchen, to the scent of coffee.

Quinn was there, leaning on his counter, all muscles and smooth skin and low-slung jeans. He got handed a cup of coffee right off. "Better?"

"Yeah. All dried." He took the cup, his hands glad to have something to hold onto. "Didn't mean to worry you."

"It's okay. I just wanted to make sure you weren't hurt. And that Old Lady Barnes wasn't going to be a problem." It was a little unnerving the way Quinn was watching him. Maybe there was something about being a cop that made people more observant or something.

"No. She's just a busy-body." Damned old bat used to watch him trying to help Pop get up and down out of the car for treatment. "I'm okay. Just getting old, yeah?"

"Shit, you're a year younger than me, babe." The pet name just slipped out. Sipping his coffee, Quinn watched him. Just ... watched.

"Yeah, well, mileage, I guess." He put the coffee cup down, wandering a little, putting the bread away, putting the jam away.

"That could be. I know Sam always says so." Compared to him, Quinn was still. Quiet. Which was also kinda weird because Quinn had always been a foot tapper and a leg shaker.

"Sam?" Christ, he was hot.

"Yeah. He's a friend. An old cop I met in Denver. He says the wear and tear is what makes you old."

"I think I'd agree with that." He nodded, managing to make it back to his coffee. "Is your dog going to be okay?"

"I put him in before I came over. He'll be fine." The implied worry about him was pretty clear.

"Oh. Would you like to come and sit?" It was unnerving—he probably only had someone in the house twice a year and never anyone who looked at him like that—of course, no one who came to the house had ever seen him as much as Quinn had.

"Sure. It was about time for a break anyway." Quinn poured another half a cup of coffee then looked at him expectantly.

"Front room. I have a good sofa." And his own comfy recliner that he could just stay in all day, if he needed to. He led the way, settling into his chair with a happy sigh.

Quinn settled across from him, wiggling down into the sofa. "You've got a nice house, Dan."

"Thank you. I've been here a little over ten years, so it's had a chance to be mine."

"Yeah." A wistful look passed over Quinn's face, so fast it almost wasn't there. "I haven't stayed in one place too long."

Guess that's why I have Rags. He makes it the same everywhere."

"Yeah? I can see that. He's a neat-looking beast." He intended to die in this house, or at the Willowtop nursing home down the street.

"He's ugly as homemade sin. It's weird, Dan. To see you so settled. I can remember you saying you wanted to get out of this town someday."

"Yeah. I was young then and feeling immortal. I got over it." He grinned, shrugged a little, the act taking a little bit of thought. "And look at you, escaping and coming back of your own free will."

"Sorta." He got a laugh, short and sharp, just like the curse Quinn had thrown out at Old Lady Barnes. "I didn't actually apply for the job."

"They went hunting you?"

"No. Sam, the guy I told you about? He put my name in. And they were all for it, me being a local boy and all."

"Wow. So are you and Sam like a thing?" Because he hadn't seen four kids or a trophy wife. Although Quinn had the dog ... "No." Quinn started chuckling, the sound low and mellow and so familiar it made him jump. "Sam? Married for twenty-six years with four kids. He just thinks I need fathering."

He grinned, shook his head. "I knew there was going to be four kids in there somewhere."

"Huh? Are you sure you're okay?" Quinn got up, came over to kneel by his chair. "Your eyeballs look funny."

"Funny weird or funny ha-ha?" Oh. Wow. He'd forgotten how Quinn smelled. Simple musk and he still used Old Spice. And he still radiated heat.

"Funny weird. Did you bump your head?"

"No. I took a Flexeril, otherwise I'd stiffen up. No big deal." He had the world's longest-standing prescription.

"Oh." Quinn was just looking at him, not saying anything. Just petting his knee.

He watched, reached out, and traced one finger along Quinn's cheek. Quinn hadn't shaved this morning, and his cheek was rough, stubbly. Quinn's hand came up to capture his, holding it against that hot skin.

Dan could hear his heart pounding, see the vein in Quinn's throat just throbbing. God, he'd loved this man to distraction, would have done anything. Hell, had done almost anything.

There was something in Quinn's gray eyes, something dark and pained before Quinn squeezed them shut and stood, letting go of his hand. "I should let you rest. I'm sorry, Dan. I didn't mean to hurt you."

And Quinn turned on his heel and left.

Just like that.

He sat for a long time, just listening to the sounds outside. Then, once the sun started going down, Dan got up and locked the door. A glass of tea, and another pill, and he took to his bed, the house going quiet and dark. PAGEBREAK

Chapter Three

Quinn shot the hell out of his paper target, putting enough holes in it that he could hardly tell it'd had a head. Thank God for weapon re-qualification and shooting ranges. Quinn really did figure if he hadn't had the police academy and the self-defense training and all that shit he'd be in jail.

He had a bit of a temper.

The deputies around him started muttering as his sheet came back in, looking at it and shaking their heads. He could hear snatches of it, "big city airs" and "showing off." Made his teeth itch. They didn't like him if he talked about being a down-home boy. They didn't like him if he talked about newer methods he'd learned in Denver.

Quinn shoved the paper at under-Sheriff Andy Dean. "Here. I think I qualify. I'm going home. I'll see you tomorrow."

He headed for his truck, intent on going home and pouring some tea and sitting in front of the TV and vegging out. He was on call, but not on duty, and he wanted some peace and quiet.

He pulled up in front of his house, automatically looking over at Dan's house. God. He wanted to see how Dan was doing, so bad. He was just afraid to bother Dan. Afraid of what he might say. It wasn't a feeling he liked. He was usually pretty damn the torpedoes.

Well, shit. There was Old Lady Barnes. That was what made up his mind. Quinn let Rags out, fed him, put him back

in, and headed for Dan's. He rang the doorbell and waited, resisting the urge to flip the old bat off.

The door opened, Dan offering him a smile. The smell of something burning was in the background, a thin haze of smoke hanging in the air. "Evening, Quinn."

"Hey. Something burning?" He didn't want Dan to burn his house down or anything.

"Not anymore. Now it's just smoking. Oh, and just so you know? Those As Seen On TV stove top grill pans? Suck rocks."

"You should get a Foreman grill. They really work. Uh. If you're sure the fire is out, I just came over to see if you wanted to go out to dinner. In, say, Montrose." Montrose was a much bigger town, and only a half hour away.

Dan's mouth twisted, but those eyes were smiling. "Well, given that my burgers are now fossil fuel? I seem to have no plans for the evening."

The smoke alarm went off and Dan rolled his eyes. "Come on in. Let me kill that."

He nodded, stepped in, eyes watering. Wow. That was a lot of smoke. He wandered after Dan to the kitchen, hands in his pockets.

The back door was open, a fan going, a mangled grill pan in the sink with water pouring off it. "How's the sheriffing going?"

Dan grabbed a broom and proceeded to whack the alarm off the wall, sending the white piece of plastic flying.

"You could just take the batteries out. And it's going. I shot things today. It was good." He tried to hide a grin. That was the first sign of the Dan he remembered.

"Shooting things sounds fun." The sudden quiet after the shrill alarm was sweet. "And taking the batteries out requires getting the step ladder, climbing up, unscrewing. Nowhere near as fun as just knocking the hell out of it."

"This? Is true. Any time you want to go to the shooting range, you let me know." He could just see Dan blowing the heck out of things. "And did you want Silverjack's for steaks or the Grandview Palace for Chinese?"

"Steaks, I think." Dan looked down at his grease-spattered T-shirt. "Let me throw another shirt on. There's sodas in the fridge, if you want."

"Thanks." He didn't bother, just leaned against the counter, listened to Dan move around, and resisted the urge to snoop through cabinets.

He could see Dan's reflection in the mirror at the end of the hall, the T-shirt coming off and baring a chest that was thinner than he remembered, paler. The man needed to get out more, needed to get some sun. He looked hard, trying to see if there were any visible scars, needing to know all the ways Dan had changed.

There were a few places—one jagged tear on Dan's shoulder, one round scar in between two ribs, nothing horrifying.

He wondered what there was that didn't show. He looked away when Dan came back down the hall. Didn't want to get caught staring.

"There, that's better." Dan did look good in green.

"Matches your eyes." Oh, man. That was a dumb thing to say. True, but dumb.

Dan stopped, blinked, then smiled, turning a sweet pink. "Yeah. That's why I bought it."

"I like it." Had it been that long since Dan had a compliment? Looked like it, and that was sad. "We need to stop by and put the lock on the refrigerator at my place, and we're ready to go."

"You lock your refrigerator?" Dan grabbed wallet, keys and cap on his way out.

"If I'm going to be away more than an hour or so? Yeah. Otherwise Rags gets into it. He's never gotten over being hungry." Quinn led the way out, cutting his eyes over to Old Lady Barnes' house just in time to see her disappear from the window. "Does she ever sleep? Or has she just become some sort of demon when no one was looking?"

"Oh, you have no idea. She used to drive me mad when Pop was sick, watching me trying to get him places." He wrinkled his nose. "I mean, I know she's a lonely old woman, but Christ, she's a busybody."

"I guess. I haven't asked, but I'm figuring he's gone?" He knew, had gone to the state library webpage and searched the newspapers, both for Dan's dad and for the accident, but he felt he ought to ask.

"Yeah. It was for the best. He was hurting and ready." Dan followed him up the walk to his house.

He kept his hands to himself until they got in where no one could see, then turned and put a hand on Dan's cheek. "I'm sorry, Dan."

"Thank you." Dan looked up at him, blinking slow. "No one touches me anymore. I forgot how it felt."

"Yeah. I know what you mean." They stood there for the longest time, staring. Then Rags barked, and he moved away, laughing and scratching. He gave treats and loving and locked the fridge. There.

"You ready?"

"Yep." Dan nodded, heading out. "You know, I have a lot of Pop's furniture in storage. You're more than welcome to come and take some of it."

"That bad? I just don't have a lot. And going to the furniture place downtown always results in a where are they now thing." Which just made him want to hurl. He let his hand rest at the small of Dan's back while they went out, only dropping it when they got out in the open.

"Not bad at all. Stuff's just sitting there, waiting on someone to use it." Dan opened the passenger side of the truck, pulling himself in.

"I'd appreciate it. This has all sorta scrambled my brain." They headed out. He didn't want Dan to think he didn't want to be seen with him in town, but Quinn honestly wanted to be able to eat in peace.

"So, have they warned you about Ronnie Cox? He tends to celebrate payday and ends up in the drunk tank again. I swear he's a decent man, 'til the whiskey gets him."

"Yeah? Wasn't he a few years behind us in school?" He vaguely remembered the man. He thought. "He work up at the hatchery?"

"Yeah. He's a big, big man, blond, beard, built like a brick shithouse, pardon my French."

"I'll keep it in mind if I ever have to haul him to the drunk tank." A thought occurred to him, one that wasn't entirely comfortable. "You and him aren't..."

Dan gave him a look. "No. God, no. I ... I'm a schoolteacher, Quinn. I don't."

"You don't what?" He looked over, caught Dan's eyes for a minute. "It's against the school's regulations to have a life?"

"If you're a gay man who isn't in a position to keep his butt from being kicked, yeah. The administration and I have an agreement—they don't bring up the past and I don't give them any reason to bring it up." Dan shrugged, looked out the window. "Just small town politics."

"Yeah. Sorry, that was out of line." He could never remember apologizing so much in his life. Everything was just a wrong step. He was too blunt, too damned mean, and too ... invested in the past, maybe.

"It's okay, Quinn. Christ, I'm not going to burst into tears if you have an opinion. Hell, we haven't seen each other in almost twenty years; we got stuff to talk about."

Quinn looked over again, just searching a little, and nodded. That was much better. "I just feel like I'm not sure what to say. A lot's happened, you know? And Lord knows I have my sore spots."

"Well, if I hit any, just tell me and I'll back off. We're going to get bored if we just talk about the weather and the historical impact of Bacon's Rebellion."

"Bacon's rebellion? Is that when it turns green in the fridge?" They pulled into the lot at the steakhouse and headed inside. He was already feeling more at ease.

"I think that's Montezuma's revenge." Dan chuckled, looking damn near young for a minute.

"Yeah." It was good to laugh. Damned good. Good to sit and order food and not be stared at. They actually chatted over salads and tea, talking about this and that.

He found out that Dan had actually been good at school, Dan was interested in his experience with law enforcement, and they both agreed that the last ten years of movies had basically sucked.

They got done with their steaks and ordered key lime pie and coffee, neither of them really willing to go.

Dan nibbled, licking his fork. "I haven't eaten so much in years."

"Yeah? Sometimes a man's gotta indulge." He wasn't about to admit he could eat two meals like that and still be hungry.

"Sometimes, yeah. Thanks for the invite, Quinn."

"You're welcome. I enjoyed it." He so did. Hated to think of going back to town.

Dan nodded. "We would have so stuck our noses up about enjoying a night like this as kids."

That surprised a laugh out of him. "We would have. We'd have gotten a six-pack from my dad's cooler and headed out to the hatchery and made out."

"And thought we were the hottest shit ever, too." Dan chuckled. "Such studs."

"Hey, we were. We had a muscle car and liquid courage and each other." God. They'd been so damned young. He didn't drink anymore. At all.

"Yep. It's hell getting old." Dan leaned back, drinking his coffee. "What did you do with that Thunderbird?"

"Sold it. I made it as far as Las Vegas before I ran out of money and decided I'd rather sell the car than my ass." He'd hated getting rid of it, hated the guy he sold it to with an unreasoning passion. Especially as it was his own damned fault.

"That's a shame. I guess I'd always sort of imagined you driving it by the beach." Dan pinked. "Silly, but there you are."

"Nah. That would have been nice."

Hell, by the time he'd gotten to the beach? He was selling anything they wanted. So much for being a stud. "That's okay. I pictured you married."

"Married? Like with kids and stuff?"

"Yeah. I thought. I dunno. I thought with me gone you'd maybe think it was ... Hell, I don't know. It just seemed like the thing." Shit, he was running off at the mouth.

Dan chuckled. "Well, I have a hundred and twenty kids a year, so it wasn't far off." Dan looked down. "I couldn't

believe you'd gone, you know? I was real slow back then and it took a long time to really get it."

"It took a long time to stop hating the world when I left you. You were the only thing I missed about this town, you know? And I missed you every day."

"Well, you look like you made the right decision. You'd have been miserable had you stayed on."

"I'd have been in jail." For killing his father, if nothing else. "I almost was anyway."

Dan nodded. "I don't blame you for going. Hell, you'd've stayed, I might have killed you, too."

"Yeah." Much as he'd loved Dan? They were on a one-way trip to hell back then. Just crazy as all get out. "Well, we're depressing. Wanna go get a movie or something?"

"Sure." Dan pulled cash for his half of supper and tip, sat it on the table. "I'm ready when you are."

"Cool." It was good. Easier. Maybe getting out of town was good. "We need to get something with dogs. To make it up to Rags that I didn't save him steak."

"I won't tell if you won't." Dan smiled, winked. "I'm heading to the restroom, get rid of some coffee."

Then Dan stood, moving away with that stiff, odd, almost-but-not-quite-just-fine walk.

Quinn watched him go before settling up the bill and getting up to wait for Dan by the door. Damn it was good to just be kinda easy. To just talk.

Just be nice and friendly. Easy together.

He chuckled. Dan was right. They were getting old.***

"I'm telling you, Sam. It's locked down tighter than a nun's thighs around here."

Quinn pushed up with the weight, breathing out, and held it before easing it back down. Thanks to the wonders of the modern speakerphone he could talk to Sam and bench-press at the same time. The way work was going, he needed to work off steam while he talked to the real boss.

"And you've tried a few nuns, huh?"

"Asshole. I'm just saying that no one is talking, and everyone is suspicious. Hell, I'm still no closer to knowing who might be involved than I was two months ago. This was a rotten idea."

"No." He heard Sam murmur to someone in the background. Probably Angie or Bobbie. Bobbie was the only one of Sam's kids living at home. Then Sam was back. "No, you were the right choice. Even a bad boy has a reason to want to come back to the old hometown. And you living in Hotchkiss instead of the county seat makes you look less like you have an agenda."

He sighed, adding one more rep, then another, until his arms shook and he was breathing like a freight train. "Well the one thing I do figure is that Andy Dean is clean. He'll make a fine sheriff when I leave."

"Great. Now you just have to find some evidence on the old sheriff."

"Yeah." Finally his arms wouldn't hold up any longer, and Quinn let the weight settle back into the cradle. "I have a feeling that will be easier said than done."

* * * *

Old Town New
by BA Tortuga

Dan spent the mornings working on a book about Elijah Howe. He'd been writing on it for ten years and didn't really expect to ever finish it, still, it was what teachers were supposed to do in the summers—advance themselves professionally—and he enjoyed it.

Lord, who'd've thought he'd grow up to be a geek? Rail skinny, hopalong, glasses, sitting and typing about an inventor not a damned soul cared about but him, and enjoying it.

He shifted, propping his legs up and sighing. Okay, he was depressing himself.

He needed to get out and about in the afternoon. Buy some bedding plants for the yard. Maybe a steak to do on the grill. Maybe two.

Quinn liked steak.

He liked the company.

Chapter Four

Fuck, it was hot. Which, given that it was late July, wasn't particularly stunning news, but still. Bleh. Dan was in the backyard, pulling weeds and sweating like a stuck pig.

A cold nose slid up the back of his thigh and he squeaked and jumped, turning to face Rags, who had obviously broken out again. "Oh, you big turkey! Does Quinn know you're out?"

The beast wagged and panted, big dark eyes staring at him, sort of like one of his first period students.

"I'll take that as a no." He brushed his hands off on his cutoffs and shrugged his old work shirt on, but didn't bother buttoning it up. "Come on, Rags. I'll take you home."

Rags went easily, still wagging and panting and drooling in copious amounts. The front door was closed up tight, and no one answered when he rang, but the back gate and the back screen door were open when he checked.

"Okay, pup, let's put you back here." He got Rags in the back yard, shutting the gate behind him. "Uh, Quinn? I brought Rags home."

There was no answer, just the gaping screen door that told him how Rags had gotten out. There was music on in the house though, so maybe Quinn just didn't hear him.

He sort of waffled. He could just leave the pup and go. He could knock. He could holler again. He could...

Oh, shit. The man deserved to know his back door was broken.

He walked up, knocked loud. "Quinn?"

There was no answer save for Rags' soft woof, and the dog nosed at the door until it just sorta ... fell.

"Oops." He shook his head and went on in, looking around for either Quinn or something to repair the backdoor with.

He found Quinn on the sofa, sound asleep, snoring to beat the band. He went over, shook Quinn's shoulder. "Quinn?"

Quinn popped up off the couch like a jack-in-the box, hand clamping down around his wrist as Quinn's other hand went to his throat, thumb pressing against his windpipe.

He didn't stumble this time, just sort of rocked backwards, tugging at Quinn's hand, startled.

He wasn't ever coming over here again. He was too old for this shit.

"I..." He swallowed, Quinn's thumb making it hard. "I brought Rags back. Your door's broke."

"Shit! Oh, shit, Dan." Quinn immediately let go, then grabbed his shoulders as he teetered. "Oh, man. I'm sorry, I didn't. Are you okay?"

"Yep." He nodded, looked behind him before he stepped away. "Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you. Rags got through the screen and out, and you didn't hear me knock."

Okay. Good deed done. Time to go home.

Except Quinn was still holding him. "I was sleeping hard. We had a raid last night. Some meth places. Did you know western Colorado is the crystal meth capitol of the country?"

Quinn was also only wearing a pair of thin boxers.

"No. No, I didn't. I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to bother you." He didn't know where to look. Where did you look at your

former lover, turned sometimes friend and neighbor, who was real close to naked?

"You didn't. I'm glad he came to you and you brought him home. Escape artist." Quinn grinned, stood. "Let me look at your throat."

"Oh, it's okay. Hey, if it bruises, people can think I have a hickey." He shook his head, found a grin. "If I ever have to do that again, I'll just throw a dog toy at you."

"Not a bad idea. Unless you've gone to bed with me, I can be a bitch to wake up." There was a long pause, Quinn's cheeks going bright red.

"Yeah. Uh. I. Right. I..." He motioned to the back door. "Have extra spline, if you need it."

"Yeah, that would be great ... a hickey? What would folks say?" Those gray eyes warmed, twinkled at him.

He chuckled, grinned, the expression easier this time. "Oh, no stress. That wouldn't even cross anybody's mind. They'd ask if I bumped into something."

"You do seem to." This time when Quinn's thumb brushed his throat it was gentle. Sweet.

He shivered, goose pimples raising right up. "This time something bumped into me."

"Yeah. Too bad I wasn't awake to enjoy it." Oh. He was thinking Quinn wasn't awake now.

"I..." He took a deep, shuddering breath. "Would you have? Enjoyed it?"

Quinn went still, eyes going dark. Serious. "Yes. Hell, yes."
"Oh."

He couldn't think of anything to say. Nothing. Nothing at all. So he stepped closer, figuring Quinn would step away if it was the wrong thing to do.

Quinn didn't move back, only closer, pulling him right up against that bare chest, lips brushing his. His hands were on Quinn's shoulders before he even thought to worry that they were dirty, and by then it didn't matter, he wasn't letting go.

Quinn's hands slid around his waist, holding on, lips moving over his. Hot and soft, Quinn's tongue came out, opening his lips and pushing inside. Oh, sweet Christ. He met those gray eyes, stunned and lost and hard as a rock. His tongue slid alongside Quinn's, a long-past-due hello and how are you?

Quinn didn't look stunned. He looked ... hot. Knowing. Needy. Those hands burned as they slid under his loose shirt to find skin. And, oh. Quinn was hard against him, their thin shorts no barrier to it.

Just the memory of that heat on him, in him, was enough to make him moan. The reality? Had him pressing closer, rubbing.

The kiss went even deeper, a little hotter, Quinn's hands hard on him. The taste was different. Small things made it that way, like the lack of hops and yeast. But, oh, it was good. One of his hands slid down, palming one of those hard ass cheeks, Dan just flying on the feel of Quinn, hot and male and right there.

"Danny." Quinn shifted, moved into his touch. Quinn was bigger now, broader. Hard with muscle. A full grown man instead of a boy. And touching him all over.

He nodded, hand sliding under the shorts, against skin. Oh, shit, he wasn't careful, he'd end up embarrassing himself.

He wasn't alone. Not one bit. Quinn worked the button on his cutoffs, fingers sliding in to touch. To feel.

"Oh. Oh, Quinn. I ... It's been a long time." He panted against those lips, working the soft boxers off and away, needing to feel more.

"Yeah. So damned long." His shirt floated to the floor as Quinn pushed it off, and his shorts dropped, too, and soon they were skin to skin. Quinn pulled him close again, their cocks rubbing, the hair on Quinn's chest teasing his nipples.

Dan bucked, holding on tight. "Don't let me fall."

"Not going to." He got a nip, a squeeze, and Quinn was backing them right up to the couch, easing him down, rubbing against him.

"Fuck." He was buzzing, aching, cock wet-tipped and throbbing like he was a kid.

"Yeah. Danny, I want..." Quinn's hand closed around him again, pulling strongly at his cock, lips fastening on his. The kiss was all heat, all aggressive male, deep and hard.

The world went white-hot and bright, his body slamming up toward Quinn, hands too busy holding on like a drowning man to reciprocate.

"Oh, shit, Danny. Oh, God." He only vaguely heard Quinn curse, but the splash of heat on his belly was unmistakable. Quinn was with him all the way. He gasped, just letting go, the rush and heat and breathlessness just what he needed, had needed for so long.

They collapsed together, Quinn turning them in mid-flop so Dan was on top, long arms going around him and holding him close. And four feet away, Rags was sitting, watching them with his head tilted and ears perked.

He laughed, tickled, happy, flying. "W ... we confused your dog."

"We did. He's never seen me wrestle with anyone but him." Wrestle. That was one way to put it. Quinn looked damned happy, too.

"So, since I'm pinning you, does that mean I won?"

"Yeah. This round anyway." Warm, rough hands smoothed over his ass, down his thighs. "We'll see about the next one."

"Mmm..." It felt so good, being touched, being *felt*. "You're on."***

They ordered pizza. No way was Quinn going to cook. He was like an overcooked noodle himself. He did get the screen door fixed, and Dan apparently got the yard finished, though it was a hard thing to be productive when they kept gravitating toward each other.

When they finally went back to Quinn's house and got settled in, it was all Quinn could do not to jump Dan immediately. Someone besides Rags needed to be able to buy the pizza though, so he kept his hands to himself until they were sitting on the couch in an awkward silence.

Then he finally got to touch, settling his hand on Dan's thigh.

The skin was covered in a web of scars, a few bigger scars from surgeries ropy and thick under his palm. Dan smiled, stretched a little. "Hey."

"Hey. Looks like it hurt. That's kind of a stupid thing to say, huh?" He could tell from the feel of it. Quinn had seen enough accidents to know.

"It's funny. The accident itself? Didn't seem to hurt; it was all so fast. The therapy? I wanted to die."

"Yeah. I hear you." God, yeah he heard. He'd felt that way about fucking withdrawal. Sometimes you thought it might be easier to just lie down and give up. A thought occurred to him. "Since when do you like vegetable pizza?"

"Since I was in college. I worked at a pizza place and you got the leftover pieces at the end and I always ended up with the veggie pieces. I learned to like it out of sheer self-preservation."

"Oh." Well, that made sense. Quinn was still a meat guy. In more ways than one. His fingers wandered up to the cuff of Dan's cutoffs.

Dan shivered, thighs parting. "Your hands are warm, Quinn."

"Yeah? Is that bad?" He grinned a little, teased a little. Tickled.

"No. Not bad." Dan chuckled, sat up, legs sprawling.

"Oh, good." Because he wanted things to be good. So fast, and yet it seemed like he'd been waiting forever. He stroked, pushing his fingers up under the shorts, searching.

"I ... Fuck." Dan shifted, rubbing against his fingers for a second. "You make me feel young."

"Yeah. I know." Danny made him feel like a kid, too. But not. Dan was different, inside and out, and Quinn was ready to learn all of it.

The scars were worse under the shorts, the left hip odd and awkward under his fingers. "It's fake. I broke both hips and my pelvis. They managed to save the right one."

"Wow. Jesus, Danny. You're something else." He meant it. No wonder Danny was so ... off balance sometimes. So careful. Not so much breakable as maybe afraid to be broken again. "Let me see."

"It's ugly. Sorta Frankensteiny." The warning was gentle, a little timid, but Dan unbuttoned for him, slid the shorts down and off.

He turned to face Dan, still didn't get the view he wanted, and slid to the floor, hands moving on the scarred skin, learning it. Memorizing. It was like a design, but random, fascinating, maddening to his fingers. There were even the tiniest of scars on the long, thin cock, on the tight sacs.

Thank God that still worked. He snorted at himself, but softly, because he didn't want Dan to think he was laughing. He leaned down, rested his cheek on one thigh, petting and stroking.

"Oh." Dan's eyes were hot, glasses set aside, just watching him, feeling him.

He just traced the patterns until they all blended, until Dan's cock rose and filled. He breathed in the scent of Dan, turned and let his lips press against the healed skin.

Dan's hands were shaking, sliding through his hair, petting him. "I thought ... Oh, you feel so good."

"You thought what, babe?" God, those tiny scars on Danny's balls were like little scratches on a piece of glass.

Barely there, just like little hairline cracks. It was hot as hell. Showed him how Danny was a survivor.

"I thought I wouldn't have this, feel this again."

"I'm glad you let me." Yeah. He so was. Quinn rubbed his face against Dan's cock, tongue coming out to steal a taste at the base.

Danny slid, rocked against him, so slow, so careful.

He wrapped his hand around Danny's prick, chin rubbing those heavy balls, hand starting to move nice and easy. "You feel amazing, babe."

"Yes. I ... I'm feeling amazing." He got a grin, stunned and teasing.

"Oh, babe." He chuckled, biting Danny's thigh lightly as punishment, before soothing it with his tongue. The taste was all salt and man and heat, burning him.

"Quinn. I want you." Danny's fingers traced his face, his lips, his eyes.

"Yeah. I want you, too, babe. What do you say we move this to the bedroom." His bed? One of the few things he refused to move without. And he would bet Dan would be more comfortable there.

Dan nodded, grinned. "I've never done it in a bed. I'm looking forward to seeing if it's as good as people say."

"You've never." He stared. He couldn't help it. "Not ever?"

"Nope." Dan looked away, cheeks red as apples.

"Well, damn." Quinn let it go because it obviously made Dan embarrassed. "You've got some catching up to do."

Quinn stood, held out a hand to Dan, helping him up.

"Only about fourteen years, smartass, and I'm a quick learner." Dan winked, hip bumping against his own.

"You bet. You're the one who went to college." Fuck. He wanted to ask why not? But you know, it made sense. The accident, Dan's dad, the schoolteacher thing. It didn't take a genius to figure out why, even if Dan should have been having hot, wild sex every chance he got. "And if I remember? You were damned good at it."

"I sure enjoyed it." Dan's hand slid around his waist, tickling his belly before sliding down to pet his prick. "Show me your bed, Quinn."

He did just that, taking Dan down the little hall just like the house across the street, right into his bedroom with the big walnut bedstead and queen mattress. It was the one thing he'd gotten for his first place big enough to hold more than a futon, sort of a sign he'd made it.

"Oh, pretty." Dan nodded, moving to step into his arms, mouth soft and warm as it pressed against his own.

He put his arms around Dan's waist and kissed right back, tongue tracing, one hand dropping to Dan's ass. God. Maybe Dan wasn't the only one who'd thought he'd never have this again.

Dan chuckled, those eyes gone all green. "My mind keeps superimposing what I remember, and what is, and going, ooh ... Wide."

"Your ass?" he asked, surprised. "Your ass is skinny."

Oh, that laugh was low and husky and pure, unintentional sex. "My ass is not skinny and I was talking about your shoulders, dork." "Oh. Did you just call me a dork?" Quinn was

laughing, too; he couldn't help it. He gave Danny's ass a gentle pinch. "You should have seen me six weeks after I left here."

Danny squeaked and pressed closer. "Hard times, huh?"
"Yeah. I ... yeah."

He'd talk about it sometime. With Dan, because he'd bet Dan would understand. Now was for the bed, though, and he backed Dan into it, letting him settle before stripping off his shorts.

Dan stretched out on his sheets, one hand covering that left hip, fingers splayed over the scars.

Naked, Quinn stood and looked, taking in the long legs, the lean chest and belly. Saying something like, 'don't hide' sounded like a bad romance, so he settled for crawling on the bed and taking Dan's hand away, kissing Dan's fingers.

Dan cupped his jaw, scooted close enough that he could smell the hint of grass and soap and male. He leaned down for a kiss, moving their joined hands to rest on Dan's belly, tongue pushing at Dan's lips.

That kiss went from slow to deep to breathless, just sliding like a kid down a superslide—bump, bump, whoosh, and Dan was pressed against him.

Yeah. Just like that. He loved it. Quinn kissed harder, his lips starting to sting, his breath coming fast and hard. He wanted.

Dan groaned, hand curling around his nape, fingers not shy at all, holding him.

He rolled to his side, pulling Dan closer. He didn't want to squash the man, and he wasn't at all sure those hips were up

to on top. He figured Dan would let him know. In the meantime he could bring their cocks together, could rub nice and hard.

Dan nodded, nipping his bottom lip before scooting down to lick his jaw, his throat, panting against his skin. One of Dan's hands twined with his, adding a little squeeze, a little speed.

"Yeah. Babe." God, it was hot. He could remember a hundred nights in the back of his T-bird, their hands moving just like this in the cramped space, the heat outside making them sweat.

This? Was even better.

"Fuck. You taste good. Your skin." Dan's mouth was hungry, sliding over his skin, heading to his shoulders.

"You. So hot." He was losing the words. Nothing new there. He stroked, pulled, humped against Dan, his free hand petting down Dan's back.

Dan groaned around one of his nipples, hips meeting his thrusts, the motions jerky, but strong, sure.

"Dan!" His skin was too tight, too hot. His hips snapped, harsh groans coming out of him. He was fucking seventeen again, just like that, a long, thin cry coming from him as he shot, way too soon.

"Oh..." Dan purred, licking and sucking his nipple, hand rubbing his come onto that long, hard prick.

"Fuck, Danny." So fucking trusting. "Want you, babe."

"I'm right here." Dan looked up, lips swollen, eyes just shining. "Right here, Quinn."

"I know. I mean, I want you to do me, babe. Want this in me." He gave Dan's cock a little tug. He wanted it so bad. Could almost feel it.

"Oh." Dan laughed, the sound breathless and eager, hips pushing toward his hand. "Okay. You have stuff?"

"Yeah. I, uh. I bought some last week." There, let Dan make of that what he would. "It's in the drawer."

He got a quick look and a half-grin, then Dan stretched, giving him a good, long look at that lean body.

Oh, hell, yes. He reached, touched, fingers finding sensitive spots.

Dan moaned, twisting a little, legs shifting on the sheets. "Love your hands, Quinn. Don't remember them being hot."

"I remember your mouth, Danny. And your cock. But there's more to learn." He moved the very tips of his fingers over Dan's scars. "You're all grown up."

Dan gasped, rippled, eyes going wide as his long fingers gripped the base of his prick. "Yes. Yes, Quinn."

He didn't want Dan to pop like he had, so Quinn rolled to his back on the bed, spreading wide. "How do you want me, babe? What's easiest for you?"

"I'm not sure. We'll have to explore a little." Dan winked. "Means lots of trial runs, yeah?"

"Yeah. I can live with that." He could, and easily. He pulled his knees up and back. Man, he'd never opened to anyone but Dan this way. Never thought to. Wasn't that he'd pined so much as he just hadn't trusted the few guys he'd taken to his bed. Dan? Oh, yeah.

"Oh..." Dan settled against one of his thighs, slicking up those long fingers and circling his hole, one finger pressing just inside. "So sexy..."

His hips bucked and Quinn took a deep breath, bearing down to open up. Felt amazing. Fucking amazing. "More."

"Yeah." Another finger, both of them pressing deep, stretching him. Dan just watched, cheek rubbing his leg.

It had been awhile, and the burn would have been too much if it wasn't Danny staring at him, Danny inside him. Quinn breathed deep, relaxing, letting Danny open him. "Babe. Soon."

"Uh-huh. On your side? Let me spoon you?" Danny gave him a smile. "Don't want to screw it up."

"No, just screw me." He hooted, rolling to his side carefully, feeling it jolt all the way to his toes.

He heard a crinkle and then Danny was pressed against his back, lips soft on his shoulder. One hand wrapped around his waist, petting his belly as slick heat pressed into him.

"Oh. Danny." So good. So damned good. He pushed back, slow and easy, just opening right up.

"Yeah." A soft sob sounded, Danny's lips hot and wet on his shoulder. "Right here."

He groped, finding Danny's hand and twining their fingers. They rocked together, skin heating, sweat sliding. He was panting, grunting, trying to get more.

Danny groaned, pushing him, rolling them so Danny was above him, sinking deep, cock sliding right past his gland.

"Fuck!" That was it. That was—yeah. Everything he'd been missing, at least since he'd been back. Quinn pushed up, muscles straining, needing to feel Danny come.

"Oh. Oh, shit. I can't wait, Quinn. I gotta..." Danny groaned, jerking, fucking him hard.

"S'okay, babe. I need it. Need to feel." He was ready. So ready, even if he wasn't good for another one. He squeezed down as hard as he could, gasping, moaning.

"Yes..." Danny's cry was deep, low, almost vibrating within him as Danny stilled, hips just jerking in tiny motions.

The air just whooshed right out of his lungs, the feel of Danny moving inside him ... fuck, it was good. He reached back, patting whatever skin he could find, trying not to wheeze.

Solid warmth settled against his back, Danny's eyelashes tickling his shoulder. "Oh. Good."

"You know it." He waited until they slid apart before turning to pull Danny close, nose under Danny's chin, lips moving idly. "Good, babe."

"Mmmhmm." Danny's hands stroked his hair, held him close, a soft, satisfied hum filling the air.

It was probably way too early for them to go to sleep. But he had the next day off, and he knew Danny did, too, so it didn't matter. They'd nap.

And who knew what else they'd figure out about each other before morning? PAGEBREAK

Chapter Five

"So did you get anything out of the raid?"

God, Sam was relentless. The reports Quinn sent him never seemed to make him happy; he always had to call with about a million questions. Quinn turned the truck toward the Dairy King, since he was still in Delta, wanting one of those really good milkshakes. He was even setting an example and using his hands-free set.

"A few names. This guy was small potatoes, cooking up shit in his barn. He didn't deal with the big boys. He did know a couple of folks who looked the other way though, and that might give me a little ammunition. I got a dispensation to hold him over at the Junction, too, so these boys couldn't get a hold of him before I got all I needed."

Which is all in my report, he thought, but didn't say it.

"Good. So how's the personal life?"

Quinn swerved to avoid a couple of dead prairie dogs.

"What?"

"You seeing anyone?"

Jesus, the man had radar or something. "Maybe. Why?"

"Oh. Just wondered. Sparky Granger rode through a few days ago, saw you talking with someone out in the yard. Said you were smiling."

"So I'm seeing him because of a smile?"

"You don't smile enough, Quinn. Angie wants to know when you're coming back this way. She wants to make you pie."

"Well, I have to drive up Tuesday to drop off some State's evidence. I can swing by your place on the way home."

"Not too late. That's a long drive back."

Yeah, didn't he know. Six hours from Denver to Delta, and then a little more to home. "I'll be careful."

"Then I'll tell her. We miss you, son."

That always warmed him, considering how his own father had been anything but fatherly. "It'll be good to see you, too. Later, Sam."

"Bye."

The phone went dead in his ear, and Quinn tossed the little headset away. These days he was torn between wanting to settle this case as quickly as he could and drawing it out to be close to Danny longer.

He had a job to do, though. And he knew it was about time he really got with it.

* * * *

Dan pulled into the fair grounds and parked, shaking his head at the crowds, the dust, the noise. Damn, there was a reason he hadn't come out to the fair in fifteen years.

Well, lots of reasons.

Still, Quinn had asked and he hadn't had the heart to say no. Or, in all honesty, the courage to admit that he had sort of been really out of the loop for a really long time.

He paid his way in, nodding to Willie Benton and Katie, both of them spotty and grinning. Shit, they'd be seniors this year. College soon.

Damn.

Dan stayed on the edge of the crowd, heading over to the small stage where a trio of little girls was singing gospel. Quinn said they could meet there and grab some fair food.

Man, had this place always been so little? So cheesy?

The crowd shifted and parted as the girls finished up, most everyone heading for the pig races if he heard right, and he was just debating getting food to amuse himself when he spotted Quinn. He was in civvies; jeans, a T-shirt and his sheriff's hat, listening intently to old man Watkins and nodding occasionally. But those eyes were on Dan, meeting his.

He nodded once, then turned as someone touched his elbow. "Why, Danny Avers? I didn't think you left that little house of yours from June to September."

"Only for groceries and the periodic corny dog, Elise."

Just what he needed, the school counselor and her husband, town gossips and all-around golden children, wanting to make conversation.

"Well, it's damned good to see you out, Danny. The kids will be thrilled to have you here to see their 4-H displays." Elise's husband Bill pumped his hand and grinned his white-white smile. Over the man's shoulder Dan could see Quinn frown and turn to look at something, shifting from foot to foot. Waiting.

"I'll make sure to look. Have a good one." He nodded and moved away. One good thing about being the town hermit; people excused bad social skills.

Quinn met him on the opposite side of the exhibit hall, near the quilts. "Hey, you."

"Hey. You been here long?" He held out his hand, shook Quinn's. Shit, the man looked good.

"Long enough to get roped into judging the peach jam. God, these people are relentless." Quinn put his hands in his pockets, shrugged. "I like your shirt."

He grinned, rolled his eyes. "Green. Do you remember when this was so cool? You could pay double and get beer at the stalls?"

"Yeah. And the midway rides actually seemed fast." Quinn looked about casually, voice dropping. "Green is good on you, babe."

Oh. He smiled, cheeks heating. "I'll remember that. I'm jonesing on the jeans, myself, Sheriff."

"Yeah?" The jeans that went with the braided belt, that went with the buckle that accented things, and the boots at the bottom. Quinn smiled back. "Thanks."

Dan nodded. "You hungry?"

God knew he was.

"Yeah. Corn dogs or Navajo tacos?" They headed back for the food stalls, and he wasn't sure if he was relieved or disappointed that Quinn kept a prim and proper distance.

"Oh, corn dogs, I think. There's something about deep-fried food on a stick."

"Yeah. Tube steak. Gotta love it." They got in line, chatting amiably, but he noticed Quinn was constantly scanning the crowd.

He wasn't sure if he was a cop thing, or a paranoia thing, or if he ought to ask about it if it was either one. Of course,

any questioning got derailed by the group of former students coming up to laugh and harass.

It was weird, having Quinn hear the kids call him Mr. Avers, having the public and private parts of things come so close.

It was just as weird the way people treated Quinn. They called him Sheriff and nodded and smiled, but there was wariness there, like they were waiting for Quinn to get drunk and start shooting up the fairgrounds.

It almost made him chuckle. Neither of them drank anymore, not even a drop. It had to be irritating, the constant watching; the looks.

He knew because he'd spent ten years getting them, too.

And Quinn had always had a worse temper than his, even. Quinn blew out a breath as the mayor's daughter left them to get a deep-fried Twinkie, patting his pockets like he used to when he was hunting a cigarette.

It made him sort of sad, really, because the fact was? This town wasn't going to change and eventually Quinn would go again. Still, he was going to enjoy what time they got. He had years and years to be an old man after Quinn moved on.

The tiniest touch on his elbow made him jump as Quinn moved him forward. Those eyes, though? There was nothing tiny about the way they were just eating him up. Just like they were fifteen again.

He couldn't stop grinning. God, it felt fine, being seen, being wanted.

Quinn grinned back, just fine as long as the townies left them alone. There were even a couple of folks Quinn said hi

to with genuine enthusiasm. Still, it was nice when they got their dogs and fries and headed off to sit in the shade. Alone.

"I think Annie Wilson's got eyes for you, Sheriff. You watch it, you'll end up married." The tease was quiet, easy, his grin hidden as he worked the mustard packet open.

Oh. That got him a look. "She was not my thing in high school and she's not now. God, can you imagine me with kids?"

He started chuckling. "Oh, sweet Christ. No. No, you have enough trouble keeping Rags corralled."

"You know it. I crated him today, gave him a new bone." He knew Quinn hated crating Rags, but with him not in the neighborhood to rescue the mutt when Quinn was away, it was the smartest thing until Quinn could get the fence fixed.

"Oh, he's gonna be pissed when you get home." Dan nibbled at the tip of his corny dog, all grins. "I'll have to leave the back gate open so he can come pout."

"Yeah. He'll want petting and soothing and rubbing." There was a pause and Quinn grinned, a look as intimate as a touch. "Me, too."

"Well, then, I know I'll have to leave the back door unlocked." His whole body went tight, hot.

"Yeah. Just for a bit. Wouldn't want you to be unsafe." Their fingers touched as Quinn reached for the napkins, just another excruciating little brush.

"I'm not worried." He bit his bottom lip, then went back to licking the mustard off his dog.

"Yeah. I hear the sheriff lives just across the way." Quinn watched him out of the corner of his eye.

"I've heard that. Damn good, too."

The flow of people moved past them, just far enough away to let them look, and talk, and laugh. It was good. Quinn looked damned happy. He imagined he did, too. He settled, sipping his Coke and watching the lights on the midway start to light up.

Quinn sighed. "I ought to go on and wander a bit. You want to come along or are you headed home?"

"You don't mind a little company?" He could wander.

"Not one bit. You can save me from Annie Wilson." They stood up and Quinn groped his butt where no one could see, before laughing like a loon and heading off to the trash can.

Lord, Lord. He finished his Coke, wiped his forehead, and put his cap back on. He ambled over, feeling loose and easy in his bones. "Where to?"

"The midway, I suppose. That's where the drunks will be. I'm not on duty, but I need to make a show."

"Okay. Man, I remember riding the tilt-a-whirl and thinking it was the neatest thing."

"Yeah. Remember that year when we were thirteen and we got Buster Maynes to eat that huge bag of multi-colored floss and then get on the thing five times?"

"Oh, Christ. Technicolor conversations were happening all over that ride. The damned carnies were going to kill us."

"Hell, yes." Quinn laughed right out loud, startling stares out of a few of the kids hanging around.

Dan nodded to the kids, causing them to scatter. "Or the time we were determined to get the AC/DC mirror. Spent every dime we had."

"God, yes. Silly thing." They made two turns around the midway before one of the sheriff's deputies stopped them to talk to Quinn about something. Quinn was really in his element in the cop work, he could tell. A take charge kinda guy.

He wandered a little, giving Quinn his space. God, it was just like going back in time; he could swear the rides and the games and the cheesy prizes were exactly the same.

"Hey. They got it under control, and I think the guys want me to go so they can relax and have a beer. You ready to go?" Quinn was back, carefully staying a few feet away.

"Yeah. I have ice cream and cookies at the house wanting to be sandwiches."

"No kidding. Chocolate chip cookies? Strawberry ice cream?"

He grinned, nodded. "You know it."

"Excellent. I'll see you there? I just need to stop by the fair office and sign the log." Yeah, it would be smarter to leave separately, probably.

"I'll leave the gate open for Rags." He tipped his cap and started wandering, heading back toward the parking lot. He caught sight of Ricky and George Martin standing by his car, looking like all sorts of trouble.

"You two get away from there." He'd failed Ricky and was going to get stuck with both of them next year. He should have passed Ricky just to be rid of the little shit.

The boys just grinned at him, looking like the little fucks they were, just waiting on him.

He dug his keys out, refusing to back away, to let them know he might be a touch intimidated, might not be able to take on a fifteen year old and a thirteen year old who were destined to be linebackers.

"You boys got a problem?" That made him jump much more than the boys, because he hadn't even heard Quinn come up behind him. "I think you ought to get on."

Shit, they scattered like dust in the wind, leaving nothing but a few more scratches in the fender of his Corolla. That? Was damned impressive.

"You logged out quick."

"The fellers at the office told me the boys were out so I hustled. I know you can handle yourself, but those kids are vicious." Quinn shrugged, ears and cheeks going red.

"You think?" Dan nodded, showed the tiny can of pepper spray on his key ring. "I'm sort of on their shit list. Kept one back, and now he can't play ball with his buddies."

"Oh, man. You are a glutton." Quinn moved toward him, but a car pulled in over in the next row, and Quinn stepped back, shaking his head and looking rueful. "Well. I gotta go ... let Rags out."

"Kay. Thanks for the help, Sheriff. I'll remember it." He went to unlock his car, eager to get home, to get in, to leave the gate open.PAGEBREAK

Chapter Six

Quinn threw the last of his gear in the back of his truck and popped the hood and checked the oil. He made sure he had water and coolant, too. No sense getting caught out between Delta and Grand Junction with nothing to fix an overheated engine.

He wasn't on duty. He wasn't on call. He had the whole freaking weekend off. Three days. Quinn clipped the leash on Rags. "Come on, buddy. Let's go get Danny."

Dan was up. He knew it because he'd seen him get the paper about an hour earlier. Dan had no idea they were going anywhere, but Quinn would bet he'd not say no. So he went and knocked on the door.

Dan's door opened, those mostly-green eyes smiling behind those glasses. "Well, Sheriff. Good morning."

"Morning, teacher. Get a bag. Some jeans, your hiking boots. We're going away for the weekend."

"What? We are?" Dan stepped back, letting him in. "Did I miss a conversation somewhere?"

Oh, that was a fine smile. Just fine.

"Nope. Rags just informed me this morning. We're heading on over to Glenwood to go camping." That was far enough away for him to really relax. And not get called back.

"Well, then. I can't really argue with him." Dan chuckled, winked, eyes just twinkling. "There's coffee and muffins in the kitchen, Quinn. I'll pack a bag."

"There you go." He let Rags follow Dan, knowing that big-eyed stare would hurry him along. Then he headed right for

the muffins, pouring the coffee by turns into travel mugs and a thermos, grinning stupidly when he realized he knew the house well enough to know where those were.

"There's some grapes and peaches in the fridge, Quinn. Oh, and I have two T-bones in the freezer, if you want to take them to cook." Dan's voice was muffled, happy.

"Oh, hell yes. We can stop at the City Market in Glenwood for everything else."

T-bones. Jesus, he could die happy.

Dan wandered back out with Rags as he finished grabbing the food. The man looked good in jeans and boots. Hell, even the old straw hat looked fine. Dan had a backpack and a huge, long pillow with him. "Cushion."

"Gotcha. Ready?" He sure was. He couldn't wait to get the hell out of Dodge. With Dan.

"Yep. Let's ride." They gathered up the food and locked up, settling their stuff in the back of the truck.

Rags hopped into the back of the cab and they were off. Damn. Yeah. The radio was on, he had Dan with him. It was good.

"This was a good idea." Dan leaned back, grinning at him. "How'd you wrangle a weekend off?"

"I asked for it. Been here long enough for them to know I won't go ballistic if something happens and the under-sheriff has to handle it." Grudgingly he had to admit that Andy was a good guy. Capable. And so not the reason he was there working.

"Well, now, that may be the first positive thing I've heard you say about the guys you work with. Things must be

easing." Dan smiled over at him. "I'm just enjoying the last few days before teacher-in-service days start."

"I bet." Easing. Right. "Well I figured we could enjoy them together. And, not that I want you to think we have to sneak around to do it, but I wanted to be away from prying eyes."

Dan nodded. "We'll have to make s'mores and have screaming orgasms to scare away the bears."

"There you go. And I, uh. Well, since you don't start in-service until Wednesday and I don't have to be in until noon Monday, I booked us Sunday night at the Hotel Colorado."

The Hotel Colorado was a swanky, historical hotel in Glenwood Springs, and he'd never thought to have the money to stay at a place like that.

"No shit?" Dan grinned, reached out to pat his knee. "Has to be so much nicer than the Circle S motor lodge—God, you remember how the water would go from warm to icy, just like that?"

"Hell, yes." He'd go from firecracker fucking to shrieking in no time at all. Of course, looking back? Those had been good times. Getting to know Dan as an adult though, was turning out to be even better. It was like Dan had been tempered by what he'd been through, and what was left was a core of steel. Scarred. But strong.

Dan nodded, resting against the seat, watching him drive. "You look comfortable behind the wheel."

"Huh?" That kinda took him aback, made him wonder if he was that obvious for a minute. "Yeah, well. Some of the places I've worked I did a lot of driving."

"You always did like to drive, Quinn. I think getting back behind the wheel after college was the scariest thing I'd ever done."

"But you did. That takes balls, babe." He reached out, stroked Dan's thigh where he knew scars hid beneath the jeans. "It's when you give in to the fear that you've lost."

"Yeah. Of course it doesn't make a lick of sense—I wasn't driving that night. I was so fucked-up I couldn't even walk. They fucking poured me into the bed of the pickup. But it was driving that scared me."

"Yeah. It's funny what your mind does." His thing was any kind of alcohol or drugs. He didn't even like to take cold medicine.

"Yeah." Dan nodded, took a long drink of his coffee.

Quinn thought about it for a minute. "So if you weren't driving why would anyone blame you?"

"Well ... Mostly 'cause everyone was fucked-up and that was sort of my doing. I ... I had a bit of a bad run once you left, did some shit I shouldn't have." Dan shrugged a little. "The witnesses that saw Enrique take the corner say I was standing in the bed, screaming, hitting the back window with something. I don't remember. I remember taking my first hit about five or so, May 20th, then the next thing I remember? It was June 4th."

"Shit, babe. That's a hard row to hoe." God, how many stupid things had he done right after he left? Maybe he would have straightened up a lot sooner if he'd had a shock like Dan's. Not that he would wish that on anyone.

"I didn't get cleaned up until I came back this way. I was in Denver. Sam should have arrested me that night. Instead he took me to the Y and stuffed me in a cold shower and pretty much browbeat me clean."

"He sounds like a good man, Quinn. A good friend. He talk you into being a cop?"

"Yeah. He was evil." He grinned, remembering his horror. "He taught me what it might be like to have a dad."

"You ... you know your dad got in trouble, yeah?"

"I heard a bit." He still wasn't sure what the heck had happened. Well, he could have found out right enough. He just hadn't. "I've been avoiding looking into it."

"Oh. Okay." Dan nodded, reached out and twined their fingers together.

He sighed, squeezing Dan's hand. "Maybe you should tell me, just so no one blindsides me. I didn't want to read the report, you know?"

"He, uh. Well, he was watching the Super Bowl. God, twelve years ago? Maybe thirteen. The lady he was living with and him got into it and it looks like he pushed her out of the trailer and down the stairs onto the concrete. They found her in the morning, took your dad off. He didn't even look to see if she was out there."

"Well, that explains why he hasn't been over to ask me for money." He knew it had to be something bad, had known the damned fool would kill someone some day.

"Yeah. I didn't follow the news a lot. I was sort of involved with other stuff, but I know he did some time."

"Thanks, babe." The rode in silence for a bit until they got into Delta. "You want to stop and pee? Maybe get a sausage biscuit?"

"Sure. I could use a stretch and a walk."

"Cool." So could he. Just talking about his old man made him itch. There but by the grace of God. Besides, Rags was whining a bit. They stopped at McDonalds. It was the only decent place to get a fast-food breakfast in Delta since Hardee's closed. Quinn didn't hold with Carl's Jr.

Dan took Rags on a walk, both of them ambling along the edge of the parking lot and stretching as he went in.

He figured Dan could only take so much sitting. He took a leak, got them biscuits and coffee, and headed back out to let Dan get to the bathroom. And God, he was a sap, because it warmed his heart to see Dan standing in the sun with his dog, just smiling at him.

"Hey." Dan was grinning, the lines beside his eyes somehow sexy, the green showing.

"Hey. Your turn. You need us to run to City Market for aspirin or anything?" He took the leash, fingers sliding against Dan's.

"No. I have a standing order for the good stuff. Anti-inflammatories every day, muscle relaxants for the bad days." Dan winked, headed towards the MickeyD's. "Better living through chemistry."

Yeah. He didn't say anything, just watched Dan go. Hating that he had bad days. Quinn patted his pockets, remembered that he'd quit a year ago. Rags sniffed him determinedly,

looking for his usual McDonald's breakfast. Two breakfast burritos, extra salsa.

It didn't take Dan long, those green eyes laughing at Rags. "You are a spoiled dog, Mr. Rags. Lucky mutt."

"He is pretty damned spoiled. But he's earned it." He grinned at Dan, heading over to the little picnic table on the grass. "Man, it's good just being out of there. How have you stood it all these years?"

Dan sat, unwrapped the sandwich. "You want the easy answer or the uncomfortable one?"

"I'd rather know the truth." He would. He wanted to know as much about Dan as he could.

"Well, at first I stood it because Daddy needed me and that sort of got me through the finger pointing and whispers and nasty looks. Then I stood it because I owed those people something. I got those kids fucked-up. I got those kids killed. Now I stand it because I'm ... well, not old, I guess, but ... settled? I mean, I sort of had a routine—school, grocery, home. Every day. I'm ... below the radar. Just Mr. Avers, you know?"

God. That was ... "And now? You know, you keep on taking up with me, we're gonna pop up in radar range, no matter how careful we are, babe."

"I know." Those eyes were so green, so serious. "You're worth being on the radar for, Quinn."

"Oh." Oh, good. He reached over, touched Dan's hand. "So are you, babe. So are you."

They finished in an easy silence, took Rags for another walk, and hit the road. The weekend was gonna be a good one. He could feel it. ***

Dan eased himself down on the soft bed, willing himself not to moan, not to wince.

Oh, fuck, they'd had fun—eating and playing and laughing and screwing, and if he never slept on the ground again, it would be too soon.

Of course, if this looked like a regular thing, he'd just have to invest in a good air mattress and a pump.

"You okay, babe? We could go down to the hot springs pool, soak a bit." Quinn looked relaxed, happy, just all and all good.

"In a little bit, maybe. I just got down here." He gave Quinn a grin, enjoying the ability to take a good, long look.

"Yeah. You've been busy this weekend." The bed dipped as Quinn sat next to him, hand coming out to pet his belly. "It's been good. Even if we did have burned potatoes with our T-bones."

"They were fine under the black." He stretched out, enjoying the touch more than he could say.

"Yeah. And Rags liked the peels. Weirdo." Rags was staying with friends tonight. He had a play date with a couple of labs with even worse names than Rags. Quinn petted him absently, smiling down at him, gray eyes glinting.

"Yeah..." He wasn't quite sure what he was agreeing to, but it was worth it, so long as Quinn kept on.

They stretched out together, Quinn stroking and petting through his clothes. Loving on him. He reached out, returning

the favor, fingers sliding over chest and ribs and belly, just petting and feeling. He lifted his head a little, the kiss slow and sweet.

Quinn pulled him close, turning him half on top, hand massaging his back with deep, slow motions.

"Oh, sweet Jesus." A low moan was just pulled right out of him, his eyes rolling.

"You're all tight, babe. How am I supposed to fuck you raw if you're hurting? Let me help with that."

Dan nodded, panting just a little. "Yeah. God, that feels good."

"Yeah? Feels good here, too." Quinn's voice was husky, happy, full of all the good things.

He nuzzled into Quinn's neck, mouth open on the hot skin. Oh, God. He. That was. Yeah.

"Fuck, the noises you're making, Danny. You sound like you're in heaven." Quinn was starting to breathe hard, skin beading up with sweat under his mouth.

"Uh-huh. Don't stop. Please." He licked the salt away, whimpering at the flavor on his tongue.

"Not going to. Promise." Yeah, Quinn just seemed like he could go on all night.

It took him forever, but he got Quinn's shirt unbuttoned, found skin. Every muscle in his back was relaxed, eased. Then Quinn started on his thighs.

His fucking world stopped. Still. Stuff stopped hurting that had hurt so long he'd forgotten about it.

"Oh, babe. You look..." One of Quinn's hands came up, fingers tracing the lines beside his mouth. That were not as

deep, from the feel of it. "I like being able to do for you, Danny."

He pushed against that hand, kissing the palm. "I feel so good, Quinn. You make me feel so much."

Quinn pulled him closer, holding him. Just holding him. "Get some rest, babe. Then we'll play."

"Promise?" He cuddled in, melted deep inside, body just limp as a rag doll.

"You know it. I want you, here, in this bed. But you need some sleep. And I do, too." God, it was good, the way Quinn petted, held him, nuzzled his temple.

"Kay." His fingers slid over Quinn's ribs, holding on. Just holding on.***

Quinn waited.

He waited until Dan was all rested, letting the good work he'd done with the massage sink in while Dan slept. He waited while they went to the hot springs pool and got nice and loose, and while they went to Marshall Dillon's for the all-you-can-eat ribs special.

When they got back to the hotel room he was through waiting. He wasn't wanting Dan to stiffen up, so he didn't just pounce, but he didn't waste any time leading Danny over to the bed and pulling him down for a kiss.

He got a laugh, Danny pressing close, just like that, hands wrapping around his shoulders and pulling him closer. He moaned happily, tongue pressing between Danny's lips, enjoying the taste, the feel of them together.

Dan rubbed against him, motion slow and sensuous, relaxed. Easy against him. "Want you, Quinn."

"Hell, yes. I've been wanting, babe." God, it was good. And not just because he didn't feel like any of the neighbors were out there trying to look in. He slid his hands down Danny's back, cupping under that tight ass.

"Mmm..." Danny chuckled, lips mapping his jaw, his throat, up to his ear to nibble.

That made him crazy. The way Danny just purred for him, the way Danny knew all of his old hot spots and was fast learning his new ones. And he adored the way Danny's tight, lean muscles felt under his fingers.

His shirt was unbuttoned, pushed off and away, Danny hungry, so focused on tasting and licking, eating him right up.

He let Danny go, let him take the lead, remembering the first time Danny had done that back in the day. It had been so hot he'd come all over. He was a little better controlled these days, but it still made him feel like a god.

"Want you to fuck me, Quinn. Want to feel you inside." The skin above one of his nipples was licked, then a circle drawn with that hot tongue.

He arched, stretching, hands coming to rest on Danny's shoulders. "Yeah, babe. Yeah."

Sharp teeth found his nipple, scraped across it just enough to spark, tongue immediately soothing.

"Fuck!" He started working at Danny's clothes, wanting that skin, wanting to play a little, too.

Shirt. Jeans. Belts. They worked together, got each other bare and available, and settled back together on the bed, skin-to-skin. "Oh. Better."

"Good." It was so good. He traced the scars on Danny's thighs, the ones on his hips. Nibbling Danny's neck, he rolled them to their sides, giving him plenty of room to touch.

Danny groaned, arched toward him, fingers sliding in his hair, tracing his ears, his nape. That flat belly slid and rubbed against his, Danny's cock so hot against his skin.

His own cock was just throbbing with his heartbeat. He rubbed, leaving a wet trail against Danny's hip. "Where did we put the stuff, babe?"

"It's in my shaving kit next to the bed. Wanted it close."

"Oh, you're a wonder." He moved away quick, not wanting to be out of touch long. It was like they just couldn't get enough of touching. What was it Danny had said? No one did that anymore. It felt so damned good.

Hell, it felt like that he wasn't the only one feeling that way. Danny's hands were on his ass, rubbing and squeezing, tongue soft and hot as fuck against his spine.

"Oh, yeah." He got the stuff, paused long enough to let Danny work up his back to his tattoo, and turned back for a hot kiss. He was starting to need more than slow and steady.

Of course, from those needy little sounds? Danny was right with him, opening right up.

He got the lube open, got his fingers good and wet, and started down Danny's back, fingers pushing between those tight cheeks. Quinn wanted in.

One of Danny's legs slid up along the top of his own, knee bending, thighs parting for him.

"Oh. Babe." He slid one finger right in, just pushing, opening Danny up for him.

Danny rippled, moaned so low and hot, face lifting for a kiss. "More."

Well, he wasn't one to deny a request like that, was he? Especially when he wanted the same thing. He slid another finger right in, pressing deep.

He knew those sounds that filled the air, lower now, richer, but he knew them down deep. Danny shifted, slid, riding his fingers, body gripping him tight.

Shifting, stretching, Quinn got Danny ready for him, then handed over a condom. "Put it on me, babe."

Danny smoothed the condom down over him, hands warm and sliding, squeezing, petting all the way to the base of his shaft.

It made his hips jerk, made him gasp. "God, Danny. That. You. How do you want me?"

Danny rolled, pulling him on top of the lean heat. "We'll start here, and move if it starts hurting, okay?"

"You got it." Oh, fuck, yes. He settled carefully between Danny's legs, the tip of his cock pushing past the tight muscles. Making them both groan.

Green-green eyes watched him, watched them as they pushed together. "Quinn."

"Danny. I. God." He slid all the way in, right into the tightest, hottest place, breathing hard. He kissed Danny, matching the motions of his tongue to the motions of his hips.

He supported Danny's left leg with his hand when he felt those muscles tremble and the low moan that pushed into his lips, the way Danny's hips sped up, let him know they were good.

It was easy. Should it be that easy to read every response, every move? He moved just a little faster, felt the sweat run down his back, felt it start to run into his eyes.

Danny arched, one hand on his shoulder, the other reaching to grab that hard, needy prick, pump and pull.

He grunted, holding it back as best he could, waiting for Danny. Waiting. "Come on, babe."

He got a jerky nod, Danny's shoulders leaving the mattress, entire body squeezing and straining as he shot. Quinn watched, just watched, as Danny's face and chest went red, as that hot prick let loose. Then his head fell back and he groaned, hips snapping as he came hard enough to see stars.

"Oh, shit, Quinn." Danny was panting, shuddering. "You rock my fucking world."

Quinn nodded, trying to get his breath back, easing down beside Danny. "You do it for me, babe."

One hand landed on his belly, heavy and hot. "Yeah. Yeah, Quinn."

He didn't want to go back. Didn't want to get back to Hotchkiss and the hiding and the dirty job they'd forced on him. The not being able to touch Danny in public. Quinn sighed, pulling Danny so close. He wasn't one to whine, and he wouldn't start now. He'd take the time they had this weekend and hoard it as long as he could.

And make it last until the next time they could be themselves together. PAGEBREAK

Chapter Seven

Quinn was ready to explode. Between the job, which was just not going as well as he'd hoped, thanks to the tight-knit nature of the old boy network, and the fact that he could only see Danny once in a great while without making people suspicious, well. He needed some release.

So he clipped Rags to his leash, put on his running shoes, and headed out to get sweaty and loose. He ran until Rags was panting and slowing, which was something for the big old mutt. Ran until some of the noise in his head about the lack of leads and abundance of cover-ups quieted down.

The only thing he couldn't seem to run out of his system was the need to see Danny. So when Rags led him to Danny's back door instead of his own? He didn't argue. He just went, testing the knob to see if it was unlocked.

Yep. Unlocked, the smell of chocolate chip cookies in the air, and ... Hello! Danny wearing a skimpy pair of shorts, sliding a batch of cookies onto waxed paper.

"Oh. Now that's a fine thing. You and cookies."

Dan jumped, but was grinning wide when those eyes met him. "Hey! Oh, you look worn out. Water for both of you?"

"Yeah, that would be good." He was panting as hard as Rags, had kinda forgotten it in the admiration of Danny.

He got tossed a bottle of water, Rags given a bowlful, giving him a nice, long look at Dan's ass.

He almost reached for that ass, but Danny was too close to the hot oven. So he guzzled water and looked his fill, sweats starting to tent up a bit.

"Seems like it's been forever. How's the job?" Dan pulled a pan from the oven, turned it off.

"It sucks." He didn't have the energy to lie, so he just left it at that. "How's school?"

"There are kids. They keep showing up. They smell horrible." Dan winked.

He laughed, sucking down the rest of his water and moving close to grab a cookie and a handful of Danny. "You smell good."

"I understand how to wash myself." Dan laughed softly, stole a bite of his cookie.

"Yeah. Kids not so much. Kind of like dogs," he said, nudging Rags away from the counter. He took a kiss, warm and chocolaty.

Dan pressed against him, warm and close, tongue sliding against his, hand sliding under his T-shirt.

"Mmm." Yeah. That was what he needed. God, Danny was the one good thing ... He kissed Danny hard, letting the man know.

Those fingers slid over his belly, pushing up, finding his nipples.

"Oh, damn, babe." Sparks went right up his spine, exploding in his brain. Quinn pushed Danny back against the counter, hips pressing, needing to get close.

Dan chuckled, tongue pushing deep, fingers pinching and pulling randomly.

He was so hard that even the soft cotton of his shorts and fleece of his sweats scratched. Quinn moved his hips back, pulled them down and off, letting them drop to the floor. He

got ahold of Danny's shorts, too, skimming them down over Danny's hips, moaning as their skin met.

"Oh. Yeah. That's. Yeah." Dan's lips slid over his jaw, down his neck.

The only thing left between them was his T-shirt, and Quinn made quick work of that, rubbing into the vee of Danny's spread thighs. He tilted, let Danny have his throat, hands sliding up and down Danny's back.

Danny's fingers cupped his ass, thumbs rubbing his hips. His throat was licked and nuzzled, tongue so hot, almost burning his skin.

"Babe, I need..." He needed all sorts of things. Mainly he just needed more. He reached down, palming Danny's cock, rubbing firmly. He needed that.

"Uhn..." Dan arched, wincing as his hip bumped the counter. "Bed. Bed, I want to touch."

"Yeah. Okay." Quinn pushed the cookies to the center of the kitchen counter, where Rags couldn't get them, and dragged Danny down the hall to the bedroom. He pushed Danny down, came down on top of him, licking and nibbling.

Dan's laugh was half moan, half gasp, the lean body arching, reaching for him.

"Want you, babe. Want you in me. Can you?" He wanted it, but only if Danny wasn't hurting. They'd do something else if he was. He went into Danny's arms for more kisses, deep and drugging.

Dan nodded, hands tangling in his hair, holding their mouths together.

Oh, good. Quinn pressed down, tongue tasting, hands sliding. God, Danny felt good. Hot. Danny's skin was slick with his sweat, Danny's belly wet where his cock touched it. His.

"Ride me." The words were groaned, almost growled. "Want to feel you all around me."

"Yeah. Okay." Quinn nodded, rose up above Danny. He didn't even think about it, just licked his palm really well, got it wet so he could slick Danny up. He straddled Danny's hips, getting ready to push back and take Danny in, just like that.

"Quinn. Love. You sure?" Dan was shivering, cock throbbing in his hand.

"Huh?" He was focused, needing. Leaning on Danny's chest, Quinn looked down, trying to make sense of what Danny was asking.

"I'm clean, Quinn. Wouldn't hurt you, but I don't have recent proof. I just don't."

"Oh." Oh, yeah. He nodded, bearing down and letting the head of Danny's cock slide in. "You wouldn't lie to me, babe. And I have to get tested for work."

"Oh..." Danny arched, hips pressing up toward him. "Yes. Yeah, Quinn. Damn."

Oh, fuck. So hot. So damned big and good. Quinn moved, down then up, taking all of Danny in before raising up to let him slide almost all the way out. Then dropping to take him again.

Danny's gasp was low, shuddering, those long hands reaching for him, wrapping around his waist and pulling him down.

Nodding, Quinn went, grinding down. He braced on one hand and used the other to pet Danny's chest, to pinch and pull Danny's nipples. A little turnabout was always fair play.

"Fuck, yes." Danny's eyes trailed down his body, thumbs stroking his cock, fingers digging in.

"Danny!" Quinn couldn't hold back anymore, couldn't tease. He just started moving, rising and falling, no grace or rhythm in him anymore.

Those green eyes were hot, watching him, panting, cock driving up into him, taking him.

He put his hand around Danny's, stroked his own cock with Danny's palm. Up and down, in and out, and Quinn panted, moaned. Begged.

"Fuck. You're so fucking hot, Quinn." Danny's fingers wrapped around him, tugged, gave him what he needed.

"Babe. Nothing as good as you." He needed Danny to know that. Needed Danny so bad. "Don't get you ... near enough." Breathless, he stopped talking, went faster and faster, just slamming himself down.

"Never enough." Dan arched, thumb pressing good and firm against the tip of his cock.

"Fuck!" He crashed down against Danny, hips jerking hard as he came. He squeezed down hard, muscles clenching.

Dan bucked, rocking up furiously until heat filled him, his name echoing in the room.

Oh. Oh, yeah. Danny. Inside him good and deep. Quinn leaned down, kissed Danny gently, lips and tongue brushing, tasting. "Oh, babe."

"Yeah. Yeah, Quinn." Danny moaned, fingers sliding on his skin. "Needed this."

"Me, too." It occurred to him just then what Danny had asked just before, and he laughed at himself. "I'm clean. You know that, right?"

Danny chuckled, nodded. "Yeah. Yeah. Oh! Oh, man, I get to taste you."

"Yeah. You do." Oh, fuck. That was a hell of an idea.

He got a needy, wanton grin. "You got any plans for tonight? Besides ice cream cookie sandwiches?"

"Not a plan in the world. Nothing but maybe bathing, so I don't offend." He nuzzled. Ice cream. Yum.

"I'm hard to offend, Quinn. I'm a middle school teacher."

"Yeah, but I want to impress you with my bathing skills." They laughed together, rolling on the bed. He needed that as much as the sex. It made him feel whole.

"Well, in that case, Sheriff, I think this teacher better get in the shower and watch." Danny chuckled, winked. "Make sure you're not cheating."

"Sounds like a plan. Then we can have ice cream. And then you can see if I taste better." He grinned, kissing Danny hard in thanks for all sorts of things.

Mostly for just being there. That was the key to all sorts of tension release.

* * * *

He was better than any weathervane—his hips knew when the cold was coming, steel turning to shattered glass inside him, scarred muscles going tight. He had the good drugs for

those mornings. They were in a little basket by the bed—muscle relaxants and pain meds and tranquilizers. Things to ease him.

Vicodin and Baclofen, Percocet and Flexeril. Diazepam and Phenergan and Percodan and shit ... No wonder he didn't drink anymore. He didn't have to.

Dan winced as he shifted, his hips screaming, and reached out, fingers trailing over the tube of icyhot and the lube before finding his pills. He almost smiled, thinking of Quinn.

There was something about Quinn's hands, wide and strong and not scared to touch him. It was something else, the way they soothed aches deep inside like the best kind of heat. There was something about the way Quinn looked at the scars—like they were something special, something beautiful. Yeah, Danny knew that couldn't be it. He saw them every damned day, knew that they were weird at best, hideous at worst, still...

He chuckled at himself. He was getting sentimental in his old age. Still, there was something about Harlan Quinn.

That man? Those hands eased him.

***"So what are you doing here, Quinn?"

Surprised, Quinn turned to look at Andy Dean, who had caught up with him just outside the sheriff's office in Delta.

"Was working. Now I'm heading home."

"No." Andy was a clean-cut guy, tall and solid, with dark hair and serious brown eyes. Right now his face was set in even more sober lines. "I mean what are you doing here. As sheriff?"

He knew Andy wasn't involved in what he was there to investigate, but he still had to step carefully.

"You figure you should have been appointed?"

That got him a snort. "Nah. I'm young. But so are you. And you don't want to be here."

"I have to be."

"You come back for Mister Avers?"

His back went right up. "What the hell does Danny have to do with it?"

"Saw you two together at the fair, and a couple times since. Word is from Chrissy Lockhart that you were kind of an item in high school."

Chrissy. Lord, he hadn't known she was still in the area. "An item."

"Yeah. Look, Sheriff, I'm not one to judge a man on his personal life, but if that's all you came back for, you're doing this whole county a disservice."

Right then and there he made the decision to bring Andy in on the case. "How do you feel about the Hallelujah café?"

"I'm in favor. They have great huevos rancheros."

"Then let's go. You and I need to talk."

Chapter Eight

Dan muscled into the front door, hands full of papers. God, he hated mid-term tests. Of course, they weren't semester finals, which were sheer hell.

He started turning on lights, stacking the work on his desk, and wandering to check his messages, make coffee, ponder dinner.

Or maybe just a hot bath.

A nice long hot bath.

He had one message. It started with silence. Then, "Danny? Call my cell when you get home."

He frowned, Quinn's number three-quarters dialed before he really knew what he was doing. Surely nothing was really wrong. Surely.

"Lo?"

"Quinn? 'S me. You left a message." Are you okay? Do you need anything? Can I see you?

"Danny." Quinn didn't sound hurt, or freaked. He sounded ... hungry. "You're home?"

"Yeah. Happy Friday."

He adjusted his prick, which wanted to do its own hellos.

"I'll be there in five. Be naked." The phone clicked off on the other end, leaving him listening to himself breathe.

He unlocked the back door and stepped out of his shoes, tugging off his T-shirt, free hand opening his jeans. Naked. He could do naked.

It had been days.

Hell, weeks.

He and Quinn hadn't been able to make their schedules mesh in way too long. Looked like the dry spell? About to end.

The back door opened just about the time he was starting to feel a little silly, Quinn coming right for him, hands sliding around his waist and pulling him close.

"Hey." He tugged Quinn down for a kiss, their lips meeting with a click of teeth and a pair of low groans.

Quinn kissed him like a starving man, actually bending him back and holding him just off balance, but so solid he knew he wasn't going to fall. He let himself trust Quinn's strength, focusing instead on the damned clothes, fingers tugging and pulling at Quinn's buttons, searching for skin.

"Danny. Babe. I need." Quinn hauled him toward the bedroom, hands moving on him. From his arms to his nipples to his cock.

"Yeah. Fuck, it's been eons." The bed wasn't made, so he just pulled the comforter out of the way, gave them a smooth surface.

Quinn eased him down, grinning at him, eyes dark and needy. "Too long." He got another kiss, Quinn's arm slipping under his shoulders to hold him up.

He pulled Quinn's shirt off, fingers slip-sliding right up Quinn's belly, finding both nipples at once. "You know it."

Gasping, shivering, Quinn bit him, just bit right down on his neck, lips moving just below where his collar would sit.

"Oh, sweet fuck!" He jerked, arching, hips damn near fucking the air.

"Yeah. Yeah, Danny." God, they were just too hot. Too much. Too damned hungry for each other. Quinn pushed down against him, finally naked, their cocks pressing together. His hand found Quinn's ass, fingers tugging them together, both of them trying to find a rhythm.

It was difficult because Quinn kept trying to get to all of him, slipping and sliding and rubbing. That mouth was just all over him, Quinn's fingers finding his throat and his hips and his scars.

God, Quinn even made the fucking scars seem sexy, fine.

"So damned hot, Danny." They rolled on their sides, finally, Quinn giving him as much access as he needed. Quinn pushed back into his hands, ass tight, hard.

He touched spine and thighs, shoulder, balls, cock, eyes just eating Quinn up.

"You're one good-looking man, Quinn."

Color rose in Quinn's cheeks. It was a good look for him. "You're not so bad yourself, Danny. I love the way you feel under my hands."

"Yeah? You make me feel..." He shrugged, leaning in and giving Quinn a deep, long kiss, letting Quinn know exactly how he felt.

It worked. He got a good taste of how Quinn felt, too, right from Quinn's tongue and lips. Quinn's skin was so hot he thought it might burn his fingers, and the muscles beneath his hands were shaking.

He scooted down, lips sliding over Quinn's belly, tongue licking that salty skin. "Need you."

"Oh, God, babe. Yeah. Please." Quinn leaned back, one leg propping up, spreading for him.

"Yeah." His fingers blazed the trail, his tongue following along, sliding around Quinn's navel, then circling the tip of that full cock.

A short, harsh sound met his touch, Quinn's hips pushing that wide prick at him. Quinn petted him, ran long fingers through his hair, along his shoulders.

"Yeah. Yeah, I need." He opened up, mouth dropping over Quinn's cock, pulling and sucking hard.

The muscles of Quinn's belly and thighs went tight, a deep flush staining that skin. The taste was all salt, all male, and so strong it made his mouth water. He dropped his hand to his cock, working it in time with the motions of his mouth on that hot prick. "Oh, Jesus, Danny. You look ... I can't." He could feel Quinn's cock twitch, feel how Quinn's balls drew up. His moan was low, hungry, hips jerking as he sucked, swallowed. "Come on, Quinn. Need. Need you." Quinn gave, hips snapping as he came hard, filling Dan's mouth with heat. That thick cock just throbbed, and Quinn's moan echoed through the room.

Drinking down what he could, Dan got distracted by the throb and leap of his cock in his hand, balls going tight as he shot.

When he was done he found himself in Quinn's arms being kissed silly. "Oh, babe."

"Uh-huh. Hey. Good to see you."

Chuckling, patting his ass, Quinn nodded. "You know it. Missed you, Danny."

"Yeah. Work still kicking your fine butt?" He snuggled in, enjoying the touching, the touches.

"Yeah. It's been ... well. It's been tough." He hated that tone in Quinn's voice, the one that told him that there were things Quinn just couldn't tell him, and that they were bad things. "How's school?"

"School. Kids. Grades. I've had my house egged twice. Normal stuff." He grinned, winked.

"Maybe you should keep Rags at night." Oh, that was better. Normal. Happy Quinn. Quinn's stomach rumbled. "Have you had supper?"

"Nope. I just got home before I called. You want pizza? Or I could make pancakes?"

"Ooh. Pancakes. Pizza takes too long and would require getting dressed." That was a perfectly reasonable argument.

"Cool. I might even have microwave bacon." He winked. "No splatter."

"Splatter is bad." Squeezing his spent cock, Quinn rolled them both out of bed. "I want this intact."

He chuckled, nodded, led Quinn on a lazy wander to the kitchen. "You want to make the coffee?"

There was something too cool about the fact that Quinn knew where everything was.

"Yeah. I'll heat up the syrup, too." Something cool about being naked in front of someone and not being the least bit self-conscious, too.

He nodded, locked the back door on his way by to grab the milk, the bacon and the butter.

They moved around each other easily, falling into the rhythm they'd had since who knew when. Only as adults, it was better. Not so edgy, not so competitive. Just easy and hot and ... he had to reach quick when Quinn handed him the eggs.

He was chuckling when he broke them into the batter, butt sort of shaking as he stirred. "There's frozen juice in the freezer, too, if you want."

"Sure. We'll do it up right." Quinn got out his Grandma's pitcher and the orange juice can and started making. Quinn juggled, too, and they both grinned at each other.

They started chuckling, both tickled, both fucking happy. God, he'd have never guessed that the best part of his whole fucking week would be making pancakes naked.

They only burned one batch because they were kissing, and the bacon was a little limp, but there were no splatters. When he said that to Quinn, he got a laugh and a swat and a reminder that there was limpness because of splattering on someone's part.

They licked syrup off each other's fingers, shared tart, orangey kisses, touched each other with fingers heated by coffee cups. It was the most fun he'd had in weeks.

"Mmm. Damn that was good, babe. When is your next holiday?" Quinn was sucking his finger, nibbling it occasionally.

"Thanksgiving. I have Wednesday through Monday. Two full weeks for Christmas, too."

"Oh, damn. I don't think I can wait that long, babe." He got a very serious look. "This was too long."

Dan nodded. "It was. Is. Whatever. I was considering tunneling into your house."

"Now there's a thought." His fork was removed from his free hand, Quinn bringing those fingers up to taste, too.

He moaned, scooting over so their legs slid together. "Can you stay awhile?"

Say yes.

"Yeah. I've got the weekend off. Not even on call."

"Yeah? I've got some papers to grade, but besides that? I'm all yours."

"Good." He got a sharp bite, right at the base of his thumb.

His cock jerked, thighs spreading a little, belly going tight as hell. "Oh. Yeah."

"Oh, babe. I think the dishes can wait."

"Yeah." He reached out, eyelids drooping as his hand slid up Quinn's leg. "Hell, yeah."

"God, I just always want you." Quinn touched him right back, hands pushing over his skin, his ribs and shoulders and neck.

"Sofa? Shower? Bed?" He leaned into the touches, vibrating with pleasure.

"Yes. Wherever we make it to." Quinn got up, held down a hand to help him up.

"Yeah." Dan took Quinn's hand, let his lover help him up, draw him close. "God, you're warm."

"You cold? I can warm you up fast." They moved together, bodies rubbing, almost like they were dancing. They made it to the sofa.

He stretched out under Quinn, hands finding a home on that fine ass. "Mmm. I'm getting warmer."

"Good. Would hate for anything important to freeze off." Warm, warm hands reached between them, cupping his cock.

"Uhn ... won't. Not with those hands." He leaned up, licking at Quinn's lips.

Quinn opened for him, letting him in to taste and feel, fingers squeezing him gently. "I love touching you."

He met Quinn's eyes, chest going tight as he nodded. That touch made him feel whole. "I'm getting to where I ache to feel your hands."

"It's mutual, Danny. It's ... it's getting hard not just coming to you when I come home at night."

"I hear you." He held on, just breathing Quinn in.

They stayed like that for a long while, Quinn's hands on him, sharing air. There was a whole hell of a lot left unsaid, and whole volumes of truth spoken in those touches.

Then one of them got tired of waiting—God knew who—and they were kissing, deep, slow, breathless kisses that went on and on. Quinn was hard against him, skin so hot, sweat coming up under his hands. They rocked together, Quinn taking control of the kiss, tongue pushing in, burning like too-hot coffee.

He spread, tugging Quinn in between his legs, hips sliding up. The sofa was slick, cool against his back, his ass sliding on the fabric. Grunting, shifting, Quinn pressed down against him, hands moving from between them to grab his hips, pull him up.

"Oh..." He arched, pushing into Quinn's hands, the support easing the ache that got trapped deep down. "Fuck, yes."

"Yeah, love. Yeah." Those eyes watched him, ate him alive.

They rocked together hard enough the sofa creaked, his muscles singing with it, both of them grunting and groaning. He got words, low and harsh and steady on his skin. Love words, sex words, they all blended into one, Quinn's voice rough and hoarse.

He? Didn't have any words left. All he had was pleasure and need, and more love than he'd thought he could believe in.

Quinn was panting, moaning, telling him all about it. "Come on, babe. I need. I wanted to ... but damn."

"We ... we got time." He tugged on Quinn's ass, fingers digging in, whimpering as their bodies rocked together.

"We. Yeah. God." That was it, Quinn just went off like a firecracker, like they were teenagers again, painting his skin with spunk.

He reached down, slid his fingers in that wet heat and drew a quick circle on Quinn's lips, licking them clean, the bittersalt flavor and the flash of heat in Quinn's gray eyes sending him over the edge.

"Fuck. So sexy." Quinn held him close, tight, breathing hard.

He snuggled in, fingers drawing lazy circles on Quinn's ass. "You inspire me."

Old Town New
by BA Tortuga

"Good. I like that in a man." Nuzzling in, Quinn relaxed against him, most of Quinn's weight sliding off to one side so he wasn't squashed.

He tugged the old afghan over them, figuring it would do until they wandered back to the bed.

Which they would. Sometime. They had all weekend.

After that? They'd find a way. He'd make sure of it.

PAGEBREAK

Chapter Nine

Quinn wanted to just pick Dan up at the school, but that would be reckless and stupid. If they met at Dan's house they just looked like two buddies going camping up on the Mesa. If he showed up where Dan worked, it looked funny.

He paced, making Rags look at him with his ears up. Rags whined. Quinn sighed, bending to scratch the mutt's ears.

"Yeah. I know. Me, too."

It was a relief when Danny finally pulled up across the street and Quinn could get his shit together and load it in the truck before wandering out all casual like to go and knock on Danny's door.

"It's open." Danny sounded happy, relaxed, sexy as fuck.

"Hey." He walked in, carefully closing the door behind him. He wanted to make sure no nosy neighbors were peeping in before he went in and found Dan and kissed him silly.

"Hey." He got a warm grin, Dan unbuttoning his work shirt, toeing off the butt-ugly dress shoes. "Happy Friday."

"You know it. You ready to hit the road in a few?" They were getting out of Dodge again. He wanted to be where they could touch. A lot.

"Just let me change into real clothes and I'm good to go. I packed this morning." The shirt was thrown in the hamper, then the slacks came off, giving him a good long look. "We stopping somewhere for food, or should I grab something?"

"We'll stop. Maybe get some fried chicken or something." He didn't want to wait any longer than he had to.

"Works for me." On went the jeans and T-shirt and flannel, boots, cap, a little backpack grabbed. "There's a bag of goodies on the kitchen counter and some groceries for the cooler in the fridge."

"Cool." He waited until Dan was all dressed before catching him and kissing him hard.

Dan pressed close, hips snuggling right in, fitting against him, hand in glove.

Fuck, yes. He kissed and licked, hands moving over Dan, savoring even through the cloth. Dan's hands slid over his shoulders, down his back, holding them together.

They kissed each other breathless, then kissed some more, neither of them wanting to let go. Quinn finally did, because he didn't want to spend another weekend locked tight in Danny's house.

Those green eyes stared at him, Dan looking kiss-swollen and happy and needy all at once. "If we don't go now, I'm taking you to bed."

"I know. We need to go, babe. I bought a new air mattress." He couldn't quite resist licking Dan's lips.

"Mmm ... you're good to me." Dan grinned. "I bought steaks and stuff for hot chocolate."

"I'll get the groceries if you get the goodies. If I get too close again, we're in trouble." He grinned, turned to the food.

Dan chuckled and nodded, grabbed a coat on the way out the front door, grinning like a fool. "You think we'll have snow on Halloween?"

"Could be. Been kinda cold this fall." Hell, it had been downright chilly the last week, and Halloween was still a week away. "Might well be snowing up at the Mesa."

"Yeah. I have my pills, if I get stiff." He got a quick wink, then Dan was greeting Rags.

"I hope you do." That was a low pun, but damn. He couldn't help it. They climbed into the truck together and got Rags settled, and he pulled out, hand going to Dan's thigh after he shifted.

Dan visibly relaxed as they started moving, leaning back and taking a deep breath. "Man, I needed this."

"Yeah. I tell you what, Danny. This is getting tough." Not that it wasn't worth any effort, because it was. But it was so damned frustrating.

"I hear you." Dan sighed, rubbed his forehead. "Maybe I'll win the lottery and buy us an island. A porny island."

Shit. He hated being the one that put that tired tone in Danny's voice. Of course, he was the one that put that happy smile on there, too, and he'd heard that was a novel thing before he came back to town. When he left? Danny was coming with him, whether he knew it or not.

"We'll figure something out, babe."

"We will." Dan nodded, reached out and squeezed his hand. "After we spend our weekend fucking like bunnies."

"Hell, yeah." Danny on his back, with him right inside? Oh, God, yeah. He growled a little, knowing it was too soon to pull over and make out.

"Fuck, that's a glorious goddamned sound." Dan shifted, chuckled. "And I thought you couldn't get sexier than you were as a kid. Shit."

"And you? I had a jones for you then, Danny, but this is something altogether different." He'd not said it to Danny, but he figured it was something very much like love.

"Yeah. This is ... ours, yeah?" Dan nodded. "Not just fucking around."

"Ours. You bet." He squeezed Dan's thigh. They'd stop, get some chicken and coleslaw, hit the campsite. And he'd show Danny how much it was theirs.

Dan found something good on the radio, low voice crooning along, nice and easy. Rags started crooning along, too, and it made him chuckle, lightened the mood. Being with Dan made him happy. Eased all of the day-to-day shit.

They zipped through the drive-thru, Dan feeding him french fries as he drove, telling him stories about the kids, about the teachers.

He'd kill the little shits. He so would. He was not looking forward to Halloween at all. "So do you have any you're expecting trouble out of?"

"Oh, yeah. The Martin boys? Both failing my class. I'm going to park the car in the garage so I still have tires and windows on the first."

"Yeah. I hear you." Luckily he'd be driving his vehicle around. He'd had enough trouble.

"Besides that, most of the rugrats are good kids. Goofy, but decent." Dan offered him another fry.

He nibbled it, just grazing Dan's fingers. They probably ought to head on out to one of the out-of-the-way campgrounds, but it was cold enough they would probably do all right a little closer to the road. And he wanted.

Dan snuggled a little closer, hand warm on his thigh, on his knee.

His cock grew, twitched inside his jeans. "Babe, you'd better watch that. I'm wanting pretty bad."

"I am watching. You watch the road."

"I am." He was. Really.

"Good. I'll just sit over here and be good and watch you." Dan's breath was hot on his shoulder, hotter than the hand on his leg.

"Good. Right." He watched for the little brown signs on the scenic byway, finally picking one that said 'campground open' and heading in. That air bed thing was sounding damned good.

"Mmm..." That hand drew lazy little circles, Dan rubbing against his arm.

God. He found the campsite more by blind luck than by knowing, and threw the truck into park, grabbing Danny and pulling him over for a kiss.

Dan opened right up for him, lips parted and eager and hotter than hell. That was what he'd been waiting for. Hell yes. He touched Dan all over, or at least as much as he could, cooped up in the truck.

They groaned, kiss going deep and frantic, and it was looking like they could just get the edge off in the truck. Well, at least until Dan squeezed and pulled away, looking at Rags

and wiping the drool off his ear. "Oh, that's gross. No doggy threesome. Ew."

"We need to get camp set up, babe. Let him go chase squirrels." He was trying hard not to laugh, and not succeeding very well. Rags just loved Danny to death.

Dan cackled and nodded, backing away reluctantly, rubbing Rags' ears. "Go on. Squirrels. Running."

They let Rags out and got to work setting up camp, and only when they could zip themselves into the tent did he reach for Dan again.

"This time? I'm not stopping." Dan pressed right up against him, hands sliding around his waist.

"You got that right." No stopping. Full-out. He kissed Danny hard, lips burning, hands moving.

The sound that pressed into his lips was hot as fuck, Dan meeting his need, wanting him just as bad. He rolled to his back, pulled Danny on top of him, letting gravity work for them. The air bed worked beautifully, cushioning them.

"Mmm ... That feels good." Danny worked his shirt open, fingers sliding on his skin. "You feel good."

"So do you, babe. So do you."

He wanted skin, wanted Danny naked, so he started on the flannel, trying to get it off. Now.

They got tangled up and Dan sat up with a laugh, stripping down, baring that chest for him.

The least he could do was strip off, too, shivering a little in the cold, nipples going tight. "C'mere, babe."

Dan shivered, nodded, pushing right into his heat, snuggling. "Gonna keep me warm?"

"You bet. Gonna make you so hot you scare the bears." He bit Dan's throat, leaving a mark, loving the look of it on that fine skin.

Those long hands slid along his belly, counting his ribs, stuttering a little at his bite, the gasp filling the tent.

"Mmm. Tasty. Better than french fries, babe." They could hear Rags whining outside the tent, and it made him laugh. They'd let Rags in after.

"Poor pup, he never gets any action." Dan chuckled, settling so their bellies rested together, hips snuggling.

"We need to get him a girl." Quinn grabbed Danny's ass, pulling him down gently, arching up.

"You mean you have a straight dog? Quinn!" Danny's laughter turned into a moan, that heavy cock jumping against him, just like that.

He lost track of the conversation at the feel of it. He rubbed, looking to get them all lined up, their cocks sliding. "Oh, babe."

"Uh-huh." Dan nodded, lips sliding on his shoulder, tongue leaving a wet trail.

He shuddered, holding on tight. "Yeah, yeah. Just like that."

It felt fine, the contrast of the wet kisses of Dan's lips, Dan's cock and the cool air. Made everything feel sharp and immediate. They just rubbed and touched and kissed, one of his legs coming up to wrap around Danny's thighs.

Danny made one of those low sounds that let him know he was doing it right, that Dan was right there with him. Teeth scraped against his shoulder, his chest.

"Fuck, Danny." He wanted all sorts of things, but he wanted the heat and wet of Danny more, and he squeezed a hand between them to pull on their cocks.

"Uh-huh. After. This now." Dan found his nipple, lips surrounding it, sucking hard.

"Oh!" Quinn arched, finger tightening on them, electricity shooting through him. So good.

Those sharp teeth threatened, teased, just drove them both harder. He slid his free hand down to stroke the scars at the small of Danny's back. He stroked and pulled and watched Danny's face. Those eyes shone, the surprise when he touched those scars still there, but fading faster and faster each time he did it.

He loved those scars. Every damned one. He touched the top of Danny's cleft, slid one finger down.

"Mmm..." Dan shifted, thighs parting a little more, hips rocking a little faster.

Quinn moved faster, too, pushing them both, panting with the need. God, Danny did it for him. Every time. The little, needy sounds got louder, harsher, Danny losing his grace, just pushing that cock along his.

They humped and grunted, and finally Quinn just lost it, hand squeezing down on both of them, hips rolling as he came hard.

Dan's cock slid through his hand, moving easier now through the last few thrusts before more heat spread between them, Dan slumping down with a moan.

"Oh. Babe." Quinn brought his hand up and licked it, tasting them mixed together.

Dan's tongue slid against him, a soft moan sounding.

"One of these days we're going to remember how to fuck, Danny."

"You think? We might have to buy a manual."

"Now that could be good. Give us positions to aspire to."

Quinn laughed, settling a little, pulling Danny close. The laughing was probably the second best thing about them being together.

Danny snorted. "I saw a book once using pulleys and shit. Pulleys. Can you imagine?"

He could imagine, but it only made him laugh harder. Certainly not with Danny. It might hurt the man in ways that just weren't fixable. "Sounds a bit too complicated, babe. I like the simple approach."

"Hell, we're lucky to get as far as lube." Danny was laughing, eyes just dancing.

"No kidding." He patted Danny's ass. "Most of the time we're lucky if we can get our clothes off."

That started another round of laughter. "If only your uniform was a kilt..."

"Sheriff in a Skirt. That would go over like a lead balloon." God, he loved this man. Quinn went very still, realizing he'd probably just said that out loud.

Dan dropped a kiss on his chest, right above his heart. "Yeah, Quinn. Yeah, me, too."

"Oh. Good." He just held Danny close, quiet and still, letting that just soak in for awhile. Sooner or later they'd remember how to fuck. For right now? He'd settle for being close. And not being licked by Rags.***

Dan stirred the eggs over the Coleman stove, chuckling as Rags chased squirrels and birds. It was cold this morning, but sleeping with Quinn was like having his own personal heating pad.

The bacon sizzled, the tortillas warmed. Coffee perked. He was happy as fuck. The sky was clear. Now, to wake the sleeping bear with a kiss.

He snuck into the tent, sliding up Quinn's body. "Morning, you."

"Mmmfph." Quinn growled, sleepy, hoarse and so, so warm. "Hey, Danny."

"Hey. There's coffee. Bacon. Eggs." He nuzzled Quinn's belly, Quinn's shoulder.

"We should get to that before Rags does." Yeah, Quinn sounded really focused, but not on food.

"Or before he adds squirrel meat to the tortillas." He made it to Quinn's lips, tongue sliding along the brush of hair, the soft skin.

"Mmmhmm." He got a kiss, slow and easy and toe curling, before Quinn popped his ass. "Okay, food first."

"Coffee, too. It's chilly out there." He squeezed Quinn's ass—maybe goosed it a little.

Quinn jumped, yelped, and outside the tent Rags barked. They laughed hard as Quinn struggled into clothes. "God, that food smells good."

"Everything's better outside, yeah?" He grinned. "You want some salsa?"

"Yeah." They crawled out of the tent, Quinn wandering off to do his business before coming back and washing up, giving Dan a kiss, a cold hand sliding across Dan's neck.

He squeaked a little, tongue pressing into Quinn's lips.
"Morning."

"Morning, babe. We need to find a place where we can do this all the damned time." Those eyes watched him, careful and quiet, just like the night before. Quinn was making promises. Ones he hoped the man kept.

"I'd like that. This whole sleeping alone thing's getting old." He made up six breakfast tacos—boom, boom, boom—handing some over.

Quinn snarfed down three, then made them both two more while he caught up, throwing a hopeful but well-mannered Rags a piece of bacon. "Yeah. Coming home to an empty house ... it's wearing on me, Danny."

He nodded. He heard that. He hadn't known he was lonely. Now? It was like an ache.

Quinn picked up his coffee and drank deep. "The job is getting to me, too, lemme tell you."

"Yeah? Is it different? Being a sheriff than being a cop?" He settled in the chair next to the fire.

"It is here." Reaching over, Quinn grabbed his hand, playing with his fingers idly. "It's hard, working with these guys. They resent me, they suspect me of all sorts of ulterior motives, and they plain don't like me."

He got a lopsided grin. "Now you know I've never given a damn for being liked, but I'm tired of flat tires and sugar in my gas tank."

Danny nodded, "Sucks, because they're supposed to be the good guys, you know?" He couldn't see it, why someone wouldn't get on with Quinn. The man was decent.

"Yeah, well. It's immature and annoying but not dangerous. They just wanted the under-sheriff to step up and I can't blame them." Quinn shrugged. "Took them all strange, Sheriff Farris stepping down right after the elections."

"Yeah. He was an odd bird, sorta..." He shrugged. "I don't know, but he would make a man unnerved."

Quinn nodded. "I hear he was strange." His hand got a strong squeeze. "I'm not figuring on filling in long. Someday soon I'm gonna wanna talk about after."

He looked over, trying not to let the panic creep up on him. "I can do that, so long as after involves both of us, yeah?"

"That's what I'm looking at, Danny. I know it's probably too damned soon. But things happen fast." The hand squeeze got a little harder.

"You know I'm really not good at fast anymore, yeah? But ... I ... Well, you're ... You're important to me."

"Good. I don't want to push you, babe." Quinn turned, pulled him half out of his chair for a kiss. "I just want to make sure you know where I stand."

He nodded, hands reaching up to slide around Quinn's neck. "I'm standing with you. I am."

Quinn kissed him hard, licking at his lips. "Works for me."

"Good. Wanna go get naked?" He reached down, cupped Quinn's package, rubbed a little. Not that he was focused, but. Damn.

Purring, groaning, Quinn arched into his hand, touching his face. "Yeah. Naked. Fucking."

"My favorite kind." He nuzzled into Quinn's touch, fingers stroking that hard cock.

"We should give Rags the leftovers and move inside. There's a bed."

Breathless, laughing, Quinn kissed him some more.

"Works for me. Bed. Sleeping bags. Lube. We're set." He started working Quinn's buttons open, helping in the whole naked thing.

"Yeah. We remembered the lube. Go us." He got help, Quinn struggling with his clothes, baring him to the cool morning air.

God, it felt fine, being in the sun, together, touching. Like being a fucking kid again, but better. This was no beer-fueled fumbling. This was all about the heat, with something solid behind it, something real. Quinn took his hand, leading him toward the tent.

He went easy, free hand squeezing that tight ass as they went.

"Watch that, babe." Quinn sounded more amused than upset, and the bright grin he got as Quinn zipped them in said volumes about how happy the man was.

"I am, Quinn. Watching every fucking inch." He was damn near bouncing, so fucking eager.

"C'mere." Quinn pulled him close, kissed him deep, sitting up and pulling him across those solid thighs.

"Mmm..." Oh, that felt good. He settled in, his hips happy with the position.

"You good, babe?" One strong hand stroked his back, settling against the base of his spine to support him.

"Yeah. More than. I could stay right here a long time." He relaxed, hands dragging over Quinn's chest.

"Good." The wealth of satisfaction in that word made him smile. Quinn nibbled him, licked him, made a second breakfast of him. He spent his time exploring, touching, finding little scars and little imperfections in Quinn's skin that fascinated him.

"Feels so good." Quinn returned the favor, hands stroking over his hips and lower back, his thighs, tracing him like a map.

"It does." He leaned back a little, cock bouncing on his belly. "You make them seem almost sexy."

"They are. They're hot." One finger slid along one of the worst scars. "Makes you strong, babe."

He shivered, moaned a little. "I want you."

"Got me. Any way you want." That trailing finger slid around to his cleft. "How?"

"Mmm. I want you to fuck me." He winked. "Prove you remember how."

"You got it." Quinn scrabbled for the lube, coming up with it and crowing softly in his ear. "Want it to be good, babe. Tell me what you're up to."

He thought for a second, then turned, straddling Quinn's thighs again, ass in Quinn's lap. "How about this?"

He got a moan, rough and harsh. "Yeah. Oh, fuck, yeah."

He leaned forward, offering Quinn his ass, feeling sexy as fuck.

It was a matter of moments before he felt cool, slick fingers against his hole, pressing in. Quinn bit lightly at his neck, growling for him, the vibrations working down his spine.

"Oh." He groaned, shifting back, riding Quinn's fingers just like that.

Those fingers pushed in, right in all the way, spreading him wide. "So fucking hot for me, babe. So good."

"I want you." Need you, Quinn. So much.

"Yeah." After he was open and wanting, lifting up and down on Quinn's fingers, Quinn pulled away, and soon he felt the head of Quinn's cock nudging him, hot as anything.

He settled back, taking Quinn deep and ending with Quinn hot and strong at his back. He could feel Quinn's belly ripple, that wide chest heave for breath. Quinn touched him, his chin, his nipples, down to his cock.

"Yeah." His hands slid over Quinn's thighs, hips slowly rocking, nice and steady.

"Tight." They moved together easily, Quinn sliding in and out, lips hot on his neck. That thick cock speared him, opened him, went deep inside.

He brought one of Quinn's hands up, sucking and licking at those fingers, teeth sliding over the tips. Quinn groaned, hips jerking. Touching his lips, dipping inside, Quinn brought those wet fingers out, pushed them down to dip into his slit, to slide down around his balls.

"Oh, sweet fuck." His body went tight, eyes just rolling, balls going tight as hell.

"Yeah. Yeah, babe." Quinn stroked him, pulled at him, biting down on the skin of his nape, just pounding him.

Every nerve in his body felt like it was firing, hot and sharp and too fucking good to hold in. His cry split the air as he shot, back bowing with the pleasure.

"Fuck!" It was a snarl, right next to his ear, and Quinn rode out his spasms, filling him with heat soon after.

He gasped for air, heart just pounding. "You ... oh, sweet fuck. You remember how, Quinn."

"So do you, Danny. Damn."

He chuckled, Quinn's cock slipping from him as they settled into each other.

"I think we jogged the old memory for sure. Jesus, Danny." Quinn held him easily as they sort of toppled, spooning right up.

"Hell, yes. I'm thinking if I forget that anytime soon, I'm seriously slipping." He couldn't stop grinning, pleasure still sliding through him in random arcs.

"Mmm. Yeah. I'll make it my personal mission to make sure you don't lose it." Quinn nuzzled up to him, and he figured they could nap until lunch. Then maybe they could remind each other again.

He settled, cheek against Quinn's arm, the scent of them together strong and right. Maybe reminding first, then lunch.***

Sunday morning rolled around way too soon. Quinn woke up flat on his back, one arm out and supporting Dan's head, and for a wild moment he almost woke Danny up, got in the truck, and drove until the road ended.

He didn't, because if there was one thing old Sam had finally drilled into his brain it was responsibility. And Quinn

liked his job. Oh, not the assignment he was on now, but in the bigger picture he was pretty happy. Even if he was considering early retirement, because at his age they started expecting you to do management jobs, or shit like he was doing now.

Quinn sighed, easing out from under Danny and sliding out of the tent to take a leak. Then he fed Rags and ran him a bit and started on breakfast. Least he could do was return the favor.

Dan crept out of the tent about the time the coffee was done, a sweet, dark mark on one shoulder that got hidden by a heavy flannel shirt. "Morning."

"Morning. Eggs and sausage." He grinned over, trying not to let his own dull mood take the morning.

"Mmm ... Yummy." Dan came up behind him, hands warm on his ass. "You okay?"

"Just not wanting to go back. I'm a selfish bastard." He turned, took Danny's hand and drew him close for a kiss.

Dan opened up for him, free hand on his nape tugging them closer. They kissed long and deep, their rough stubble burning each other's skin. He shifted, trying to get more, to rub against Dan, only to yelp when his back pocket hit the hot sausage skillet.

"Shit! That's a hell of a way to wake up."

"That ass is mine, now. No burning it up." Dan turned him to look, fingers sliding over his hip.

"I'm okay. Just singed me a bit." That possessiveness was very real, and it made him half hard just thinking about it.

Those hands kept touching, kept petting him. "You sure? Maybe I should take a closer look."

"I bet you ought to. But we'd best eat first." No sense wasting the food, and the anticipation would make it all the better.

A low, husky chuckle tickled his jaw. "Sausage before the sausage. Good plan."

"You're a sick man, Danny." He liked it. A lot. Quinn served up breakfast and they fed each other. Now, he had to admit scrambled eggs were not as sexy as french fries, but he figured they still did good, and Rags only tried to take their fingers off once.

It was the laughter that was addictive, Dan leaning against his shoulder and sharing dirty jokes, teasing him blatantly.

Damn, it was nice. The humor would leave, the tension would come back, for both of them. But it would come even sooner if he dwelled on it, so Quinn pushed the nagging thoughts aside and laughed and played and threatened Danny with dishwater.

"Don't make me put you over my knee!" The threat had them both laughing hard, Dan red-cheeked and bright eyed.

"Oh, God." He wheezed, and Rags started dancing around them, barking his fool head off until they both threw him some food and he stopped. "I think it's time for that once over, Danny."

Dan stood, moving real good for the cold in the air, and nodded, grabbing his waistband and hauling him toward the tent.

He went easily, doing a bit of grabbing of his own, gently goosing Dan's ass. Dan settled on his knees on the air mattress, hands working his belt open, his zipper down.

"Yeah. Damn, babe." He got them all zipped in again, enclosing them in their own little world before starting on his own clothes. Only to get distracted when Danny's hips and thighs appeared.

Danny was hard, cock curling up toward that flat belly, the scars almost like decorations.

They reminded him of his tattoo. Like a rite of passage. Quinn reached for them, moving his hands lightly around Danny's cock, not quite touching it with his thumbs as he stroked each raised line of skin.

"Oh." Those green eyes stared down, not hidden behind the reading glasses yet, just looking at his hands, his fingers.

That look made him move more slowly, made him concentrate on each tiny fold of skin, each little nick and cut. He couldn't think of how that must have hurt, could only think of how those scars made Dan look, how they felt under his hands.

"Don't stop, Quinn. Please." Dan shifted, almost swaying under his hands.

"Not going to, babe. You can't even imagine how you look. How you feel." He didn't know what the heck it was that made him want to talk to Danny like he never had to anyone else, but he did. Wanted Danny to hear it as well as feel it.

"I used to hate them." Danny's voice was low, almost a whisper.

"Yeah. I can see that. A constant reminder." As if Danny didn't remind himself every day. Quinn bent, leaning down to press his lips to one long scar on Danny's right thigh.

Dan groaned, entire body rippling, the scent of need suddenly heady. From thigh to hip he licked and nibbled, letting his rough stubbled chin drag across Danny's cock.

"Oh, Christ. That. Oh." That cock leapt, pushed against his chin.

Quinn wanted more of those noises. More of that jerky, needy movement. He licked at the crease between thigh and hip, moved lower to lift Danny's balls with his tongue.

"Make me need." Danny's thighs parted, sacs drawing up.

"Make me crazy." Fuck, the scent there was all male, all musk. Perfect. Quinn went looking for the taste to match, licking, sucking.

"Oh. Oh." Danny arched, panting for him, low, needy noises just filling the air.

He finally moved up, pushing his tongue into the slit of Danny's cock, taking up all of the liquid there, moaning at the saltybittersweet.

"So good..." Danny's hips shifted, rubbing the swollen head in and out of his lips.

"Yeah, babe. Yeah." He was so fucking greedy for it. Needing it so bad. Quinn took Danny all the way down, lips sealing tight around the base. Danny's hands settled on his shoulders, squeezing, trembling more than a little. Words started to fall around him—promises and prayers and pleas.

They were so hot, so good, those words. Danny's voice was just torn, rough and deep, and Quinn could jones on that forever. He pulled harder at Danny's cock, wanting it all.

Heat poured into his mouth, Danny's cry sharp as a blade, the sound vibrating inside him. Quinn took it, savoring the sharp flavor, the fullness. The heat. He pulled up, pulled away, and kissed Danny on the mouth.

Danny melted into him, sucking on his tongue like a starving man.

"Mmm." Loved the way Danny responded to him. Loved it.

Danny's hands were all over him—ass and back, balls and belly. So clever and quick; they drove him insane, made him want. He rolled onto his back, shedding the rest of his clothes, laying back and spreading his legs for Danny to touch and taste. Every inch of him was explored, loved. Danny's mouth slid up his leg, then he turned him, tongue hot on his ass.

"Fuck! Danny. Yeah." God, that felt ... like nothing else ever.

Danny nodded, cheek rough on his spine as those hands spread him, thumbs sliding in circles around his hole.

"Please. Danny. I need." He needed all sorts of things, but mainly he needed Danny in him, some way.

"I'm here." That tongue slid across his hole, hot and wet.
"Right here."

God, yes. Fuck, yes. He squirmed, trying to get more. Wanting. Quinn spread wider, back arching, ass rising. Danny just settled in, fingers spreading him, tongue fucking his hole like there was no tomorrow.

Oh, God, oh, fuck, oh, please. He was grunting, begging, hips rolling. He was just all over it. Danny's tongue was hot, wet, needy. One hand circled his shaft, giving him something to push into, that tongue pressing deep over and over.

"Danny. Danny." Quinn chanted, humping that tight fist, scrabbling for some kind of purchase on the slick airbed.

Danny's hum shuddered through him, hot and wild, fucking amazing. He cried out, hoarse and desperate, and gave it up to Danny, shooting hard, muscles going tight and hard as he struggled.

Warm lips brushed against the small of his back. "My lover."

"Love you, Danny." He did. No matter what.

"Yeah. Love you, Harlan Quinn. Gonna fucking keep you this time round."

"I'll count on it." They might have to go back and make like they were just friends, but he knew better.

And for the time being, it would have to do. PAGEBREAK

Chapter Ten

Dan had on a Zorro cape and a mask, wandering around the kid's Harvest Festival. It was cheesy and silly, but it was a harmless way to spend Halloween and always gave him brownie points. Not only that, but it was all the coffee you wanted and free popcorn—never bad.

He walked over to the volunteers' table, nodding to the parents he knew, the co-workers. The conversation died straight-away, people giving him the oddest looks. Damn. Looked like somebody new must be going on about the wreck. Hell, the damn thing only happened eighteen years ago, it was obviously worth gossiping about now.

Just the aggravation made his hip twinge and he got his coffee and gave Tina a smile. "The kids look like they're having fun, yeah?"

She looked away. "Yeah. Great costume."

"Same one I wear every year."

"Yeah. Zorro."

Dan nodded, the eyes on him making him uncomfortable as hell. "The sword's fake, Tina. I won't poke anybody with it."

"That's probably a good idea, Dan. A real good idea."

What the fuck?

He wandered off, wondering if next year he shouldn't get something new, something else.

* * * *

The late night raid had been a total success. Not only had they confiscated an entire warehousing system for meth, coke and pot, he'd also picked up a pair of brothers who were, not coincidentally he'd bet, cousins to the old sheriff. They weren't talking, but they were being held at the State police office, so there was no way anyone connected to the Delta County mess could get hold of them.

He was getting close. Damned close. All he needed was for one person to say the right word, or for the right fucking evidence to show up, and Quinn figured he could pop the whole ring, put Andy up for sheriff, and hightail it back to his life.

With Danny in tow.

"You want my report, Sheriff?"

Andy gave him a look, warning him to keep it simple. He nodded, slipping his laptop into its case. "I do. You want to give it to me now, so I can look at it tonight?"

"You bet." Andy handed over a sheaf of papers. The man had proven invaluable to him in his investigation, helping him dig up old records without causing suspicion. "Make sure you keep that stuff where you can find it."

And no one else could. Yeah. He got that. He'd put it in the toolbox on his truck and lock it up for the weekend. Then it would be out of reach at his place. He didn't leave anything down at his office in Delta anymore. He knew the retired Sheriff Farris was in on it, knew about a couple of local folks in Paonia and Hotchkiss who were, but there was someone still in the sheriff's department who was tipping his hand to the bigwigs. And he couldn't figure out who.

It was damned frustrating. His gut clenched. With the news he'd gotten today? It was fucking scary, too.

"Will do. Have a good one, Andy."

"You, too, Sheriff."

He needed to get home before Dan did. Bad.

* * * *

Dan pulled into the drive, head just pounding. Fuck, work had been weird lately, everything seemed harder than normal—kids, co-workers. Hell, even the new textbooks were falling apart at an amazing rate.

He slid out of the car, sneaking a quick look over at Quinn's, the light in the front room blazing.

Rags' head appeared in the bay window, hound barking and woofing up a storm at the sight of him. Silly mutt.

He could hear Quinn scolding, and the curtains closed over the window, blocking out the light and the big old dog. Not a minute later, though, he could see Quinn waving at him over the newly fixed back gate.

He headed over, nodding. "Hey, neighbor."

"Hey." Quinn looked through the twilight at him, then carefully up and down the street. "Come on. I got some barbeque on the way home."

"Okay. Thanks." He frowned, came in the gate, rubbed Rags' ears. "Had a long day?"

"You could say that." Quinn reached out, then let his hand fall. "Come on in."

He walked up the back steps, slipped inside, frowning, worry a hard little ball in his belly.

The worry was eased a bit as Quinn immediately grabbed his upper arms and pulled him close for a hard kiss.

"You okay, babe?"

"Am now." He grinned, pushing closer. "Been a weird week at work, nothing serious. Pre-Christmas break jitters."

Quinn held him, rubbing a rough chin into the curve of his neck and shoulder, breathing deep. "Yeah? Weird how?"

"The kids are off, the new textbooks suck. Hell, even the faculty's acting like psychos." He hummed, hand petting Quinn's hair.

Quinn went stiff under his hands, a sharp sigh sounding. "We need to sit down, babe. Eat. Talk."

Talk? He frowned, still petting. "Have I done something, Quinn?"

"No. You? Haven't done a damned thing. Please, Danny." Quinn leaned back, looked at him, gray eyes dark and serious. "It's other shit."

"Okay. Where do you want to sit?" Whatever it was, he'd deal. He was good at dealing.

"On the couch? We'll eat." Yeah. Eat, when Quinn had that serious cop look on his face. They went to the couch, Quinn setting out barbeque and buns and tea. He picked at a bun, shifting, searching for a comfortable position.

"You need a pillow or something?" Quinn was ... bustling. Setting out pickles and shit. Not like him at all.

"I need you to tell me what's up." He put the bread down, hands sliding on his slacks.

"Okay. Sorry." Quinn sat. "I got a call from the Principal today. And the Mayor."

"The ... Ted? Why?"

Finally Quinn stopped fidgeting and looked him right in the eye. "They want me to do an investigation on you, Danny. On the QT."

"On me? Why?" That didn't make any sense. No sense at all.

"Because." Now Quinn was starting to look pissed.

"Because someone must have seen us, Danny. Together. I don't know where, I don't know. But they said they saw you, with another man. One they didn't recognize. And now they want to make sure you aren't molesting little boys."

"Oh." He sort of sat there, eyes focused on the meat on the table. He shouldn't be here. He shouldn't. Someone might see. "I should go home."

"No. Not gonna let you." Quinn took his hands. "I know you, Danny. If you think for one minute I'm investigating you, you're wrong. And if they don't drop it when I tell them to, I'll tell them who you were with."

"I." He just closed his mouth, staring down at their hands, holding on. He didn't know what to think, what to do. What to say.

He'd worked with these people for years. Years.

"I'm sorry, Danny. I ... Jesus. This has to be my fault." Quinn sounded—He didn't know what Quinn sounded like, but it was enough to make him look up, see the weird look on Quinn's face.

"Don't. I knew the risk. I knew. You were worth the risk."

"No. I don't think you did." Pulling him close, Quinn leaned back, drawing him to rest against Quinn's chest. Much more

comfortable. If he could get comfortable. "I think it's a put up job, Danny."

"What do you mean, Quinn? Why would anyone come after me like that? I'm a history teacher." He was trying not to freak out, not to just lose it.

He could feel Quinn practically vibrating beneath him. "I'm not sure it's you, babe."

He reached out, petting Quinn's belly, trying to figure out what the fuck was going on. "Then who?"

"Well. What if they did see who you were with? What if they're getting to me through you?" The muscles under his hand were hard as a rock.

"What? Trying to out you? If they saw us, wouldn't they just have outed us both?"

"It's not just as simple as me being the sheriff and not being well liked, babe." Those big hands started petting him, soothing him even as Quinn's heart raced against his hand.

"That's simple?" He sat up, looking into those grey eyes. "Is there more?"

"Yeah." Quinn didn't back down, looked right at him, hand coming up to his cheek. "I'm here on an investigation in the first place, Danny. Of the Department. Well, of the whole county government. Drugs, Danny."

"So ... you don't work for them? Do they know? How long are you here?" He had ten thousand questions, and he thought for a second about being pissy about Quinn keeping secrets, but shit. What good would it have done him to know?

"They aren't supposed to know. I work for the State police, babe. And I'm here until I get something concrete. Old Farris

knew I was coming, supposedly as a deputy. That's when he retired. And suddenly I was the new sheriff."

Quinn just watched him. Waiting.

"Wow. You're a busy guy." He shook his head. "Man, I ... This has been one hell of a day."

"I know. I wanted to tell you, but I thought it would be better if you didn't know." He got a wry snort. "And now, of course, it's moot."

"So. What now? Is Ted looking to get me fired? Are you gonna get ... whatever it is you'd get?" He rubbed his forehead, stood and started pacing. God, he wanted a beer. Wanted one.

"I don't know." And Quinn just sat, looking at him. Looking worried.

He chuckled, the sound a little panicked, hurting as it tore out of him. "At least I'm not alone in that, then."

"God. Danny." Standing, Quinn reached out to touch him, hand on his shoulder, sliding down his arm to catch his hand. "I'm sorry."

He looked down at Quinn's hand in his, swallowing hard. "Me, too. Am..." He swallowed. "They don't really think I'm hurting my kids, do they?"

"No. They know better. They know what will hurt us, Danny." Up and down, his Quinn, from hurt to anger, and all on his behalf. He could hear it, see it.

"I'll never work again, if they push it. I ... No school district would hire me." The reality hit him all of a sudden and he swayed. "But there's nothing to find, so there's no worry, right?"

Oh, sweet Jesus.

"There's no worry. Nothing will come of it. And tomorrow I'll call Sam and make a complete report, just in case something happens to me..." Quinn trailed off.

"I really fucked things up for you." Dan grinned, shook his head. "I said, way back when, if I just lived, walked again, I'd lay low. Not fuck anybody's else shit up."

That made Quinn snap, and suddenly he was in Quinn's arms, Quinn's lips on his. Hard.

He held on tight, lips parted on a gasp, eyes flying open, meeting Quinn's gaze. Oh, sweet fuck, he would have done it anyway, even knowing they'd be caught. So would Quinn. Those clear eyes were open, fierce, telling him everything. That it was all worth it.

It didn't make the shock and hurt go away, but it made it better. Made it bearable. Made it theirs.

"I love you, babe." Quinn kissed him again, a light press of lips. "We'll get through."

"Yeah. Yeah." He rested their foreheads together. "Your supper's getting cold."

"It'll keep. We can heat it up later." Quinn held him, warm and strong and right there. Loving him.

He nodded, fingers wrapping around Quinn's. "How long can I stay?"

"You can stay all night. Fuck 'em." He knew that obstinate look. He'd known it since they were thirteen.

He found a real grin. "Not with somebody else's dick, Harlan Quinn. I'm a one-man type."

"Oh, good." He got a real smile in return. "I was kinda counting on that."

"Just kinda." He brought their lips together, the touch slow, sweet.

Quinn gave as good as he got, tongue pushing gently past his lips, opening him. Tasting him. Quinn's hands rubbed up and down his back, the touch firm and soothing. He made himself relax, let himself snuggle into Quinn's heat.

He got a happy moan, Quinn rubbing against him easily, leading him back to the couch to sprawl. "Did I mention I love you, babe?"

"Once or twice. I like how it sounds."

"I do, too. This whole cluster fuck is worth having you again." Quinn laid back and spread for him, pulled him down between those long legs.

"Yeah." He settled, shifting and finally finding a good spot, a comfortable spot. "Oh. Better."

"Yeah? You okay? I know stress does bad things to you. God, babe..." A little impromptu massage made him feel even better.

Dan groaned, head resting against Quinn's chest. Those hands made things feel better that he didn't even know were hurting. The sweet touches went on and on, relaxing him, making him melt. Quinn rocked with him, kissed him, nuzzled his throat.

"Love." He stretched, fingers sliding over Quinn's face, shoulders.

"Right here." They moved together like they were fragile, like anything too fast might break them. Quinn stroked and petted and licked, lips and tongue moving lightly.

He breathed with Quinn, just listened to the beat of Quinn's heart, hips rocking in time.

Soon there was nothing but Quinn's voice, low and deep, love words and nonsense words. Nothing but Quinn's hands, rubbing his sore muscles into submission. There was nothing but Quinn. He lost himself, mouth trailing over Quinn's skin, breath flavored with musk and salt.

Quinn kissed him again, lips sealing against his easily. The sounds Quinn was making started to turn a little desperate. Dan reached down, worked Quinn's jeans, his slacks open, fingers wrapping around both their pricks, pulling and rubbing.

"Danny." That thick cock pushed against his, through his fingers, Quinn moaning. The touches on his shoulder and neck turned greedy, Quinn getting his shirt off, pinching his nipples.

"Yeah. Want." He shook his head. "Need."

"Me, too, babe." He could feel the truth of that in Quinn's pulse, the skin under his fingers full of Quinn's life, intimate as holding someone's heart. Quinn rubbed and bucked, soft words becoming curses, demands.

"Anything. Fuck. Love." His mouth fastened around the skin above Quinn's heart, sucking hard. His.

"God, Danny!" So fast. It had come on them so fast, from sweet to needy. Quinn's hand closed around his; they stroked in time with each other, making their hips roll.

Old Town New
by BA Tortuga

He bit, bucking as he came hard, heat spraying over their fingers, Quinn's cock.

"Shit!" Following close, Quinn climaxed, too, that deep voice loud and harsh as Quinn cried out. His name.

He eased down onto that wide chest, relaxing. Staying right there.

Under him, Quinn's chest rose and fell, slowing breath by breath until Quinn just went boneless, holding him close.

Dan listened to Quinn's heart pounding, listened to the steady beat and just stayed right there. They'd do what they had to.

Later.

Chapter Eleven

He drove straight from the school to the liquor store and bought a fifth of Jim Beam.

Dan didn't speak. He didn't think. He didn't even move much. He pulled into his driveway, walked in and got a glass, and started drinking. Funny how the burn didn't change, not even a little.

Not even after years of hanging on that wagon.

His caller ID said there had been 52 calls since 9 a.m.. Fifty-two. He didn't think he'd had fifty-two phone calls last year in total. As he stood there and looked, the phone rang again. Harlan Quinn. Dan didn't pick up. After the fifty-sixth call, he unplugged the phone, sat at the little table in his breakfast nook with his bottle and his glass. The weekly local newspaper was in front of him, ink gone blurry where the periodic tear had fallen.

The headline though? It didn't seem to blur at all.

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER INVESTIGATED FOR POSSIBLE ABUSE: Local man, sole survivor of a drug related vehicular accident seventeen years ago, questioned regarding sexual abuse of his students.

* * * *

Jesus fucking Christ. Quinn had to wait until after dark to look for Danny, and it almost killed him. As soon as he'd seen the headline in the Valley Chronicle he had called the school, figuring they would think it was part of his investigation.

They said Danny had gone home.

He'd panicked, but he knew there was nothing he could do. Not until he knew it was safe. He couldn't jeopardize Danny any more than he had.

So he waited. He fed Rags. He waited some more. Then he slipped over to Danny's house and tried the back door.

The lights were off. The door locked. The place silent as a tomb.

The back door rattled gently under his hand as he made a compromise between pounding on it and not making any noise. The curtains twitched, bloodshot green eyes appearing for a second.

There was a second where Quinn didn't think Danny would let him in, but the doorknob shifted under his hand, unlocking.

Oh, fuck. Thank God. Slipping through the gap in the door, Quinn shut it behind him and locked it. He looked Danny over carefully. "Hey."

Danny nodded, stepping back into the kitchen, into the dark, a mostly empty bottle of whiskey on the counter, glass beside. "Hey."

Words came right up to the surface, but he bit them back. Who was he to judge? Just the guy that had fucked up Danny's life. "Babe..."

"I guess you saw?" Dan sounded sober enough, almost normal.

"Yeah. I saw." He'd seen. The sick things they implied about his Danny made him want to kill them. Made him fucking furious. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah." Dan's head drooped. "They wouldn't let me back into my classroom to get my stuff."

The red rage rose in him again, like it hadn't since he was a teenager. Until today. "I'll make sure I get it for you, Danny." God, he wanted to touch him, but he wasn't sure if he could without being rebuffed. "Fuck, I was worried about you."

"I just came home. The phone keeps ringing and ringing and I just turned it off."

Finally Quinn couldn't take it anymore, and he reached out, rubbing his hands up and down Danny's arms. "What do you need?"

"I don't know. I don't know." Dan shook his head. "I'm going to lose my job."

The one thing he didn't want was for Danny to lose anything because of him, and he wanted to scream with it. But this wasn't about him. Not tonight. "Sit with me?"

"Yeah. You shouldn't stay, though. Someone might see. People have been driving by, looking in." Dan led him through the little dining room turned office, limp pronounced.

"They can't see in. I don't want you to be alone. My lights are all on behind the curtains, and Rags is over there acting like his usual self. I want to stay." He wanted to pack Danny's shit and leave town, but that would be like admitting guilt, and Danny hadn't done a damned thing wrong.

"Thank you." Dan reached out, fingers twining with his. "I don't know what to do."

"I'm going to tear them new assholes for a start. Whoever it was that leaked it, that pencil-necked reporter. They're going down." He'd make it his personal agenda.

"Okay."

A series of honks and flashing lights lit up the front room windows. "Baby fucker! Murderer!"

Dan winced, stepped further back into the shadows.

Holy fucking shit. Quinn pulled out his cell phone, pressing his hand to Danny's lips as he called dispatch. "I need a unit to Hotchkiss. Yeah. No, my fucking street. Yeah, it's bad. Thanks, Arlene. Yeah. Bye."

He turned to Danny. "I'm getting these assholes away from you, babe. I promise."

There was the sound of glass breaking outside, then the squealing of tires. "I'm going to bed."

"Can I..." He stepped back a pace, not wanting to crowd, not knowing what the hell to do. Saying, 'I want' and, 'I need' seemed fucking selfish. "Is it okay if I stay?"

"Please." Dan shuddered, took a hitching breath, hand shaking violently as it reached for him.

"Oh, God, babe." That was all he needed. Quinn took Danny's hand and pulled him close, wrapping his arms around Danny's thin form and holding on.

Those long arms circled his waist, a low, broken cry sounding.

"I love you, Danny." That just seemed like the best thing he could say. The truest.

"I know." He felt Dan try to smile and fail. "I don't. I can't do anymore today. I hurt. I can't even be mad anymore."

Fuck, it hurt. Quinn just nodded, moved Danny toward the bedroom. "Come on, babe. Let's get you to bed."

Danny followed Quinn without a word, let Quinn unbutton his shirt, slide the familiar slacks down. Quinn bent to take off Danny's socks, kissing the spot just above Danny's hipbone. "Do you need to go to the bathroom, Danny?" With that much whiskey he'd bet Danny needed to, but just might not have thought about it.

"I. Yeah. Yeah." Danny stayed against the wall, not turning the lights on.

Periodically he heard cars drive by, the brief flash of multicolored lights keeping things moving along. Danny did his business, crawling into the big bed and cuddling in a mass of blankets.

Well, it was nice to know someone was doing their job. Quinn checked all the doors and windows, making sure the blinds and curtains were pulled, making sure no one could see in. As an afterthought he moved a coat tree from the hall into the bedroom, in front of the window. No sense taking chances on someone throwing rocks through the window.

The gun he slipped off got set on the nightstand on the side of the bed he was taking, and Quinn did his bit in the bathroom, using Danny's toothbrush and washing up, before sliding into bed. Dan moved right into his arms, no hesitation at all, and it felt good. It shouldn't—nothing should feel good when things were so deeply fucked. It was good though, so good, and Quinn knew it was because he and Danny were together. The risk was enormous, but the need was worse. The rest he could deal with tomorrow.

One of Dan's hands curved over his hip, still and sure, like an anchor.

Quinn put his hand over Danny's, holding on, letting the closeness soothe them both. This shit had decided him. It was time to stop fucking around. It was time to figure out who was involved in the damned drug ring.

Time to get the fuck out of this town, and take Danny with him.***

"Sheriff?" Arlene the dispatch-secretary, all-around, scarily efficient, department wonder woman stood in front of his desk, hand held out with a paper in it, her eyes wide. She was pale as chalk. "You'd best look at this."

There was an envelope stapled to the folded piece of 8 by 11, with no return address and no postage. "Sheriff Quinn" was typed on the front.

"You opened it?"

"I open all your mail, Quinn. I ... it was in the stack. I'm sorry, I didn't look."

God, she looked like she was gonna fall down. "It's okay, Arlene. Sit, will you?"

She sank into a chair and he opened the note. It was neatly typed, Times New Roman, twelve point font.

YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU? BACK OFF UNLESS YOU WANT US TO HURT YOU WORSE THAN WE HAVE. YOU, YOUR BOYFRIEND, THE DOG.

LEAVE IT ALONE

There was no signature.

Quinn had an urge to laugh, thinking how it all sounded Wicked Witch-like. And your little dog, too.

But then he thought of Danny.

Shit. Quinn needed to get home and see if he was okay.

"Have you told anyone about this, Arlene?"

"Andy. Deputy Lawrence. Kyle." Kyle was the local prosecutor. "Oh, and I called the mayor. He said you should go home."

"Okay. Sit on it, and tell them to, as well. I will go home to check on my dog and my house, okay? If you get any calls, transfer them to my mobile."

"Yes, sir."

He grabbed his hat and coat, checking his holster. The urgency was riding him.

"Sheriff?"

"Yeah?"

Arlene gave him a tremulous smile as he walked out the door. "Be careful."

Yeah. He'd have to be, wouldn't he?

Chapter Twelve

Dan made himself a pot of coffee, searching for something to make to eat. He hadn't left the house in five days. He'd looked outside once the morning after, wincing at the spray paint and broken windows of his car, and just closed the windows. Quinn had the car towed, filed the report.

He? Had made coffee.

The knocks on the door had stopped pretty quickly, and the only time he'd plugged in the phone was to call Ted, only to find out he was on mandatory leave until after the Christmas holidays.

It was like a weird, distant dream.

He kept waiting to be angry. He knew it would come. It had to come, but he hadn't figured out how yet.

He poured himself a cup and grabbed some graham crackers, curling up on his sofa and flipping channels.

He almost had a heart attack when Quinn appeared in front of him, coming through from the kitchen. He'd given Quinn a key after that first night when he'd locked the door. Just in case ... well. Just in case.

"Hey, babe."

"Hey." He found his lover a smile. "There's fresh coffee. You want a graham cracker?"

"No thanks." He got a smile in return, Quinn looking tired, fresh stress lines around his mouth. "I left some groceries in the kitchen. I'll cook later."

Dan blushed, ducked his head. "Thanks. I ... I haven't been out. You okay?"

He opened his arms up, giving Quinn the only thing he really had these days.

"I..." Quinn came, sat down, curled up against him like he'd been huddling into Quinn lately. "Would you believe it was me they sent home today? I hope you don't mind, but I brought Rags over, too. You were kinda out of it when I came in. You okay?"

"Just thinking." He petted Quinn's hair, cheek, the simple act making him relax. "Rags is always welcome. In fact, I was tempted to go get him today for company." The rest of what Quinn said hit him. "Why did they send you home?"

Quinn sighed. "I got a death threat. Arlene ... you know Arlene in dispatch?" He nodded. Arlene was the secretary, and a nice lady.

"She got it, freaked out, they sent me home to make sure my house was okay, told me not to come back. Called the mayor. All that shit."

"Shit." He hugged Quinn close. "We have got to stop pissing people off."

He kept his voice light, knowing that Quinn worried about him, about them.

"No shit, babe. But it could be a good sign. I'm not doing what they want me to, obviously." He got a kiss, Quinn shifting, easing that heavy body off him. "And this way we get to have brunch in bed."

"Yeah? I like that." He slid around, finding the place where they fit together perfectly. "I like you."

"Oh, good. We'd be kinda screwed if you didn't." He got a few more kisses, lazy and easy, Quinn not acting too

concerned about his life and death situation. At least not anymore. "Eggs or pancakes? Or both?"

"Pancakes. There might be sausage in the deep freeze." He took another kiss, rubbing their noses together. "You working on Thanksgiving?"

"I don't know. Going to try not to. Rank has to have its privileges somewhere." Quinn nipped his lips.

"We could cook. Never cooked a turkey, but we could try." If they went out of town to shop.

"We could. We could go over to Montrose, instead of Delta, get some groceries, have mashed potatoes and green beans."

"Pecan pie and brown and serve rolls." He chuckled, smiled.

"We'll even give Rags some turkey and gravy. With some of those giblets." Oh, Quinn was smiling, too, a real one, hands sliding on him.

"Hell, yes. Oh. Dressing. There has to be dressing, and cranberry sauce from a can." They were laughing together and it felt fucking amazing.

"Cornbread dressing, with extra onion." Looked like Quinn felt the same way, because those hard lines were smoothing out, Quinn's eyes going from almost black to gray again.

"Oh, we'll have a ball. Paper plates so we don't have to do too many dishes after." He rubbed their noses together.

"One of those paper turkeys that's all folded tissue paper and cardboard for the centerpiece." Quinn laughed right out loud, squeezing him, the happy sound bringing Rags out of the kitchen finally, tail wagging cautiously.

He grinned, held his hand out. "Rags! Hey stranger! Come see me."

Rags came over, wiggling and panting, doggie grin in place. Poor mutt had been feeling their tension lately.

"Hey, pup." He scratched ears and neck. "We'll get you some treats, too, huh? Make things right."

"Yeah." They sat for a long while, petting the dog and listening to each other breathe. It was good, almost making him forget.

There was another knock on the door, making him jump, Rags barking once. "Don't answer it. I don't want to talk to anyone."

"I need to at least see who it is, babe. Just in case. I won't open the door."

A woman's voice sounded. "Dan? Dan, it's Carrie. I ... There's a basket. Food. I know you don't want to talk, but ... We know you didn't. Wouldn't."

Carrie'd been the English teacher on his team for seven years. Hell of a lady. Dan closed his eyes.

"If you need anything—a ride, casserole, a friend? Call me, 'kay?"

Then her steps moved away from the door.

"You have some good friends, Danny." He could hear a car door shut outside and Quinn waited several minutes and checked outside again before opening up and grabbing the basket.

He nodded, took a deep breath, trying to decide whether to laugh or cry when he saw the contents. Snickers, instant

oatmeal, coffee, gingersnaps. All things he liked, things he kept in his desk at work.

"Chocolate." Quinn sat next to him again, pushing Rags away from the cookies. "Nice haul, babe."

He nodded, opened up the card, gasping as five hundred-dollar bills fell into his lap, dozens of signatures supporting him. "Oh. Fuck. Quinn."

His lover just pulled him close, reading the card over his shoulder. "Reminds you that the bad apples are just the loudest, yeah?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Makes me believe that it hasn't been a waste, you know?"

"Good. You've done your time, babe." They shared another warm, sweet kiss. "What do you say I got put the groceries away, and we have a brunch of chocolate and gingersnaps?"

"Ooh. I'm more than up for that." For the first time in almost a week, he felt awake, felt like moving.

"Cool." Quinn got up, hauled him up, the smile on that well-loved face almost blinding. Rags barked, tail just going ninety to nothing.

He laughed, hugged Quinn hard. "Yeah. Yeah, Quinn. I'm cool."

The hug that came in return was a bone crusher, Quinn's breath stirring the hair on top of his head. "Good."

"Yeah. One way or the other, Quinn. Good."

Chapter Thirteen

It was damned risky and Quinn knew it, but he'd promised Danny a home cooked Thanksgiving dinner, and fuck if he wasn't going to try and provide. He probably should have gone shopping by himself, but that was also something they were both looking forward to, so Quinn borrowed Andy's truck and picked Danny up just after dark.

They'd go to Montrose, have supper, and go to the City Market. If they went to the big one, it was pretty unlikely they'd see anyone they knew. Of course, Quinn was getting to the point where he didn't give a fuck if someone did. His "investigation" of Danny was a fucking joke and everyone knew it.

The death threats? Not such a great joke.

He grinned over at Danny as they pulled out of town, both of them wearing caps and coats and looking not quite like them. "Hey, babe."

"Hey." Dan looked almost happy, almost normal. "What are you wanting to eat?"

"Doesn't matter to me. I was thinking lots of finger food. Ribs or Chinese or something." He wanted a quiet booth and lots of licking.

"Oh, that sounds good. Something we can't make at home." Dan's hand landed on his thigh.

"Yeah. If we were in Denver we'd go to this Spanish tapas place. As it is? I think we can make do with pot stickers or ribs." He stroked Danny's hand, happy to see that face smiling. He missed that.

"Do you miss Denver?"

"Some. I miss..." How could he put it? There was a lot about western Colorado that he loved. Hell, sometimes Denver and the rest of the front range made him insane. "I miss the anonymity of it sometimes. If we were in Denver I'd be able to kiss you in public, and someone might try to kick our asses, but they wouldn't know us from Adam."

"Yeah. I ... I never thought seriously about leaving, but. Well, things have changed."

God. Danny's fingers curled around his and Quinn squeezed tight. Yeah. Things had changed, and he knew enough to know why. He was honest with himself if nothing else.

"You thinking of it now? When I go?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I mean. I don't know what I'd do, but ... I don't know. I wouldn't give for you, you know?"

"I'd stay if you needed me to. If you couldn't stand." Well. That was pretty well self-explanatory.

"Thanks. That's ... that's good to know, but ... Shit, Quinn. I'm tired of pretending we're doing something wrong."

Yeah. Oh, God, yeah. They'd both paid enough. It was time to have their own lives. "Well, I can go anywhere, babe."

"I don't know where to go." Dan petted his thigh, his hand moving slow. "I don't know what to do, really."

"We'll work it out." They would. Tonight wasn't for making decisions. At least ones that didn't involve egg rolls or steamed dumplings. "Grandview Palace okay?"

"Works for me."

Dan grinned. "I haven't had decent egg rolls in eons."

"Yeah."

They got to the restaurant, and it was a little crowded, but managed to snag a back booth, pretty out-of-the-way and private. Sometimes asking nice got you things. They settled in and looked at the menu, ordering an appetizer platter and green tea to start.

Dan crowed softly as the appetizer came, piled high with goodies. "Oh, man, I do love a pu pu platter."

"Hell, yes. And I love the name. It makes me feel like I'm in high school again, snickering like an idiot." He grinned, hand meeting Dan's over a pot sticker.

Dan chuckled, those eyes happy and green, laughing at him. "Are you feeling me up, Mr. Quinn?"

"If you don't know the difference between hand holding and feeling up? We need to review the bases." He laughed, too, holding up a bit of teriyaki for Dan to bite.

"Oh. Are we forgetting stuff again?" Dan leaned over and bit at the meat, tugging it playfully.

"They say repetition is the key to memory. I think we need more practice." He popped what Danny hadn't eaten into his mouth, licking his lips.

An egg roll was dipped, offered over to him. "I'm a huge fan of practice, Quinn."

"Oh, good." He licked at the sweet duck sauce, crunching down through the egg roll. Eating like this made everything taste better, made the cabbage a brighter green, added a kick to the shrimp brine.

Crunchy noodles. Cheese rangoon. Fried wontons
One after another, they shared bites, laughter.

They nibbled fingers, and played footsie, and when the last soft and crunchy deep-fried banana was gone, Quinn sighed, leaning back and patting his belly. "Well, they say you should never shop on an empty stomach."

"Man, we could shop tomorrow and be safe."

"No shit." Neither of them had been eating well. On him it looked a little leaner. On Danny it looked almost gaunt. It was not just good to get out of town. It was necessary. He paid the bill, reluctant to go, but knowing they needed to.

"You ready, babe?"

"Yeah. We need to choose a turkey. All that. You got the list?"

He patted his front shirt pocket. "You bet. I still think we need pumpkin *and* pecan pie."

Dan slid out of the booth. "If we have enough whipped cream? I think that's fair. Rags can share."

"He'll fart." They were almost holding hands as they left the restaurant, the tiny brushes of Danny's skin on his making his arm tingle.

"Then we need to buy air freshener, too. That pup curls my nose hairs."

"We'll get the pine stuff. Make it smell like the holidays."

The holidays. God, he'd never spent them with anyone but Sam since he was a teenager. His cheeks heated and his belly went tight.

"Oh, yeah. And we need to get Rags reindeer antlers, too." Dan winked, fingers sliding against his wrist.

"And some bells." Damn. They were having fun.

"Battery-powered blinky lights."

They got in the truck and Quinn took a quick look around, leaning to kiss Danny before clicking his seatbelt into place. "Silly music."

Danny's tongue slid along his bottom lip. "Tinsel."

"Balls." Damn. That mouth. He was kinda losing track of what he was saying.

"Uh-huh. Presents in bows..." Danny's fingers slid right up along his thigh.

"Danny." Goddamn he was hard. He'd need to spend some quality time in the freezer section.

"Yeah. Want you." Those fingers cupped his cock, rubbed.

"I want you, too, babe. So bad." He thrummed with the need to just push Danny down and fuck him. It wasn't the time or place, though.

Dan leaned against his shoulder, hand stilling, just cupping his cock, not stroking. "Feels good. So good."

His legs spread, Danny's hand burning even through his jeans. He took another kiss, a hard promise. "Soon, Danny."

"Yeah. Yeah. After we wrestle ourselves a Thanksgiving bird."

"And cranberry stuff." They both relaxed, both sat back to get going. Little things. The gift was getting to do the little things together.

"Is that sort of like Jell-O wrestling, but ... chunky?"

"Oh, gross." They laughed hard as he started the truck, so much that his belly hurt when they were done.

They waded into the grocery store, shopping, laughing. They bought a bag of green apple sours, a huge sack of nuts,

Dan tossing them in from across the aisle in the produce department.

Terrorizing the boy running the floor buffer, they went from aisle to aisle, the bright lights and dizzying variety of pickles and olives and cheese for the relish plate making it all seem damned surreal, but fun as anything.

They spent a few minutes deciding whether they needed a little turkey or a gargantuan one.

"I'm thinking thirty pounds of turkey is ... excessive, Quinn."

"Rags would love us. So would the neighborhood cats." He would suggest freezing it, but he wanted to be gone before they needed to haul out leftovers.

Danny laughed, a full, deep, right in public, fuck you world belly laugh and the big-assed turkey was plopped into the cart. "Okay, then. We need some of those aluminum pans. And butter. I read turkey cooking requires a lot of butter."

"Butter has many uses." Butter, sweet potatoes, corn. Quinn bumped hips with Danny and made a face at an old lady who was staring at them disapprovingly over her cart full of cat food and for a minute he was fifteen and wild again.

"Indeed. As does whipped cream. Oooh. We should get the stuff in the can." Danny's fingers slid against his. "And more coffee."

"Mmm, yeah. We could get some peppermint extract, have some fake Irish coffee." That? Was definitely not him at fifteen.

"Oh, that sounds good. Hell, they have the Irish coffee creamer, too." They'd neither one said a thing about the

bottle of whiskey on Danny's counter, or about the fact that the dregs had been dumped and the bottle tossed.

They didn't have to.

"They do. And that amaretto stuff, too." They piled the cart recklessly full, making the tired cashier they rolled up to sigh and shift from foot to foot. Quinn grinned. "I'll bag."

"Man, good thing we have the truck. This would never fit in the car."

The cold stuff they packed in the king cab, the rest went under the cargo net in the back. "It's the turkey. It's the size of a small bull."

"No shit. Rags might decide we've brought him a girlfriend." Dan grinned, sliding into the seat, the apple sours in his lap.

"Oh, God." He wheezed, the thought of Rags humping the Thanksgiving turkey making him laugh like a loon. Dan's laughter joined with his, that hand finding his thigh again.

Thanksgiving would be damned good for them. They'd make it that way. He reached down to hold Danny's hand again. They'd make it that way together.***

They shared almost the whole bag of candy—so much for never eating again.

Dan chuckled, fastening the bag and tossing it between them. "I don't want to eat them all yet, Quinn. I want to kiss you after one."

It was amazing, how easy it was to say things like that, to let Quinn how much he wanted. To play.

"Oh, damn, babe. Gonna make me run off the road, and I don't think you want that." He got a glinting grin in the dark

before Quinn looked right back at the road. Quinn was probably the safest driver he knew, at least with him in the vehicle.

"Nope. Fucking is way more fun in the bed. Trucks aren't comfy."

"I can remember when we were glad to have a truck. Remember that time we did it down by the river on that old army blanket?"

Oh, God. Ants, gravel, and only after they almost slid into the river did they figure out they'd laid their blanket out on a big old piece of sandstone.

"I had ant bites in the most delicate places." Dan chuckled, shook his head. "Or the time we snuck into the old football stadium?"

"Oh, fuck." Quinn chuckled. "That was a hoot and a half. I thought we were gonna give Ed the security guy a heart attack."

"I thought those damned bleachers were going to crash right down on us when he was stomping on them." He grinned, shook his head. "We were nuts."

"We were young and kinda crazy." The hand wrapped around his squeezed. "We would have killed each other if I'd have stayed. But I think I knew even back then."

Quinn had never been one for sentimental stuff, so every time Quinn said stuff like that it warmed him.

"What matters is that we're not going to kill each other now." He twined their fingers together. "I wonder how long a ten thousand pound Thanksgiving turkey takes to cook..."

"The important thing is how long it takes to thaw." They were rounding a curve taking them around the outskirts of town, maybe a mile and a half from home when suddenly bright headlights flared up on either side of the road, a sound like angry bees splitting the cold, still night air.

"What the hell?"

Dan sat up, let Quinn have his hand back so he could drive, squinting, trying to see what was up.

The truck skidded, jerked nearly off the road, as Quinn lost control, cursing viciously and fluently.

"Down, Danny." That big hand grabbed him and pushed him down below the dash just as the windshield splintered above his head, cracking like a spring-thawed lake.

Oh, fucking hell. His heart started pounding, eyes feeling like they were going to pop out of his head. "Quinn?"

A low growl came out of Quinn, the truck rocking back on its springs, Quinn ducking and coming up with a big, black gun in his hand. "Someone's shooting at us, babe. When I get out, move to the middle and stay low."

"Shit, Quinn. Be careful." Danny reached for his cell phone, shaking as another shot sounded. "I'll call 911."

"Yeah. Ask for Andy to come out if possible." The door popped open and Quinn rolled out. The noise now was more like roaring, the sound of Quinn's gun discharging ringing in his ears.

He dialed, hands shaking.

"911. Police, ambulance or fire?"

"Police. The sheriff's being shot at on 92 just outside of Hotchkiss. He says to send Andy."

"Sheriff Quinn? Who's this?"

He winced as another shot was fired, cursing all nosy nighttime dispatchers under his breath. "What the fuck does it matter? Christ, Martha, get your head out of your ass and call Andy!"

"I'll get him out there right away." Whether Martha recognized his voice or not, him knowing her must have worked, because she did what he asked. He could hear her relay the information as she kept him on the line. "Andy's over in Austin. He says fifteen minutes. I have a unit right there in Hotchkiss I can send."

Sometimes, having the sheriff's office two towns over sucked.

The sound of a truck without a muffler was loud enough to drown out both Quinn's shots and the squeal of two sets of tires, and suddenly it was so quiet he could hear his heart pound. Quinn stuck his head in the cab and reached for the phone.

"Martha? Just send Andy. No one else, you hear? This is part of a private investigation. And get me a trace on a license."

Dan managed to get out of the truck and a half-dozen steps down the road before he sat. Hard. He shook, staring out into the darkness, sucking in the cold air.

Okay.

Okay.

Everything was okay.

Hopefully they didn't shoot the turkey.

"Hey, babe, you okay?" Quinn was there, hands warm and firm on his arms.

Dan nodded, not trusting his voice. He could feel his skin crawling, shaking.

"Fuck." Quinn was rock solid, but when he pulled Danny close to hug him Danny could feel Quinn's heart going a mile a minute. "Shit. That was close."

"You." He swallowed hard. "You've really pissed someone off."

"Yeah. Scared 'em. But I got a license plate, babe. Let's hope the fucker was stupid enough to use his own car."

He nodded, thoughts just racing through his head, hanging up on the word hope. Hope. Christ. What was a vaguely cracked history teacher doing sitting on the highway on Thanksgiving week, on leave from work, shot at, cold, waiting for an official who would want to know whys and wheres and whens.

He was beginning to think maybe he'd been caught in an alternate dimension.

"Babe. Babe I need you to get up. We're safer by the truck. It will be warmer, too." Quinn pulled at him. "Andy will be here in a minute and we can go home."

"You. You'll get outed with me here."

"Andy knows. Hell, Danny, it's his truck." Without him even knowing he was moving, he was sitting on the tailgate of the truck, staring down the road.

"Oh." He looked over, teeth chattering. "You're okay?"

"I'll live." Quinn patted his arm and disappeared for a minute, coming back with a couple of pieces of candy. "Eat up. It will combat the shock."

He dropped one, but got the other into his mouth, the sour apple taste making him pucker. How long had it been since they were joking about tasting this from each other's mouths?

Quinn started prowling, just stalking back and forth. Then it was like Quinn shook off the shock, too, because he got in the toolbox in the king cab and got out some flares, lighting one on either end of the truck, leaving plenty of room. They were kind of sitting in the middle of the road, and late as it was, there was always some traffic

"Can I help?" Could he do something? Be less useless?

He got a once-over before Quinn nodded. "Yeah. Take this flashlight, and pace off the skid marks. We'll need to know how far we went after they started shooting. They're good and gone, so there's no worries."

"Kay." He held his hand out, letting Quinn help him off the tailgate before taking the flashlight and walking. Counting. Watching. Very carefully not thinking.

Headlights coming at him made him flinch, made him move quickly to the side of the road, but it was a sheriff's department vehicle, and it was Andy Andrews who stepped out. "Hey, Danny. Quinn?"

"Over there by the truck, Andy." He gave Andy a nod, a wry grin.

Andy nodded back, a smile curling up one corner of his mouth. "You're not hurt?"

"No. Just a little wiggled. The truck's less fine."

"Damn." He almost grinned as Andy walked over and looked at his truck, cursing up a storm. He saw Quinn come over to meet him, and there was a lot of gesturing and walking back and forth.

He stayed away, walking, frowning as he counted. The light swung in an arc, catching little bits of this, glints of that, something shining on the street. Dan went over, frowning. A watch.

Weird.

A guy's watch.

"Quinn?"

"Yeah, babe?" Both Quinn and Andy came over, looking down. "Oh, well done, Danny."

"Yeah? Cool." He grinned, and it didn't have a damned thing to with finding the watch. It was that 'babe', just so natural, so easy.

"Yeah. If it belongs to one of our guys we have something to help positively ID him with. Andy says he's got a few guys on the way, and we can get out of here, give statements in the morning. Avoid the microscope." Quinn grinned and Andy rolled his eyes.

"Is the truck drivable?" He looked over at it, seeing their big-assed turkey just sitting there.

"Yeah. Thank goodness. Though we could have taken the car." Quinn's hand was warm under his elbow, and Andy took the flashlight as they passed. "Thanks, Andy. For everything. I'll see you tomorrow."

He nodded to Andy, let his lover put him into the truck, wincing at the shattered windshield.

They got in the truck and settled, Quinn starting it up and then just kind of ... sitting there, hands clenched tight on the steering wheel.

"You." He took a deep breath. "You want me to drive?"

"I'm ... You're okay, right? Not hurt?" A muscle jumped in Quinn's jaw, and Quinn just stayed there, staring straight ahead.

"No. Be stiff in the morning maybe, just from being tense. I ... We need to go, Quinn. We need to put the groceries away." He needed to touch his lover.

"Okay, yeah." Quinn finally looked at him, and it was pure rage he saw in those gray eyes, not at him, he knew that, but at the people who tried to take him away. "Home. I can do that."

Carefully, Quinn pulled back into their lane and headed down the road, taking them home.

He didn't touch Quinn all the way home, didn't talk.

Didn't do anything but wait.

It seemed to take days, that mile or two, the street lights sparkling in the broken glass.

They parked in front of Quinn's house. Stood to reason, they needed to take care of Rags, and Quinn had room for the groceries, since he didn't keep much in his freezer. They got out without a word, Quinn pulling out his pistol and motioning for Danny to stay where he was as he made a circuit around the house.

He started gathering up the groceries in the cab, pulling them into his lap. Waiting. Again.

It didn't take near as long, Quinn coming back with the gun tucked away, hauling out the turkey, which looked unmolested. "Come on, babe."

"Yeah. 'Kay." He carried as many bags in as he could, going in and checking Rags, putting things away. Not touching.

When they were done putting everything where it belonged, and feeding the dog, and letting him out and letting him in, and it was quiet and all the doors were locked, that was when Quinn touched him. Just walked over and put those long arms around him and pulled him close.

"Oh, God. Quinn." He tilted his head, brought their mouths together in a sharp, deep kiss.

The kiss he got in return was voracious, hard enough to immediately bruise his lips, hands hard on his back, one coming up to cup the back of his head. Yes. He pushed against Quinn, needing this. Needing to taste and touch. His fingers twisted in Quinn's shirt, tugging it open and finding skin.

A sharp moan met his touch, Quinn rubbing hard, the length of Quinn's cock obvious through their jeans.

His fingers slid up those ribs—those whole, healthy ribs—and found Quinn's nipples, pinching and pulling.

"Shit! Bed, Danny. Bed. I need to ... please." Quinn's voice was as rough as the touch of those lips and hands. Hot, needy.

"Yes. Fuck. Now." He nipped Quinn's bottom lip, groaning. "Need you."

"Yes." They stumbled into the bedroom, dropping clothes as they went. When they were naked he could see little scrapes on Quinn's skin, patches of bruising where the seatbelt must have pressed in. As he explored Quinn's skin, his was explored as well, Quinn searching him carefully.

He kissed and licked each scrape, each mark, tongue sliding over them, making them his.

Just like Quinn did his scars.

Quinn pushed him down on the bed, mouth on his throat, tongue sliding over his nipples, teeth threatening on his hipbones.

"Want you to fuck me. Need to feel you." He spread, heels pushing into the mattress as he made the offer.

"God." That wasn't a no, though, because Quinn wet two fingers and pushed them inside him, with no gentleness or ease, just need. He opened for Quinn, letting those fingers spread him, and Quinn watched him with eyes gone black with emotion.

He rode them, taking Quinn in deep, letting Quinn know he needed it, needed to feel.

More spit slicked Quinn's cock just enough and Quinn's fingers were out, cock sliding in. They both breathed a sigh of relief; that was what they needed, the connection. The joining. "Danny..."

"Yeah, Quinn. Yeah." He nodded, hands on Quinn's face, easing, touching. "Right here."

The kisses finally gentled, Quinn tasting him, their tongues sliding. The thrust of Quinn's hips didn't get any softer though, that thick cock just taking him. He met each thrust,

body moving sure as anything, shaking a little until Quinn's hand supported him, gave him the leverage he needed.

"Danny, love." Quinn was panting, breath coming fast, sweat dripping from Quinn onto him. Their skin slapped together, their sounds mingling, filling his ears, drowning out the memory of gunfire and squealing brakes.

"Yeah. Yeah, Quinn. Gonna." He bore down, squeezing as hard as he could, spunk just spraying from him.

A low, harsh moan came from deep in Quinn's chest, his lover slamming into him hard, heat filling him deep inside.

They kept moving, pushing through the aftershock, their bodies making sure the pleasure held out. Finally, Quinn just lowered down on him, lips pressed against the pulse in his neck. Holding on to him for dear life.

He did the same, hands shaking. "Could've lost you. Fuck."

"M'okay. We're going to get them now. It's only a matter of time. They fucking could have killed you. No way are they on the loose for much longer."

"Yeah. Yeah. You were ... Fuck, Quinn. You're something else."

"So were you." A chuckle ghosted over his skin.

"Me? Bah." He blushed; he'd never felt so helpless in his life. Not even in traction.

"You didn't fall apart on me. You called it in. That's the best thing I could ever ask for in a partner. More than I would normally think to ask in a lover. You're a good one, babe."

Quinn kissed his chin, grinning as Rags joined them on the bed, whining.

He reached out, beaming, smiling, scratched Rags' ears.
"Hey, pup. We got you a little turkey girlfriend."

Rags circled, finally flopping on them. Quinn laughed, hands on his as they petted and soothed. "And pie."

"And Irish cream coffee makings." He leaned up, rubbed their cheeks together. "A whole feast."

"Just for us."

"Yeah." Dan nodded. "Yeah, Quinn."

Just for them.***

"Anything on the license plate?"

Andy nodded, jerking his chin toward the outside door.
"Let's walk."

They went out, the bright blue sky just blinding, the cold hard enough to eat right through Quinn's shearling jacket. Andy walked with his shoulders hunched, hands in his pockets, until they got around the courthouse and headed for Main Street.

"The vehicle belongs to Fish and Game, Quinn. It was signed out to Frank Baylor. That's Ken Lawrence's cousin."

"You think Ken is in on it?" That would make a lot of sense. Ken was a deputy with about a million family members in the Delta County area, and he was married to ex-sheriff Bob Farris' niece. He'd been a prime suspect for Quinn the whole time, but had checked out squeaky-clean.

"I think so, yeah. Goddamn, Quinn. I've known these guys more than half my life. How could they?"

"All it takes is one bad apple to convince them it's okay."

One bad apple like Bob Farris, setting up the trafficking of drugs coming up from South America and disseminating them

for profit. The beauty of it? People looked for shit like that in the big cities. In the little towns? Hell, the law was the good guy still.

No one had ever looked twice.

Until Sam had gotten a call from an old friend and opened the can of worms that had brought him here.

"The watch?"

"Tons of prints, no matches. We're pulling Frank in today to see if we can get a match. If we can, I bet we can get him to talk. We've got shell casings, too, and the bullets from my truck."

Andy sounded more pissed about the truck than anything else so far.

"Sorry about that, man."

"You're okay. That's what matters."

"Sure."

They grinned at each other and Quinn clapped Andy on the back. "Keep me posted. I'm taking Thanksgiving off."

"You enjoy, Sheriff."

"I will, buddy. Believe me. I will."

Chapter Fourteen

The morning was quiet and still when Quinn woke up in Danny's bed on Thanksgiving Day. Rags lay at the bottom of the bed, big head lifting as Quinn rolled up, padding to the window to look out.

Snow. Snow as far as the eye could see. It was almost eerie, but damned peaceful, not even a footprint to mar the pristine view. Danny needed to see this before Rags got out there and tore it all to shit. He grinned, sneaking back over to the bed and sticking his hands under the covers. Right on Danny's butt.

"Quinn!" Danny wriggled, laughing, head popping up from under the covers.

"Hey, babe. Come look. It snowed." God, he sounded like a little kid, but he wanted to share.

"Yeah? All white and sparkly?" Dan slid out of the bed and they moved together to the window, Danny resting against him, grinning wide.

"Yeah. Thought you'd want to see it before I let Rags out. He loves snow." Damned fool dog would roll in it and eat it and generally go on a rampage.

"It's gorgeous." Danny's hand slid around his waist, holding on. "Happy Thanksgiving."

He turned, kissing Danny lightly on the lips. "Happy Thanksgiving, Dan. You think that turkey is thawed yet?"

"I was a good man and got up at four and put it in. Theoretically I even turned the oven on."

"Bless you. Why don't you crawl back in bed and I'll put Rags out and serve you breakfast in bed." Hell, he wanted to lick syrup off Danny's skin. It wouldn't be a hardship.

"Oooh. Tell you what, I'll come make the coffee and we'll both get back in the bed faster."

"That sounds like a plan." He gave Danny another kiss, making all sorts of plans in his head as he headed out with Rags. After the week they'd had? They deserved some downtime.

Danny pottered in the bathroom a bit, then came out in a pair of his old gym shorts, hanging low on his thin hips. Soft humming filled the air as they worked together, nice and easy.

What a look. Quinn stared, waiting to see if they dropped to give him tantalizing glimpses of pubes or ass. He almost burned the first batch of pancakes when Danny bent to tie up the garbage bag.

After getting out cups and plates, Danny settled behind him, snuggled against his back, his ass, fingers drawing on his belly.

"Gonna make me burn 'em, babe." It wasn't really a complaint, and his free hand came up so he could stroke Danny's arms.

"I'm just keeping you warm." Soft kisses stroked along his shoulders.

"Doing a good job. Those shorts are almost better than you being naked." He rubbed back against Danny, humming low.

"I like wearing them. Makes me feel good." His bellybutton was circled, the line of hair on his lower belly just barely tugged.

He moved back a few inches from the stove as his cock rose. No sense tempting fate with heat and delicate skin, even through his shorts. "I like you wearing them. Oh, have you got some old towels? We'll need to rub Rags down."

"Yep. You think I should throw them in the dryer for a minute? He's got to be cold."

"You're a good man, Danny." Any man who treated his dog that well was a keeper. "Yeah, he's a doof, but I'd miss him if he got pneumonia and keeled over."

"Well, yeah." Danny swatted his butt and wandered off, grabbing some towels and tossing them in the dryer.

Damn. He missed the warmth of Danny at his back as he put the bacon and pancakes in the toaster oven to keep warm and went to get Rags. On the way he set out the Irish Cream coffee stuff.

Danny brought the towels over, draping one over his shoulders, warming him right up as they got the beast dried and settled. Rags had been soaked to the bone.

The damned mutt was happy, though, just wagging and panting and licking them to death. They finally got Rags done, and got themselves washed up, and got back to bed with nothing stomped, bitten or burned.

Danny shut the door, offering Rags a piece of bacon to placate the pup. Then that pretty ass in his shorts crawled into the bed. His body remembered why he'd been making

breakfast in the first place, and Quinn put the tray next to the bed and hopped in, reaching for the syrup and flapjacks.

Danny purred and moaned over the coffee, offering him a cream and sugar kiss, lips hot and soft against his own. Oh. That was almost like ... Quinn took the kiss, licking it off Danny's lips. Damn, he'd have to remember that cream stuff.

They settled in together, sharing one kiss after another until Danny's stomach rumbled and they laughed, reaching for the food.

He ate from Danny's fingers, from Danny's lips. Hell, he ate one pancake off that flat belly, just above the waistband of the shorts.

Danny's laughter, all mixed up with moans, was the finest fucking sound.

They had a few hours before the parades started, and an hour after that, maybe, before the dressing needed to start baking if they were going to have it for supper, so when breakfast was done, Quinn set the dishes aside, and set to making a feast out of Danny.

That earned him more of those moans, that fine skin sliding under his lips.

Danny twisted under him, touched him back, those sounds driving him higher. Their legs twined together, hips bumping as Danny tilted his head, kissed him hard. Looked like play time was over, and that was okay with him. He kissed right back, tongue pushing in, tasting sweet and salt. He wanted. Damn, he wanted.

And Danny gave it up, eager and hungry, eyes so green, so alive, and it thrilled him, that he'd done that, made them shine.

His own were probably black, if what Danny told him could be trusted. He grinned widely, pushing down against Danny. "What do you want, babe? Want to fuck me?"

"Want you to ride, Quinn. Want to watch you." Danny's cheeks pinked, eyes burning, wanting.

"You sure you're up to it?" He wanted that, too. His cock just tried to up and dance at the thought. But no way was he going to hurt Danny. No way.

"If it hurts, we'll make another plan." Danny grinned, stroked that long cock. "You tend to ease my pains."

"I try, babe." God. He bent, just licking the tip of that cock, tasting. Loving it. He would get it good and wet, get himself good and wet at the same time.

Dan spread, a needy groan filling the air. "You ... you do a damned sight better than try."

"Oh, good." He licked and sucked and got his own fingers wet, reaching behind him, bracing himself on the other arm so he could stretch himself.

Danny was watching, eyes hot, hips pumping that flesh into his lips. Just knowing Danny liked what he was doing made him slow down a little, made him really put on a show.

"Oh. Oh, sweet Christ. Quinn." Danny panted, hands touching where he could.

He nodded, gasping, riding his fingers. "Just need you so bad, babe."

"You're the finest thing I've ever seen."

His head was gonna pop off if he didn't get on Danny and ride, and Quinn did just that. He grabbed Danny's cock, moving up, his own fingers sliding out as he lined up to slide Danny in. "Love you."

It seemed even more important to say that once in awhile these days.

"Oh..." The word was a long, low exhalation, Danny's hands warm and sure on his hips.

God. Danny felt huge inside him every time. They didn't do it this way often and it made him moan, made his muscles pop and jump under his skin.

Danny's fingers moved over him—balls and belly, thighs and cock. Dan was trying to drive him insane. It was working. Quinn bore down, body squeezing Danny's cock, hands braced on either side of Danny's waist.

"So fine." Dan groaned, hips rolling. "So tight."

"Only you, babe." He'd only do this for Danny. No one else. He rode faster, Danny's hands spurring him on, one of his own hands coming up to pinch Danny's nipples.

Danny's thumbs slid along his cock, pushing, driving him. "Yeah. Yeah, Quinn. Love."

He needed it so bad, loved the feel of Danny inside him so much. Quinn rocked, fingers sliding down Danny's belly to the place they were joined, feeling them together.

"Oh, fuck. Quinn." Danny's face flushed dark, hand wrapping around his cock, tugging hard.

That took him by surprise and he grunted, head falling back as his cock jerked in Danny's hand. He shot hard, breath coming short, eyes rolling in his head. Danny bucked, cries

sharp and deep, driving into him again and again, hand bruising on his hip.

"Oh, fuck, Dan." He gasped, still moving, riding out every move Danny made.

"Uh-huh. Love you. Love you. Fuck." Danny's shoulders left the mattress, heat filling him deep.

He squeezed, helping Danny along, loving the look on that thin face. Goddamn. That was good.

"Oh, sweet fuck, Quinn. You're. I. Wow."

"Mmmhmm." He sort of toppled. "Wait 'til you see what I can do with turkey."

The laughter started as a little snort, then a giggle, then a full-fledged laugh, making Danny's cock throb inside him.

"Fuck!" He grabbed Danny, laughing hard in return, their bellies rubbing. God, it was good. So good. He had a hell of a lot to be thankful for.

And that damned turkey was nowhere close to the top of the list.***

Oh, Lord. He was never eating again.

They'd napped and cooked and eaten and napped and eaten again. Rags was the happiest dog in the universe.

Quinn was stretched out on the sofa, head in his lap, both of them making wild, goofy bets on the football.

There'd never been a better Thanksgiving.

"This has been the best, babe." Quinn rubbed his head against Dan's thigh, hair tousled. "Even Rags didn't go hungry."

"Lord. We'll be eating turkey sandwiches for weeks." He smiled down, smoothing the dark hair. "Has it only been seven or eight months since you came back?"

His whole world had changed.

"Yeah. Just enough time to come into town and tear things up. Maybe some things never change." The tone was wry, the smile even more so.

"We've changed, but I couldn't have asked for anything I needed more."

Quinn looked up at him, hand coming up to cup his cheek. "It was time to come back, I think. Damn that Sam, he was right."

"I'd like to meet him, tell him thank you." He owed this Sam more than he could say.

"Mmm." He grinned, leaning into the kiss, hand cupping the back of Quinn's head.

Coffee and pie and whipped cream. Quinn hadn't shaved either, so there was rough stubble rubbing against his cheeks, his chin. Humming, he licked and lapped, one hand sliding down Quinn's belly, cupping those heavy balls through the soft sweats.

"Oh. Babe." Quinn just spread, hips rolling up, giving him room to move. The kiss went deep, needy.

Oh, yeah. He let go just long enough to slide his hand into Quinn's sweats, finding flesh. Gasping, grunting, Quinn pushed into his touch, hands holding his arms. Quinn licked and nipped at his lips, tongue pushing inside to take anything he had to give. His fingers wrapped around Quinn's cock, pulling good and hard, lips open, letting Quinn in.

The kiss just went on until they both had to breathe, and man it was good. Quinn pushed into his hand, those fingers coming up to pinch and pull at his nipples.

A soft growl left him, lightning shooting from his tight nipples, headed straight to his cock.

"Mnnh. Babe." His sounds must have made Quinn happy, because that heavy cock jumped in between his fingers. Quinn kept at him, scraping over his nipples again, teeth threatening his neck.

"Shit." He pulled harder, chin lifting, offering Quinn his throat.

He got a moan, deep and throaty, those teeth pulling up a mark on his skin as they sank in. Quinn rode his touch, whole body begging.

"Oh, sweet fuck, Quinn. Come on. Come on, love." He was soaring, skin tingling. Wearing Quinn's mark.

"Danny. Babe. I, oh." Quinn gave it up to him, every bit, teeth just clinging to his skin. Those hands dug in, too, Quinn shaking and jerking as he came right into Dan's hand.

He whimpered, balls drawing up, the scent of Quinn making his belly tight.

"Babe. I need." Quinn reached down, rubbed him through the thin shorts he wore, Quinn's shorts.

"Please." He spread his legs, groaning, bringing his slick fingers up to his mouth to lick clean.

"Oh, God." Surging up over him, Quinn slipped that hot hand into his shorts and closed it around him, pumping, pulling, thumb brushing the tip.

His toes curled into the carpet, heels thrumming against the floor, eyes wide as he shot hard.

"Mmm." Following his lead, Quinn brought his hand up, licking and sucking him right off, looking happy and sated.

"H ... happy Thanksgiving." He laughed, head lolling back on the sofa.

"The best, babe. The best." Quinn was laughing, too, sliding back down to lay in his lap, petting his thigh.

"You know it." He snorted as Rags rolled over, scratching and rubbing on the floor. "For all of us."***

"Good work, Quinn. We can't tell you how we appreciate it."

The mayors of Delta and Hotchkiss, along with the newly appointed Sheriff Andy Dean, stood with two judges and the county prosecutor, all wanting to glad hand him.

It wasn't over by a long shot, but it was well on its way.

Between the two prisoners he'd been holding in Grand Junction, Frank Baylor, and finally, Ken Lawrence, former deputy, they had enough to break up the biggest drug ring in the history of Western Colorado.

Quinn still couldn't believe he'd actually done it.

He'd only had to ruin Danny's well ordered life and get himself shot at. Twice. Thank God Danny didn't know about the second time.

"Thanks, gentlemen. I need to make a report to the State police office, and I'll be back and forth a good bit in the next few months, taking statements and getting ready for the various trials. I hope I can depend on you folks to help."

Farris, Lawrence, the Hotchkiss high school principal, Ted Olen, two members of the Delta city police, a fire chief and several local business owners had been arrested, and five storage locations had been raided. There was a helluva lot of mopping up to do.

Andy nodded. "You bet, Quinn. Anything you need."

"Excellent." He tipped his hat, grinning wryly. "I have a lot of paperwork to catch up on in Denver. I'll see you folks next week."

He would go see Sam. Make his report.

And maybe he would get Danny to come along. And stay.

* * * *

Dan drove slowly down FM 1570, taking the route they'd taken that night. He didn't remember much of it at all. He remembered buying horse and blow and some maryjane that afternoon. Remembered partying hard, the lot of them dancing and screaming. He remembered it was getting cold, that they'd built a huge fire. The rest? All pieced together by the witnesses.

The truck had flipped four times, taking him with it for two and a half. It had saved him; everyone else had burned up. He knew because Pop had told him, shaking and staring at the green tiles on the hospital floor. Told him how people were saying that he shouldn't have been the one saved, that he was the one who led those kids astray and delivered them into hell.

Old Town New
by BA Tortuga

He'd promised Pop then that he'd toe the straight and narrow. He had, too—no booze, no drugs. One little fling in his second-to-last semester of college that had ended badly.

Dan pulled off the highway, hobbled out to the monument, and traced the names carved in the marble. Katherine Ann Edwards, Elizabeth Joy Farr, Enrique Jesus Garcia, Richard Peter McDougal, Robert Allan Sherridan, and Samuel Vaughn.

His name should, by all accounts, be on there, too.

He wasn't doing anything wrong with Quinn. He wasn't. He was loving and being loved and he'd paid his dues. For years. Hell, for longer than these kids had been alive almost. He wouldn't give it up, not for God or money.

"I'm sorry, but I've paid. I have."

He sat until he was almost frozen, hips screaming. Then he hobbled to the car and headed home.

Chapter Fifteen

What had to be the formal apology from the mayor was still sitting on Danny's coffee table. Quinn found Rags chewing on one corner of it when he got back from Denver late one night at the beginning of December. Sam had him running back and forth, and the snow was making what should be a five-hour trip into a grueling eight or nine.

He didn't see Danny as he let Rags out the back door, so he went looking, finding him in the little dining room office, asleep in his chair, a Denver guidebook open in his lap. That was gonna hurt when he woke up. Unless Quinn woke him now.

"Danny?" He gently touched one of Danny's legs, not wanting to startle him too much.

Danny's eyes popped open behind his glasses, green and bright. "Quinn! Hey!"

He got a grin, warm and welcome. "How was the drive?"

"Dismal. Eisenhower tunnel was ice on one end and slush on the other, and there was a tanker turned over in Glenwood canyon. Better now." He so was, just seeing Danny smile at him, being able to touch.

"Yeah." Dan sat up, wincing a little, hands coming to work his shoulders. "How's Sam?"

"He's good. Wants us to come to Christmas dinner." He reached out, tracing Danny's hips gently. "We should at least move to the couch. I need to let Rags in and I'm starved."

"There's a roast in the Crock-pot. Potatoes and carrots and everything." He stood and Danny let him help, let him hold him for a long minute. Let him have a long, slow kiss.

God, he needed that. So bad. "You didn't eat?" It would be just like Danny to wait dinner on him. "Do you need a pill?"

"I didn't, and I don't think I do." Danny grinned at him. "You keep me warm and loose when you're in bed with me."

"I try, babe." He tried really hard. Grinning, he kissed Danny again, tugging him gently into the kitchen. They'd eat, then he'd ask about whatever else. Like the mayor's letter. And the guidebook.

Dan got plates out while Rags mauled and ignored him in turns, then deserted him to beg at Danny's knee when the lid to the Crock-pot came off.

Who could blame him? "God, that smells good, babe." He was drooling as hard as Rags.

"I didn't know when you'd get here, and I knew it would keep." Dan grinned over, winked. "And it wasn't turkey."

He snorted. They'd had turkey salad and turkey casserole. Turkey tetrazzini and hot turkey sandwiches with gravy. Quinn was turkeyed out. Hell, even Rags whined when he smelled the stuff, ears down. "Like I said. Smells good." He ducked as Danny tried to pop him with a dishtowel and put the kettle on for hot tea.

Two heaped plates landed on the table, homey and natural and easy as pie. They worked well together. They lived well together.

Which was why he needed to convince Danny to leave with him, come hell or high water. "Sam says we should look for a house. Says it's a buyer's market right now."

"Yeah?" Dan looked over, tilted his head. "I've never lived anywhere but here. College and hospitals, but those don't really count."

"Well my apartment is way too small for the both of us." He was presuming a lot. Not that Danny might come with him; Danny had said that much himself. Kind of. Just that Danny would want to go in on a house with him.

"Yeah, this place is in good shape." Dan handed him the salt. "The real question is, do we want to sell for a down payment and a little cushion until I work out the work situation or rent it out since it's paid off."

He salted and peppered and thought on it. He didn't want to be the one to tell Danny to sell his Dad's house. Hell, he didn't even know if he wanted to anyway. What if Danny wanted to come back some day? Quinn would. For Danny. "Maybe we should rent it. Around here we're not as likely to get someone destructive."

"Yeah..." Danny picked a little. "I don't know. I ... I've been thinking about something and I could use a little money cushion."

"About what, babe?" He reached over, took Danny's hand, looking at him intently.

"I—I love my kids, Quinn, I do. But..." Danny shook his head. "I don't want to do this again. I can't. I'm thinking about going back to school, teaching grownups. Teaching somewhere I don't have to hide."

"Yeah?" His heart raced a bit. "You'd be good at it. And we don't need your money for the down payment. I've got a good bit saved."

"My grades were good. I'd have to take some classes to ramp up, but, yeah. Yeah, Quinn. I'm ... I'm tired of acting like loving you's a secret. I'm tired of hiding, and this town? It's always going to be about dying and hurting and hiding."

He nodded, thumb sliding over Danny's hand. "It is. I love you, babe, and I want to be able to do something about it. I don't want you hurting."

"You sure you and Rags want me full-time?" Danny's fingers twisted with his.

"I've never been so sure of anything in my life." It was true. Hell, he and Sam had planned for him to spend the night and come back tomorrow, but he'd been so itchy at having to call Dan and tell him he wouldn't be home that Sam had waved him out the door.

"Then I guess we need to figure out if my bed or yours is more comfortable."

That made him laugh, finally relaxing enough to eat. "Definitely mine. But otherwise, you're the furniture guy."

"Hell, yes. My couch? Fits us both." Rags snorted, stretched. "And Rags."

"And I don't have a couch. Just an old recliner that has seen better days." He was grinning like a fool. He knew it. But damn.

"Good thing I have dishes." Dan started eating, stocking feet sliding along his leg.

He jumped a little, grinning over his stew. "Yeah. And you cook. More than breakfast."

"Yeah. And I have a washing machine..."

"I have a big old freezer." The roast tasted even better for its lack of turkey and the sweetness of knowing Danny was willing to throw his lot in with Quinn. He ate it down and let Rags lick the bowl. "And a dishwasher."

"Ew. Dog germs." Danny was laughing, the lines around those eyes from happiness.

"But pre-washing. I'll do the dishes, babe." He wanted Danny to rest up. He? Still had a lot of energy.

"I cleaned my desk out today, gave my notice. I won't be going back."

He stopped mid-plate-pull. "Are you sure?"

"It's done. My 401K check will be in the mail next month."

"Then we can move you as soon as possible." They could get to Denver. Get on with their lives.

"Yeah. Yeah, Quinn. You can ... you can take me home."

He would do just that. Take Danny home with him, make a new place for them together, with a house and plates and Rags and lots and lots of sex in his big, old bed. He couldn't wait.***

The past few weeks had been insane.

Insane.

Packing and cleaning and sorting. They'd put the house on the market, knowing it wouldn't sell until spring, and goddamn if folks hadn't come through the day it went up and met the asking price.

He had until January thirtieth to get shit out and find a place and decide what to do and ... and ... and ... ?

And Quinn had showed up, determined to drag his ass to Denver for a few days and house hunt, and chill the fuck out.

"You're going to drive yourself into an early grave," Quinn pointed out reasonably. "We can put your stuff in storage, if we need to, until we find a place."

"I know. I've just never been in a position where this wasn't my house and my stuff wasn't supposed to be here." He shrugged, grinned. "It's just odd. Lots of change."

"Yeah." Quinn kissed him, tasting him nice and deep. "And I've never had a house."

He relaxed, scattered thoughts coalescing with Quinn's kiss. "Our house."

"Yeah. It's like a dream, babe." The last of the load of stuff they were taking to Quinn's apartment got loaded, and Quinn goosed him lightly. "You ready? Sam's itching to meet you."

"You sure he'll like me? It'll suck if your best friend doesn't..." He whistled for Rags, patting the back seat of Quinn's truck—which was way sexier than the one the sheriff's department let the man drive.

"He's going to love you, babe." They waited for Rags to pee all over before getting everything closed up and getting on their way. "I think he already does. Just from the way I talk. And he's making brisket in the oven. With beer."

"Oh ... Brisket..." He made loud, crude drooling noises, laughing with Quinn. When he saw the curtains at Old Lady Barnes' flick, he actually dared to wave.

Quinn hooted, making an even ruder noise. "That old bat. I almost feel like that should have been part of the full disclosure on you selling. 'Beware, nosy old biddy neighbor'."

"No shit. Of course, maybe the wife will like it, make sure hubby's not stepping out."

"This is true." They hit the highway and Quinn got them moving, the long drive ahead of them making his hips hurt just thinking about it. Quinn was great about it, getting him a special cushion for the truck and all, making frequent stops.

And he had to admit, they passed the time well, sharing snacks, Dan looking through the paper for houses, both of them admiring the Christmas lights on the houses they passed.

Even Rags behaved, not farting them out of the cab, and the weather cooperated. The roads from Glenwood to Vail pass were wet but clear, and they never had to stop and put chains on. Even the semis seemed to leave them alone, passing without rocking them. Hell, they had time to go to Quinn's apartment and unload before they went to see Sam.

He chuckled as they pulled up to the huge complex, one building indistinguishable from the other. "I finally get to see your apartment."

"I cleaned." Quinn sounded a little worried. Somehow he figured that must make it worse than the sterile rental house.

"Cool." He grabbed Rags' leash and his suitcase. Christ, this place was huge. "Show me."

"Yeah. Come on." There was a dizzying array of hallways and doors and Quinn led him into a white painted living room

with nothing on the walls and the rattiest recliner he'd ever seen. "Mostly I just sleep here."

"Yeah?" He looked around. "Doesn't look like you've had lots of reasons to come home. Least 'til now."

"I tended to come get Rags and go to Sam's." He got a huge grin. "But this you'll like. Come look."

He followed eagerly, fingers squeezing Quinn's ass as they moved.

That made Quinn chuckle, made him move even faster. They went into the dark bedroom, stale smelling from being closed up, and Quinn turned on the light. Oh. Man. That was the biggest fucking four poster he'd ever seen, done in a dark walnut finish. Very manly. Very Quinn. And when he tested the mattress? Just firm enough for his bad hips and back.

"Oh, wow ... I thought that was your bed at the old rental house?" It was perfect, even the dark sheets were soft and warm. "Do we have time to test it out?"

"I got this one because it was a little bigger, and it could take the special mattress for your back. We do have time. Get naked and we'll go to town." Hopping up on the bed, Quinn laid back, arms crossed. Staring at him.

He pinked, eyes dragging down Quinn's body, fingers working open his buttons. "Man. You look like you were made for that bed."

"It's custom done." Those gray eyes went dark as Dan took his shirt off, touching him like an actual physical caress. "Sort of like a present for us."

"Gifts like that will get you laid, Harlan Quinn." He shimmied his jeans off.

"Excellent." Quinn shifted a bit, reached down to unzip those faded jeans and push inside, letting him watch as Quinn stroked himself.

"Damn." He licked his lips, hand sliding over the dark wood. "Just. Damn."

"Yeah, babe. God, you look good. Gonna look even better in our bed. C'mere."

He crawled up onto the bed, sliding right up Quinn's legs, eyes fastened to Quinn's.

Hands sliding down to cup his ass, Quinn smiled at him, lips touching his gently. "Mmm. Babe."

"Yeah. Yeah, I want." His hand joined Quinn's on that hot prick, pumping slowly.

Quinn's hands were just as hot on his skin, sliding over him, testing all of his muscles, from his ass to his back to his arms and shoulders, before heading back down to touch his scars. "Yeah. You look good."

"God, you make them something sexy." He loved that, loved how Quinn made something so painful sensual and fine.

"They tell me all about you." Quinn twisted, turned, bore him down to the mattress, bending to kiss each visible mark.

"Quinn..." He stretched, moaning low, sliding on those soft sheets.

"Been dreaming of you in this bed, in our own house. Love you." That rough tongue made his skin tingle as it scraped over the raised scars. Every part of him got touched and kissed and nuzzled. There was nothing he could hide.

He twisted, hands finding skin, petting and rubbing, loving on Quinn.

Quinn turned just a bit, pulling his jeans down even more, mouth finding his cock. Quinn's hips were level with Dan's head, that thick prick inches from his face.

"Oh..." He groaned, stretching and reaching for that cock, tongue sliding along the tip.

"Babe." It was a deep, rough groan, and Quinn's lips slid all the way down his length, pulling him.

He took Quinn in deep, sucking hard, those balls soft on his face.

Hands spreading his thighs, Quinn licked and lapped, tasting the tip of his cock before pushing back down. Pulling back again, Quinn mouthed his balls, tongue pushing them back and forth. He reached up, slicking his fingers alongside Quinn's cock before sliding them around that tight hole.

A harsh shout landed on his skin, Quinn thrusting into his mouth, pulling back from him for a moment. Then that mouth was right back, licking and sucking at him, drawing him in. His fingers pushed deep, head bobbing, lips pulling at Quinn's cock.

The only warning he got was a sharp pop of Quinn's hips before Quinn filled his mouth with wet heat, shooting hard. Quinn's grip on his hips tightened, Quinn's moan echoed around his prick.

His entire body shuddered, hips rocking as he swallowed, toes curling. Sweet fuck.

Quinn urged him on, recovering nice and quick, fingers sliding against his ass, his balls, encouraging noises meeting each of Dan's thrusts.

Heat flushed through him, pushing out of his balls, from his prick. "Quinn!"

"Mmmm." Quinn took everything he had to give, petting, licking, just fucking humming.

"Oh, wow." Dan cuddled into the pillows, moaning.

"God, yeah." Slowly, with much moaning and groaning, Quinn unbent, crawling up to snuggle up to him. "We really don't have time for a nap, Danny."

"No?" He cuddled into Quinn's arms, humming low. "This is a great bed, Quinn."

"Glad you like it." He got a sloppy kiss before Quinn stretched out, reaching for the phone on the bedside table. He lay next to Quinn and listened to him call Sam to tell him to keep that brisket warm for them, they were going to be late.

Looked like they had time for a nap after all.***

They finally got up sometime around six-thirty or so, getting cleaned and dressed and clipping Rags to his leash, managing to get to Sam's old house in LoDo. Sam's youngest son, Bobby, met them at the door.

"Oh, hey, Quinn. Come on in. Dad's waiting for you out back."

"Thanks." Quinn grinned at the kid, introducing Danny. Bobby was a typical teen; he just grinned and said, "Hi," and headed back to his room. He led Danny through to the back yard, the loose floorboard in Sam's back hall squeaking, reminding him he'd promised to fix it. Sam was indeed waiting for them, stocky and square and looking like a minor

volcano as the smoke from the grill wafted up in front of his lounge chair.

"Hey, Sam."

Sam looked up, grinned hugely, heaving up out of his chair. "Quinn. 'Bout time you got here. You two must have had some good fun."

He blushed, feeling like a teenager called to the carpet for being caught necking. Damn, Sam would embarrass him. "I thought you were making brisket in the oven. It's too fucking cold to be out here grilling."

Sam hooted. "Never too cold, and I decided I wanted chicken, too. You must be Dan. Damned pleased to meet you." One beefy hand was held out for Danny to shake.

Danny smiled, shook Sam's hand. "I'm glad to finally get to. I've heard a lot about you."

"Don't believe it. Or at least not all of it." Sam got a plate and opened the grill, pulling sauce encrusted chicken off with a pair of tongs, leaving the grill open to cool. "Well, come on. Food's waiting."

Quinn just shook his head, grinned at Danny. "Come on, babe."

He got one of those smiles, pleased and surprised and warm. "I'm right behind you."

Yeah, like he had to hide from Sam. He grabbed Danny's hand, stepping in the back door just in time to overhear Sam's wife scold him for leaving the door open. Angie was a doll, and put up with a household full of men with a gentle equanimity. He pulled Danny in to meet her, too.

"You're Harlan's Dan, are you? Come in, come in. Do you want coffee? Tea?"

Danny chuckled. "Coffee, please. Thank you. And yes, I am."

"Well, now, Angela, he would hardly have brought someone else." Sam pulled at Angie's shirt sleeve as he went by and Quinn grinned and settled as they started a familiar argument.

About nothing.

Dan sat on the overstuffed sofa, gave him a grin. "Should I offer to help?"

"Nope. They'll argue, and he'll set the table, and she'll get the drinks and food, and we? Would get run down. You could kiss me." God, he felt good, introducing Dan to what was essentially his family.

"Yeah? You sure?" Dan leaned in, lips sliding over his forehead.

"Mmmhmm." Pulling Dan down, Quinn took a kiss, lips just brushing Danny's.

"Cool." Danny's eyes were so clear, so green, smiling at him. They shared a soft, sweet kiss, Dan never dropping his gaze.

"Okay, you two. Here's your coffee. Dinner is on." Sam was beaming at them like a proud papa, and Quinn had to laugh. Smug old bastard.

Danny took the coffee, chuckled. "Did Quinn tell you I'm looking to be here full-time by Christmas?"

"He did. Thank God, because he's a wounded bear when you aren't around. You want chicken or brisket or both?"

Lord. Quinn rolled his eyes.

"Both, please." Dan's hand was warm on Quinn's waist as he whispered, "A wounded bear?"

"I get a little snarly." Just a little. Yeah. Dinner smelled good, and there was enough for an army. Which was a good thing, as they'd worked up a heck of an appetite earlier.

Dan was relaxed, charming, and Quinn could see why he'd made a good teacher. His stories were entertaining, filled with jokes, and Dan paid attention to everyone else's stories, too.

It was a side of Danny that Quinn really hadn't seen, not with the whirlwind of tension they'd been through, and he found himself admiring it as much as Sam and Angie obviously did. Hell, even Bobby talked to the man.

Of course, the way those eyes kept swinging over to him, just looking, smiling? He was going to get used to that, too.

He stuffed himself silly, steering the talk deliberately away from police work when it went that way, making Angie smile at him, her eyes crinkling. He couldn't help it. He wanted to stay far away from that rotten fucking experience they'd had, sort of revel in the now.

"Oh, I'm not an apartment guy. I think we need a house-house, Angie. Rags needs a yard and who knows, maybe a little friend." Danny finished his coffee, winked over.

Oh. He grinned as Sam and Angie looked right at him, and Bobby made an ew face. Yeah. "I thought we'd start looking soon. I have that house account, you know, Sam? You think you could help us out?"

Sam puffed up and looked pleased as punch. He knew the city better than anyone, knew what neighborhoods to look in for them. They'd have a house in no time.

"You bet." Yep, there was Sam, right on cue.

"Cool. The house closes in January, so we'll have some help there, too."

"Excellent. Danny, would you mind helping Angie clean up? There's pie for later. I want to talk to Quinn." Oh, man. Here it went. Divide and conquer.

Dan nodded, fingers squeezing his for a second before following Angie with only the slightest hitch in his getalong.

"I like him." Sam said it immediately as Danny left the room and Bobby fled back upstairs. "I can see why you do. You got the wrap up over there in hand, yeah? You need to get him out."

"I do and I will. So glad you approve." The sarcasm was probably uncalled for, but he couldn't help it.

"Good." He got a hard clap to the back. "I've been waiting to see you settled a good while. You need to think about moving out of Vice."

"I know." He did know. He had someone else to think about now. "I'll look into it."

"You do that."

The rest of their talk was shop talk, and finally Angie and Danny came back with pie and more coffee. Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Caffeine would give him plenty of energy for later.

"So did you two hooligans finish your super-secret cop talk?" Angie settled next to Sam, cuddling in, all smiles. "I was telling Dan all your secrets, Quinn."

"Oh, no." He held out his hand for Danny, offering him a place right next to him. "I'm doomed."

Danny handed him a piece of apple pie, chuckling. "You were doomed months ago, Quinn."

"You think?" Oh, it was still warm. Angie made the best pie. "Doomed to be happy, babe."

Sam chuckled and Angie whistled. "Well, I'll be; Sam told me I'd see you happy one day. Didn't believe him."

"Sam knows me too damned well. I was just waiting." He bent to his pie, ears hot, but happy was a damned good word for it.

Danny's voice was soft, sure, pitched low. "Thank God for small favors."

"Yeah." He needed to get Danny home soon. Now that he knew Sam approved and Angie liked Dan, it was time to spend some time alone, where they didn't have to worry about anyone staring or interrupting but Rags.

Dan's knee rested against his, sure and warm, those eyes coming back to him again and again.

When he set his dessert plate aside, Quinn took Danny's hand, stroking over the palm. They chatted amiably, agreed to come play cards, and waited for Bobby to come back from walking Rags before Quinn stood. "It's getting late, folks. We need to head back."

He helped Dan up and it felt fine to have that lean body beside him, to head to the truck and the apartment knowing Danny was there.

Knowing they'd be together at night, that Danny would be sleeping right there. God, it was enough to make him fly. The apartment even seemed less sterile.

"I like them, Quinn. They're good people." As soon as they got Rags settled and their coats off, Danny started working his shirt open, relaxed and easy, and every time it got better, more natural, more real.

"Yeah. They pretty much saved my life, back in the when." His shirt, Danny's shoes, both of their jeans. It didn't take any time before they were naked and crawling into his big, old bed.

"I'm glad. I'd been hibernating a long time." Danny's tongue slid up his abs, those long hands on his thighs.

"Oh, fuck, Danny. Love the way you touch me." He did. It warmed him, inside and out. Made him hard.

"Been wanting all evening. You look so happy." Kisses trailed towards his nipple.

"Yeah. I couldn't wait to get you home." He touched Danny's cheeks, his lips. "Babe."

Danny smiled, the corners of those eyes crinkling as the tips of his fingers were sucked and nibbled.

He was happy. Happy to get Danny away from Hotchkiss, happy to be alone together. Just happy in his bones.

Leaning down, Quinn took a kiss, pushed his tongue against Danny's for a nice hard taste. Danny opened right up, moaning for him, so eager, wanting him. The kiss just

slammed right through them, making them both moan. Sweet. Danny still tasted like pie and ice cream. Quinn licked Danny's lips before pushing back in, wanting more.

And didn't Danny just meet him halfway, pushing them together, hands sliding over his skin.

"Babe. Yeah." They were on fire, so fast. Danny always got to him so fast. That skin just begged for touching, and Quinn slid down, hands on Danny's back, his ribs, fingers searching out the scars. He always did it, but Danny didn't seem to mind.

Dan sucked his tongue, hips and body moving into his hands. It was so hot, Dan in his bed, their bed. Oh. Yeah. Their bed.

Fuck. It was too hot to even think about for very long, so Quinn quit thinking. Instead he just touched and moved and kissed and loved on Danny. Loved on him hard and good.

They knew where to touch, when to push it and when to back off. The bed was creaking, both of them rocking together, hungry and desperate, driving each other.

There was no way he was even gonna get in Danny, or get Danny in him. They were too close, just like that. He reached down, grabbed their cocks and pulled them together. Oh, fuck, the slide of skin on skin was fucking amazing.

Dan's lips were on his throat, teeth teasing, suction almost too-gentle, just enough to drive him mad. "My Quinn."

"Yours. God, babe. Yours." He was. He so was. And Danny? Was his. He pulled harder, hips rolling.

Dan sucked harder, nipping, marking him. Sweet fuck.

His eyes rolled in his head. "Danny!" Fuck, he just shot all over his fist and Danny's belly and cock and ... fuck. He was damned well melted, still petting Danny weakly.

Of course, Dan was panting against him, heat spraying on his hand, the low cry near his ear just right.

"God, babe. Make me crazy." A good kind of crazy. But still.

"S my job. Duty one. Make Quinn crazy. Duty two. Make ice cream sandwiches. Duty three. Uh..." Danny nuzzled his jaw.

"Walk Rags. Rags likes you." He could think of about five hundred things he wanted Danny to do for life.

"Oh, that works." Dan chuckled, nodded. "Duty four. Ensure four daily orgasms."

"Hell, yes. I'll put that on my list, too." He grinned, snuggling up, trying to decide if he had another one in him or if he should let Rags in.

"Liked your friends, Quinn. We'll have to cook turkey for them."

"Oh. That's a good idea. They have four kids. Fewer leftovers." With a turkey the size of a small pony that was a good thing.

Dan's laugh was the greatest fucking thing he'd ever heard.

Chapter Sixteen

Danny tottered into the house, Rags and Buddy raising up a racket as soon as his key turned in the door. "Now, you two stop, or nobody gets biscuits."

He plopped his backpack on the little table and grabbed the mail, sniffing as the dogs came barreling in. Oh. Stew. Yum.

Both pups squealed to a halt before they hit him though, Quinn's voice stopping even the puppy in his tracks.

"Hey, you. Stew smells good."

"Yeah. It's got beer." Quinn came over to peer in his bags, leaning to scratch the pups' ears. "Get anything sweet?"

"Oreos. The brownie things looked stale." He handed over a half gallon of milk and the dog biscuits. "Are we taking a vacation this summer? If we are, I won't volunteer to take Dr. Martin's class for him."

"I'd like to, yeah. I've got two weeks I gotta use up by July first or lose them." They bumped hips as Quinn grabbed the box of saltines. One hand came out automatically to steady him. He hardly ever got off balance with Quinn around.

"Then I'll take the summer off to research." He leaned into Quinn's touch, the heat of it sinking right in.

Quinn grinned against his cheek, lips moving down to his, taking a light kiss. "I like that research option, babe."

"Yeah? You think that works?" He had laughed more in the last year and a half than he had his whole life.

"Uh-huh. And I like that you can research anywhere." They traveled a good bit in the summer, not just for vacation, but

for the seminars Quinn taught at. The man had gotten out of active undercover and did consulting for the State police now.

"Yeah." He wasn't sure exactly what he was agreeing to, with Quinn nuzzling and nibbling that way, but whatever it was, was good.

A soft chuckle ghosted over his ear. "Anything that needs to go in the freezer, Danny?"

"Uh-uh." If there was, he'd go buy more.

"Oh, good." Turning, Quinn backed up against the counter, pulling him close, letting him lean against that long body while they kissed.

Quinn felt so good, wider now, stronger, hours spent working before now spent in the garage, either lifting weights or rebuilding that Thunderbird.

They'd really worked on spending time together, both of them giving up a little to get a lot, and it was okay. It was good. Quinn kissed him breathless, tongue pushing in.

He wrapped his arms around Quinn's shoulders, holding on, both of them settling into the spot they both liked best. Oh. Oh, just. Right there.

"Mmmhmm." Quinn said it like he knew, kissing down Danny's throat, lips and tongue working him good.

He started working on tugging that old T-shirt up and off, wanting to get those muscles under his hands.

Quinn helped, raising his arms, humming as Danny touched him. Muscles rippled for him, that six-pack he'd learned to love shifting.

Oh, that was better. His fingers found each little hot spot, each spot that tickled when touched too softly, made Quinn moan when he pushed.

"Babe. There. A little lower. Yeah." Wiggling, Quinn pulled at Danny's clothes, getting in the way of the touching going on.

He started working on belts and buckles and zippers and buttons, making sure to touch all the while.

He got touched back, Quinn tracing every bit of skin, one hand dropping to touch his scars as he wiggled out of his jeans.

He bent forward, Quinn helping him balance so that he could taste that flat belly, trace the muscles with his tongue, his lips. Salt and Quinn and uhn. Yeah.

"Danny! Shit, babe. Good." Those hands petted his back, his neck, ruffling his hair. "Feels good."

"Mmmhmm." Good worked, but feeling great was better. He nibbled some, hands working Quinn's cock out and starting to stroke.

"Uhn." That probably approached great, the way Quinn arched into his grip. He got more touching as a reward, Quinn's hands slipping down, fingers finding his nipples.

"Quinn..." His teeth scraped across Quinn's belly, dragging on the skin.

"Want you." That was the one thing he never had to doubt. Quinn always wanted him. That hard prick just helped prove it.

"Uh-huh." He couldn't suck Quinn from here, though. The floor was too far. "You want to find a couch? A bed? A soft chair?"

"Someplace, yeah." Quinn pulled him up, laughing as his back popped. "Definitely someplace soft."

He got the milk shoved in the fridge, and the dogs their treats, with a speed reserved for emergencies and offers of good sex. "I'm all yours."

"Good deal." Grinning, Quinn dragged him to the front room, flopping down on the couch, big body all stretched out for him to touch and lick and love.

Oh, miles and miles of skin, and it was all his. He settled right in, comfortable and easy in his skin, tongue sliding on Quinn's shaft.

Groaning, Quinn stretched under him, legs spreading wide, hands sliding on him. Quinn always gave as good as he got. Always.

He got his lips wrapped around the tip of Quinn's prick, sucking slow and easy, fingers sliding over those heavy balls.

"Danny ... I. Oh." He loved it when he had Quinn speechless, when his big, strong cop just lost all thought and coherence. It was the hottest thing.

"Mmmhmm." He got a groan and a shudder as he hummed, Quinn's hips rolling to push that pretty cock deeper.

They moved together so well. They always had, even after being apart for years. But now that they'd had time to get it back, to get to know what did it for them. Oh, yeah. Quinn just went nuts for him, balls pulling up, cock hot with Quinn's heartbeat.

He slid one hand down, wrapped it around his own cock and started tugging in time.

Quinn thrashed, moans continuous now. "Fuck. Danny. Sexy. So fucking sexy. I need ... gonna."

He nodded, head bobbing. Yeah. Yeah, he was gonna. Yeah. Too.

"Oh. Oh, fuck!" Quinn shouted and gave it up, filling his mouth and throat, hips just pumping up and up. Giving him every last bit.

Danny moaned, swallowing hard, fingers working his cock furiously, just tugging and trying to push himself over the edge.

Bless him, Quinn helped, grabbing him gently and moving him, hands reaching down his body to pull and rub, easing the ache and yet driving it higher and higher.

That was just what he needed and he leaned into the touch, shaking as his balls tightened, heart pounding.

One thick thumb brushed the vein on the underside of his cock, the other pressed against the slit as Quinn urged him on, urged him higher and higher. Demanding. "Come on, babe. Come on."

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Quinn." His head snapped back, cock pulsing in Quinn's hand.

"Oh, babe. Look at you." And Quinn was. Looking at him when he came down off the high of the orgasm. Staring, really, eyes hot and intent. "Love."

"Yeah." Yeah. It was. Had been for a long time. Danny grinned, slumped down on Quinn with a happy sigh.

Those arms folded around him, Quinn hauling him up so he could rest easy with nothing giving him a twinge. One leg wrapped around both of his, and Quinn groaned a little, the sound happy as a pig in shit. "Uh-huh."

His cheek rested on Quinn's chest, that heart just beating away. Buddy came up, touched his hand with a cold nose before going to pounce Rags again.

Trust Quinn to make him get a dog. They'd gone to the pound. They'd even had to schedule a play date with Rags before they were allowed to take Buddy home. Just to be sure. He loved that stupid mutt.

Quinn petted his hair. "Oh, what are you doing after class on Thursday?" Quinn asked.

"Hmm? I don't know? What am I doing Thursday?"

"I have to go to the middle school and give one of those drug and alcohol things." The man never talked on it much, but he'd taken to helping out kids who might end up on the same road they had. Said everyone needed a mentor like Sam had been to him.

He nodded, smiled a little wryly. "Gonna let me be your example?"

"Nah. It's just this is more or less your age group. Thought you could hold my hand." Teenagers kinda baffled Quinn.

"I'm good at that, and I'd love to. I haven't had my dose of evil-smelling teenagers in months."

"I figured. Just sweaty me after a workout and the amazing scent those mutts emit sometimes."

Old Town New
by BA Tortuga

Quinn smelled best after a workout. Or sex. Or when they went camping with the woodsmoke and all. The dogs, not so much.

They started laughing, soft at first and then harder and louder, Quinn holding them both on the couch.

Every time he thought life didn't get any better, he found out he was wrong. Everything old was new again with him and Quinn. Everything was just the way he wanted it. He'd hold onto that as hard as he could for the rest of his life.

end

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