



Forbidden Publications

Carol McKenzie



Day of  
Reckoning

DAY OF RECKONING

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Day of Reckoning

By

Carol McKenzie

## Chapter One

Blue's Jeep stopped and within seconds he ascended the stairs outside. The door opened and Ramblin' Jack Freeman turned away from his refrigerator and stared at his approaching on-again off again lover. He'd come inside without bothering to knock. Blue McClellan entered the kitchenette of Jack's travel trailer.

A tall man, Blue took the dark Stetson off his head and placed it on the back of a chair. He wore his usual expensive tight jeans that flaunted his perfect hard ass. Ruggedly handsome, he wore a silver belt buckle and a neatly tucked-in, stylish western shirt.

Jack had bad news for Blue, but he couldn't just up and blurt it out like an unfeeling clod. He realized his demeanor was edgy and harsh at first; his mouth tightened, so he decided to tone it down and break the news in as easily as possible. He had to grow a spine and tell Blue like it was--he was leaving to go on the rodeo circuit; he was broke and he had no other alternative. And maybe there was one other reason; he didn't want to discuss the problem Blue was having making his parents believe he was gay.

He owed Blue some honesty.

Blue raised his strong arms; he grasped Jack's shoulders. "Why'd you call me over at noon? Is everything okay?" His concern seemed more intimate than a kiss.

Shaken, Jack felt stupid and deceiving as he floundered for an answer. It was a more difficult task than he had anticipated. He looked at his buddy, the guy he could share his innermost, intimate thoughts with.

"Blue...yes, everything's okay, I guess. It's just that...." Jack's voice softened

considerably as he stammered, "I--we need to talk," said Jack backing himself into the sink, thinking about crossing his arms on his chest to build a wall between Blue and himself that moment, though his body ached for his touch.

The only thing Blue said was "Shhhh," as he began to take possession.

Jack knew when Blue brought his palm to his lips and pressed a kiss there that telling him would be difficult, if not impossible. A definite turn on. Shouldn't he fight off the feelings of desire? He needed to stop Blue's advances and they needed to talk. Instead of letting Blue have him and keeping him in the dark, Jack should help him face facts about his departure.

Blue looked and smelled yummy. His stringy but clean-smelling raven hair came to just below his ear. His attitude had always been unpretentious even though he had been born into one of the richest cattle baron's families of Wyoming. In short, he ranked high on Jack's stud meter. Dammit, he hated saying goodbye; it tore him up. Why was he so weak in these matters? He realized that after he left Sheridan, he'd daydream of Blue all the livelong day.

But Blue wasn't listening anyway; Jack saw pure lust hazing over in his gorgeous ice-flecked blue-grey pools. He placed his hands on the counter on each side of Jack's hips, hemming him in for kisses.

"Now's not the time to talk," said Blue as he backed Jack into the kitchen of his small travel trailer. "I'm wantin' somethin' else, b'side's."

Jack felt like such a sneaky polecat. Blue had him half-boned already. "Come here." For a kiss he didn't have to ask twice; Blue was ready for it. Blue's hot breath braised his cheek.

Unable to help himself, Jack ran his hand up Blue's shirted chest, up and around his neck. Being with Blue was as addicting as taking powerful drugs. Hating himself for not bringing up the news of his departure, Jack's lips found Blue's mouth ready, needy and open. Pushing all thought of the negative announcement to the back of his mind, Jack ran his fingers through Blue's raven thick hair back as he deeply thrust his tongue into his hungry mouth and explored the recesses.

God, he hated leaving Blue, but he had to. He didn't want settle down. There were hundreds of reasons why Jack should leave Blue and Sheridan, Wyoming.. God, why did Blue tear him up this way? Staying in one place made him antsy; he likened himself to a rolling stone that gathered no moss.

Nevertheless, Jack kissed Blue's bearded chin, neck and throat, while unbuttoning his shirt saying, "Now see what you've done? You've got me as hot and bothered as Hades."

"Same here, babe." Blue re-claimed his mouth, more passionately this time. The rough bulge at the apex of his Levi's rubbed his cock under his sweat pants.

Jack recalled the feel of Blue's beard on his balls and his teeth dragging down his hard cock. He needed that and more. If he wanted that now he couldn't tell him the news.

Blue slipped his hands around Jack. Through the material of Jack's sweats, Blue cupped his round, firm moons and held him to his clothed cock.

Jack's own shaft began to throb with anticipation; an involuntary moan left his lips as Blue's hand went under the waist band of his sweat pants, grasped his cock and balls and gently squeezed, pushing him beyond the point of no return. Jack thrust his hips forward, urging Blue on.

"This way, babe," said Blue like he had said many times before.

In their decision to take it down the hall to the bedroom, they haphazardly got out of their clothes along the way littering the hallway and the bedroom floor. They continued undressing until they stood beside the bed, face to face, naked, in broad daylight.

Blue's cock dribbled pre-cum while Jack licked and nipped his nipples. For a while, Jack purposefully avoided touching Blue's hard-veined dick.

So Jack knelt below and licked the head of his buddy's cock, twirling his tongue around its rim, driving Blue crazy with pleasure.

They moved to the bed. Once there, Jack licked and toyed until Blue shot his hot seed and he swallowed it greedily down, milking him dry.

A half hour later, Blue retrieved the tube of lubrication gel from the bathroom medicine chest and a condom then went back in the bedroom. In a low lusty voice, he said, "Give me some of that hot cock of yours." Then he rolled Jack's balls with his right hand and jacked for a moment or two with his left, causing him intense, pure pleasure.

After applying generous squirts of the slippery lotion to his sheathed cock, Jack finger fucked him to relax his muscles. Then gently he pushed his shaft into Blue's soft, hot, velvety hole while gently parting his ass cheeks. And soon, the in-out pace picked up. Jack felt his balls tighten and he let out a moan. "I'm coming, Blue. Oh god...." It truly was a wondrous act of man love. The climax was beginning to reach its crescendo.

"Oh yes, I'm almost there," he said, as he shot his load, ending the session of hot lustful sex. "Yessssss!"

Their spent bodies relaxed; their dicks slumbered. They each in turn went to the bathroom and showered all the evidence of their get together down the drain. Jack went into the kitchen, grabbed a couple of Coronas out of the fridge and popped the lids. He handed Blue one. They clinked them, and soon crawled back onto the bed. It seemed to Jack that Blue knew his plans.

Blue held him a little more closely a little longer that night as they lay on top of the sheets. In a matter of moments, Jack heard Blue's heavy breathing.

It was night before Jack left Sheridan for the rodeo circuit; he just knew that he was leaving Blue feeling like a failure in love. Also, knowing Blue, he'd soon feel like a failure to his dad. Earlier that day Jack had heard at a cafe that his dad knew of Blue's orientation. For leaving, Jack felt lowly and wrong. How could he do it to his buddy? Then again, why couldn't Blue make his parents believe he was gay? Was he ashamed of it?

## Chapter Two

A little over a year later, holding the reigns, Blue walked his horse across a stream fifteen feet ahead of his dad. The scenery behind them was awe-inspiring, with the pastel blue mountains, the rolling blue-green grass and the straight and tall lodge pole pines. The air was fresh; a hawk banked and soared. He loved the property and would hate to leave it; it was home.

Blue felt anything but inspired. Why did his dad take him all the way out to the canyon, making sure they were alone? True, they aimed to cull a few cattle along the way. He hoped it wouldn't be the start of a new father-son talk. They always ended in disaster because he and his father were as different as night and day. They crossed the stream and ambled toward a few head of cattle. When they stopped, his father asked, "Your mom's havin' a nice dinner tomorrow night. Why don't you clean up and come on down?"

After unleashing a gusty sigh of weariness because of the subject, Blue said, "Dad...I'm not interested in Jenny Carver. Yeah, she's nice but--" He stopped, knowing he'd pissed his dad off righteously this time, especially since his mom worked with him to match him up with a pretty woman from Sheridan.

His dad's jaw tightened in obvious fury. "I don't want to hear any more of that 'gay' crap. You ain't gay."

Blue knew better, so he went ahead and said, "I'm not listening to this-- I can't help it no more than I can stop the damned sun from rising," he countered icily.

His dad's face reddened and Blue thought he might be having a heart attack. Blue felt of all his five brothers, he was the one who let him down the most by being



gay.

Mack dropped the reins and his boots crunched through the rocks and dirt as he neared Blue. He drew back, swung hard. His fist connected with Blue's chin. More hits followed. The blows cracked like boards hitting concrete and hurt like hell, but never once did Blue raise his fists. A man took it from his dad. He didn't cry or act fearful. A damned McClellan took it. Being slugged by his dad had happened before, when he was eighteen. The reason it had occurred was strikingly similar to why it had happened that day.

"Why don't you talk right and be a man...not act like no goddamn fruit likin' a man's cock," he said as though he breathed fire. "Real men like pussy."

An hour later, after he parted company with his dad, Blue returned to the ranch. Sporting a black eye, he ignored the weird glances from the ranch hands and Texas vaqueros. Blue McClellan dismounted the gray paint and handed the reins to, Juan who stood near the house. "Put 'er in the barn."

"Si, Senor."

In enraged silence, wearing chaps and all, Blue located the keys in his front pocket, climbed into his Jeep and drove down the road that led away from the Rocking M ranch, not bothering to clean up before he went into town. The dust billowed behind him. Pissed off like all get out. Like a traffic disaster waiting to happen, unthinking and emotional, Blue didn't let up on the gas until he neared Sheridan City limits. He didn't know where he was going, but it was fast and far away from the ranch.

"Shit!" he said as he pounded the steering wheel. By the way the old man had acted, he'd stay away for a year...or a decade. What a loser! Blue said he'd leave the ranch, but he knew he'd go back that night; his past history proved that was what he'd do.

It was nothing a few beers and a night of sleep wouldn't fix.

With \$150 in his pocket, western wear on his back, Levi's and chaps on his legs and tight ass, and boots on his size twelve feet, he decided he needed a beer.

The connection of his fist to Blue's right eye had been quick and unexpected;

probably wouldn't go away for a week or more. *Fuck the old man and fuck my brothers too*, he thought as he steered his Jeep onto the highway and headed toward town. He passed the Watering Hole, pulled off the highway and stopped. Maybe he'd have a cold one. He raised his Stetson and rubbed his forehead with his shirtsleeve.. "Fuck it," he mumbled to himself as he parked outside the Waterin' Hole Saloon.

It was a brown board sided building that was once a tourist trap, but a resident from Cheyenne bought it and it now catered to the natives who probably didn't spend as much money.

He'd had enough of his dad's straight, old-fashioned ideas; they weren't for him. His dad could kiss his ass for all he cared now. Blue didn't give a crap how Mack felt now after he'd slugged him. His mom aggravated him too. She was just plain meddlesome. Out of sheer desperation, she had invited Jenny Carver to dinner the next night in hopes that they would hook up. Jenny Carver!

They thought he could wake up and his old personality and preference would vanish. Right. What was important was how he felt; being straight was not his bag and holding up appearances for his dad's sake ended. He was coming out for the whole world to see.

He ordered a beer and a shot and parked a boot on the foot bar. Maybe one day soon, he'd sign up on the rodeo circuit and kiss the Rocking M goodbye. He could ride a bull as good as the next bull rider or rope a steer.

He had to do something different. Christ, his parents acted like he had nightly affairs with men. And he didn't. He'd been with one guy. It was a lurid, one winter fling, barely worth mentioning, that took place in the guy's travel trailer. The guy took his virginity. Hell, Blue barely remembered his name was Jack. Some called him Ramblin' Jack. Blue still remembered the touch of his taut lips on the head of his cock and got a hard on from it. Warmer weather came and the dude had hit the trail to God only knew where. He'd never brought Jack to the house or asked him to stick around town.

Shit, no one understood; at least no one he knew did. They loved Blue like

parents are supposed to love their twenty-two year old son, but they sure as hell didn't try to understand him. "Set me up with a shot and a beer," he told the bar keep.

\* \* \* \*

A jukebox silenced after a couple left Blue alone and standing at the bar. The bar owner finished talking on the phone and began stocking canned beer in a beer cooler. A silky voice cut in to the silence. Blue didn't know where it came from. Maybe, someone came out of the restroom or the side door that led to the parking lot. He sounded familiar when he said, "I'll buy."

Having been in there just a couple of minutes, Blue's eyes hadn't quite adjusted to the dark of the bar room after being outside in the bright sun all day, but he recognized the voice.

He turned and looked, wondering if he was right. "I thank you, mister."

"Mind if I join ya?"

His eyes focused and his mind fully registered. "Jack?"

He had a grin on his lips big as the Rocky Mountains and then some. He looked a sight for sore eyes. He wore a blue plaid western shirt, new blue jeans, a black Stetson and hand tooled black boots. He smelled of aftershave lotion and looked hard as a butte.

"Miss me," Jack whispered into his hear, his voice low and smooth.

"I thought you were gone for good."

"I came back lookin' for work. I thought maybe I'd look you up again."

"I thought you'd be out rodeoin'. You sure took off out of here like you're clothes were on fire." At least you could've talked to me first. Not leave a cold-assed note."

"I'm sorry." He shrugged. "I got gored in Canada and have ta quit for awhile. Oh, I can do chores for ranchers and shit like that, but as far as bullridin', hell no. Those days are over."

Blue nodded at his snazzy appeal. "How old are ya?"

Twenty-five, remember?" Jack grinned, looked down and reached for a belt loop in Blue's jeans. "Why?"

"I didn't know." He lifted his arms into a shrug. "Just wonderin'."

"What the fuck happened to your eye?"

"Nothin'." Blue frowned broadly.

After the bartender delivered them each a beer and shot, they downed it simultaneously and reached for their beer.

"I want to see ya again. Think it's possible?" asked Jack.

He took a deep breath. He didn't think getting back with Jack was smart. "Hey buddy. I'm not lookin' to get..." He shrugged and continued. "...well, never mind." He had a short flashback of the hot sex they once shared and clucked his tongue.

A long, tense silence followed. A couple entered and took a table. The man ordered two drinks then left the table. He crossed to the jukebox and played a twangy country song while the woman crossed to the other side of the bar room and located the restroom down the hallway.

After a lingering silence, Blue thought Jack had forgotten what they had been talking about.

"I wasn't lookin' to hurt no one. It's just that..."

"Stop talkin' shit to me Jack," Blue snapped. "You couldn't wait to get out of Sheridan. All it meant to you was sex and nothin' else. Right?"

Aggravated, Blue turned his back to the bar, uncomfortable with what he had to say. "Well, dude, it hurt like hell," he said, as he absently watched the bartender carrying drinks to the couple at the table.

"Listen...you knew what I was all about, didn't you?" Jack asked. "But I did care about you. I still do. Blue, you're not dealing with being gay."

"I've told them."

Jack's jaw clenched. "Maybe you're not making them believe it."

"I guess. Hell, whatever," he said, grasped his hat and tapped it onto his head with a tell-someone-who-cares attitude.

The bartender approached, causing their silence. He wiped the bar in front of them and asked, "You want another, Blue? How about you?" he asked Jack.

He didn't pull his glare off of Jack's face for five or maybe ten seconds. "Not me," said Blue. "I'm leavin'. Thanks anyway. Here. Give Jack one. It's on me." He put a dollar on the bar and grabbed his Stetson.. He turned on his heel and walked away. He thought about that moment being the second time he'd left someone who'd soured his good day.

Jack rose from his bar stool "Blue, wait."

"I don't want to hear it," he said as he grasped the metal bar and pushed the heavy glass door.

"If you don't reconsider, I will have to leave town. I don't have a job."

"That's what you do best... leave me. Go, then," he said, bristling with indignation while holding the door open. "Adios. Goodbye. Fuck it. Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out."

After letting the door close, Blue fumbled for his keys and hopped into his dark green Jeep. His eyes stung with tears. He'd had enough of Jack's crap for one lifetime. It had been painful to see Jack again, and he didn't want to stand around brooding about the past with him, wishing he'd stay in town.

## Chapter Three

A little before six, the cocktail hour started slowly as it always did at family functions. Fourteen places were set with his mother's best china, rose cloth napkins and matching tablecloth. Stemmed glassware was filled with folded fanned napkins. It would be merely a time his parents could get their six son's and their girlfriends and wives together and dressed up. His brothers arrived in varying degrees of lateness and stood around the bar room right off the living room of the McClellan mansion. Four of his brothers had arrived with their dates and were sipping cocktails or soda, discussing politics or their latest venture on the stock market. It was always polite and everyone smiled. Blue groaned audibly as he sat at the bar, still feeling the sting of Jack's words and his sore eye. Had Jack left, Blue wondered.

Blue's mother, Lucy McClellan, had no special occasion in mind when she had planned the family get together. She darted from the kitchen to the cook, to the dining room and the bar room then back to the kitchen. She was breaking in a new cook, it seemed.

Her motive was innocent enough, but for Blue, such occasions were awkward, phony affairs where everyone hid their true feelings and selves and pasted on a smile and spoke and acted in a gracious, civilized manner and in reality they were ready to throttle a few of the people in attendance.

He came down wearing a dark western summer suit, white shirt and tie, and boots just like his parents wanted him to do. Being a McClellan, it was expected of him. Two shots of tequila and two beers didn't numb him enough for the dinner. He noticed Jenny standing alone across the room. Twice, his father and once his mother told him to

go make her feel welcome. He crossed the room to her and spoke to her as one civilized human being would to another. But, if his parents were matchmaking again, they could forget it. Throughout the meal, his mother and dad smiled and chatted with his brothers' girlfriends and wives. They made several attempts to strike up a conversation with Blue, but his mood had soured long ago. As usual, the dinner affair stifled him.

When they left the bar room which overlooked the Olympic-sized pool, for the candlelit dining room, with audacity she addressed Blue, "And here's Jenny, Blue. We didn't want you to feel left out. You need to talk to her...you know, to get acquainted."

Blue's jaw tightened and he had no choice but to say, "Mom, listen. Jenny and I know each other from town. We're friends, but..."

His mother looked at him in horror. "Blue, please. Don't give me that dreary gay shit. You've experimented and it's over. So, let's forget it."

"I've told you several times, that's what I really am!"

Several heads turned and gazed intently. Everyone knew he liked men. "Why can't you accept it?" muttered Blue as he downed the rest of his drink.

In his defense, two of his older brothers murmured, "I accept it."

Their coming to his side made him feel good.

"So do I," said another of his brothers.

One of their wives said, "No problem at all with it here, Blue."

"Shut up with that gay crap!" His dad said as he approached and chimed in with his two cents, "You'll come around. It just takes time. There's no such thing as gay. It's a fad."

His parents infuriated him; Jack was right. He'd never made them actually believe it. "Do ya think I can turn this off and on like a water faucet?"

"Let's not ruin this evening, Blue. Your mom's been working on the details for a week, with the new cook and all.

"Let's go in the dining room and sit down," his mother said, angry now.

During the meal, his father chewed but stopped long enough to give Blue a threatening look, daring him to say anything out of line. His brother's eyes arched from

Blue to his parents as though they expected a family blow out. They knew how their dad was regarding Blue's sexual preference. Jenny rushed out of the room, Blue guessed, in route toward the front door.

"Damn you, Blue!" his dad shouted as he rose abruptly and went after Jenny Carver, who had made it out to the garage by then.

With the remaining sets of eyes on Blue, he threw up his hands in an angry fashion.

"It's the fuckin' day of reckoning, Dad! And I see where that puts me...out of this house!"

He stomped out of the house and into the garage where he started his Jeep. The garage door rose behind him. His parents were crazy; it was time for him to move out. What planet did they come from? And, what century?

After Jenny sped away in her little red sports car screaming indignantly, "I didn't come over here to try to save Blue and make him straight! This is nuts!"

Blue said, "She's right. I don't blame her," he told his dad, from the driver's seat of his Jeep, "I have a boyfriend too. Or I did, and he's gay."

"What the hell's his name?" he asked, his lips thinning with anger.

"Jack. Jack Freeman."

His dad's lips curved into a cynical grin. "Great. What the hell does he do?"

"He rides bulls in rodeos. Right now he's out of work because he got gored and he's lookin' for regular work."

"Wonderful, just wonderful. Don't bring 'em here. People's gonna say McClellan's are runnin' a goddamned freak show. Do I make myself clear?"

He threw up his hands. "Hell with you dad! Take this ranch and stick it!"

The tires squalled as he backed out of the garage; he avoided his dad's eyes as he yelled, "I need to get to him before he leaves. I've been so stupid. Leave me out of the will, I don't give a crap."

His dad went to the Jeep, opened the door pulled Blue out of it. He raised a fist to slug him; Blue blocked the punch and shoved him back.



He fought the tears. "I'm movin' out."

"Don't ever step foot on this property again. You hear me, boy?"

His dad had talked to him that way many times before. This time, it didn't matter. Blue knew what and whom he wanted and would pursue him. Some things in life were more important than others. To him, Jack was more important than being who his dad believed him to be.

He made a note to go to Jenny's house the next day and apologize profusely for his parent's shortsightedness as he sped to the trailer park at the edge of town. His emotions under control, he had the overwhelming need to be close to Jack, hoping to God that Jack hadn't left town.

As he pulled down the gravel road that led to the trailer, it seemed Jack was preparing to leave town so Blue honked his horn and shouted, "Wait! Don't go! I want to talk to you! I understand now why you couldn't stay here!"

\* \* \* \*

Elated, Blue caught Jack before he left Sheridan. When they went into the trailer, he took off his suit and tie, stripping for Jack...slowly, tantalizingly...and for himself.

"Mm cowboy, come here." Blue loved his physique and his furry chest.

He bent and rubbed his hand up Jack's jean clad thigh until it covered his clothed cock, causing him to tense up. Sensuously, he ran his hand up Jack's bare arm, knowing full well what he was doing to Jack--sucking him in slowly.

He unbuttoned his shirt, Jack taking in his gentle, understanding eyes. Jack didn't say a word; he merely enjoyed it as all the clothes came off his body.

In the dim light of the living room, Blue dropped before him to worship his delectable cock, welcoming him to stay. "Don't go. I'll help you find a job. Let me make you feel better."

Jack's eyes hazed with pleasure. "Mm."

Blue took the end of his buddy's rod into his mouth and teased it until pre-cum

oozed from the slit. Sucking the pearly liquid, Blue savored the salty tasting seepage.

"It's so sweet of you to take it so damned deep," said Jack as he let his head drop back and grasped a handful of Blue's hair. Slowly, Jack undulated his hips, moving his shaft in and out of Blue's mouth and on occasion moaning with pleasure. During the few moments of Jack's withdrawal, when Blue took his mouth completely off the end, he sucked in a deep breath and let Jack refill his mouth and throat with his thick shaft. Jack pressed it back in, between Blue's taut lips. Back he'd push it, farther and farther letting it slide over Blue's wet tongue. This continued until cum shot from the slit and Blue had sucked every last drop up.

And, when they lay legs entwined in the bed in Jack's trailer, Jack whispered, "I ain't goin' no where."

\* \* \*

Two weeks later when Jack and Blue sat outside on lawn furniture, wearing their hats, no shirts, jeans and boots. They sipped Coronas, sprayed mosquito and tick repellant on each other and idly chatted, drinking in the comfort of each other's nearness.

The appearance of the black McClellan Cadillac did not surprise Jack. Blue didn't seem too happy to see the car pull slowly up the gravel lane and park nearby. He bristled as his dad and mom climbed out of the car and walked toward them.

"Well, here comes trouble." Blue shot them a cold look and said out the side of his mouth and said critically, "They must be slummin'."

It seemed to Jack that they didn't look too mad. When Blue started to talk, his dad raised a hand and said, "Wait. Hear me out first before you kick me off this property, son."

Blue sighed and rolled his eyes skyward. "I don't want to hear that crap with a capital C that I'm going to outgrow this, 'cause, I'm not. If that's what you're going to say, you can get in your car and go down the road."

"I'm not sayin' that." He paused and extended his hand to Blue's mother as they neared Blue and Jack. When they stopped five feet away, Blue's dad extended his hand and said, "I'm glad to meet you. I'm Mack McClellan. I didn't get your last name, Jack."

"Jack Freeman."

Blue sighed with what Jack thought to be exasperation.

"This is Lucy, Blue's mother, my wife."

Blue's brows shot up in surprise as he watched his smiling mother also step forward and warmly accept Jack into the family. "Oh, God." He took a long sip of Corona, while he looked to be cautiously considering his parent's change of heart.

"It's my pleasure," said Jack.

Jack grinned at the 'are-they-not well' look on Blue's face. Blue's eyes arced from his mother's face to Jack's as they began inviting him over to the ranch and offering him work there if he needed it. Blue's dad even stepped forward and hugged him warmly, then took Blue and hugged him, apologizing for not understanding and ignoring the truth.

Mack's low voice made his tone sound awkward. "Forgive me, Blue. I--we love you. Come back," he said.

"I don't know if I can. But...I love you." Jack noticed that Blue started to tear up. "This is my friend, Jack. He has been for a long time."

After a thoughtful hesitation Mack replied, "We're sorry, Jack."

His eyes turned to Blue. "Give us another chance, son," he said to Blue in a soft contrite tone. "We'll get it right this time, I promise." His eyes turned back to Jack.

"You're welcome at the Rocking M."

Blue's eyes moved to Jack. "It's up to Jack."

Jack smiled and received Blue's parents warmly. "Sure, why not? I need work and I sure as hell am not going anywhere. Not this time around."

## **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

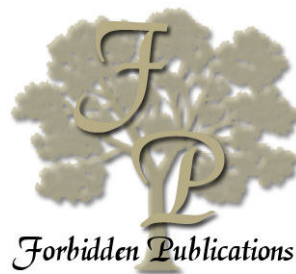
Carol McKenzie

<http://carol-mckenzie.com>

When Carol McKenzie is not writing she is caring for her dog, quilting or rendering artwork. She graduated from a major university as an adult student and enjoys watching American Idol.

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