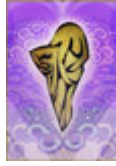


Rawley's Redemption

Carol Lynne

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Good-time Boys: Rawley's Redemption

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Warning:

Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *total-e-burning*.

Good-time Boys:

RAWLEY'S REDEMPTION

Carol Lynne

Dedication

Dedicated to my cowboy loving friend, Drew Hunt.
Thanks again for all your hard work.

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The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Wrangler: Wrangler Apparel Company

Chapter One

Standing at the bottom of the steps, Rawley looked up at the only person he'd ever been in love with. "I've been relieved of my duties as Summerville Sheriff. I no longer have a need to hide the way I feel about you. Care for a roommate?"

Jeb didn't say a word, but Rawley saw first the shocked look and then the brief smile. He simply held out his hand and waited for Rawley to join him. Turning around, Rawley waved good-bye to Meg, and picked up his bags. With a deep breath and a prayer on his lips, he walked up the steps to his future.

Taking his hand, Jeb led him into the living room and through to the master bedroom. "I'll clear some closet space out for you later." Jeb ran his hands up Rawley's chest and smiled. "Welcome home."

Letting out the breath he'd been holding, Rawley dropped the bags and wrapped his arms around Jeb's lean body. Leaning down, he whispered a kiss across Jeb's soft lips. "I love you."

"I know," Jeb said as he opened his mouth for Rawley's tongue.

The kiss was savage, both men tired of waiting. As Rawley continued to plunder Jeb's mouth, he began to pull his soon to be lover's clothes off. When he had Jeb shirtless, he broke the kiss and knelt before him. Lifting Jeb's foot, Rawley removed his boots before running his hands up Jeb's thighs to land on his fly. Burying his face in Jeb's crotch, he inhaled the scent of his man as Jeb ran his fingers through Rawley's short black hair.

Looking up, Rawley moved his hands to Jeb's button and slowly relieved him of his jeans and underwear. Pushing them down the leanly muscled thighs, Rawley's hands began to shake. "I can't believe I'm so nervous." Hiding his face against Jeb's closely cropped thatch of hair, Rawley inhaled again. Without looking up, he ran his tongue around the crown of Jeb's cock. "I've never done this before. I've had it done a time or two, but this will be my first time giving."

Jeb ran his hand over Rawley's cheek. "If you'd rather not, I'll understand."

"No. I can't believe how much I do, but I want to." Rawley held Jeb's generous shaft by the base and licked his way up and down its length. He felt each ridge and vein against his tongue as he heard Jeb begin to moan. Taking the heavy sac into his mouth, Rawley was amazed at how soft the skin was, no hair to get in the way.

As he took the head into his mouth, Jeb thrust forward. The generous erection hit the back of his throat and Rawley gagged slightly.

"Sorry," Jeb said.

Shaking his head, Rawley refused to release his hold on Jeb's cock long enough to answer him. He moved closer to the tip and sucked. He felt his cheeks hollow out as Jeb moaned. God, Jeb tasted good. Wrapping his hands around to rest on Jeb's sweet ass, Rawley ran his fingers through the crease. Finding Jeb's tight rosette he added a little pressure with his fingertip until it slid in.

"Shit," Jeb cried, shooting his essence down Rawley's throat.

Rawley drank it all and begged for more. He licked Jeb clean before leaning back on his heels. "Nap?"

Jeb shook his head and spread out in the centre of the bed. "You're turn now."

Oh, Rawley liked the sound of that. He quickly stripped off his jeans and T-shirt, it still felt weird not wearing the uniform, but Jeb was good at taking his mind off everything else. With the last of his clothes in a pile on the floor, Rawley stalked toward Jeb. Watching his fine as fuck man slowly stroking his spent cock, Rawley felt pre-come dripping down the length of his shaft. "You have any condoms?"

Jeb blushed and pointed toward the bedside drawer. Inside he found a new box of rubbers and a sealed bottle of lube. Rawley held the bottle up and whistled. "Wow, you bought the good stuff."

Pulling Rawley down beside him, Jeb began licking Rawley's chest. "I made a trip to Lincoln. There's a little shop there with all kinds of stuff."

Working on the seal, Rawley looked up and grinned. "Yeah, what kind of stuff?"

Jeb shrugged and finally took the bottle out of his hands. He opened it within seconds and handed it back to Rawley, spreading himself open. "You know, toys, costumes, stuff."

Before slicking his fingers, Rawley wanted a taste of his man. He'd seen this done, but had never thought he'd ever feel like doing it. Looking at Jeb, loving Jeb, changed everything. He set the bottle on the bed, and slowly licked his way down his lover's body. Positioning himself between Jeb's already spread thighs, Rawley ran his tongue up the crease of Jeb's ass. "Fuck, yeah," he moaned at the taste and smell of this man, his man. Centring his attention on the tight pucker of skin, Rawley kissed him, snaking his tongue out to taste. He suddenly had an overwhelming desire to claim Jeb and his body.

With a few more licks, Rawley reached for the lube. Dripping a few drops down the crevice, Rawley began preparing Jeb. He was surprised to see that Jeb stretched fairly easily. He felt his hackles begin to rise and looked up Jeb's body. "You been with someone recently?"

Putting his arm over his face, Jeb shook his head. "Just myself," he mumbled.

Rawley slipped in another finger and worked Jeb's hole for a few moments. "Hand me a glove." He sat back on his heels and continued to watch Jeb as he opened the box and gave him a condom. Tearing the package with his teeth, Rawley was sheathed in no time. Settling back between Jeb's legs, Rawley positioned his cock at Jeb's entrance. Before entering he had to know. "What do you mean, you've been with yourself. You mean jacking off?"

Jeb shook his head. He reached over and opened the drawer again. Reaching to the back, Jeb withdrew a rather large butt plug. He handed it to Rawley, still unable to look him in the eyes. Rawley looked at the toy and nodded before setting it down next to Jeb's hip. "Good to know," he said as he slowly worked his cock past the ring of muscles.

Arching his back, Jeb's ass sucked Rawley's cock right in. "Shit," Rawley groaned as sweat popped out on his forehead. With Jeb's ass squeezing his cock, he just hoped he'd make it all the way inside before shooting. Taking a deep breath, Rawley pushed slowly in to the hilt. Closing his eyes, he rested his head on Jeb's shoulder. "Home," he whispered.

He felt Jeb run his fingers through his hair as he began to squirm underneath him. Rawley smiled, getting the hint. With a quick kiss, Rawley wrapped his arms around Jeb's thighs and spread him even further. He watched as he moved in and out of Jeb's body in a slow but hard rhythm. "See how pretty I look inside you?"

Jeb sat up on his elbows and looked down at their joined bodies. "Damn, that's hot." He grinned at Rawley as the pace quickened.

"I'm not gonna last long." He thrust even harder, his heavy balls slapping Jeb's ass on each thrust.

Jeb collapsed back down and Rawley watched the cords in his neck, pulse and stand out. Seemed he wasn't the only one. "Come for me, darlin'."

Reaching down, Jeb took hold of his renewed erection and stroked himself to Rawley's pounding rhythm. The sight of Jeb's cum spurting from his luscious cock was beautiful, tipping Rawley over the edge unexpectedly. His entire body shook at the force of his climax. "Baby," he howled to the ceiling.

Without losing contact, Rawley fell to Jeb's side, rolling Jeb with him. He felt his cock softening and knew they wouldn't be joined for much longer, but it's what he needed at that moment. "I love you."

Tracing his square jaw, Jeb smiled before leaning in for a kiss. "I love you."

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After a short nap, Rawley woke with Jeb still in his arms. For the first time in his life, he'd made a decision based on what he wanted and needed. Being the oldest of four brought with it an amazing amount of responsibility. Rawley had always been the Good boy's protector and leader. Now, he realised his brothers were grown and it was time he built his own life. He knew that life would forever involve this man. Speak of the devil, Jeb burrowed a little deeper against his chest and yawned.

"What time is it?"

Rawley turned over onto his back and looked at the clock. "Dinner time, almost five." He rolled back toward Jeb and felt something poke his hip. Lifting up, he held aloft the flesh coloured plug. "This definitely has possibilities."

Jeb blushed again and took the toy from Rawley. "I thought it looked about your size, but I can happily say that I underestimated you."

Just that fast, Rawley's cock hardened. He rubbed his erection against Jeb's hip and moaned. "We've got a lot to make up for."

"Uh huh," Jeb groaned as he turned his body to face Rawley. "Quick rub and then let's find something for supper."

Rawley nodded and slid his cock along side of Jeb's. "You're sure about this, right? About me staying here?"

"Not staying here, living here," Jeb panted as he put a little more force behind his movements. It wasn't long before the blossom of heat spread between the two of them, both crying out the others name.

Left sticky and sated, Rawley took Jeb's mouth in a passionate kiss. "Shower, then grub."

"You got it," Jeb said climbing off the bed and walking toward the bathroom.

Rawley watched that fine ass walk away. "Damn, this is way better than being a lonely Sheriff."

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After a dinner of left-over meatloaf sandwiches, they spooned together on the couch watching the news. Jeb hadn't asked Rawley what had gone wrong at work since he already knew most of it. He figured when Rawley was ready to talk he would, and Jeb wasn't the pushy sort.

They were into prime time TV when Rawley exhaled audibly. "I need to buy a truck or something in the morning."

"Okay," Jeb said, turning. "You want me to go with you?"

"If you can spare the time." Jeb could see the lost look in Rawley's eyes. As long as he'd dreamt of this day he was sorry that it had to come at such a professional cost.

Running his hand down the side of Rawley's strong face, Jeb kissed him. "For you? Always. I'll just need to tend to the livestock in the morning, but I'll drag you out in the fresh air to help."

"Deal," Rawley whispered against his lips before kissing him. When they broke the kiss Rawley looked into his eyes. "I'm getting my job back. Even if I have to investigate this thing on my own and prove Mayor Channing's in with Lionel and Charles."

Thinking about the town mayor's subterfuge heated Jeb's blood. "Why don't you go one better and take Channing's job." He hadn't realised he was serious until he saw the look on Rawley's face. "You're thinking about it aren't you?"

"I don't know, it's an idea I'll have to chew on for a while. Although clearing my name is my top priority aside from the investigation into Sonny's shooting."

Jeb felt his chest tighten. If he'd had visions of being Rawley's world he'd just been put in his place. "Okay," he said numbly.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Rawley pulled him closer and wrapped his leg over the top of Jeb's.

"Nothing, I guess I'm just getting a little tired." The words were barely out of his mouth before Rawley was carrying him. Well, he thought, at least he was important in the bedroom.

Chapter Two

After feeding the horses, Jeb took off on the four-wheeler to check the stock while Rawley made some phone calls. With everything that had gone on, he needed to get his brothers up to date, but first he needed to call Nate. Waiting for Nate's cell to pick up, Rawley started to worry. He'd just resigned himself to leaving a message when a deep voice answered.

"Nate's phone."

Rawley recognised the voice as Rio's. "Hey, it's Rawley. Is Nate around?"

"He's still asleep. He didn't drag his sorry ass in until about two hours ago. Can I help you with something?"

"I just wanted to see how everything's going with Lionel?" Rawley rested his booted feet on the desk, and leaned back in his chair.

"I'm sure he'd tell you things are going as expected."

Rawley noted some tension in the voice. "And how would you say it was going?"

Rio exhaled, "I think you're asking for trouble. Lionel's made it clear he doesn't like gays, and to have Nate and his fairy ways flitting all over town in Lionel's shadow is just asking for Nate to get hurt."

"Fairy ways? Excuse me, but I find that offensive." Rawley put his feet on the floor and stood.

"*Well excuse me*, but you haven't watched him in action lately. Since Garron told him to amp up the volume on his little act, Nate's out of control. He's giving us gay men a bad name and I for one am sick of it."

Rawley thought about what Rio said. No way was that six foot four, tough-as-nails man gay, was he? "Did Nate tell you about our change in plans? We haven't been getting anywhere in the investigation, so we thought if Nate pushed Lionel's buttons enough, maybe he'd screw up. I don't know if it'll work, but it's the only shot we have. I'm sure at some point, Lionel will

seek some kind of restraining order against him. When that happens, you'll have to be our eyes and ears while Lionel is inside the bar. That'll probably be the only place that Nate can't go because of the distance specifications in the restraining order. I'll talk to him about toning it down some."

"Good. Something needs to be done before he gets killed."

Eyebrow shooting up, Rawley detected a hint of concern in the tough Latin man's voice. "You into him?"

"Hell no, I've already got someone back home. Doesn't mean I want to see the little shit hurt though."

Rawley smiled at the vehement response. Yep, little Nate was starting to get to the man despite his protests otherwise. "Can you have him call me when he wakes up?"

"I think you can do better than that. Why don't you come to The Dead Zone and see him in action for yourself? I'm tellin' ya, man, you're asking for a fuck load of trouble."

"All right, what time do they usually get there?" Rawley looked out the window, surprised to see Jeb back so soon. Just watching Jeb climb off the fourwheeler had Rawley's jeans fitting too tight. Deciding he had too much work to do to be distracted, Rawley turned away from the window and sat back down.

"You still there?"

"Yeah, sorry, what did you say?"

"They've been getting there about eight."

"I'll be there." He hung up the phone and called his brothers, wondering how he was going to get out of the house without Jeb. No way would he take his lover into the lion's den.

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Waiting to sign the papers on his new pickup, Rawley turned to Jeb. "I thought we'd stop and get a bite to eat before heading back to Summerville."

"Okay," Jeb said, brushing his hand.

"I...um...need to stop by The Zone before I come home. Rio's a little concerned about Nate."

"Why would he be concerned with Nate? He's one of the toughest men I know. He's almost a legend in Chicago."

"Seems he's taking our change in plans to a whole new level and Rio's afraid Lionel's at the end of his rope."

Jeb smiled, "Yeah, I've seen that particular act a time or two."

Rawley narrowed his eyes, feeling his blood begin to heat. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? Did you have a relationship with him too? Wasn't your FBI friend, Caleb, enough?"

Jeb jerked back as if he'd been struck. "No, I didn't have anything going with Nate, but even if I had, it wouldn't be any of your damn business."

"The hell its not. You're mine."

Jeb groaned and ran his fingers through his blond curls. "Don't."

The sales manager chose that moment to come into the office. He looked from Jeb to Rawley. "Is there a problem?"

Jeb looked at Rawley for a few seconds before shaking his head. "No problem," he pointed toward the showroom, "I'm gonna wait outside."

Rawley watched his man leave with a tightening in his gut. He looked back to the manager and smiled. "Sorry, where were we?"

After the deal was complete and Rawley had the keys to his new maroon dual-cab pickup, he found Jeb sitting in his own truck. "You ready to follow me to the restaurant?"

"Why don't we just eat at The Zone?"

Taking a deep breath, Rawley leaned on the driver's door. "Listen, darlin'. I don't think it's a good idea for you to go with me. I don't need anymore fodder for the town gossips right now. Besides, I'll be working. You just go home and wait for me there."

He watched as Jeb's eyes dulled, his face suddenly sullen. "Fine, whatever," Jeb shook his head, "I'll see you at home." He started his truck and rolled up his window with Rawley still standing there.

Getting the hint, Rawley stepped back, and Jeb drove off. Shaking his head, Rawley closed his eyes, "Damn."

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Walking into The Zone, Rawley was already out of sorts. He'd much rather be home with Jeb instead of checking up on Nate. He gave a short nod to Rio as he sat at a table in the back. Lilly came over with a menu and a smile.

"Hi, Sheriff," she said, giving him a wink.

"So you've heard," Rawley said, looking at his menu.

"It's Summerville, of course I've heard, but you'll always be Sheriff Good to me." Looking around Lilly grinned. "I don't suppose you're meeting your brothers here?"

"No, just me. I'll take a burger and fries with a side of jalapeños, and a big beer." Rawley handed the menu back, noticing the disappointment on her face. He seemed to do nothing *but* disappoint people lately.

"I wanted to tell them they're fixing to get new neighbours," Lilly said, popping her gum.

"What do you mean? Jeb and Sonny are the twin's neighbours."

"Yeah, but the Douglas family just sold their farm to the north of ya'll."

"Who'd they sell to? I didn't even know it was on the market." He bet Sonny didn't either or he'd have snapped it up in a flash.

"Don't know," she shrugged. "I'll put your order up and bring that beer right over."

Lilly walked off and Rawley scanned the crowd. Hopefully, Lionel and his buddies wouldn't show until after he'd eaten. He contemplated calling Jeb, but figured he was better at smoothing things over in person. He knew he'd suck at a real relationship.

Lilly brought over his beer and Rawley took a long drink, the icy cold beverage feeling good on his parched throat. The place was fairly quiet when he'd first walked in but as he drank, more townspeople filtered through the door. He looked up at the bar and grinned to himself, ranch workers sitting next to bankers and lawyers, only in Smalltown, USA.

His food came seconds before Lionel and his crew stepped through the door. Taking a bite of his cheesburger, Rawley almost choked when Nate came in. He was wearing designer low-rise jeans with a silky powder blue shirt that showed his six-pack abdomen, with a shiny navel ring. "Oh fuck," Nate looked like sex personified to him, and he was sure, every other gay man in town, Rio included. No wonder Rio wanted the act stopped. If he had someone back in Texas, the last thing he needed was to share a small apartment with someone who looked like that.

He shook his head. Lionel had to be going absolutely fucking crazy with Nate following after him. Nate spotted him as he blew Lionel a kiss and walked over to his table. It wasn't a secret in town that he and his brothers had hired Nate, so there wasn't any reason they couldn't be seen talking, unlike Rio. All business with Rio was handled in secret. Rawley still didn't understand how he managed to slip to and from the apartment without anyone seeing him, but so far he had. They didn't think Lionel or anyone else in town had a clue Rio was their undercover guy.

"Hey, Nate." He wiped his hand on a napkin before holding it out.

Nate shook his hand before motioning to Lilly for a drink. "How's it going? Rio said you called?" Lilly brought over a club soda, shaking her head and giggling as she walked off.

"Yeah, Rio's concerned that you're asking for trouble with this step-up of your game. I gotta say, after seeing you walk through that door, I agree. When we discussed you trying to get Lionel off-kilter, I had no idea you'd become this...flamboyant."

Nate waved Rawley's concerns away. "Rio's a bear, totally uncivilized if you ask me. And that man," he pointed toward Lionel, big as you please, "is getting ready to crack. I can feel it."

"What do you mean?" Rawley took a drink of his beer and leaned forward.

"He's getting used to me following him, getting sloppy. He's been meeting with that contractor from Lincoln, a lot. He thinks because his daddy and the mayor took care of you, he's above the law." Nate took a sip of his soda as he watched Lionel.

"Well, I'm going to take over the day shift from now on. The sooner I can get Lionel, Charles and Mayor Channing nailed, the quicker I can get my job back. Our FBI guy will be in town tomorrow. You still okay with the evening shift? You know, if you need a night off, you can call one of my brothers or hell, we could just have Rio watch him. Lionel seems to spend most of his evenings here anyway. Until we find something out on him, our main goal is to keep Lionel away from Sonny, and no way in hell is he dumb enough to try anything with an obvious tail. So, evenings?"

"Yeah, I'm cool with evenings. As long as I get at least six hours of sleep, I'm good. Besides, it's not like I can get anything going in this town. Although I have been thinking about checking out some of the clubs in Lincoln. Living with that bear over there isn't easy."

Rawley just bet it wasn't. He could feel the sparks bouncing back and forth between them from where he sat. Rawley wondered just how taken Rio actually was. "Just be careful. If something doesn't feel right, get on the phone and one of us will be there within minutes to back you up."

"You do know that I have black belts in four different martial arts, right?"

"Black belts can't stop a bullet."

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The house was dark when he got home, so Rawley quietly let himself in and walked to the bedroom. It was only eleven, but he knew Jeb rose early. Stripping out of his clothes, Rawley slid between the sheets and spooned up to Jeb's back.

He felt Jeb stiffen, and knew he was awake. "I'm sorry," Rawley whispered, kissing Jeb's neck.

"Yeah, you seem to say that a lot lately," Jeb mumbled, pulling away just a little.

"I love you, it's just all new to me," he said.

"You keep saying it out loud and maybe someday you'll start to actually feel it."

"What the hell does that mean?" Rawley tried to turn Jeb over to face him, but Jeb pulled away.

"Nothing, I'm tired. I'll talk to you tomorrow." Jeb flipped over onto his stomach, pulling away even further.

Turning over onto his back, Rawley ran his hands through his hair. Damn, he was in deeper shit than he'd thought. He was too new to all of this to know how to dig himself out of the hole he'd gotten himself into.

Finally deciding he was going to have to swallow his pride and talk to someone, Rawley drifted off to sleep feeling cold and alone.

Chapter Three

Rawley woke the next morning to an empty bed. He reached over to Jeb's side and felt the cold sheets. Looking at the clock, he saw that it was only five-thirty. "Damn, darlin', how long you been up?" he wondered out loud.

After a quick shower, he dressed and walked into the kitchen. He was surprised to find Jeb hadn't even made coffee. Deciding a thermos full would be a good peace offering, Rawley set out to make a pot. As the black brew slowly dripped through the grounds, Rawley thought about the day before. He still wasn't sure what he'd done wrong other than not allowing Jeb to accompany him to The Zone. Looking up at the clock, he saw it was still too early to call Garron. His first choice would've been Sonny a couple of months ago, but with Sonny's head injury and subsequent headaches, he thought it best not to upset him.

Garron, on the other hand, would probably just try to kick his ass, but at least he'd tell Rawley how to make it up to Jeb. The most important thing was that he didn't lose his man. He loved Jeb with all his heart, and he refused to let his inexperience get in the way of their life together.

Filling the tall scarred thermos, Rawley went out the back door toward the barn. He knew Jeb found solace in his horses. Someday, Rawley hoped he would find it in him.

He found Jeb brushing Butterscotch, his Palomino mare. "Hey," Rawley said, leaning on the stall.

"Morning," Jeb replied without looking at him.

"Brought you some coffee," holding up the thermos.

"No thanks."

Sighing, Rawley set the thermos on the dirt and sawdust floor. He wiped a hand down his face and walked toward Jeb. "I don't know what I've done to piss you off, but I'm sorry. I know

you're tired of me sayin' that, but it's true. I don't know how to do this. I told you, I've never been in a relationship."

Turning around, Jeb put his hand on his hip. "It's no wonder you haven't been in a relationship. You..." Jeb stopped and snapped his mouth shut. Rawley could see him trying to figure out what to say. "A relationship is more than fucking."

Something about the way he said it caused Rawley's hackles to rise. "You make it sound like it doesn't mean anything? Fucking? Seriously?"

Shrugging, Jeb put his grooming supplies away in the tack room. "When you love someone, you share your life with them, not just your bed."

"Now you're questioning my love for you? What the hell's going on? I screw up once, and this is how you treat me?" Rawley shook his head. "I'll call ya later."

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Rawley knocked on the front door of what used to be his home. Sonny opened the door half dressed. His lips were swollen. Rawley couldn't keep the smile off his face. "Morning, I take it Garron hasn't left for work yet."

Stepping back, Sonny grinned and shook his head. "He's in the kitchen. You hungry?"

Sonny turned and walked away.

Following, Rawley smelled frying bacon. "Mmm, smells good," Rawley said, taking a seat at the table.

Garron turned around and narrowed his eyes. "What? You haven't trained my brother to make breakfast for you yet?"

"Well, that's one of the things I came over to talk to you about." Rawley motioned toward the coffee pot and gave his brother a pleading look. Shaking his head, Sonny poured him a cup and set it on the table.

Bringing a pan of scrambled eggs and a plate of bacon over, Garron straddled his chair. "Talk," he said spooning eggs onto his plate.

Rawley glanced at Sonny before turning back to Garron. Evidently Garron knew what Rawley was thinking. "It's okay to talk about the investigation in front of Sonny. I had to learn the hard way about keeping secrets."

Rawley stopped and wondered if that could be Jeb's problem. Sonny loaded his plate and Rawley ate on automatic pilot. Was he keeping secrets? No, he didn't think he was. He told Jeb what was going on, but didn't want him involved. Why was it wrong that he wanted to keep his love safe? He felt a hand on his arm, and looked from his plate to Sonny.

"What's bothering you?" Sonny asked his face full of concern. Where was the cantankerous man who used to be his brother? Since the shooting, Sonny was different. They all knew it, although rarely spoke of it. He'd felt sorry for Garron and Sonny when it was first evident Sonny would probably never be the same. Looking into the concerned eyes that watched him so closely, Rawley realised this Sonny seemed to feel more than the old one had. Regardless of the seizures and headaches, his brother was still his brother, only better in some ways. He felt an overwhelming rush of love swell inside of him.

"I love you, brother," he whispered as he ruffled Sonny's short hair.

Tilting his head, Sonny grinned. "Well that's nice to know. Now, care to tell me what's wrong? Why you aren't at home eating breakfast?"

Closing his eyes, Rawley thought about earlier that morning. He knew he hadn't helped the situation by being snarly with Jeb. "I'm in the doghouse, and I honestly don't know why. I know it has something to do with meeting Nate last night. I told Jeb I didn't want him to go with me. But even before that, I don't know, I've felt him pulling away a little."

Garron broke into the conversation, having finished his breakfast. "Why didn't you want him to go with you?"

"A couple of reasons. I don't want to put him in harms way, and I don't think the town is ready to see me parading my new lover around."

Putting his face in his hands, Garron asked, "Did you tell him that?"

"Yeah, I thought honesty was important in a relationship." Shit, did he have that wrong, too? No way would he figure out this relationship stuff. He thought loving a guy would be easier than having to deal with a woman's swinging emotions.

Looking up from his hands, Garron winced. "Jeb tell you why he broke it off with Caleb?"

The thought of his man with someone else was like a punch in the gut. Rawley shook his head. "He just said things didn't work out."

"Well, I don't know the whole story, but I know Caleb refused to love him openly. His career with the bureau was too important for him to risk the retribution. It tore my brother apart to the point that when he inherited the ranch, he left Chicago without a backward glance."

"What are you saying? That because I won't show him off as my new lover to the entire town, I'm going to lose him?" Rawley pushed his still half-full plate away.

Garron started to answer, but Sonny cut him off. "Are you ashamed of him?"

Rawley thought about it for a moment. "No, I love him, but I don't want the same thing that happened to you..."

Fuck, did he just say that? He looked into Sonny's eyes. "I'm sorry."

Instead of answering, Sonny turned to Garron. "If you had it to do over again, would you have fallen in love with me, knowing what you know now about how things would go?"

Pulling Sonny out of his chair and onto his lap, Garron kissed him. Rawley watched in awe as Garron broke the kiss and looked into Sonny's eyes. "In a heartbeat. I wasn't alive until you loved me." They began kissing again, lost in their own world.

Rawley had heard enough, seen all he needed to. He quietly excused himself and walked out of the house without telling them about the Douglas farm being sold, no sense in spoiling their good mood.

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Jeb was hanging up the phone when Rawley walked into the kitchen. His throat felt thick as he tried to figure out what to say. Instead, he followed his heart and sunk to his knees in front of his love. "I'm afraid," he choked on a sob.

He felt Jeb's hand land on top of his head, and he couldn't control his tears. There had only been two occasions when he'd openly wept, at his father's funeral and the night Sonny was shot. Now, just the thought of losing this man was enough to crack his usual gruff exterior.

Hunkering down to Rawley's level, Jeb wrapped his arms around him. The sweet warmth of Jeb's embrace felt like home. "Shhh," Jeb whispered. "We'll work it out."

Rawley buried his face in Jeb's neck and held on. "I'm not ashamed of you. I saw Garron and Sonny shout their love for the whole town to see, and in a split second Lionel tried to take it all away. I didn't want that to be you. I love you so much and I don't know how to be a boyfriend." He pulled back and looked at Jeb. "I need you to teach me. I know how to love you, but it seems I need help with the rest."

Standing, Jeb held out his hand and looked down at Rawley. "Come on, we have some talking to do."

Taking Jeb's hand, Rawley got to his feet and followed him to the bedroom.

Once naked, and settled under the covers, Jeb rested his head on Rawley's chest. "You've made me feel cut off. You held me in your arms two nights ago, and told me the investigation and getting your job back were the most important things in your life. How was I supposed to feel about that? I've been so patient, waiting for you to wake up and realise that you love me. I finally get my wish, and then I learn that everything else still comes first."

"No," Rawley shook his head, and pulled Jeb up to eye level. "You're my constant, my heart. My entire life, I've done things because people expected it of me. I got my brother's out of trouble. I became a policeman so I could help others. But you, you I want for me. I don't want to talk about the other side of my life when I'm with you because I just want to be lost in you, in this feeling." Rawley leaned in and gave Jeb a short but passionate kiss, dipping his tongue in for a taste of his man. "I'm sorry if I made you feel second best because nothing could be further from the truth."

Jeb kissed him again and settled back on Rawley's chest. "I love you."

Feeling the words run rampant through his body, Rawley exhaled. "Thank you."

Their moment of bliss was interrupted by the ringing phone. "That's probably Caleb. He said he'd call when he got into town. There are a couple of things I need to talk to you about. He called last night, but I didn't feel like discussing it when you got home."

"Should you answer it?" Rawley asked, reaching for the phone. At his nod, he picked it up and handed it to Jeb.

"Hello."

While Jeb spoke to Caleb, giving him directions to the ranch, Rawley thought about the investigation. He looked at the clock, he really should be following Lionel right now, but his relationship was more important than watching Lionel sit at his desk in front of the window in town.

Jeb reached over him and hung up the phone. "He'll be here in about an hour."

"Okay," he said cuddling back up with Jeb. "What did you want to tell me about him?"

"The FBI won't authorise him to search Channing's bank records."

"So why's he still coming?"

"To help, I think. He said if we managed to get in to the records on our own, he could look them over." He looked up at Rawley. "I don't know that it's legal though. We'd probably need a hacker?"

Rawley scrubbed at his face. "Maybe we're getting in over our heads. I mean, I may not hold the title, but I still believe in the law."

"What do you suggest we do then?"

Rawley rubbed Jeb's back as he thought. "Legally, is there any way we can find out if he's made any large purchases lately?"

"I'm not sure, but Caleb will know."

"Why's he coming to Summerville if he can dig around on the computer in his own home?"

"He said he could only spare a couple of days and he wanted to show me how to search the internet." Jeb shrugged, "He's still willing to help, I didn't want to cause waves."

"About...Caleb, do you still have feelings for him?"

"Sure, he was my lifeline during my months as a stool pigeon." He crawled back up Rawley's body and straddled his hips. "My feelings for Caleb were never as deep as what I feel for you. Don't worry, he had his chance."

Despite what Jeb said, Rawley knew he'd worry. He tilted his head to the side as Jeb began to nuzzle. "We have time if you're interested," Jeb said, sliding his lean body back and forth against Rawley's ever present erection.

Grinning, Rawley flipped Jeb so he was stretched out on top. "Since the day I met you, there's never been a second that I wasn't interested, it just took me a while to admit it."

Chapter Four

Getting dressed, Rawley looked at Jeb. "So, this Caleb, he as good-looking as me?"

Jeb zipped his jeans and walked over to Rawley for a quick kiss. "No one's hotter than you."

That made Rawley's chest puff up just a bit. "Good to hear. I'm going to stay a few minutes and meet him before heading over to babysit Lionel."

"I think it would be polite to offer Caleb a place to stay while he's in town. He took vacation time just to come help out."

Rawley looked at Jeb. He knew he could trust Jeb, but what about Caleb? "You sure that's a good idea given your past with him?"

"He knows I'm taken. I made that clear over the phone." Jeb broke away to gather his boots. Sitting on the bed, he pulled one on and looked at Rawley. "If it'll make you uncomfortable just say so and I'll point him to the nearest motel, of course that means him travelling to Lincoln, but I'll do it."

Rawley took a deep breath and shook his head. "Okay, offer the man a room, but make sure he knows you're mine."

There was a knock on the door and Rawley took a few calming breaths. What the hell was he getting himself into? He held out his hand, and waited for Jeb.

Taking Rawley's hand, Jeb leaned in for a kiss. "I love you."

"Me too," Rawley said as the knock came again. "Let's get this intro over with so I can get to town."

Opening the front door, Rawley took in every inch of Caleb Spears. Perfectly styled blond hair and piercing blue eyes stared into his. Seemed he wasn't the only one doing some sizing up.

Remembering Caleb was here to help, Rawley stuck out his hand. "You must be Caleb. I'm Rawley Good."

Caleb shook Rawley's hand in a firm grip. "Jeb's told me a lot about you. Mind if I come in?"

"Oh, sorry." Rawley stepped back and Caleb walked in. "Jeb's in the kitchen getting us something to drink. He figured you'd be thirsty after your drive from Lincoln."

Caleb didn't answer. He simply nodded and looked around the room. Rawley already didn't care for this conceited prick. Who the hell wore a three piece suit out to the country? He was relieved when Jeb came in, carrying a tray loaded with iced tea and cookies.

"Hey, Caleb," Jeb said, setting the tray on the coffee table. He walked over and gave Caleb a hug. Rawley felt a growl beginning to crawl its way up his throat. Jeb broke the embrace and turned to Rawley. "I take it the two of you met?"

"Yep," Rawley said.

Leading Rawley by the hand, Jeb sat on the sofa and motioned toward a chair. "Have a seat. Would you care for some cookies? I made them myself." Jeb offered the plate of cookies to Caleb.

Shaking his head, Caleb patted his stomach. "None for me. You know I don't eat junk food. The older I get the harder it is to keep the body in shape." He flashed his fake white smile and gave Jeb a condescending wink.

Oh fuck, Rawley already felt like smashing this fake sonofabitches face in. He saw the flash of disappointment across Jeb's face as he set the plate back on the tray. "I'd like a few," Rawley said.

He was rewarded with a big smile. "They're snickerdoodles, it's my grandma's recipe."

Rawley looked into Jeb's eyes as he took a big bite. "Oh damn, darlin', this is the best cookie I've had in ages." He leaned over and gave Jeb a kiss. "Thank you."

Jeb blushed, and turned toward Caleb. "We'd like to invite you to stay here in our spare room. There's really no reason for you to drive back and forth to Lincoln everyday."

Flashing that damned smile again, Caleb nodded. "I'd appreciate that."

Rawley couldn't stand any more. He gave Jeb one last kiss and stood. "I'm going to go check on Lionel. There's a meeting called for this evening over at Ranger and Ryker's. You want me to come back here and pick you up or would you rather just meet me?"

"I'll meet you," Jeb motioned toward Caleb. "I assume you want Caleb to come along?"

"Yeah, you can fill him in on what we're looking for, but he'll need to talk to Nate and Rio tonight." With a short nod to Caleb, he left.

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Thank God, Jeb thought, as he pulled up to the twin's house and spotted Rawley's new pickup. It had been a hell of an afternoon trying to dodge Caleb's roaming hands. He stuck with it though, determined to study the way he searched the different public databases. If he had his way, Caleb would soon be on a plane back to Chicago.

He couldn't figure out what he'd ever seen in the man. After meeting and falling in love with Rawley, Caleb seemed so artificial, and shallow. He'd had to remind the asswipe several times that he wasn't interested, but Caleb seemed to think Jeb was merely playing hard to get.

Getting out of his truck, he didn't wait for Caleb. He bounded up the stairs and into the house. The first person he saw was Rio, sprawled out on the couch sound asleep. Jeb followed the laughter and ended up out on the deck. He walked right into Rawley's arms and gave him a deep, tongue thrusting kiss.

Rawley seemed a little shocked and it showed on his face. "Hey, darlin', you miss me?"

"You have no idea," Jeb said, kissing him again. Breaking the kiss he looked around, "Where's Sonny and Garron?"

"They'll be here. Garron had to work, so they'll just be a little late. Sonny said to start without them if we couldn't wait." Rawley ran his hand up and down Jeb's back, the obvious attention having a direct affect on his cock.

He heard the door close and new Caleb was behind him. Trying to be a good host, Jeb let loose a quiet sigh and turned around. "Everyone, I'd like you to meet Agent Caleb Spears." Jeb went around the deck and introduced everyone. He couldn't help but see Caleb's wide-eyed look when he introduced Nate. Good, maybe he'd leave him alone for the rest of the night.

Rawley must have felt his tension because he turned and pulled Jeb into the empty kitchen. Wrapping Jeb in his big arms, Rawley kissed him. "What's wrong? You seem a little tense. Did something happen?"

Jeb knew he couldn't tell Rawley about Caleb coming on to him, at least not until he learned how to do the searches on his own. "I'm fine, just missed you."

Rawley looked out the window onto the deck. "Caleb seems to have taken a shine to Nate."

"What?" Rio's smooth, deep voice bellowed. "Who's Caleb?" he asked as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"He's the FBI guy from Chicago we asked to come down and help us find out what Mayor Channing is hiding."

Rio grunted and went out to the deck. Jeb watched the big Latin manoeuvre over to sit on the railing about five feet from Nate. He crossed his massive arms and stared at Caleb. Jeb grinned. "What do you suppose that was all about?"

"Oh, I think you know the signs of denial well enough by now. Rio's mouth says he's not interested, but his body says differently." Rawley rubbed his hardening cock against Jeb. "Find out anything interesting working with Caleb?"

"Yeah, I found out I must have been completely insane to ever love that man," Jeb said as he rubbed back.

"Glad you've seen the light, darlin'. That guy's an ass."

"You know it. Although, I can't wait to see him get shut down by Nate."

"Do you think he will? Nate's been moaning about the lack of male companionship in Summerville. Caleb may just be the distraction he's been hoping for."

"Naw, Nate's far too smooth for the likes of Caleb. I told you before, Nate's almost a legend in Chicago. He can have almost any man he wants with a snap of his fingers. He's dated judges, politicians, rock stars and a few other well known millionaires. He never sticks around long though. I don't know what he's searching for, but he's not found it yet, and I doubt he'll give Caleb the time of day."

As they watched the scene out the window, Nate broke away and walked toward the house. "Quick, kiss me," Jeb said as he pulled Rawley's head down. The door opened and he heard Nate groan.

"Stop, you two or you're gonna make me cry."

Jeb released Rawley's lips and grinned at Nate. "What's wrong? Caleb getting a little too friendly?"

Nate's whole body shook as he made a funny face. "Creepy guy." Nate walked over to the fridge and started pulling out the food. "I told Ranger I'd get the steaks and finish up the salads. It's a hell of a lot less crowded in here." He flashed Rawley and Jeb a grin. "I still need to get home to change for my nightly date."

Jeb watched as Nate unwrapped the steaks and headed for the door. "Cover me, if Mr. Creepy gets too close, call in reinforcements."

"Oh I don't think you have to worry about that with your guard dog watching every move you make." Rawley motioned toward Rio.

A smile blossomed on Nate's face. "That big Latin hunk's watching me?"

"Every move," Jeb chuckled.

Unfastening the button on his low-rise jeans, Nate pulled them down another notch so his groin muscles were shown to perfection. "Let's see him notice this," he said with a wink as he opened the door.

Jeb and Rawley started laughing as all heads turned toward Nate, including Ranger and Ryker. Ranger turned back toward the grill and adjusted himself as Ryker punched him in the arm. Rawley squeezed Jeb's ass. "That man's a menace to society."

"Told ya," Jeb agreed.

Going back out to the deck, Rawley took a seat and brought Jeb down into his lap. Jeb watched as Nate handed off the platter, and dug in the cooler for a beer. He walked back into the house presumably to finish the salads. Sonny and Garron walked out and everyone greeted them enthusiastically.

"Sorry we're late. I had a lot of reports to fill out at the station before I left." Garron walked over and shook Caleb's hand, remembering him from the time Jeb had spent with him.

Sonny came over and pulled up a chair. "How's it going?"

"Good, I'm planning on taking a few head to the cattle auction in Greensburg if you're interested?"

"Yeah, I think so," Sonny said as Garron picked him up and took his seat, sitting Sonny in his lap. "I'll have to talk to Shelby, but I imagine we've got about ten head I'd like to part with."

Jeb was startled when Rio jumped down from the railing and stormed toward the kitchen. "Uh oh, where's Caleb?" He looked around and saw no sign of him.

"Shit," Rawley said as he hoisted Jeb up. "I'd better make sure Rio doesn't kill our FBI contact."

Walking into the kitchen, Jeb watched Rawley try to pull Rio off of Caleb. Rio's large brown hands appeared to be tightly wrapped around Caleb's fake-tanned throat.

"You mother-fucker," Rio was screaming in Caleb's face. "You leave your damn hands to yourself if you want to keep them."

"Calm down," Rawley said, using his official sheriff's voice. "Rio, goddammit, man, let him go."

Rio gave Caleb one last shove, and released him. "You stay the fuck away from Nate."

Jeb glanced over at Nate who was just glowing, despite the drop of blood where his lip had been split. His clothes were mussed and he had a feeling Caleb was responsible. What he couldn't figure out was why Nate would allow Caleb to get that close without taking him out.

Nate was one bad dude, everyone knew that. He was surprised Caleb had even tried anything with him.

Rawley turned toward Caleb, "Why don't you go on back out to the deck. We'll eat and then have a short meeting before returning to the ranch." Rawley's eyes then swung toward Jeb. He saw the question in Rawley's eyes. Shit, he was gonna have to tell him about Caleb's come-ons that afternoon.

After Caleb straightened his hair and clothes, he went back outside. Rio turned to Nate, but didn't attempt to approach him. "You okay?"

Licking the drop of blood from his lip, Nate nodded. "He just surprised me. I won't let him get the jump on me like that again."

"You bet you won't because you don't need to be anywhere near that asshole." Rio's hands flexed at his side.

Jeb watched as Nate's spine stiffened. "Unless you're staking a claim, you've got no say in it." Nate crossed his arms and looked at a furious Rio.

"I'm already involved. I've told you that." Rio ran his fingers through his thick black hair. "Forget it." Rio turned toward Rawley. "I'm getting out of here. It's my night off, but I think I'll visit The Zone as a customer. You can give me a call later if there's anything I need to know." With one last look at Nate, Rio left.

Jeb grinned and rubbed his hands together. "Well this night is starting off well."

Chapter Five

Settling under the covers, Rawley pulled Jeb into his arms. "Despite everything, it turned out to be a pretty productive meeting."

"Yeah, I'll continue to learn more from Caleb tomorrow after my chores are done."

Rawley couldn't help feeling the tension in Jeb's back and shoulders. Rubbing them out, he wondered about Caleb. "You didn't have any trouble with him today did you?"

There it was again, that slight stiffening of the spine that he'd felt earlier. "I can handle him. I just need to learn as much as I can before sending him on his way."

Now it was Rawley's turn to feel tight as his blood heated. He tilted Jeb's chin up. "What happened?"

"I said I'd handle it. I'm a man, please don't forget that." Jeb burrowed back into Rawley's neck and began licking and kissing.

"Well hell, darlin'. I can't sit back and do nothing if he's bothering you. How am I supposed to sit across from the asshole at the breakfast table if he's trying to make a play for my man?"

"Because we need him for a couple more days, and he can make all the plays he wants. It won't get him anywhere."

"Is he still in love with you?" Rawley hated asking the question, but he needed to know what he was up against.

"Caleb never loved me. I'm just the one who left him, and his ego took a beating over it." Jeb started working his way down Rawley's body with his tongue. "Enough talking," he moaned, moments before he attached himself to Rawley's pebbled nipple.

The feel of Jeb's mouth forced all thoughts of Caleb to the back of his mind. Running his fingers through Jeb's curls, Rawley hauled him on top of him. "Feels good."

After sucking a bruise on his nipple, Jeb sat up, straddling Rawley's thighs. "I wanna ride you, Sheriff."

Hoo boy was Rawley ready for that. He reached over and pulled out the bottle of slick, his fingers brushing Jeb's plug in the back of the drawer. "Gonna get you a plug for you to wear while I'm gone during the day. Make you nice and ready for me when I get home."

Taking the bottle of lube from Rawley, Jeb started stretching himself, back bowing just showing off his fantastic body. "Don't know if I could function with something in me."

Grabbing the bottle, Rawley poured lube over his cock. Jeb rose up and slowly sunk down onto his length. "Oh hell yeah," Rawley groaned as Jeb impaled himself. "You seem to be functioning just fine."

Jeb moved up and down on Rawley's cock, enthusiastically. "Not the same thing," Jeb panted, "mind doesn't have to work riding you."

"You got that right." Rawley placed his hands on Jeb's lean hips and held him up so he could thrust in and out. He must have pegged Jeb's gland because his love cried out.

"Yes, more..."

Ready to oblige, Rawley quickened his pace until Jeb's body tightened around him. Screaming his name, Jeb painted Rawley's chest with his seed. "Oh fuck you smell good," Rawley ground out between clenched teeth as he buried himself in Jeb's ass and came.

Grinding down against Rawley, Jeb fell forward in a heap. "So good..." he mumbled against Rawley's chest.

Rawley pulled the sheet up over them without breaking contact, his dick still half-hard inside Jeb's hot body. "Love you, get some sleep." Jeb mumbled something he assumed was, "I love you," before drifting off to sleep.

Yeah, his man definitely needed a plug.

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Jeb woke up just before dawn to a phone call from Sonny. "Hey," he said rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"Our cattle are loose and roaming the county road. Shelby's out of town so I'll need your help."

"Shit," Jeb replied, sitting straight up and swinging his legs over the side of the bed.

Rawley sat up, "What, what's going on?" Jeb reached out and took his hand, trying to calm him.

"See you in a bit," Sonny said before hanging up.

Jeb stood and bent over to place a kiss on Rawley's open mouth. "Someone's evidently cut the fences again. My cattle along with Sonny's are out roaming the street."

Walking toward the dresser, he dug out his clothes. Rawley was right behind him, digging through his own dresser. "You want to take the four-wheeler? I thought I'd take Buck." Jeb's buckskin gelding was the best suited for herding cattle without spooking them further.

"Doesn't matter to me, would it make it easier? I know how to ride ya know?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry. My heads going ninety to nothing right now. I'll saddle up Clyde for you." With one last quick kiss, Jeb strode out of the bedroom. He scribbled a quick note for Caleb and walked out the back door heading for the barn.

After saddling his horse, Jeb gathered a few items to patch the fence until he could fix it properly. Slinging the saddlebag over Buck's back, he was happy to see Rawley. "I didn't get a chance to saddle Clyde, but his tack's already hung on the stall."

Rawley nodded, "I'll catch up."

Jeb mounted and rode toward the road. His house sat approximately two miles from Sonny's, so Jeb didn't know where he'd find the cattle. As he rode, he scoured the area ahead, smiling when he saw the first bunch. "I've got you now my wayward friends." Riding up on the

cattle, Jeb waved his arms and started yelling, trying to get them to turn around. As soon as that bunch got turned, another group headed his way.

He spotted Sonny and Garron in the distance trying to get the stubborn cattle back through the broken fence. With all the commotion and noise he didn't hear the first gunshot. He watched as the cow in front of him was thrown to the side, a red stain blossoming on her side. Realising what was happening, Jeb took off as several more shots were fired, not bothering to turn around to look for the shooter. He saw Garron riding at a fast clip toward him, worry etched on his face.

The first thing Jeb thought of when Garron finally reached him was Rawley. "Rawley's somewhere behind me, we need to see if he's okay."

"Stay here," Garron yelled at him. "The shots have stopped, but I'm not taking any chances with you."

Garron rode off as Jeb looked at the street behind him. His cattle were in chaos, several with injuries either from the gunshots or the panic. Pulling out his cell phone, he called Mac. He was just finishing the call when he saw Garron and Rawley riding toward him. Giving Buck the go ahead, Jeb rode toward them.

Once close enough, he hollered out, "You both okay?"

Rawley didn't say a word until he was beside him. He pulled Jeb over into his lap, his hands roaming Jeb's body, assessing his condition. "You shot?"

"No, you?"

Rawley shook his head and pulled him against his chest. "I was so scared he'd gotten you."

Jeb held tight to Rawley, afraid to let go. "Lionel?"

"Nope, one of his buddies, Kyle Locke. I think I shot him, though."

Jeb looked down to the ever-present holster at Rawley's hip. Thank God, he was in love with a lawman. "Is he dead? I didn't even see him shooting."

"No, he jumped in his car and took off. He was behind you, for how long, I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if he's on his way to Lincoln to get medical attention, no way would he

go into Summerville." Rawley ran his fingers through Jeb's curls, still holding tight. "I'll make a few phone calls."

"It would probably be better if I did the calling since I have jurisdiction in Lincoln," Garron said, riding up beside them. "You okay, baby brother?"

"Yeah, just scared me." He looked over at the cattle that'd begun to settle down. "I called Mac, several of my girls are hurt."

"Better the damn cattle than you," Rawley said giving him a kiss. "Let's get them back through the fence so I can take you home."

With one last kiss, Jeb was deposited back on his horse. It didn't appear that any of the cattle were too bad to walk, even those that had taken a bullet, so they slowly moved them back down the road. They met up with Sonny who was trying to separate the cattle.

As Jeb rode up he saw both fences had been cut at the property line. Shaking his head, he dismounted. He needed to keep the cattle that had already been herded in from coming back out. Grabbing his saddle bag, he looked over at Sonny, who was doing the same thing with his side. "The way this fence is cut, we're going to need some wire if we hope to contain them."

"Yeah, I put a call into Ranger and Ryker. They're on their way out with supplies." Sonny shoved one of Jeb's Herefords back from getting in with his Angus. "What happened?"

"Not really sure. I guess they figured if they cut the fences we'd come running. Strange thing is I don't think they were aiming for me."

"What are you saying?"

"I think they were just trying to scare us. Why, I don't know, but I have a feeling if he'd wanted me dead, I'd be on the ground back there." Jeb watched as Garron and Rawley rode toward them with the last of the cattle. "Rawley shot him. Garron's gonna call the police station in Lincoln and have them check out the hospitals."

After getting the last of the cattle sorted and into the pasture, they positioned themselves and the horses to block the exit until the twins showed up. As they made quick work of the fence, Garron borrowed Sonny's cell phone to call the police.

When Garron was finished with the call he looked over at Rawley. "I'm going to head to Lincoln. I'd like for Sonny to come over to your place until I get back this evening."

Rawley nodded, Sonny puffing up and turning red. "I. Do. Not. Need. A. Babysitter.," he ground out between clenched teeth.

Wrapping his arms around Sonny, Garron grinned. "Think with your head instead of your pride, cowboy. It makes sense for the two of you to watch each other's backs while Rawley and I are gone."

"What about *my* work, I have things I need to do." Sonny looked at Mac, who was busy assessing the injured cows. "Mac? Do we need to get these cows to your clinic?"

Mac stood from his squatting position. "A couple of them. I can treat the cuts here, but if I need to operate, that's best done in a sterile environment." Mac put his hands on his hips and looked at Jeb. "That is, if you want the bullets taken out?"

Jeb looked at the three Hereford's in question. It would be expensive to have them operated on, but he couldn't sell them at auction in the shape they were in. Rubbing his eyes, he sighed. "We'll get them loaded up. I'll have you fix the two heifers, but I'll take the steer to the butcher."

Mac nodded and began patching up the cattle injured in the chaos. Jeb turned toward Rawley. "If you can ride back to the ranch and bring the cattle trailer, I'll get them loaded and taken where they need to go."

Rawley wrapped his arms around Jeb. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah," Jeb said, leaning against his man.

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Getting two beers out of the fridge, Jeb passed one to Sonny. "Damn I'm tired." He walked to the living room and collapsed on the couch. "What time did Rawley and Garron say they'd be home?"

"They didn't," Sonny said, taking the chair beside the couch.

"Well there you are," Caleb said coming into the room. "After that hastily scrawled note, I was beginning to worry."

"No need." Jeb really wasn't in the mood for Caleb right now. "Find out anything?"

"Yes. Your Mayor Channing has a house he's recently purchased in Florida. He bought it with a cash transfer from a bank in the Bahamas." Caleb moved Jeb's feet and sat down.

"Where do you suppose a small-town Mayor would come up with that kind of money?" Jeb looked at Sonny and winked. "Is it enough to warrant an investigation?"

"I've talked to my boss, and though he wasn't happy about me digging around behind his back, he said he'd look into it." Caleb stretched his arm out on the back of the sofa, ruffling Jeb's hair with his fingers.

Quickly finishing his beer, Jeb stood and motioned toward Sonny's, "Need another?"

Narrowing his eyes at Caleb, it was plain that Sonny had witnessed Caleb's actions. "Yeah."

The two men were still eyeing each other when Jeb came back into the room. He was being rude not to offer Caleb one, but after the day he'd had he didn't give a fuck. Handing the fresh bottle over, Jeb sat in the old rocking chair. "What about Channing's bank accounts? You think your boss will be able to look at those?"

Caleb chuckled, "We're the FBI, we can get into damn near anything we want if we have a reason."

Rolling his eyes at the self important prick in front of him, Jeb was grateful when the phone rang. Walking into the kitchen for a little privacy, he picked it up. "Hello?"

"Hey, darlin', I'll be home in about an hour. Is Sonny still with you?"

"Yeah, Caleb found some stuff on Channing and called his boss. Looks like we might get to hand over the investigation to the Feds."

"That's good news. This thing with Lionel is all I can handle right now. Garron called, said the Lincoln police found his buddy at Mercy. Garron's hoping once they get him to the police station he'll do a little singing."

Jeb closed his eyes and thanked the heavens. "That's good. With everything that happened earlier, I think we should call Nate off Lionel. If he's desperate enough to have someone shoot at me in broad daylight, it's not safe for him to be trailing along after dark."

"I see what you're saying, but I'll need to talk to Nate about where he thinks this thing is going. I'll stop by on my way home if that's okay?"

"Sure, as long as you bring home dinner. I'm too damn tired to cook."

"I'll bring enough for all of us. I imagine Sonny's feeling the same way you are."

"I love you," Jeb said as he hung up the phone. Now he just had to get Caleb out of his house.

By the time he got back into the living room, Sonny was gone. "Where'd he go?"

Waving a hand in the air, Caleb looked bored. "Said something about taking care of the horses for you."

"Oh," Jeb was a little surprised. Although maybe Sonny just needed to get away from Caleb. "Rawley'll be home in an hour with dinner."

Caleb stood and walked toward him. Jeb took a step back and narrowed his eyes. "Don't even think of touching me."

"Now come on, sugar, don't you remember how good it was between us?" Caleb backed Jeb into the wall and pressed his body against him. It was easy to tell Caleb was getting off on this. Jeb tried to push him away.

"Get the hell off me," he struggled with the much bigger man.

Caleb ground his hard cock against Jeb. "Cooperate with me and I'll continue to help with your little investigation."

Unable to move the man, Jeb spit in Caleb's face. Rearing back, Caleb's fist slammed into the side of Jeb's face. "Fuck," Jeb yelled, feeling blood run down his cheek. He started kicking out, trying to connect with anything.

He heard the front door open and within seconds, Garron was on top of Caleb pounding his face. After several good blows, Jeb called him off. "Garron, he's not worth it, just get him the hell out of my house."

Jeb went to the spare bedroom and gathered Caleb's clothes. He knew he needed to get him out of the house before Rawley came home. Latching the suitcase, he carried it to the front door and threw it into the yard. Holding the door, he watched as Garron bent Caleb's arm behind his back and frog-marched him out of the house.

"What the fuck is this? How am I supposed to get to town?" Caleb stood in the yard with one hand covering his bleeding nose.

"I guess you start walking," Jeb said as he slammed the door. He turned to Garron, "Thanks, brother."

Garron looked at the small cut on Jeb's eye. "You're gonna have quite a shiner."

"Yeah, and one angry Sheriff."

Chapter Six

After applying a butterfly-bandage and an ice pack to his face, Jeb stretched out on the couch. "We need to call Caleb's boss. It would be just like him to try and talk him out of following up with an investigation on Channing."

"I'll take care of it," Garron said, facing him from his seat on the coffee table. "Has Caleb been harassing you since he's been here?"

"Some, but not like earlier. He had roamy hands, but he didn't put up a fight when I'd knock them back and remind him of Rawley."

Garron looked over at Sonny. "You have any trouble with him?" Jeb could see Garron slip into full mate protective mode.

"No," Sonny said with a grin.

Standing, Garron walked toward the kitchen. "I'm going to call the FBI headquarters in Chicago and see if I can get the name of Caleb's boss."

"It's George Bitterman," Jeb replied.

"Thanks, that'll make it easier."

After Garron left, Jeb looked over at Sonny. "What's wrong?"

"I shouldn't have left you alone with that ass." Sonny plopped down in the chair and took a drink of his beer.

"Don't sweat the small stuff. Caleb would've eventually found me alone and done the same thing." He yawned, wincing at the pain in his face. "I just want food and then bed. I feel like I could sleep a week."

"Rest your eyes, I think I'll go sit on the porch and keep a lookout for Rawley. He'll need a good dose of calm before he sees your cheek and eye."

The next thing Jeb heard was the sound of Rawley's voice bellowing on the porch. He listened as both Garron and Sonny tried to calm him down. Jeb braced himself as the door flew open. Rawley came in and knelt beside him.

Checking out his injury, Rawley's face went even redder. "I'll kill the sonofabitch." He started to stand, but Jeb reached out and pulled him back down.

"He's gone, let him go. We got what we needed, that's all that really matters." Jeb tried to sit up and winced at the pain banging its way through his head.

"Lay back down," Rawley's voice took on a concerned tone. He exhaled and closed his eyes. "You're going to give me a heart attack. First someone takes pot shots at you and now this." He pushed Jeb back down and kissed him. "I need you around, darlin'."

"Good, then please tell me you brought something home for dinner?"

"Yeah, I did, but I want a few more kisses first," Rawley said, seconds before his lips closed over Jeb's.

Moaning, Jeb tried to pull him closer, but Rawley broke the kiss and shook his head. "Let's eat and then I'll put you to bed."

"Spoilsport." Jeb stuck his tongue out, but ruined it with a grin.

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After dinner, Rawley put Jeb in bed, promising he'd be in soon, and went back to talk to Garron and Sonny. The two of them were curled up together on the couch kissing.

Taking a chair, Rawley cleared his throat. "What did Caleb's boss say when you talked to him?"

Garron broke the kiss and looked over at Rawley. "He said the ball was already rolling on the investigation. It wasn't until the contractor, Dick England's, name got brought into the equation that he really perked up. Seems the Lincoln office has had him under surveillance for a

while now. Agent Bitterman didn't say why of course, but regardless it helps our case against Channing."

"And what about Kyle Locke? Did he sing after you transferred him to the police station?"

"They wouldn't let us move him yet, but I have a feeling he will. I went by Mac's office and picked up a bullet he dug out of one of the heifers. It was from a twenty-two rimfire. I think when we show him the evidence about the twenty-two being used in both Sonny's shooting and the shooting on Jeb, he'll sing. Even though we know Kyle didn't take that shot at Sonny, the evidence will show that he did. His only hope will be to give up Lionel."

"How long will it take?"

"Ballistics' are a little back-logged, but I'd say sometime within the next few days."

"Good, I'll breathe a little easier when we can call Nate off."

"I think we all feel the same way," Garron agreed.

"Yeah, especially Rio." Rawley tilted his head and looked at Garron. "You know much about Rio, like who this mystery lover of his is?"

"No mystery, Rio's been involved with my buddy Ryan since we both got out of the Marines. I know he's been working on and off down in Central and South America as a mercenary."

"They solid? Rio and Ryan? Because I'm definitely getting some heavy duty vibes from Nate and him."

"Rio would never cheat on Ryan. That I can guarantee." Garron stood and pulled a sleepy Sonny up. "I think we're gonna take off."

Walking them to the door, Rawley gave Sonny a hug and Garron a pat on the back. "Talk to you later. Thanks for being here with Jeb today."

"No thanks necessary," Garron said as he steered Sonny toward his truck.

Rawley shut the door and locked it. Thinking about the happenings earlier in the day, he went around the house and checked all the windows and doors. *Better safe than sorry*, he thought as he undressed.

Jeb was sound asleep when Rawley crawled in behind him. He knew his head was probably still hurting, so he tried not to wake him as he spooned up and wrapped his arms around his man. Just the thought of something happening to Jeb, tightened his chest. He'd had two close calls that day. Who knew what could have happened if Garron hadn't come in when Caleb was attacking Jeb. The thought of Caleb threatened to send Rawley out into the night to look for the asshole.

Taking a deep breath, he turned his mind away from Caleb to Kyle. Rawley was just damn glad he'd had his sidearm with him when that fucker started shooting. Kyle was lucky Rawley hadn't aimed for his head instead of his arm.

Jeb squirmed in his arms, apparently dreaming. Rawley drew him even closer against his chest and kissed his blond curls. "I love you, darlin'."

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Unlocking the apartment door, Nate yawned. Thank God Lionel had decided to call it an early night. He'd sat outside his house for a couple of hours after the lights had all gone off before giving up for the night. He just hadn't been getting enough sleep lately.

Stepping into the kitchen he tossed his keys on the counter and went through to the bathroom. Opening the door, he came face to face with a very naked, very large, Rio. "Sorry, I didn't know you were home yet."

Quickly wrapping a yellow towel around his toned waist, Rio nodded. "It was dead at The Zone so I got off early." He went to squeeze by Jeb, but the size of the bathroom caused Rio to rub against Nate.

Nate couldn't help the moan that escaped at the brush of Rio's hip against his rock hard cock. Rio stopped in the doorway and turned back. He looked at Nate for several moments, eyeing him up and down, before shaking his head and disappearing into their shared bedroom.

After a quick wank in the shower, Nate started to walk into the bedroom when he heard Rio's voice. "I know. It's just harder to be away this time, it's different." Nate knew he shouldn't

be listening, but he couldn't help himself, just the sound of Rio's voice had his recently spent cock twitching. "You know I'd never do that, but it's hard. You're done with your assignment, why don't you come up for a few days?" Shit, that was not what Nate wanted to hear. He thought he was finally breaking the big man down. "Because goddammit I asked you to." Nate heard Rio sigh, "Just fuckin' forget it."

He heard the phone slam down and retraced his steps to the bathroom, flushing the toilet, he waited a couple of seconds before emerging. He walked into the bedroom and looked at Rio sitting on his twin-size bed with his head in his hands. "Everything okay?" Nate asked as he dug clean underwear out of the little dresser.

When Rio didn't look up or reply, Nate shrugged his shoulders and dropped his towel. After getting his black boxer-briefs up he turned toward his bed and caught the look on Rio's face. Evidently the Latin lover had watched him get dressed and it appeared to have an effect on his own briefs.

Nate didn't let on he'd caught Rio staring. Instead, he made a show of pulling down the covers on his bed. He even pulled the sheet to the end of the bed. "God, it's been so hot lately. I've been meaning to mention the air-conditioning situation to Ranger and Ryker. I'd like to get a little window unit for the bedroom as well as the one we already have in the living room." Nate stretched out on his back, erection clearly visible for Rio's inspection.

Grunting, Rio stood up and grabbed his pillow. "You're right it's too damn hot in here. I'm gonna sack out on the couch." Rio put the pillow in front of his crotch and walked out of the room.

Sighing, Nate stripped off his underwear and took matters into his own hand, again.

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"Hello?" Garron spoke into his cell phone as he climbed into the truck after work the next day.

"Hey, buddy."

"Hey, Ryan, what's up?" Garron started the engine to get the air going.

"I was wondering how the investigation was going? Kinda worried about Rio."

"Why? He's working damn near every night at The Zone. As far as I know, no one in town besides us knows he's even in on the investigation."

"I'm not worried about the investigation, I'm worried about this guy you've got him staying with. He called me last night and said he was having a hard time. Even asked me to come up there for a couple days."

Garron leaned back against the head rest and closed his eyes. "I'm not gonna lie to ya, Ryan. There's definitely sparks there, but we both know Rio won't cheat on you."

"Who's this guy?"

"His name's Nate. He came down from Chicago. He's a private investigator that I worked with occasionally when I was on the force there." Garron picked at the oil change sticker on the windshield. "He's a good guy, but I'll be honest with you, if you like the type, he's hot as fuck."

"What type?"

"Small, lean, tough as hell even though he comes off as a little feminine, course I think most of that's an act. Geez, I don't know, like the complete opposite of you and Rio. I love ya, buddy, so I gotta be honest with you. If Rio was mine, I'd make a trip up to make sure he stayed that way."

"What are you telling me?"

"That there's a powder keg between the two of them, and I'd say it's set to blow at any time."

"I'll be there as soon as I can catch a flight. Can you tell me how to get to your place from Lincoln? Or should I go to the feedlot where Rio's staying?"

"Depends, if you're coming in tonight, you should come here because Rio's working and he'd be pissed if you blew his cover by going to The Dead Zone."

"I'll call him, and see where he wants me to meet him. Thanks for the heads-up, man."

“No problem. It’ll be good to see you again.” Garron hung up and pulled out of the lot. The gay population of Summerville was about to climb one more notch, he just hoped the small town was ready for it. His friend could be intimidating to the toughest Marine. He didn’t think the friendly ranchers and farmers of the area had ever come across anyone like Ryan Blackfeather.

Chapter Seven

Ryan pulled his rented car into the parking lot. He looked around at the myriad of pickups and chuckled. "Just like home."

He'd called Rio earlier after getting his flight information and his man had given him directions to the feedlot, saying he'd meet him there when he called. Ryan couldn't help himself though. He knew from past conversations with Rio that Nate was at the bar every night, and he needed a peek at his competition. Knowing Rio was working the front door, Ryan took a guess and went around to the back of the building. Yep, just as he suspected, the door was propped open. He sidled into the bar and moved to the darkest part of the room.

Rio was easy to spot, sitting in all his massive glory on a stool by the front door. He was staring across the room, and Ryan followed his eyes straight to... "Oh fuck," he whispered. His own cock jerked at the site of the man leaning against the opposite wall. Nate was the same size as the men they'd shared a couple of times. Only this man was sexier than all the others put together.

Taking out his cell phone, he dialled Rio's number. Ryan watched as he unclipped the phone from his belt and looked at the caller ID. "Hey, you in town?"

"Yep, no wonder you were having such a hard time, Nate's breathtaking." Ryan watched as Rio's eyes scanned the bar.

Ryan felt the heat from his gaze from across the room. "I already asked to get off early. I'll meet you at the apartment in thirty minutes."

"Love you," Ryan said. He hung up and slipped the phone in his pocket. Taking one last look at Nate, Ryan shook his head and left through the back door. As soon as he was in his car, he adjusted his cock and sighed. "What the hell am I about to get into the middle of?"

He found the feedlot easy enough, so he grabbed his duffle out of the back seat and went to sit on the top step around back of the building. If he knew anything about Rio, it was that the man wouldn't be using the parking lot.

Waiting, Ryan's mind wandered to Nate. As hot as he was, he didn't look like the type to go for a one-night stand, and Ryan wasn't sure if he was willing to share Rio for the long haul. What if Nate and Rio really hit it off and decided they didn't need him around anymore?

Rio was the first person in his life to love him for who he was. He didn't see the colour of his skin, length of his hair or the myriad of tattoos scattered around his body. He saw only Ryan. Hell his own family had ostracised him when they found out he was gay. He'd been kicked off the reservation as soon as he'd come out, ending up in Texas.

That had actually been a damn good thing, he thought. If he hadn't been forced out, he wouldn't have met Rio and he probably would have ended up a drunk trying to pretend he was straight for the sake of his family. Now Rio and a handful of friends were his only family, and he wouldn't give any of them up without a fight.

"You're thinking too hard," Rio said, starting up the stairs.

Ryan stood and waited for Rio to join him. "Thinking about you," he whispered against Rio's lips as he pulled him against his body. The kiss went on for several moments, both men rubbing against the other. "Feel's good, missed you."

"Yeah, let's get inside and get naked."

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Stumbling in at dawn, Nate opened the fridge. He tipped the juice carton to his mouth and took a long swallow. He briefly thought about fixing a sandwich, but decided he was too damn tired to chew.

After a quick stop in the bathroom, Nate headed for bed, and was stopped by a pile of blankets and his pillow outside the door. He snatched the note off the pile and tried to focus his

eyes in the dim light. "Sorry, but I've got company. Hope you don't mind sleeping on the couch. Rio."

"Well, damn," Nate sighed. He picked up a sheet and his pillow and walked to the sofa. Shucking his clothes, Nate threw down his pillow and stretched out, pulling a sheet over him. He was glad he was too damn tired to think about the implications of the note. Within minutes, he was sound asleep.

He heard someone rumbling around in the kitchen and opened his eyes. Clad only in a pair of low slung shorts, their houseguest was making a pot of coffee. Nate took the opportunity to ogle the strong back across the room. He could barely make out the bottom of a tattoo under that mane of long black hair. The tattooed arms were easy to study though. They all looked to be tribal symbols, but from the long hair and bronze skin, Nate figured they were Native American symbols. Regardless, they were hot, which surprised the hell out of him because he'd never been a tattoo kind of guy.

The professional-type men he'd always dated wouldn't be caught dead having a tattoo, so why did this man's turn him on? Scanning the length of the man, Nate spotted two more on his calves. He sat mesmerised by the play of bulging muscles in the guys back. Well if Rio was gonna cheat on his boyfriend Nate could definitely see why he'd chosen this man. It hurt though, he admitted to himself. The whole damn thing hurt.

The guy turned around and caught Nate looking. "Morning," he said. His voice was so deep Nate felt it vibrate his chest.

"Morning," Nate answered, taking in the tats on the man's sculpted chest and peeking up from his shorts. Nate swallowed and quickly made sure his hard cock was well covered by the sheet. "Where's Rio?"

"Still asleep, but I gotta have my coffee first thing in the morning. I'm sorry if I woke you." The guy came over and towered above Nate. He reached out his hand, "I'm Ryan Blackfeather, Rio's partner."

Taking a deep breath, Nate shook his hand. "Nate Gills." So this was Ryan. He was nothing like Nate had pictured. Ryan had always seemed like a name that went with a

professional guy, someone mild-mannered. He'd heard that Garron had been in the Marine's with Rio's partner, but he just pictured a communications guy or something, not this warrior in front of him.

Nate heard a door open and Rio stepped into the room. He scratched his chest and looked from Nate to Ryan. "I guess the two of you have met."

"Yeah," Ryan said. "I think I woke him up making coffee."

"What time you get in?" Rio asked coming further into the room.

Looking at the kitchen wall clock, Nate shook his head. "Couple hours ago, I guess."

"Damn, I'm sorry. Let us grab a change of clothes and you can have the bedroom. We'll disappear for the day so you can get some sleep." Without waiting for a reply, Rio motioned for Ryan and they went into the bedroom and closed the door.

Nate heard them talking but he couldn't make out what they were saying. After several long minutes the door opened, both of them carrying a set of clothes. "It's all yours," Rio said.

Throwing back the sheet, Nate was just pissed enough he didn't care if the two men got a look at his morning wood. He watched as both sets of eyes went wide. Picking up his pillow and sheet, Nate squeezed past them. "Excuse me," he mumbled as his arm brushed Rio on his way through the door. He smiled to himself at Rio's quick intake of breath.

Yeah, Ryan may be here, but Nate knew he was still having an effect on Rio.

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Damn, another meeting. These Good brothers had more meetings than he'd ever heard of. Nate walked into the house, out of sorts. He hadn't slept much after Rio and Ryan had given up the bedroom. He heard voices for several hours before they finally left the house, but he still couldn't relax enough to drift off.

Rawley called him at about three and told him to come to Ranger and Ryker's place for dinner and a short meeting. He knew the reason they always met at the twin's house was

because they couldn't be seen from the road, but he also got the feeling Ranger and Ryker would just prefer everyone left as soon as the meeting was finished.

Nate waved to Sonny as he passed through the kitchen on the way out to the deck. He needed a fucking beer. Getting into the cooler, Nate dug out a frosty bottle and downed it before closing the lid. Grabbing another, he shut the cooler, and walked over to the edge of the deck. Sitting up on the railing, Nate watched the brothers talking in a group around the grill.

He'd nodded as he came out, but other than that he didn't feel like being sociable. Nate didn't understand what was going on with himself, but he'd never felt this hollow ache in his chest. When Rio and Ryan stepped onto the deck holding hands, Nate felt his eyes begin to burn. Fuck, he so didn't want to be here.

It was made even worse when Rio broke away and walked toward him. "Hey," Rio said leaning against the railing. "You okay? You don't look good this evening."

"Thanks for the compliment, but I'm fine," Nate ground out as he took a long pull off his beer. He looked around and gestured to Rawley, "I need to find out what this meeting's about. I'm not hungry and I need to get on the job."

Of course Nate's stomach chose that particular moment to growl. Rio's eyebrows rose. "Sounds to me like you are." He pointed toward the beer. "Don't you think you should lay off the alcohol on an empty stomach? Especially if you plan on working tonight."

"What, all the sudden you care what happens to me?" He pushed off the rail and stood beside Rio. Nate saw Ryan looking over at them. "You'd better go take care of your man. I don't need your worry." Nate walked off in search of Rawley. He needed to get the hell out of here before he broke down and begged Rio to love him. Shit, that wasn't right. He didn't need that big oaf's love, just his body for about the next hundred years.

Getting Rawley's attention, Nate motioned toward the house. He continued on through the kitchen to the great room. Too keyed up to sit, he took a swig of his beer and waited for Rawley.

"What's going on?" Rawley asked taking a seat.

"I want to get out of here and go do my job. Can you tell me what the meeting's about?" Nate started pacing around in front of the big picture window.

"Sure," Rawley said, studying him. "The ballistics came back, proving the same rifle was used to shoot Sonny and take the shots at Jeb. Kyle's lawyered up and it's just a matter of time before the DA gets the case together against him. We think once he hears the charges he'll tell us what we wanna know. Lionel tried to visit him in jail earlier, but Kyle turned him away. I thought maybe you should know because Lionel didn't take it too well."

"Okay, I'll keep on my toes tonight," Nate set down the beer. "If that's all, I'm gonna take off."

"Anything you'd like to talk about?" Rawley stood and picked up Nate's empty beer bottle.

"Nope, I just want to get this case over with so Rio can be on his way back to Texas or wherever the fuck he came from." He gave Rawley a short nod and strode out of the house.

When he was in his rental car, driving toward town, everything hit him at once. He pulled over to the side of the road and buried his face in his hands. "What the hell is wrong with me?" He wiped his eyes and looked at the road in front of him. He decided it was time to push Lionel a little harder. "Dammit, enough pussy footin' around." He put the car in gear and roared off toward his apartment. He needed to get dressed for his special date with Lionel.

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After leaving Ranger's, Garron invited them to the ranch. Sitting on the porch swaying back and forth in the swing, Rio looked out over the pastures dotted with cattle. "I miss home," he said absently.

"How is your little hobby farm?" Garron asked Ryan.

"It's going good. It's nice to have something to ground us when we get back from an assignment."

Sonny laughed, "Yeah, nothing more grounding than cleaning up horse shit."

Ryan chuckled and shook his head. "Naw, we hired a guy to work the ranch. We just get to enjoy it. Ride and fish," Ryan looked over at him, "ain't that right?"

"Yep," Rio replied, but his mind was on Nate. He and Ryan had spent a good part of the day talking about him. Rio had tried his best to convey his feelings without upsetting the good balance he and Ryan had. In the end, Ryan told him he just couldn't do it. As hot as Nate was it put their relationship in too much risk for them to all get involved in a threesome. He'd been pissed at first, thinking Ryan hadn't listened to a word he'd said, but it soon became clear that Ryan was scared.

"Rio?"

"Huh?" Rio looked up at Sonny.

"Would you like a beer?" Sonny held out a fresh bottle.

"Oh, yeah, sorry. You caught me daydreaming." Rio took the bottle and received a nudge to the ribs from Ryan. He knew Ryan hated it when he drank. Coming from his background, Ryan didn't let anything stronger than Coca-Cola pass his lips. He shrugged and opened his beer.

Sonny went back into the house, and Ryan cleared his throat. "How's he doing?"

Garron looked toward the front door. "Good for the most part. He still gets headaches, he's on seizure medication, and every once in a while he becomes forgetful, but compared to the way he was right after the shooting he's fantastic."

They heard the phone ring and seconds later Sonny came back out, phone in hand. "It's for you, it's Lilly."

"Lilly?" Garron took the phone. "Hey."

Ryan wrapped his arm around Rio and kissed his temple. "We okay?"

Rio turned his head and gave Ryan a kiss on the lips. "We're okay."

Garron hung up and looked at Rio. "Lilly said someone needs to get down to The Zone. Nate's drunk and putting on quite a show for Lionel. She said Lionel looked like he was about to blow a gasket."

"Shit," Rio said standing. He looked down at Ryan, "You want to go with me?"

"Well I sure as hell ain't letting you go alone." He stood and shook Garron's hand.

"Thanks for the beer and the company. I'll call you tomorrow."

They headed toward the car and Ryan took the keys away from Rio. "I'll drive. You've had too much to drink."

"I'm not drunk."

"Maybe not, but I'm still not letting you drive." Rio blew out a breath and walked around to the passenger side.

"Just get me there. That man's gonna get himself killed." Rio put on his seat belt and stared straight ahead as Ryan took off.

Chapter Eight

As Ryan drove toward the bar, he kept glancing at Rio. It wasn't like his partner to get so worked up. Rio was usually calm in any situation. Ryan didn't think he'd even seen Rio strung this tight while in the jungles of South America being shot at. He just wondered how long he could put him off regarding Nate.

Ryan wasn't blind or a fool. Even if Rio had put his foot down at a one nighter with Nate, Ryan would have known he had feelings for the guy. At first, Ryan thought it was just a matter of screwing Nate and getting it out of Rio's system, but with Rio's vehement objection that Nate wasn't that kind of guy, all of Ryan's hopes fell.

He just didn't know if he could share the love of this man. He was very territorial when it came to Rio. Several men had tried to woo him away from Ryan in the past, but Rio had always shot them down. Nate was different. There was absolutely no doubting that. He was honest with himself enough to admit Nate seemed like a nice guy and the fact that he was hotter than hell didn't slip his notice either.

"When we get there, we'll walk in casually. I occasionally show up for a drink on my nights off, so no one will become suspicious if I just happen to walk in. Being the bouncer, it would be natural for me to try and control a rowdy customer," Rio said, breaking into Ryan's thoughts.

"Wouldn't it be better if I went in and got him out? I mean, no one knows me. Why would you want to risk your cover?" He asked the question, but he was afraid he already knew the answer.

Rio didn't even bother answering the question, instead he looked straight ahead. "I'll get him out," he mumbled.

Pulling up, Ryan parked the car. "Okay, let's get this over with." He got out and walked beside Rio. He saw the hands at Rio's sides twitching and he knew he was preparing himself for a fight.

When they opened the door, the loud music assaulted him. Ryan tried to block it out as he followed Rio casually inside. He spotted Nate in an instant. It was hard not to as most eyes in the bar were on him. He was standing in the centre of the dance floor grinding his hips toward Lionel. With a scotch in one hand and his black silk-blend T-shirt pulled up high enough to expose not only his pierced navel, but his pierced nipples as well, Nate crooked his finger at Lionel.

"Come on lover, dance with me. I don't know why you keep pretending," Nate slurred. Lionel's buddies were trying their best to drag him out of the bar, but he was too busy looking at Nate with murder in his eyes.

In a split second, Lionel broke from his friends and advanced on Nate. Rio started pushing through the crowd toward Nate and all Ryan could do was watch as Lionel reared back his arm and let a punch fly. Nate's head snapped back and Ryan was surprised he was still standing. Instead of backing down, Nate smiled a knowing smile before leaping in the air and kicking Lionel in the chest. Unlike Nate, Lionel did go down.

Rio reached Nate as soon as his feet landed on the floor. Trying not to break his cover, Rio's voice took on the authority of a bouncer. "That's enough, break it up." He grabbed Nate by the arm and pulled him through the crowd. Nate tried to break away, but Ryan knew from experience how strong Rio was. Drunk or not, he was just happy Nate didn't use any of his martial arts moves on his man.

Looking back toward the dance floor, Ryan watched as Lionel was helped up. His face showed his obvious rage and embarrassment. "Oh fuck," he said. He knew there was about to be big trouble. Knowing they'd be followed to the parking lot, Ryan decided to save Rio's cover the only way he knew how. He stepped in front of Rio and looked him in the eye. "I'm sorry my lover got out of control. I'll take him home," he said in a voice loud enough for the patrons to hear.

Rio narrowed his eyes but released his grip on Nate's arm. "See that you keep him on a leash. We don't need that kind of trouble in here."

Ryan saw Rio swallow almost choking on his own words. He gave Rio a nod and whispered in Nate's ear. "If you care anything at all about protecting Rio's cover you'll come with me."

Nate looked at him and then at Rio. "Get me the hell out of here," Nate said as he pushed out of Ryan's grip and headed for the door.

Ryan followed him out and pointed toward his car. He managed to get Nate inside just as the doors opened and Lionel and his gang came out. "Buckle up."

He started the car and pulled out of the lot. Instead of heading to the feedlot, Ryan turned his car in the opposite direction. "Where the fuck are you going?" Nate asked.

"Back to the apartment, but I don't exactly want to leave a trail of breadcrumbs in my wake." Knowing Rio parked behind the feedlot's buildings, Ryan figured it must be pretty safe. He got them heading back toward the apartment and stashed the car as quick as he could. Deciding it would be safer to stay where they were until Rio showed up, Ryan rolled down the windows and turned off the engine.

"We'll wait here for Rio."

"How the hell is he supposed to get here? Didn't he come with you?" Nate slurred without looking at him.

"Yeah, but don't worry about Rio. He has his own way of getting things done." Ryan lifted an elastic band out of the ashtray and pulled his hair back into a loose ponytail. "Mind telling me what all that was about?"

"Not that I have to explain myself to you, but I was trying to get Lionel to make a move. Christ, I'm sick and tired of sitting back doing nothing. Besides making sure Lionel doesn't get near Sonny again, Garron brought me here to get Lionel off balance enough that he'd do something stupid. Well, it wasn't working. Lionel was getting used to me following him around like a puppy dog." Nate grinned, "I think I got his attention though."

Looking at Nate, Ryan wasn't sure if he wanted to punch or kiss him. Neither was an option, so he tilted Nate's face to inspect the bruise blossoming around his eye. "Nice shiner."

"Wouldn't be the first time. I know you and Rio planned to come in and save me, but I really didn't need your help."

"Yeah, and what would you have done when the entire bar decided to take you on? You have a death wish or something? You need to get your head back into the game. If you don't, you won't be around much longer. And although it would solve a few problems, I don't know how well Rio would take it."

That seemed to get Nate's attention. Nate let loose a bark of laughter. "Yeah right, Rio's gonna be concerned with me when he's got someone who looks like you in his bed. Give me a break."

"Haven't you looked in the mirror?" Deciding he'd said too much already, Ryan pushed his seat back to the reclining position and closed his eyes. "Just keep a look out."

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Hanging up the phone, Rawley walked out to the barn. "Jeb? You in here?"

"Back here," Jeb hollered.

Rawley walked back to the tack room. Jeb was sitting on a three-legged stool, reworking a bridle. "I didn't know you knew how to do that."

Jeb looked up from his work and grinned. "I don't really, but I thought it was time I learned. I looked it up on the internet. Seemed like an easy fix, but I'm finding out differently." Jeb set the bridle in his lap. "What's up?"

"I just got off the phone with Garron. Seems our boy Nate went a little nuts overnight and got into a fight with Lionel. Garron's expecting Lionel to file a civil restraining order against him."

"Damn." Jeb scratched his cheek below the cut. "What do we do now?"

Rawley shrugged and pulled Jeb into his arms. The bridle slapped against his boots as it landed in the dirt. "To be honest, I'm not sure. Nate told Garron he didn't care if Lionel filed the order, but it'll go on his record, possibly jeopardise his private detective's licence."

"Maybe we should just send him back to Chicago before anything else happens? Lionel isn't worth ruining Nate's future." Jeb kissed Rawley's chin.

"He won't go. He says he's done with Chicago. I think I'll call him off following Lionel though. Maybe we can get him to take a break and stay in Lincoln until this thing's wrapped up. Kyle's meeting with his attorney today to hear the list of charges against him. Cross your fingers we get lucky."

Rubbing his jean clad erection against Rawley, Jeb winked and knelt. "We finished talking?"

Rawley smiled down and nodded. "For now," he moaned as Jeb started mouthing his cock through the denim. Reaching down, Rawley unfastened himself before burying his hands in Jeb's mop of curls.

Pulling his cock free, Jeb ran his tongue up the underside of Rawley's erection before taking the crown into his mouth. "Yes," Rawley hissed. Jeb worked Rawley's length further into his mouth and sucked. Rawley couldn't stand it, he had to move. "Ready for me?"

Jeb mumbled his consent around Rawley's shaft as he backed off a little. Snapping his hips in a shallow rhythm Rawley rode Jeb's mouth for all he was worth. "So good..."

He heard a zipper lower, and knew Jeb was taking himself in hand. With his fingers gripping Jeb's curls and his balls slapping at Jeb's chin, Rawley buried himself as far as he dared and came with a cry to the rafters.

"Uggghhh..." Jeb moaned around Rawley's cock as he came with his own hand.

Looking down, Rawley whistled at the white patches scattered across Jeb's red T-shirt. "Damn, that's hot. Can I have that shirt?"

Jeb finished cleaning him up and looked down. "Shit. I soil more shirts around you than I ever thought possible." He stood and gave Rawley a tongue tangling kiss. "What would you want with a cum covered shirt?"

Pulling it over Jeb's head, Rawley reached down and cleaned Jeb's cock with it. "I'm gonna stick it in my truck so I can smell you when I start missing you during the day."

"Oh hell," Jeb looked down at his twitching cock. "You sure know how to sweet talk me." He gave Rawley another kiss, "Pick up my bridle and take me to bed."

Rawley was shocked. "You want the bridle in the bed with us?"

"No," Jeb's face went thoughtful. "Well, maybe. Oh hell, just bring it, we'll figure it out."

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They were just regaining their breath when the phone beside the bed rang. Reaching over, Rawley picked it up. "Hello?"

"Hey," Garron said. "Listen, Shelby just called and Sonny had another seizure in the barn. He said it wasn't a bad one, but Sonny's getting one of his headaches. I'm waiting for word on Kyle which should take another thirty minutes or so, but it'll be an hour and a half before I can get there. I was wondering if either you or Jeb would mind going over. Sometimes he gets sick and isn't able to get himself to the bathroom. It also helps if someone rubs his head."

"Sure, we'll both go. How're things going so far with Kyle?" Rawley sat up and reached for his pants.

"I haven't heard anything official, but I did get a smile and a nod from the officer in charge of the interrogation."

"That's good, maybe we'll take care of Lionel before he ever gets a chance to go before the judge with this restraining order against Nate."

"Let's hope. By the way, Sonny will probably be on the floor of the master bedroom closet. The darkness seems to help. Tell him I'll be home as soon as possible."

"Will do." Rawley hung up and turned to Jeb. "We need to get over to Sonny's. He's having one of his headaches and Garron's tied up in Lincoln."

Fastening his Wranglers, Jeb nodded. "I'll take the pot of stew I started this morning."

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Ten minutes later, they walked into the house and as expected, found Sonny in the closet. Rawley grabbed a pillow and blanket and stepped in before closing the door. Kneeling, he slipped the pillow under Sonny's head. "Did you take some of your medicine?"

"Yeah," Sonny mumbled. "Hasn't kicked in yet."

Sitting on the floor, Rawley began rubbing his brother's head. "You're hair's growing in nicely," he said in a soft voice.

It was too dark to see, but when Rawley moved his hands to rub at Sonny's temples he felt the tears sliding down Sonny's face. As much as it hurt him to witness his brother's pain, it was a good boost to his resolve. He'd begun to have doubts about his actions regarding Lionel. Not anymore. Getting justice was worth his job and everything else they'd all been through. One way or another, Lionel would pay for what he'd done to Sonny.

Chapter Nine

By the time Garron arrived home, Sonny was in bed. "How's he doing?" he asked as soon as he stepped through the door.

"Okay, he's finally asleep. I moved him to the bed and shut the curtains," Rawley said, from his place on the couch next to Jeb. "What did you find out?"

A huge smile broke across Garron's face. "That Kyle has a rather good singing voice. Let me grab a beer and I'll tell you all about it."

"Bring me one while you're at it," Rawley called out.

Garron pulled out two beers and nabbed an apple off the counter on his way back into the living room. Handing Rawley his beer, he took a long pull off his own and sat down in the chair. "Kyle claims Lionel paid him to shoot Jeb. He says he didn't have any knowledge of the shooting on Sonny until after it had happened. I guess Lionel did a bit of bragging to his buddies. Which is good, that gives the DA more witnesses to testify against him. Because Lincoln's in the same county as Summerville, the County Sheriff's Department is taking over the investigation. They don't have any proof that Kyle shot Jeb's bull, but they're getting a search warrant for his house. If they can find the shotgun he'll be charged with that too."

"So what about Lionel?" Rawley asked, leaning forward on the couch.

"He'll be arrested for conspiracy to commit murder for sure. I don't know what other charges he'll face. That's up to the DA. Kyle said Lionel paid him to shoot Jeb, but at the last minute he couldn't go through with it. Kyle said he shot the cows to scare Jeb." Garron finished off his beer and started eating his apple. "I'm gonna call everyone over and fill them in. Even if Lionel gets picked up today, there's nothing that says he won't be out on bond in a day or two. His daddy has enough money and county influence that he may be out on the street until his trial comes up."

Rawley stood and walked toward the kitchen, picking Garron's bottle up on the way.

"Care for another?"

"Sure," he said, "While you're in there, why don't you call everyone and set up a meeting while I go check on Sonny?"

"Will do," Rawley replied.

Garron rose and walked upstairs to the bedroom. He opened the door quietly and crept inside. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he looked at his love. "I think we got him," he whispered to Sonny's sleeping form. Deciding to let him rest a little longer, Garron kissed his temple and slipped silently from the room.

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Rawley was sitting on the front porch trying to digest his dinner, when Ranger came out to join him. "Hey, have a seat."

Settling himself in one of Sonny's old rockers, Ranger looked at his brother. "So you gonna try and get your job back?"

"Yeah," Rawley replied. "I thought I'd give it another couple of days and go see Channing."

Ranger's eyebrows rose. "You gonna tell him we're on to his games?"

"Hell no. I'm gonna let him think I know nothing about his dealings." Rawley rubbed his forehead. "I just need my job back, brother. I know they haven't hired anyone to fill my position, so I'm hoping I can reason with him and the council."

"Give anymore thought about running for Mayor?" Ranger winked at him with a grin on his face.

"Sure, I've thought about it, but first things first. Right now, I need my job. After the FBI finishes with Channing, someone will need to dig into the council and clean house."

Ranger stood and stretched. "I think Ryker and I are going to head home."

"Why do you do that?" Rawley asked.

"What?"

"Distance yourselves. Have any of us ever made you feel like we don't approve of the two of you?"

Ranger shook his head and looked out toward the barn. "No one's ever understood us, so we just got used to not bothering with most folks."

"We're your family. I wouldn't exactly lump us in with 'most folks'."

Ranger shrugged, "Sometimes family can be the most critical of all. I'm going to get Ryker." Ranger disappeared back inside and Rawley was left to ponder his statement.

Had he been overly critical of them?

As he thought about it, he watched as Ranger and Ryker pulled out of Sonny's drive. They must have left through the back door. Rawley felt even worse knowing his brothers were avoiding him. Standing, he blew out a breath. "Fuck."

He stuck his head inside. "Jeb? You about ready to head out?"

"Yeah, hang on a sec and I'll clean up some of these pizza boxes first." Rawley waved to the rest of the group before going out to his truck to wait.

When Jeb climbed in, he scooted close to Rawley. "Something wrong?"

"Yeah, I think I have some changing to do," he replied as he pulled out of the ranch yard.

"Do these changes still involve being with me?" Jeb asked nervously.

Rawley slowed the truck and turned toward Jeb. "I'm afraid you're stuck with me." He gave him a quick peck on the lips. "No, this is about me and how I've evidently shamed my brothers to the point where they've pulled away."

Jeb nodded. "You're talking about Ranger and Ryker."

"Yep."

"Well in your defence, it's not exactly normal to be in love with your twin."

"You're right, it's not, but that shouldn't have anything to do with the fact that they're still my brothers. They fought my dad until they finally moved out of the house. I think that's where

I got most of my animosity. Dad was so edgy and grouchy after they left. I think I blamed them for disrupting my home-life."

Rawley pulled up beside the porch and turned off the ignition. "How do I fix it? How do I undo years of making them feel less than they truly are?"

Jeb wrapped his arms around Rawley's neck and kissed him. "Just by treating them like you do anyone else, supporting them, telling them you love them. You can't undo anything overnight. But eventually they'll come to understand." Jeb kissed him again. "Now, how 'bout you come help me feed the horses so we have time to watch a movie before bed?"

Rawley grinned, Jeb always managed to make him feel better. He nodded and got out of the pickup. He knew he had some major making up to do with Ranger and Ryker. He just hoped they'd give him the chance.

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Instead of watching a movie, they decided to go for a horseback ride. While they were out, they rode the fence, looking for trouble spots. Jeb carried his saddlebag of tools just in case. The night was quickly approaching when they reached the back of Jeb's property. "What the hell?"

Rawley's head swung toward Jeb. "What?"

Jeb pointed across the fence. "It's gone. The entire farm's gone. I mean, I know you told me that Lilly said they'd sold it, but I didn't think the new owners would do this."

Looking at the levelled buildings that had once been the Douglas farm, Rawley was shocked. "What the fuck is going on? Did you ever hear who bought it?"

"Nope, it looks like they're fixing to build something besides another farm house though."

"Come on. I wanna make a few phone calls. Something smells fishy."

They rode back to the house at a much faster pace, keeping watch that the horses didn't step into any holes on the way. As soon as they reached the barn, Rawley dismounted. He

started to unsaddle Clyde when Jeb stopped him with a hug. "I'll do it. You go make your calls."

Rawley kissed him. "Thanks."

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By the time Rawley finished on the phone and searched the internet, Jeb was asleep on the couch. After shutting off all the lights and locking the doors, Rawley picked Jeb up and carried him to bed.

Jeb woke as soon as Rawley lifted him. He snuggled his face in Rawley's neck and sighed. "Find what you needed?"

"Think so," he sat Jeb on the edge of the bed and undressed. Jeb already had his boots off, so his clothes came off in a matter of seconds. Sliding under the covers, Rawley pulled Jeb into his arms. "A corporation bought the Douglas place. I haven't found out who's behind the corporation, but I will. I have a feeling this is what we've been looking for. I'm going to call Agent Bitterman tomorrow and ask him some questions about Dick England, that contractor fella from Lincoln, and whether he's affiliated with Sundowner, Incorporated."

"Hmmm," Jeb mumbled as he snuggled further into Rawley's chest.

He felt his cock twitch and fill as Jeb began to kiss his way around his torso. "I figured you were too tired to play."

"Nope, had a little nap." Jeb kissed his way back up to Rawley's mouth. "Feel like making love to me?"

Rawley grinned and pulled him closer. "Always," he whispered against Jeb's lips. He felt Jeb's erection pressing against his own as they began to rub against each other. Rolling them over, Rawley attached himself to Jeb's neck and sucked a love bite. Their passion ignited and Rawley reached for the drawer.

Pulling out the lube, he slicked his fingers and began preparing Jeb's rosette as he continued his assault on Jeb's mouth. "Love you."

"Uh-huh...now," Jeb panted, bringing his thighs to his chest.

Rawley positioned his cock at Jeb's hole and looked into his chocolate brown eyes. Damn, how'd he get so lucky? Sinking into Jeb's heat, Rawley realised something. He shook his head to dispel the thoughts, but he knew he'd come back to them again.

When he was buried to the hilt, he put Jeb's legs over his shoulders and bent down to kiss him. He pulled out slowly before slamming back inside. Rawley grinned as Jeb went crazy. He knew this particular position pegged Jeb's prostate on every thrust. He enjoyed watching Jeb at the height of his ecstasy. His mouth opened and closed like he was trying to moan or say something, but his passion overloaded his brain and he was left speechless.

Rawley felt his balls tingle as they drew up close to his body. He knew he wouldn't last much longer and he needed to watch Jeb come. Bending over, Rawley kissed him again. "Do it for me."

Sweat dripped off his forehead onto Jeb's shoulder as he watched his lover reach for his cock. "Yes, that's it."

The sounds in the room were erotic as hell as Rawley pistoned his hips even faster, the distinct sound of flesh smacking together was erotic in itself. Jeb closed his eyes and Rawley watched the vein throb in his forehead signalling Jeb's climax.

Looking down, Rawley watched the head of Jeb's cock, coloured with a purple tinge at the tight fisted grip, erupt. Several long streams of thick white seed splashed its way onto Jeb's chiselled torso.

Without warning, Rawley came. The explosion so intense he saw spots dance through his vision. Going boneless immediately, Rawley collapsed on top of Jeb, barely remembering to release Jeb's legs from his grip. He couldn't seem to catch his breath as his entire body felt like it was on fire.

Jeb scooted out from under him and turned him over. "Shit, are you okay?" He ran his hand up the side of Rawley's face, pushing his sweaty hair back. "Come on, talk to me."

Rawley opened his eyes and saw the panic etched on Jeb's face. He licked his lips. "I'm okay," he mumbled. "Never...never like that."

Jeb got out of bed and walked to the bathroom. Seconds later he returned with a glass of water. "Here, try and sit up enough to take a drink."

Feeling like a weak kitten, Rawley managed to get his head off the pillow enough to sip at the water. He nodded and Jeb placed the glass on the table. "Shit, don't ever do that to me again. You scared twenty years off my life, Sheriff."

Rawley pulled him back down into his arms. As soon as his breathing was under control, Rawley kissed Jeb's forehead. "I've never come so hard in my life. I felt like my soul was trying to escape through my cock to find its way into you."

"Well I thought you were having a damn heart attack." Jeb punched Rawley's ribs playfully.

"No, you're stuck with me for a good long time." Rawley and Jeb settled in and soon his man was asleep. Rawley thought back to that one instant when he understood his brothers. He knew he wouldn't stop thinking about it until he talked to Ranger. Looking over at the clock he groaned, he still had eight hours until he could get the devil off his chest.

Chapter Ten

Rawley was sitting in the parking lot of the feed store at seven o'clock the next morning when Ranger and Ryker pulled in. Getting out of his pickup, he took a deep breath and walked toward them.

"Something wrong?" Ryker asked.

"Yeah. I was wondering if I could talk to the two of you." Rawley waited for Ranger to unlock the front door to the building before following his brothers inside. Ryker motioned toward his office.

Rawley took off his hat and had a seat in front of Ryker's desk. "I know you guys have to get started this morning, but I needed to get something off my chest."

"Okay," Ryker said, clearly confused.

Swallowing around the newly formed lump in his throat, Rawley closed his eyes. "I'm gonna say some things and I want you both to know I'm not trying to embarrass you. There are just some things that need saying."

"Okay," Ranger said, looking at Ryker.

"I never understood how you two could be in love with each other. All I saw was the affect it had on everyone around you. I was a selfish bastard and I was angry that, despite the way your relationship tore up daddy, you loved each other anyway. I'm ashamed to say it wasn't until I was making love to Jeb last night that it hit me. That all consuming, overwhelming, feeling of love. The kind of love where you'd gladly die to save the other person. I never had that before. And as I was making love I realised I almost missed out on the best thing to ever happen to me because I was afraid of what people would think." Rawley wiped the tears out of his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Since you were babies, the two of you knew you belonged together. You've taken hell for it, been made to feel like you needed to hide it away. Well I just want you to know, that I'm damn proud to call you both my brothers. And if the two of you want to show affection for each other while we're together, you just do it." Rawley stood and nodded his head. "That's all I came here to say. I'm headed into town to have breakfast before I go see Channing about getting my job back. I decided life was too short to wait for what you want. If you don't have the balls to go for it, then you might as well have stayed in bed."

Rawley walked out of Ryker's office toward the door. "Rawley, wait," Ranger said, coming after him.

With his hand on the doorknob, Rawley looked back at his brother. Ranger walked up and gave Rawley a hug. "Does the affection thing apply to you too? Cuz right now I'd like to hug my big brother."

Rawley grabbed Ranger and hugged him with all his might. He felt his eyes tearing again and quickly blinked them away. "Thank you, I needed that." He looked over Ranger's shoulder to Ryker. He broke his hug with Ranger and pulled Ryker into his arms. "I love you, boys. I always have. I just wanted life to be easier for you than the road you chose. I was wrong. You chose the right path for you."

"I love you," Ryker said, just before releasing his hold on Rawley.

"I'll see ya'll later. I've got blueberry pancakes waiting for me at Belle's." With one last nod, Rawley walked out the door and to his truck. He grinned as he pulled out of the lot. He felt redeemed in the eyes of his brothers. That was worth more to him than becoming Sheriff again, but he wasn't stupid. He was still going to ask for his job back.

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Rawley wasn't the least surprised when he stepped into the diner to the buzz of Lionel's arrest. He found an empty booth and turned his coffee cup over. Two minutes later, Belle herself, came bustling over to fill his cup.

"Sorry for the wait, Sheriff. It's a mad house today." She popped her gum and winked. "What can I get ya?"

"I think I'll have your blueberry pancakes and a double order of bacon with a tall glass of orange juice."

Belle nodded and put her hand on her hip. "So tell me, what's the real story on Lionel? Does this have something to do with Sonny's shooting?"

Rawley looked up at the grey haired woman he'd known all his life. She was a sweet woman, but she was also one of the biggest gossips in town. Deciding that evasive honesty would be the best approach, Rawley shrugged. "I've no idea what their charging him with," which was the truth, "remember, I'm not the Sheriff anymore. Although I'm fixin' to go see Channing right after I eat my breakfast."

Belle narrowed her eyes, knowing she was being put off. She finally grinned and nodded toward the counter. "I'd start with Chuck Peterson, he's been grumbling since you lost your job. I think he might be willing to go with you to see Channing."

Rawley looked over at the oldest member of the Summerville City Council. He'd always gotten along with Chuck, but he seemed to be rather old-fashioned and Rawley didn't know that he'd like the new relationship Rawley was involved in. "Could you ask him if he'd like to join me for breakfast?"

"Sure thing, honey." Belle walked off, and he watched as she said a few words in Chuck's ear.

Nodding, Chuck rose off his stool and carried his coffee cup over to Rawley's table. As soon as he was seated, Rawley stuck out his hand. "Thank you for joining me."

"No problem. Belle tells me you're going to see about getting your job back."

"Yes, sir. I don't have an appointment, but I'm hoping the Mayor will see me this morning."

"Well, I've made my thoughts known to the Mayor about your dismissal. I'd be more than happy to back you up. You're the best Sheriff this town's seen in decades."

Taking a deep breath, Rawley knew he had to come clean with Chuck before the man stuck his neck out for him. "Thank you for saying that. I've...um...well, you just need to know, I'm in a new relationship since I lost my job."

"You mean with that Greeley fella. Yeah, I heard all about it. It's hard to keep secrets in a small town."

"You know? And you're still willing to talk to Channing?"

"Well hell, son. Is it something that's going to affect the way you do your job?"

"No, sir."

"All right then. Let's eat our breakfasts and head over."

Rawley breathed a sigh of relief. If Chuck Peterson was open enough to accept his homosexuality, maybe he'd been wrong about the town all along.

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As soon as Rawley got out of his two-hour meeting with Chuck and Mayor Channing, he turned his phone back on. He checked his messages and found one from Jeb. Waving goodbye to Chuck, Rawley got into his truck and called him.

"Hello?"

"Hey, good news. I got my job back. I start on Monday." Rawley put the truck into gear and headed home.

"That's fantastic, I'm so proud of you, Sheriff."

"Thanks. I thought maybe you'd feel like going into Lincoln tonight and doing a little dancing." Rawley turned onto the county road and watched as a dump truck loaded with debris from the Douglas farm went by.

"Yeah, that sounds great. Hey listen, Nate called earlier. He wanted to know if you'd stop by the apartment. I think he's feeling kinda lost without someone to follow."

Slowing down, Rawley executed a U turn and headed to the feedlot. "I'll stop by on my way home. Hey, uh, did Agent Bitterman call by any chance?"

"No, you want me to try him again?"

"If you don't mind. I'd sure like to know what The Sundowner Corporation is doing with the Douglas farm."

"I'll call him as soon as I hang up. If you get home and I'm not around, it's because I'm going to ride fences with Sonny."

Rawley chuckled, "Four months ago, I would've never pictured you working along side of my brother."

"I know, cool isn't it?"

Shaking his head, Rawley pulled into the feedlot. "I love you."

"Good, because I love you back."

Rawley said his goodbyes and hung up. He waved at Ryker through the window as he headed to the back of the building and up the stairs. He knocked and waited for someone to answer. He was just about to give up, when the door opened and a dishevelled Nate stood in front of him. Rawley was shocked. He'd never seen Nate look so unkempt. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Nate said, turning and throwing himself on the couch. "I've been trying to catch up on my sleep, but nothing I do seems to be working." Nate ran his hands through his normally perfectly styled hair.

Rawley took a seat next to the couch and glanced around the small apartment. "I'm taking Jeb into Lincoln tonight to do some dancing. Maybe you should meet us there? Now that Lionel's in the county jail you could take the weekend off and get a hotel room, get caught up on your sleep."

"I might just do that. If I have to listen to Rio and Ryan fuck each other one more time, I'm afraid I'm going to slit my throat."

Oh, now Rawley saw what the problem was. "Having a hard time, huh?"

Nate rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. "You have no idea how it feels to be in love with someone you can't have."

That got a bark of laughter out of Rawley. "Well, I kinda do, only in my case, Jeb wasn't with someone else. Nope, my problem was me, and this town." He looked into Nate's eyes. "Just out of curiosity, have you told Rio you love him?"

"No, but you see the problem is, I like Ryan. I didn't want to. I wanted him to be a total asshole so I wouldn't feel bad about trying to steel Rio away. I can't do it though. They're so much in love it's sickening."

Grinning, Rawley rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, I know a little something about that kind of love. It's not meant to hurt anyone though."

"I know. It's typical of my life. After searching the entire city of Chicago, I have to fall in love with a committed man in a small town. Shit."

Rawley stood, and thumped Nate on the leg. "Try and get a few more hours of sleep. We should be at The Regency Lounge around eight o'clock. There's a nice hotel just down the block if you're interested."

"Okay, thanks, man."

"I'll let myself out. You try and catch some zzz's." Nate yawned and grinned as Rawley turned and left.

When he passed back by Ryker's office window, he caught a glimpse of his brothers sharing lunch at Ryker's desk. He felt like a voyeur but he stood to the side and watched for several minutes. Ranger was laughing and using hand gestures to tell some story and Ryker was wiping tears from his eyes as he held his side in laughter. Rawley was struck dumb. He hadn't seen his brothers this animated since they were boys. He smiled to himself knowing he'd done the right thing that morning.

Skirting the window, Rawley walked to his truck. He felt better than he had in a while. He had his job back, he'd made peace with his brothers, and he was taking a hot man dancing. Life just didn't get any better.

Chapter Eleven

By the time Jeb came riding in that afternoon, Rawley was asleep on the couch. He knelt beside the sleeping man he loved and just studied him. God he was beautiful, even without those amethyst eyes looking into his soul, Rawley was breathtaking. Reaching out, Jeb ran his fingers through the close cropped black hair as he bent to kiss the long black lashes that rested on Rawley's high cheekbones.

Rawley stirred, "Why don't you move those lips farther south and give me a real kiss."

"My pleasure," Jeb said as he kissed his way down Rawley's perfectly shaped nose to his well defined lips. Covering Rawley's mouth with his own, he was instantly hard. Rawley's tongue twining with his own caused a moan to escape him as he covered Rawley with his body.

Rubbing his erection against the front of Rawley's jeans, Jeb continued the kiss until he felt Rawley's hands between them unfastening and unzipping.

"Need to feel you," Rawley said breaking the kiss.

"Yeah, I'm needin'," Jeb replied undoing Rawley's pants.

"Shit, yeah," Jeb groaned as Rawley took both cocks in his hand. Jeb couldn't stay still and began riding Rawley's fist. "Not gonna last," he panted, feeling his balls draw up close to his body.

"Yeah." Was all Rawley said before Jeb felt warmth shoot over the head of his cock.

"Rawley," Jeb yelled as he came in his lover's fist.

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After another nap, Jeb pulled his jeans up and tucked himself inside. "I'm gonna feed and water the horses before I get showered."

Rawley pulled him back down for a kiss before he could get too far away. "I told Nate to meet us at the club. I figured he could use a break."

"Good thinking. By the way, Bitterman called me back and said he couldn't tell me anything about The Sundowner Corporation, and you have an email from a Quade Madison."

"Hmm, well if Bitterman can't talk about Sundowner, I think our assumption was right on. I bet Hibbs and England must be behind it."

Jeb played with the magazine on the coffee table. "And Quade? Who's he?"

Rawley grinned, "You feeling a little of that green-eyed monster?"

"No, just wondering."

"Last week I applied for a job I found on the internet. There's a town in Wyoming, Cattle Valley. They're looking for a new Sheriff so I applied." Rawley saw the look on Jeb's face. He stood and pulled him into his arms. "I'm not going anywhere. I'll admit, if I hadn't been able to get my job back, I might have been tempted to beg you to move with me, but we don't have to think about it now. Although I might email Quade back and give him Ryan's number. I think he'd make a damn fine sheriff."

Jeb leaned in for a kiss. "I'm gonna take care of my chores. What time do you want to head to Lincoln?"

Rawley looked over at the clock. "Oh...maybe around six. I'd like to take you out for dinner before meeting Nate."

"I'll be ready," Jeb said, grabbing his cowboy hat off the peg beside the door.

After Jeb left, Rawley read Quade's email. He reached for the phone and dialled Ryan's cell phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's Rawley. Listen, I received an email that I thought you might be interested in." Rawley told Ryan about the sheriff's opening. "So anyway, I thought I'd find out if you were interested before I emailed Quade."

"I don't know. I haven't been involved with law enforcement in years. Where exactly is this place?"

"Wyoming. Seems years ago some rich guy owned a large section of land there. His son was murdered because he was gay and the rich old guy decided since he had no other heirs, he'd form Cattle Valley. So he left the land and all his money to set up a town where gays weren't discriminated against.

"How come I've never heard of this town? Sounds like heaven."

"That's probably why you haven't heard about it. If word got out, the town would be overrun with every gay man and woman in the country. Let alone every religious zealot known to man. Cattle Valley has a population of around twenty-five hundred and I think they like it that way. The question is would you be willing to give up that ranch you're so fond of?"

"For a settled life in a town where I don't need to hide who I am? Are you kidding?"

"Well then, I'll email Quade back and give him your phone number." He admitted to himself that the town of Cattle Valley sounded too good to be true, the only thing missing was Jeb and his brothers.

"Tell him I'll look forward to hearing from him."

"Will do. Hey, tell Nate that we might be a couple minutes because we're going to stop and have dinner before meeting him at the club."

"What club?"

Shit, Rawley didn't realise Nate wouldn't have told Rio and Ryan where he was going. "Nate's decided to spend the weekend in Lincoln. Jeb and I are meeting him at The Regency later."

"Is it a gay bar?"

Rawley grinned at the protective tone Ryan had taken. "Yes."

"And Nate's going by himself?"

"Well no, I told you, Jeb and I will be there."

"You gonna watch out for him?"

"For Christ's sake, he's a grown man who could probably kick both our asses." Damn, Rawley was enjoying this.

"Right, okay. I'll give Nate the message. And thanks for the heads-up about the job."

"No problem. Talk to you later."

Rawley hung up and rubbed his hands together. It seemed Rio wasn't the only one with feelings for Nate. Damn, if the three of them would just get their thoughts out in the open, they could all be happy. "Oh yeah, now you're the voice of authority on love," Rawley snorted as he headed for the shower.

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Nate studied himself in the bedroom mirror. He had his favourite low-rise jeans on and a white silk-blend T-shirt that fit his leanly muscled frame to perfection. He fussed with his hair for a couple more minutes before getting a strip of condoms out of his drawer. He didn't know if he'd have the nerve to use them, but better safe than sorry.

Sticking the condoms in his front pocket, Nate put on his loafers and left the bedroom...and ran smack dab into Rio. "Hey," he said surprised.

Rio took a step back and looked Nate up and down. "So it's true?"

"I don't know. Tell me what the hell you're talking about and I'll tell you if it's true." Nate took a step to the side and pushed by Rio. He just couldn't trust himself to be that close to the man.

"Rawley told Ryan you were meeting him at a gay club in Lincoln. Said you were going to stay the weekend," Rio turned to face Nate, crossing his massive arms over his chest.

Nate felt his mouth begin to water at the site of all those muscles on display. He also felt his cock lengthen and fill. Turning back around, Nate picked up his cell phone and his keys. He realised he'd forgotten his suitcase in the bedroom and sighed. Shit. He was going to have to squeeze back by Rio.

"Well?"

"Well what? Am I going to a club? Yes. Am I going to spend the weekend in Lincoln? Yes. Am I gonna get fucked? Hopefully." He tried to push past Rio again, but the larger man pinned him up against the door jam.

"Don't do this."

Nate looked into the dark brown eyes of the man he'd fallen in love with. He saw the hurt and it almost made him forget about the whole thing. "Why do you do this to me?" Nate asked. "You have to know how I feel about you. No way can you be blind enough not to see how hard my dick gets when you and Ryan are around. It's killing me, Rio. I need to move on."

Nate thought Rio was going to kiss him, but instead he buried his face in Nate's neck and whispered in his ear. "I don't want to think about you in another man's bed."

"And I don't want to think about you in Ryan's without me. We don't always get what we want in life." He put his hands on Rio's chest and closed his eyes. It took every ounce of his willpower to push him away.

Without looking at him, Nate retrieved his suitcase and walked toward the front door. "I love you," he whispered before walking out.

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The club was in full swing by the time Rawley and Jeb stepped through the door. Rawley had heard about the place from Sonny but this was his first visit. He was impressed at the classy elegance of the lounge. Creams and browns mixed well with the dark woodwork. The chairs, covered in buttery leather, were grouped together with a low table in the centre.

They immediately spotted Nate, surrounded by a group of what appeared to be business men. Jeb leaned into Rawley. "This is definitely Nate's playing field."

"Yeah, and it looks like the whole team wants a go at the fresh meat." He led Jeb over to a quieter spot, away from the dance floor. "I'll go tell Nate we're here. Order me a beer if the waiter comes."

"Will do."

Rawley weaved his way through the crowd, surprised when more than one man purposely brushed up against him. Damn, these guys were in some kind of feeding frenzy. He thought about Ryan and how he'd be fighting mad if he saw Nate surrounded by all these good-looking men. He even thought about calling him just to push the issue. He felt in his bones that the trio would eventually end up together, but then he remembered how he felt when Sonny tried to push Jeb on him. No, it would be better to let them work it out on their own.

Squeezing his way through the group of men, Rawley finally caught Nate's eye. "Hey, I was beginning to think you guys stood me up." Nate got to his feet and picked up his drink. "Sorry fella's my friends are here. I'll catch up later."

Rawley watched as he winked at several of the men before coming to stand by him. "Ready?"

"Sure, lead the way." Nate followed close behind Rawley as they made it back to Jeb.

Rawley rubbed his ass. "Damn, someone pinched me."

Nate laughed, "You? My poor body's going to be black and blue in the morning." He took a seat with his back toward the crowd and set his drink down. "So what took you so long?"

Rawley watched as Jeb looked at Nate and blushed. "We...um...got a late start."

Nate's brow rose as he grinned. "Decided to ease the tension before grinding against each other on the dance floor?"

"Yeah, something like that," Rawley answered as the waiter brought their drinks. "I got a call on the way over. Garron thinks the judge is going to set Lionel's bail on Monday."

Nate sat up a little straighter. "Why the hell would he do that? What about the attempt to kill Sonny?"

"He's not being charged with that, yet. The DA said he needed more proof than just the say-so of Kyle and so far, his other buddies aren't talking."

"What about the ballistics expert determining the shooting was done from Lionel's father's building?"

Rawley rubbed the back of his neck and took a drink of beer. "I know it's frustrating, but the DA has to make sure he has an airtight case and he doesn't. I'll start back to work on Monday and get involved in the investigation."

"So where does that leave me?" Nate asked, slowly ripping his napkin into shreds.

"That depends on you. If you continue to follow Lionel once he gets out, I think you'll have to do it covertly, which means, no following him into The Zone."

"So this is my last free weekend until he goes to trial," Nate said accepting his new assignment.

"Yep, looks that way. I can have Rio watch him in the bar. I don't think Lionel has a clue that he's working with us. Ryan? I don't know. He's a wildcard. Lionel knows that you know him, so he can't follow openly either. Of course, maybe Ryan'll just end up going back home until the job's done."

Rawley watched several emotions pass over Nate's face, first happiness and then despair. The music started picking up and Jeb grabbed his hand. "I love this song, come on and dance with me."

Rawley looked down at Nate. "You okay by yourself for a dance or two?"

Nate looked around the club. "Who says I'll be sitting them out?"

Shaking his head, Rawley let Jeb lead him through the crowd to the dance floor. Once there, Rawley pulled Jeb into his arms.

"Uh...Sheriff? This is a fast song."

"Yeah? So? I wanna dance like this. Besides, if I let you get too far away, someone will probably grab your ass and that'll just piss me the fuck off."

Jeb batted his long dark lashes, "It's so nice to have a big strong man around to protect me."

Giving Jeb's butt a good swat, Rawley bit his neck, "Smartass."

One dance led to two and by the time the third one was over, both Rawley and Jeb were hard as steel. "Fuck," Rawley said, leading Jeb back to their seats. "As much as I want to take you home, I think we need to keep an eye on Nate for a while longer."

Jeb looked toward the dance floor where Nate was sandwiched between two men. "Looks like he's doing okay on his own."

"Yeah, but I told Ryan I'd keep an eye out for him."

"Or...you could call Ryan and tell him we're leaving and if he wants to watch Nate in the centre of all these men he can damn well do it himself."

Thinking about that phone call, Rawley shook his head. "I don't know that I can do that. Right or wrong, Nate's in love with both Ryan and Rio. If they come up here and get into a fight, I don't want to be the one responsible for breaking up a good thing."

"What good thing? They don't have a good thing. What they have, is a fucked-up mess."

"Yeah, but it's their mess."

"Exactly," Jeb said, grabbing Rawley's phone from his belt. He scanned the phone log for a few seconds before pushing a button and holding the phone to his ear. "Hey, it's Jeb."

Rawley looked back toward Nate. He thought he looked like he was having a damn good time until he caught a glimpse of his face. Although Nate's body might have been interested in the two men on either side of him, his mind definitely wasn't. Nate's eyes looked completely blank. If the eyes were the mirror to the soul, Rawley would guess, Nate left his back at the apartment.

Jeb shoved the phone in his face. "Here, they said they were on their way. Now, can we get out of here? I'm sure Nate can handle himself for the hour it'll take them to arrive."

Clipping the phone back onto his belt, Rawley nodded. "We need to stop by and tell him we're leaving. I wouldn't mention that you called Ryan though."

"Okay, I get ya." Jeb finished off his beer and stood.

Rawley broke into the threesome and leaned in to Nate's ear. "We're gonna take off, are you gonna be okay?"

Nate nodded and winked. "I'm walking to the hotel from here, so I should be fine."

"Give me a call in the morning."

Nate smiled for the first time all night. "Worried about me?"

"Sure, buddy. I worry about everyone who means something to me."

"Thanks, I needed to hear that."

With one last wave, Rawley and Jeb left the club. On the drive home, Rawley squeezed Jeb's thigh. "I hope you did the right thing calling Ryan."

"Yeah, me too."

Chapter Twelve

Ryan gripped the steering wheel a little tighter as he sped toward Lincoln. "What the hell were we thinking?"

"As you pointed out earlier, he's a grown man. It's not like we could have kept him from going." Rio didn't even turn his head away from the passenger side window.

"That's not what I meant. Do you love him?" When Rio didn't say anything, Ryan continued, "Because I think I do."

Rio's head whipped toward him, "What? All this time, you've watched me die a little every day and you didn't say anything?"

"I didn't realise it until today, when Rawley said Nate was going to the club. After I got off the phone, I went outside and puked. That's when I realised it."

"Shit, so where does that leave us?" Rio said, putting his hand on Ryan's thigh.

Taking one hand off the wheel, Ryan covered Rio's hand. "I guess that's what we need to figure out. Do you think he'd be interested in a relationship with both of us?"

"Yeah, he said as much before he left earlier."

Rio scooted closer and kissed Ryan's neck. "What about jealousy? You know you're prone to that."

"I'm not going to lie. I have no idea if it'll make me jealous to see you with him. Shit, I can't believe I fell in love with a guy I haven't even kissed."

Groaning, Rio covered Ryan's hard cock with his hand. "I can't wait to kiss those gorgeous lips of his, and to watch you do the same." He gave Ryan's cock a squeeze. "I can see the idea turns you on."

"Hell yes it does, but if you don't scoot back over, I'm gonna wreck this damn car and we'll never get to Nate."

With one last grope, Rio moved back over and re-fastened his seat belt. "Spoilsport," Ryan heard him mumble.

Ryan smiled, he felt lighter than he had in days. He hadn't realised how much this situation with Nate had weighed on him. Now they just had to convince Nate to give them a chance. He thought of the phone call earlier with Quade Madison. He hadn't told Rio about it because he didn't want to get him all stirred up. Quade told him he'd need to do a little checking into his background before officially offering him the job, but Ryan wasn't worried about that. He'd done his years in the Marine's before eventually going to the police academy. After finding out his kind wasn't treated the same by his fellow officers, Ryan got out and went into the mercenary soldier field with Rio.

Some people thought mercenaries were nothing but paid killers. Ryan had only shot one person in his years in the field and that was in self-defence. What he and Rio did most of the time was to guard medical aide workers as they travelled from village to village. No overthrowing governments, no rescuing kidnapped dignitaries, they were basically well paid bodyguards. So no, he didn't worry about a thorough background check. He'd miss his ranch though if they moved to Wyoming. Of course, there was a lot of land in Wyoming just waiting to be turned into a Cattle Valley for him, Nate and Rio.

"What are you thinking about so hard?" Rio asked.

He turned and gave Rio a wink. "Just the future. Trying to map stuff out in my head." He looked at the scribbled piece of paper on the dash with the directions to the bar. After a few more turns, he parked the car. Turning to Rio, he held out his hand. "Ready to do this?"

"Let's go."

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Reaching over, Rawley put his hand on Jeb's thigh. "Thanks, I enjoyed dancing with you."

Covering his hand, Jeb moved it toward his erection. "Just get us home so we can dance some more."

"Oh that's what you wanna do? I thought maybe I'd have some of that pretty little ass of yours, but if you'd rather dance..."

Jeb put his feet up on the dash and opened a little for Rawley's wandering hand. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure," Rawley replied. He looked over at Jeb and saw the concern on his face in the glow of the oncoming traffic.

"Do you think you'll ever let me make love to you?"

That stilled Rawley's hand. He suddenly felt ashamed that he'd never even considered it. Would it make him less of a man?

"Rawley?"

He looked over at Jeb. "I've never done it before."

"I know, and it's not something I'll ask for all the time, but..."

"Okay. I think," Rawley said taking a deep breath. His hands began to sweat and he felt beads of perspiration pop out on his forehead. He thought he'd come so far, but he realised he still had a long way to go. How could he feel this way? He could tell by the look in Jeb's eyes this was important to him. Why hadn't he ever taken Jeb's needs into consideration? Hell he didn't even know if Jeb was used to being bottom or top in a relationship. With his smaller size he'd just assumed.

He looked around and determined he had about ten more minutes to make up his mind before they arrived home. Jeb had gotten quiet beside him, and Rawley knew his own silence was hurting the man he loved. He needed to work this out though. He had to figure out why, mentally, it made him feel weaker to let another man mount him.

Pondering his options, he ran out of time when they pulled into the ranch yard. He started to open the door, but Jeb stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Rawley?"

"Yeah?" He looked over his shoulder at Jeb.

"Forget I asked, okay? Let's just continue as we have been."

Rawley knew it was the coward's way out, but God help him, he just wasn't ready. "Okay. Thanks." Jeb released him and Rawley got out of the pickup. He waited for Jeb beside the truck and took his hand as they made their way into the house.

Jeb gave him a quick kiss, "I'm going to make myself a sandwich, you want one?"

"No," Rawley shook his head. His stomach was in so many knots, he wasn't sure he could keep down what he'd already eaten. "I'm gonna take a shower." Jeb nodded and Rawley walked into the bathroom.

After undressing, he stood under the hot spray berating himself. He'd screwed up the entire evening and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it. He glanced down at his flaccid cock. That sure wasn't going to help. Maybe Jeb would be too tired and Rawley could just hold him until they fell asleep?

He stood there until the water went cold, but he still wasn't ready to face Jeb. Climbing out, he left the water running and dried off. Sitting on the closed toilet seat, Rawley put his head in his hands. He was going to lose it all if he didn't get over this.

A knock sounded on the locked door and Rawley knew his time was up. He turned off the shower. "I'll be out in a second," he said through the door.

"Ryan's on the phone. He wants to speak with you," Jeb answered.

Wrapping the towel around his waist, Rawley opened the door, embarrassed that he'd locked it. "Thanks," he said as Jeb handed him the phone and walked toward the bedroom.

"Hey, Ryan."

"You sonofabitch, I can't believe you just left Nate at the bar like that."

"He's a goddamn grown man and you were on the way." It registered that Ryan had to be pissed for a reason. "Why, what happened?"

"Some sick fuck drugged him. Luckily Rio and I got there in time. The asshole was trying to carry him out of the club when we got there."

"Oh shit, oh fuck, man. I'm so sorry. We had no idea something like that would happen. Is he okay?"

"Yeah, now. He had to puke his guts out in the club's bathroom, but I think he'll be fine."

Rawley looked toward the bedroom and watched as Jeb crawled under the covers onto his side facing the wall. Rawley closed his eyes, fuck.

"Anyway, we're at his hotel for the night. We'll probably just stay up here for the weekend."

"Okay, look, I'm really sorry."

"I know, I just needed to get that off my chest. I'll talk to you later."

"Goodnight," Rawley said hanging up the phone. He went through the house to make sure Jeb turned off the lights and locked up before making his way into the bedroom. Dropping his towel he slid under the covers. Jeb didn't move although Rawley knew he wasn't asleep.

Moving to spoon against his back, Rawley wrapped an arm around the man he was so desperately in love with. "Ryan said someone drugged Nate after we left. He and Rio caught the guy before he carried Nate out of the club though. They think he'll be all right."

"That's good," Jeb mumbled.

"I love you," Rawley whispered in Jeb's ear.

"I know," was Jeb's only reply.

Deciding to just let it drop for the night, Rawley tightened his grip on Jeb and drifted off to sleep.

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The next morning Rawley wasn't surprised to wake up in an empty bed. Looking over at the clock he saw that it was only a little after six. He covered his eyes remembering another morning not too long ago when he'd woke to an empty bed.

Knowing a peace offering wouldn't do any good, Rawley sat on the edge of the bed trying to figure out what to do. He couldn't talk to Jeb about what was bothering him because he

didn't really understand it himself. Deciding it would be better to just bypass the whole scene until he worked out his own hang-ups, Rawley got dressed for the day and went into town for breakfast.

He'd just ordered his usual when his cell phone rang. Looking at the caller ID he saw it was Sonny. "Hello."

"Hey, big brother. Is there something going on I should know about?"

"What're you talking about?"

"I just saw Jeb. He seemed pretty messed up."

Rubbing his eyes, Rawley sighed. "We're just working out a few things."

"Do you need to talk about it?"

"No, I need to work it out on my own. Can I ask you a personal question though?"

"Maybe, depends on the question."

He couldn't believe he was about to ask his brother about his sex life while sitting in the middle of the town's diner. "Have you ever topped Garron?"

Sonny started laughing, "When you're in love you don't think of it as topping. You think of it as making love to the person most important to you. And yeah, sure, I've made love to Garron."

"Okay, that's what I needed to know. Would you do me a favour and check on Jeb a little later. I'm going to be out most of the day."

"Coward."

"Yeah, something like that. Talk to you later." Rawley hung up just as his breakfast came, although suddenly he wasn't hungry.

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Deciding to run by the station, Rawley walked the four block and opened the door to all sorts of chatter. Looking around at the group of secretaries and deputies, Rawley held up his

hand. "What the hell is going on here? I leave for a while and the place turns to shit?" They all stopped and looked at him. Rawley grinned letting them know he was just giving them a hard time.

"Sheriff," Verna cried as she waddled over to him. Wrapping her arms around his waist, she gave him a big hug. "We've missed you. We heard you were going to start back on Monday?"

"Yep, just thought I'd stop in and see what was going on." He grinned again. "I can see you've been busy."

Verna slapped his arm and moved back to her dispatch desk. "We were just talking about Lionel. Something new must have happened overnight, but we can't get any more information."

"Oh? Is there anyone using my office?"

"Well no, why would anyone be using it, it's yours."

"Good, I'll go see if I can find anything out. And it's good to be back, I've actually missed all your mugs." Rawley walked down the short hall to his office. After closing the door he sat at his desk and looked around. "Yes, this is where I belong," he said to himself and picked up the phone.

Chapter Thirteen

After getting off the phone with the County Sheriff's office, Rawley placed another call to Garron. "Hey, did you hear?"

"A little, I'm heading into town now, why don't I meet you at the diner and we can compare notes."

"Sounds good, I'll try and get out of the station in one piece and meet you there." Rawley hung up. Walking out of his office, all eyes were on him.

It was Verna who eventually spoke up, "Well?"

Rawley held up his hand. "I've been told not to discuss the recent developments until the official announcement this afternoon. I'm sorry guys. I just can't chance losing my job again."

Although they all nodded, Rawley could tell they were disappointed. "Maybe I'll come back and sneak you all the information just before the word comes down."

Verna winked, "Thanks, Sheriff. What's the use of working here if you don't get inside information, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I know. The whole protecting the innocent is just a side detail." Rawley winked back and walked out.

Strolling down the street, Rawley's mind wandered back to Jeb. He wondered what he was doing right now. He longed to call him just to hear his voice but he didn't know what to say. It was quickly becoming evident that he needed to talk to someone. He thought about Sonny, but he was afraid his brother wouldn't understand. Despite what Sonny said, it was clear that Garron was definitely the natural top in that relationship. Maybe talking to another Alpha about his concerns would help?

Finding a booth, Rawley slid in and turned his cup over. Seconds later, Belle appeared with a pot of strong black coffee in her hand. "Hi, Sheriff, back so soon?"

"Yeah, I'm meeting Garron for lunch."

"Speaking of, how's Sonny doing? He doesn't come into town much anymore."

"Well, he's not been cleared to drive yet. He still has seizures once in a while. He drives around the ranch some but he's not supposed to do it at all. I told him if I ever caught him, I'd give him a ticket for sure." Rawley grinned. "Being Sheriff definitely has its advantages."

"So the doctors are worried that he'll have a seizure while driving," it wasn't a question. He could tell Belle was working it out in her mind. "Everyone in town assumes because he survived the shooting and is at home he's back to normal, but that isn't the case is it?"

"No, Ma'am. Sonny will be on seizure medicine for the rest of his life. He has debilitating headaches that cause him to hide in a dark room for hours. His personality has changed a bit as well. His sweet side seems to be more dominant these days."

"Oh heck, Sonny's always been a sweet boy, even when he was getting into trouble." Belle started to turn away and stopped. "I just want you to know. I don't think most people in town blame you for doing everything you could to catch his shooter. Badge or no badge, you're a brother first."

Rawley felt warmed by the statement. "Thank you, Ma'am."

Belle squeezed his arm briefly before turning away to wait on her customers. Rawley looked around the room and realised these people accepted the Good boys because of who they were, not what they were. He was smiling to himself when Garron slid into the seat across from him.

"Something funny?" Garron asked.

"No, just had a chat with Belle about Sonny. She misses him. You need to bring him into town with you more often."

"I think he's a little afraid he'll forget something or have a seizure while in town. He doesn't want people to see him that way."

"You need to talk to him. Explain that the town's people won't like him any less if something happens. They're all aware of what he went through, and believe it or not, the majority of the town cares about him." Rawley took a drink of his coffee.

"Wow, you're good at telling other people what to do, how 'bout cleaning your own house before you start on mine." Garron looked at him, eyebrows raised.

Rawley rolled his eyes. "I take it you've talked to Sonny?"

"Nope, I talked to my brother. Well, I tried to talk to him. He pretty much shut the conversation down when I asked how he was getting along." Garron looked into Rawley's eyes and leaned forward across the table. "I know Jeb's voice when he's been crying. Are you responsible for that?"

"Yeah, but it's not intentional, I swear its not." He leaned forward so no one else could hear their conversation. "Listen. Before we get into my problems can we discuss Lionel?"

"Sure, tell me what you've heard and I'll tell you if I know anything more," Garron said.

"Lionel, the dumbass that he is, tried to hire someone inside the county jail to kill Kyle so he couldn't testify. Not realising of course, that it was a county jail and not a fucking maximum security prison. The guy he tried to hire was in for assault because he got into a bar fight when some other guy tried to muscle in on his lady, a far cry from a hit man."

"Yep, so now the DA has something else to charge him with and Lionel is looking at a very long prison sentence even without Sonny's shooting. Evidently, Kyle called one of his buddies and told him what Lionel had tried to do. I guess the DA's been getting calls all day from Lionel's ex-buddies. They're all ready to testify that Lionel not only bragged about shooting Sonny, but they were there when Lionel ordered them to sweep and clean the roof of the Hibbs' Building. My guess is the delayed announcement has to do with Lionel's buddies trying to work out a deal with the DA. I'm sure they want immunity if they testify against him."

Rawley scratched his jaw. "So either way, Lionel will be looking at more than one trial."

"Yeah, I was just thinking it's time to celebrate. I thought maybe I'd have a barbecue at the house later today. You interested?"

"I'm interested, but I have a few things I need to work out with Jeb first."

"Okay, now that Lionel's out of the way, you feel like talking?"

"Yeah, but not here. Let's walk down to the park." Rawley stood and tossed a couple dollars on the table. He waved to Belle on his way out.

Walking beside Garron, Rawley tried to get his thoughts in order. Garron thankfully must have known because he kept quiet. Reaching the park Rawley gestured to an empty bench off to the side. Settling himself beside Garron, Rawley rubbed his hands together. "Jeb asked me if he could make love to me," Rawley said without any lead in.

"And?"

"What do you mean, and? I've never allowed a man to do that to me. I mean, I thought being a top meant I wouldn't have to do that."

"Who said you were the top? And what exactly does that mean? I don't mean literally, I'm talking about a top in a relationship. What exactly is that?" Garron just looked at Rawley waiting for an answer.

"You know. I'm the guy who does the fucking. The Alpha. What would it make me if I let Jeb mount me?"

"Okay, first, don't ever say Jeb is going to mount you because I'm expecting to see your head on the wall of the living room someday with that term. Now, that said, I gotta tell you, you're starting to piss me off. Do you ever stop to listen to yourself? Alpha? What's that make Jeb? Your beta? I don't think so." Garron ran his fingers through his long hair, "Listen, I know this is all new to you, but you've got some fucked up ideas about relationships. Jeb doesn't need an Alpha, he needs a partner. Can you say partner?"

"Knock it off," Rawley grumbled.

"What I'm trying to get through to you is that a partnership doesn't have an Alpha. You're both equal, and as far as letting Jeb make love to you? Try it before you knock it. You might just surprise yourself."

"But..." Rawley didn't know how to explain his biggest hang-up. "I love Jeb, and only Jeb, but if I allow him to do...that, I'll look at myself as a gay man instead of just a man." There he'd said it. It may not have been pretty but the words were finally out there.

Garron stood and paced around the bench with his hands on his hips. He watched as Garron took several deep breaths before turning back to him. "Do you think I'm less of a man because I love your brother? I'm not talking about who fucks who, I'm talking about love."

"No."

"Do you think Jeb is less of a man because he loves you enough to allow you to make love to him?"

"God no."

"Then what exactly is the difference between a gay male and a hetero male in terms of manliness?"

Rawley didn't have an answer. He felt totally drained by the entire conversation. "I think I have some more thinking to do," he mumbled.

Garron sat back down and thumped Rawley on the back. "Well do it fast, because the next time you pull a stunt like this and make my brother cry I'm gonna tear you apart. Now get your shit together and make up with Jeb. We'll expect you for dinner around seven." Garron stood and walked toward his truck.

Rawley rested his head in his hands. It was bound to be a long day.

Chapter Fourteen

Putting his horse away, Jeb walked toward the house. He looked at his phone to make sure he hadn't missed a call from Rawley. Nope, still nothing. He knew leaving that morning before Rawley woke was a shitty thing to do, but he deserved it. He knew what Rawley's problem was even if Rawley didn't. He'd been through it before, with Caleb most recently. He was an idiot for thinking Rawley would be different. Lord knew he enjoyed a big strong man, but he didn't enjoy all the baggage that came along with them.

Stomping the dust off his boots, Jeb went inside. He had a little over an hour before he was supposed to be over at Garron's, so maybe he'd get ready and sit on the porch and have a beer. Jeb sighed, and waited for his wayward man to come home.

Pulling his dirty T-shirt off, he turned on the shower. Once naked he stepped in and tried to let the hot water melt his tension away. He soaped up and washed his hair, but after ten minutes he still felt as bad as he had before. Deciding to give up, Jeb got out and dried off. After hanging his towel on the back of the door, Jeb made his way to the bedroom. He stopped dead in his tracks and almost swallowed his tongue.

"I've been waiting," Rawley said from his position in the centre of the bed.

"Wow," Jeb said in awe. Rawley laid spread eagle on the bed with what appeared to be Jeb's plug inside him. "Um...did I miss something?"

"Not yet, come over here." Rawley held out his hand. "I'm sorry but I used your toy. I'll buy you another one, I just wanted our first time to be good and I figured this way there wouldn't be any pain. And believe me, when I stuck this bad boy in, there was definitely pain involved."

Jeb tried not to grin as he settled beside Rawley. "There would have been less if I'd helped. It's easier to do when you're aroused." He leaned over and kissed his man. "I appreciate the gesture though." Jeb reached down and wiggled the plug.

Rawley jumped, "Oh, shit." Rawley looked at him wide-eyed. "Do it again," he moaned.

Stretching out beside Rawley, Jeb kissed him. "I love you."

"I know," Rawley smiled. "If you didn't you wouldn't put up with my stupid ass. I'm sorry."

"You don't have to do this. I'll love you anyway," Jeb said circling Rawley's nipple with his finger.

Shaking his head, Rawley pulled Jeb on top of him. "I want you to make love to me."

Jeb looked into his lover's beautiful eyes and smiled. He could see the want there, yes, he saw apprehension but that was totally normal. Reaching over, Jeb took the bottle of lube off the table and sat back on his heels. Applying a liberal amount to his hand he stroked his cock as Rawley watched.

"You're so sexy," Rawley crooned.

"Ha, you should see what I'm lookin' at." Jeb reached down and shifted the plug a few times before sliding it out. Even though it appeared Rawley had used most of the bottle, Jeb decided to add a little more. Slipping his fingers inside, Jeb smoothed a digit over Rawley's prostate.

"Hell, yeah," Rawley howled, arching his back. "Need you, now."

Leaning down, Jeb pressed a kiss to Rawley's lips as he positioned himself. He was surprised at what a good job the plug had done in stretching him. After only one minor wince, Jeb was buried to the hilt. Maintaining eye contact, Jeb slowly began to move.

Rawley hooked his arms under his legs and brought them to his chest. "Feels good," Rawley said, sounding surprised.

"Yes, I know," Jeb replied smiling. When he thought Rawley was ready, he began to thrust harder and faster. The look on Rawley's face was absolutely breathtaking. Jeb felt mesmerised by the light dancing in his lover's eyes as he surged in and out.

When Rawley reached between them to wrap his fingers around his cock, Jeb knew he was doing something right. Moving to another position, Jeb went at Rawley from a different angle. The result was immediate and Rawley cried out his name as cum splashed across his chest.

Relieved he could finally let go, Jeb sunk into Rawley's heat twice more before burying himself as deep as possible. He came growling his love for Rawley, before collapsing onto his man's chest.

Jeb buried his face in Rawley's neck and hummed. "Thank you," he said reaching up to run his hands over Rawley's face. He felt tears and sat up enough to look at him. "Did I hurt you?"

"No, it was beautiful, you're beautiful. I'm just ashamed that I thought I'd be less of a man if I ever experienced it." Rawley went on to tell Jeb about his fears and his conversation with Garron.

"I can't believe you talked to my brother about this. I think I love you even more." God, Rawley must have really been confused if he'd gone to Garron for advice. He had to keep reminding himself that this was Rawley's first relationship.

"Do you love me enough to call us in sick to the barbecue?"

"No, because I need to give my brother a big hug and you need to tell everyone who's helped with Lionel thank you." He licked the side of Rawley's face. "Get up and take a shower with me and I'll let you make love to me tonight when we get home."

"Promise?"

"Definitely," Jeb said, startled when Rawley jumped off the bed and carried him to the shower.

After getting another beer out of the cooler, Rawley sat down on the porch steps next to Nate. "I wanted to apologise for leaving you at the club like we did."

Nate waived his concerns away. "If you hadn't left me, Ryan and Rio wouldn't have come to my rescue." He looked at Rawley and tilted his head to the side. "You look different."

Rawley grinned, "It's the look of a completely contented man."

"Oh, well then, in that case, I must be wearing the same look."

"Ryan said you were going back to Texas with them," Rawley said, taking a swig of beer.

"Yeah, I don't really see the two of them fitting into my Chicago life, so I'm gonna become a cowboy." Nate looked down at his expensive loafers. "I might need to invest in some snake-skin boots."

"Real cowboys don't wear fancy boots," Rawley reminded him.

"Look, just because I'm going to live on a ranch doesn't mean I can't look good. I've got two hot men to keep interested."

"Oh, I don't think that's going to be an issue," Ryan said sitting down behind Nate. He wrapped his legs and arms around him and leaned down to kiss his neck.

Rawley tipped his beer toward Ryan. "So, have you heard anything about the Sheriff's job?"

"Not yet, but hopefully in the next week or so. In the meantime," Ryan reached down and pinched Nate's nipple, "if we don't get on the road, we won't make Kansas City tonight like we hoped."

"Well if you don't stop doing stuff like that, we won't make Kansas City at all," Nate replied.

With a grunt, Ryan stood and pulled Nate up beside him. He stuck out his hand, "It was nice to meet you. I hope we'll be living close enough that we can still get down here from time to time."

"I look forward to it. The three of you are always welcome," Rawley said shaking first Ryan's and then Nate's hand. He looked over his shoulder, "Where's Rio?"

"Trying to get that barbecue sauce recipe out of Sonny," Ryan chuckled.

"Good luck. He doesn't share his recipes with anyone."

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As Jeb and Rawley laid in bed that night, coming down from an explosive bout of love making, Rawley thought about everything his family and loved one's had been through lately. They all came out of it changed. Maybe not physically, like Sonny, but changed none the less. He was so happy. He couldn't imagine anything making him happier. "You know, I don't think I want to be Mayor. I love my job."

"Sure, you say that now, but after the FBI finishes with their investigations, this town's going to need a leader who can pull them through this and get the job done. If that doesn't sound like something you'd love, you're foolin' yourself. And as much as I like the idea of shagging the Sheriff, it would be a real turn on to make love to the Mayor."

Rawley laughed, "Well then, Mayor's office here I come."

About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles between being a full-time mother and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find Carol either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favourite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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