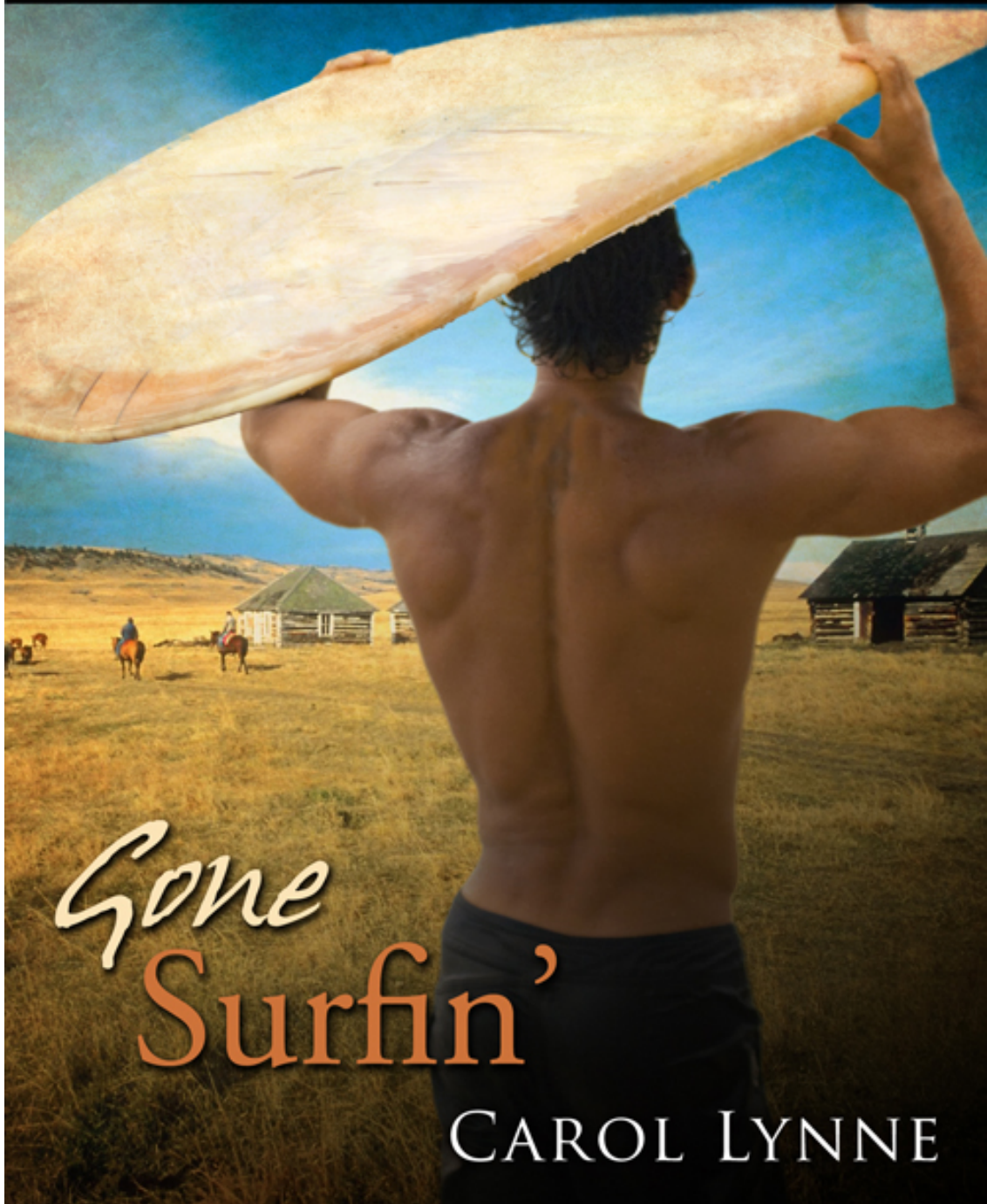




CATTLE VALLEY



Gone **Surfin'**

CAROL LYNNE

A Total-E-Bound Publication



www.total-e-bound.com

Gone Surfin'

ISBN # 978-1-906811-79-2

©Copyright Carol Lynne 2009

Cover Art by April Martinez ©Copyright January 2009

Edited by Claire Siemaszkiewicz

Total-E-Bound Publishing

This is a work of fiction. All characters, places and events are from the author's imagination and should not be confused with fact. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, events or places is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form, whether by printing, photocopying, scanning or otherwise without the written permission of the publisher, Total-E-Bound Publishing.

Applications should be addressed in the first instance, in writing, to Total-E-Bound Publishing. Unauthorised or restricted acts in relation to this publication may result in civil proceedings and/or criminal prosecution.

The author and illustrator have asserted their respective rights under the Copyright Designs and Patents Acts 1988 (as amended) to be identified as the author of this book and illustrator of the artwork.

Published in 2008 by Total-E-Bound Publishing 1 The Corner, Faldingworth Road, Spidlington, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, LN8 2DE, UK.

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

Cattle Valley

GONE SURFIN'

Carol Lynne

Dedication

For the members of my yahoo group who continually push me for more, I thank you.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

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

Michelin Man: Michelin North America, Inc.

The Travel Channel: TRAVEL MEDIA, INC. CORPORATION DELAWARE C/O COX COMMUNICATIONS, INC.,

Sponge Bob: VIACOM INTERNATIONAL INC. CORPORATION DELAWARE

Cadillac Escalade: General Motors Corporation

Dr. Pepper: Dr Pepper/Seven Up, Inc. CORPORATION DELAWARE

Jeep: CHRYSLER LLC LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY DELAWARE

Chapter One

"Just deal with it!" Quade yelled, burying his face in his hands. He heard a shuffling noise before Hurricane Carol hit the room.

"What the heck are you getting paid for again? Because I seem to recall your paycheck being a hell of a lot more than mine."

"Drop it, Carol. Just type up an email cancelling the damn Christmas Party and send it out."

"Well, Merry Christmas to you too, Mr. Scrooge."

Quade glanced up from his hands to stare at the pain in his ass. At five-feet two-inches, Carol was worse than any haemorrhoid on the planet. "I'm busy trying to get the roads cleared in time for Christmas."

Carol got that look on her face that Quade hated. "Where's your shovel? I don't see any shovel. If you don't have a shovel, then you aren't doing shit about snow removal. Which means, Mr. Scrooge, that you have time to send out a damn email!"

Quade threw up his hands and shook his head. "Seriously. I know you enjoy this witty banter of yours, but I'm really not in the mood to step into the ring with you. At least not right now. I'll pencil this discussion in for next Tuesday. How does that sound?"

Carol crossed her arms and slumped into the chair in front of Quade's desk. "Kai still hasn't returned your call, has he?"

Despite being his nemesis, Carol was also his best friend. "Yes. As a matter of fact, Kai called a few hours ago. He just finished competing for the season and wanted me to join him in Oahu for the holidays. But I can't, because Mother Nature decided to fuck with me."

"Bummer," Carol echoed Quade's thoughts.

"Yeah. So forgive me if I'm not in the best of moods."

With a resigned sigh, Carol stood. "So tell me what I should say in this very important email."

Quade rolled his eyes and sat back in his chair. "I don't know. Due to the fact that it's colder than a witch's tit in a brass brazier, that the roads are piled with more snow than we've seen in a half-century, the annual Christmas in the Park and Party will be cancelled."

Carol pursed her lips in disapproval. "I think I can come up with something a little more tactful than that."

"See? You didn't need my help after all."

Without another word, Carol turned and strode from his office, slamming the door on her way out. "Good riddance," Quade fumed.

No sooner had he wiped the episode with his secretary from his mind, than the phone rang. "Crap. What now?" Quade reached across his desk and picked up the handset. "Quade," he answered.

"Hey," Sheriff Blackfeather replied. "I was wondering if you'd take a short ride with me."

"Is this a date?" Quade quipped. "Because I'm not sure if I'm up to defending my life against those two hoodlums you call partners."

"Not in the mood," Ryan Blackfeather admonished.

"Fine. So tell me why we're going for a ride?"

"I need your superb math skills to help me figure out the salt situation at the City Barn."

"Sure, flattery works every time. Give me time to jump into my Michelin Man suit, and I'll meet you out front." Quade hung up and dug his snowsuit out of the small closet in his office. After taking off his house slippers, he climbed into the puffy white suit.

"I'm heading to the City Barn with Ryan," he told Carol as he exited his office. He went to grab his boots and stopped. "Um, did a burglar break in, or have you done something with my boots?"

Carol glanced at him over the top of her reading glasses. "What? You can't wear your slippers?"

"Hey. Don't knock the slippers. Now, where are my boots?"

Carol pointed across the room to the heating vent. "Thought maybe dry footwear would put you in a better mood."

Quade gave his friend a grunt. "Sorry to disappoint. Unless the sun came out, the temperature rose to eighty-five and palm trees sprouted up through the ground, I'm gonna be grouchy."

He used the chair in front of Carol's desk to sit and lace up his boots. He knew he was being a royal ass, but his heart felt like it was breaking. For the first time in years he had someone who actually wanted to spend the holidays with him, but his duty as mayor wouldn't let him enjoy it.

"Maybe when all of this is over," Carol tried to soothe.

"By the time this is over, Kai'll be getting ready to go back on tour," he pouted.

Standing, he went back to the heater and retrieved his gloves. "I shouldn't be gone long."

"I'll alert the media," Carol replied in a deadpan monotone.

Still shaking his head, Quade walked out of the building. Ryan's SUV was idling at the bottom of the courthouse steps. Quade quickly got in and slammed the door. "Hey," he greeted.

Ryan covered a yawn and nodded his hello. When Ryan didn't make a move to drive off, Quade threw up his hands. "Anytime."

Ryan pointed towards the unused seatbelt over Quade's shoulder. "Come on," Quade whined. "That thing'll strangle me in this getup."

Ryan shook his head. "Better to be strangled than thrown through a windshield."

With a growl of annoyance, Quade fastened the safety belt. "Happy?"

"No. What would make me happy is being home playing in front of the fire with the men I love," Ryan barked.

Quade grinned. "Glad to see I'm not the only one pissed at Mother Nature."

"The bitch," Ryan grumbled, pulling away from the curb.

"So, what am I calculating?" Quade asked.

"Our salt supply is dwindling at an alarming rate. I need someone to figure out if we have enough to plough and then salt the road up to the lodge. I'm afraid if we don't, the packed snow and ice will be there until spring. Dealing with dead tourists is not the way I care to spend my winter."

"Okay, but don't we have an engineer on staff to figure this shit out?" *God*, did he have to do *everyone's* job?

"Yes, that would be Ed, but he's home puking his guts up. Besides, last time I checked, you were also an engineer."

"A non-practicing engineer," Quade added.

"You're still better than anything else I've got."

"Gee, thanks."

Ryan came to a stop outside the large structure used to house the salt and sand mixture as well as the other city equipment. Bracing himself for the blast of frigid air, Quade turned to Ryan. "Let's get this over with."

* * * *

Stepping out of his snow gear, Quade walked through his living room to the kitchen. He went straight to the coffee pot and made a fresh batch. Waiting for the coffee to brew, he looked out the set of French doors to the tarp-covered pool. "I miss you," he crooned to the lonely pit of cement. At least he was happy to see his state-of-the-art heated cover had done its job. No telling what kind of damage the pool would've sustained had the snow been allowed to accumulate on the cover.

The beeping of the coffee pot pulled him away from the view. He grabbed his cup from the sink where he'd set it that morning and poured the elixir of the gods into it. Mug in hand, Quade moved to his favourite chair and settled in. He looked at the gas fireplace across from him and moaned. The remote was on the mantel. Damn.

Too tired to get up, he threw the blanket from the back of his chair over his lap and picked up the television remote. A show on the Travel Channel caught his attention. With his thumb hovering over the channel button, Quade argued with himself. *You know you'll just get more depressed if you watch this. Turn it to something else. No. If I can't see Hawaii first hand, at least I can watch others having fun in the sun.*

He took a sip of his coffee and fixated on the surfers in the background. *Maybe Kai's out there?* A commercial came on, ruining the moment. Quade's thumb finally connected with the channel button as he moved on.

After an hour of watching Sponge Bob, he turned off the television and picked up the book on the table beside him. When he opened the mystery to where he'd left off, a bookmark fell to his lap. Quade picked up the snapshot of Kai.

Gazing at the gorgeous man, Quade moaned. Why did he continue to do this to himself? It had been ten months since he'd said goodbye to the younger man. Despite the phone call earlier, Quade had no doubt Kai had been filling his time with all sorts of surfing groupies. A man that hot couldn't be expected to be faithful. Hell, they hadn't even mentioned the L word.

Quade knew he had no hold on Kai. Maybe things would've turned out differently if he'd been honest and professed his feelings? Naw. He'd have just ended up with egg on his face.

Maybe he should put up a tree? He hadn't had a Christmas tree in years, but he knew there was a small four-footer in the attic. Replacing the photo between the pages, Quade tossed the book aside and stood. "No time like the present," his voice echoed through the empty room.

* * * *

Still in his robe, Quade stared at the shabby tree. *I really should take it down.* After several minutes of arguing with himself, he decided to wait until the next day. Yep, New Year's Day is the perfect time to clean. There wasn't anything else going on except a town full of people trying to survive hangovers from the previous night's festivities.

As usual, his Christmas had sucked. Spending Christmas with his family back in Charleston wasn't an option. It had been years since he'd been to his parents' house. Quade knew his friends thought the estrangement had been brought on by his homosexuality, but the truth was, he'd simply never liked Nelson and Lorraine Madison. He'd spent his entire childhood trying to live up to the family name. Until, at the age of twenty-six, he'd realised being a Madison of the Charleston Madison's wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

He'd ended up going over to Carol's house for Christmas dinner just to shut the woman up. The only bright spot of the entire day was the brief phone call he'd received from Kai.

His lover had told him he missed him, and things weren't going well with his career. Quade already knew Kai had dropped dramatically in the standings the previous year. He'd tried his best to give the younger man encouragement for the upcoming season, telling Kai he could do anything he set his mind to.

The words Quade had longed to say to his lover sat on the tip of his tongue but didn't budge. He once again vowed not to show his hand until they were together again. Quade knew he'd be able to tell when he saw Kai. The man's soulful brown eyes were easy to read.

He looked at the wall calendar. Only thirty-seven days until his annual vacation. Maybe he should call the travel agent and see if he could move his departure up by thirty-six days. Quade sighed. Knowing his luck, he'd try and surprise his lover only to find Kai in bed with someone else. *Surprise!*

Yawning, Quade stretched and rubbed his stomach through his thick terrycloth robe. Maybe a nap was in order? If he was lucky, maybe he'd sleep right through the big party and wake just in time to catch his plane for Hawaii.

Chuckling, Quade shuffled to the bedroom. A guy could hope, couldn't he?

Chapter Two

Arriving at the big New Year's Eve party, Quade immediately noticed Ryan and his men. Instead of doing the usual hobnobbing, the threesome seemed lost in their own world of giggles and sly touches. *How depressing.*

Detouring towards the bar, Quade ordered bourbon and scanned the room. Drink in hand, he tugged on his shirt collar. Damn he hated suits, especially tuxedos. He spotted a mountain of a man coming towards him and grinned. "Hey."

"Hey yourself," Ezra grumbled.

Quade looked around Ezra's incredible bulk. "Where's your better half?"

Ezra shrugged. "Gossiping, no doubt."

"That can't be. I just saw Nate occupied with Ryan and Rio." The two men looked at each other and laughed. It was well known around town that Nate had the scoop on everyone in the community. Quade still didn't understand how the man managed to have so many friends. Hell, Nate had more friends than he did and he'd lived in Cattle Valley five times longer.

"No," Ezra's laugh died to a chuckle. "He's talking to Richard and Chad."

Quade nodded and took another sip of his drink. "The place looks fantastic," Quade commented, looking around at the ballroom. "When am I gonna get a tour of The Grizzly Bar?"

"Now if you want one," Ezra offered.

Out of his peripheral vision, Quade saw George Manning coming towards him. Shit. He knew the fire captain would want to discuss city budgets again. The man thought of nothing else besides work.

"Let's go," Quade declared, and took off for the bar.

Evidently, Ezra knew exactly why Quade practically ran to the opposite end of the lodge. "That bad, huh?"

Quade glanced over his shoulder. "You have no idea. Don't get me wrong. I like George, but the man is a pain in the ass. He needs to learn to loosen up once in a while."

The large heavily carved doors of The Grizzly Bar were propped open and Quade noticed several people milling around. "Is it open for business?" he asked, looking down at his empty glass.

"Not officially, but I'm sure I can hook you up. We decided to let people get a first look at the bar during the party."

Ezra took Quade's glass out of his hand and moved towards the bar. "What were you drinkin'?"

"Bourbon," Quade answered. The room was spectacular. "You've done a great job. I can see why Brewster was desperate enough to hire someone to delay the opening."

Ezra handed his drink over and gazed around the room. "I'd love to take the credit, but it was all Wyn and Richard. They wanted the rustic cabin feel."

"Well, they got it in spades." Quade could easily picture himself sitting beside the fire with Kai wrapped around him. Thinking of Kai started him on a downhill slide. He thought about the phone in his pocket. "Would you excuse me for a minute? I need to make a call."

"Sure. I'll go find my wayward partner. Hopefully dinner will be served soon. I'm starving."

"Save me a place at your table," Quade called out. "If I'm stuck with Ryan and his playmates, I might just slit my wrists."

Laughing, Ezra acknowledged the request with a nod of his head.

Alone, Quade pulled out his phone and called Kai. He'd tried earlier in the day, but Kai must've had his phone off because it went straight to voicemail. Quade refused to wonder why his lover never returned the call.

"Hello," Kai's smooth voice answered.

"Hey. It's me."

"Quade," Kai sounded surprised.

Quade heard shuffling in the background before Kai's voice came back on. "How're you doing?"

"Fine," Quade answered. "I thought I'd call and wish you a happy New Year."

"Uh, thanks. Listen, I hate to cut you off, but I'm headed for a big party, and I'm not near ready. Can I talk to you later?"

The dismissal hurt, but Quade refused to let Kai hear it in his voice. "Sure. I'll be around."

"I'm glad you called."

"Yeah," Quade managed to get out. "Later." Quade closed the phone and stuck it back into his pocket. Shit. Now he felt worse than before.

He quickly finished off his drink before heading towards the ballroom. Maybe a nice dinner would get his mind off his broken heart.

* * * *

Kai gave himself one last glance in the full-length mirror. For a rental, the tux fit surprisingly well. He cupped his hand over his mouth to check his breath once again. Still minty fresh. Excellent. He planned to do a lot of kissing in the hours to come.

He stepped out of the dressing room, clothes he'd worn into the store, tucked under his arm and walked towards the counter. "Fits perfectly. I hope you don't mind if I wear it out? I'm already late for a party at the new lodge in Cattle Valley."

The clerk behind the counter shrugged. "As long as you're paying, I don't care what you do."

After settling his bill, Kai left the shop. He unlocked the backdoor on the SUV and threw his wrinkled clothes inside. He hoped the nap he'd managed to squeeze in on the plane would be enough to get him through the evening. With a little luck, he'd be up well into the wee hours of the morning.

Getting behind the wheel, Kai checked the map once more. The nice lady at the rental car agency had told him the roads were in abhorrent condition and would be even worse the further south he drove. She'd suggested a four-wheel drive to ensure his safety and Kai had taken her advice.

It took him longer than he anticipated to get to the small town he'd heard so much about, and Kai began to worry he'd miss dinner. The quick burger he'd managed to grab between flights in LA hadn't stayed with him long. He could've eaten in Sheridan, but his nerves refused to entertain the thought. What he was truly hungry for he knew he wouldn't find on any café menu.

After probably the scariest drive in his life, Kai arrived at the Tall Pines Lodge. It took him several moments of sitting in the SUV to get his heart rate back under control. Snow was definitely not his thing. He'd grown up in Hawaii for God's sake. What was he supposed to know about slick roads and snow drifts?

He looked through the windshield at the building in front of him. *What if Quade brought a date?* Shit. He hadn't really considered that possibility, but the more he thought about it, the more sense it made. For the fifth time in an hour, Kai kicked himself for the brush-off he'd given the man earlier. Surely Quade wouldn't have called him if he was on a date?

With that in mind, Kai walked up the hotel steps. The moment of truth, he thought as he stood in the ballroom doorway. He spotted Quade right away, his gaze zooming in on the man he'd dreamed about incessantly.

Quade's eyes locked with his, and Kai knew his lover was surprised when he began to choke. Some guy beside him started pounding Quade on the back. Kai's feet were frozen to the floor, wondering if the well-groomed man was Quade's date. He let out a sigh of relief when Quade stood and strode towards him.

The hungry look on Quade's face put the rest of Kai's nerves to rest. Yes! He felt like shouting. In a matter of seconds, Quade's soft lips were pressed to his own. Kai wrapped his arms around his lover and took the kiss deeper, needing more reassurance than he was prepared to acknowledge.

At that point, Kai couldn't have cared less what the rest of the people in the room thought of them. He ate Quade's mouth like the starving man he was. A soft whimper escaped him as Quade finally broke the kiss.

"I can't believe you're here, right in front of me," Quade said.

"I'm sorry," Kai apologised. "I just couldn't stay away any longer."

Quade shook his head vehemently. "Don't apologise. If you knew how much I've missed you..."

"I hope I'm not barging in on a date or anything," Kai interrupted.

"Date?" Quade chuckled. "I haven't even entertained the thought of going out with anyone else since I left Hawaii."

Quade's face took on a concerned look. "What about you? I mean, I know I don't have the right to ask, but...are you dating anyone else?"

Kai shook his head. How could Quade think such a thing? In the short time they'd had together, Quade had shown him what it was like being with a real man, one who didn't let his eyes roam to other men when they were out together, a guy who was actually still in his bed come morning.

"No one could compete with you," Kai finally answered. "You've got my head so screwed up that I couldn't even concentrate on surfing."

Kai knew in his heart it was one of the main reasons he'd come to Wyoming. With his surfing career on the line, he had to find out whether or not his feelings were real. Gazing into Quade's green eyes, he had a strong sense they were.

His stomach chose that moment to growl, making Quade chuckle. "Hungry?" he asked, rubbing Kai's stomach.

God he wanted to move that hand further south. "You have no idea."

"Come on," Quade said, wrapping an arm around Kai's waist. "Let's see if Chad can scrounge you up another plate."

Kai's steps faltered when Quade started to lead him to the table. "I don't want to impose on your friends."

"Don't worry about them. Hell, they'll probably welcome you with open arms." Quade winced. "I've been a tad grouchy lately."

"Really? You?" Kai was genuinely surprised. He'd never known Quade to be anything but easy going.

Stopping next to the table, Quade introduced him. "Ezra, Wyn, this is Kai Hachiya."

The man Quade introduced as Ezra stood and held out his hand. Holy shit. Kai had never seen a hand so big. He met the man halfway and shook his hand. "Nice to meet you," Kai greeted.

Ezra was unceremoniously pulled back before the much smaller man took his place. "It's so nice to finally meet you. I've seen your picture a number of times, but it definitely didn't do you justice."

Kai looked from Wyn over his shoulder to Quade. "Picture?"

Quade's face turned a pretty shade of red. "Uh, yeah, I've got a picture of you on my desk. Wyn's forever dropping by to bother me about something."

The thought of Quade having his picture out for anyone to see, warmed Kai. He turned and gave Quade a peck on the lips. "Thank you," he whispered.

"For what?" Quade asked.

"For not forgetting me," Kai answered.

"Not remotely possible," Quade declared.

Quade pulled out a chair. "Have a seat, and I'll go find you something to eat. What'll you have to drink?" Quade asked, before rushing off.

"Just water."

Quade's eyes glanced at the full glass of liquor on the table. "Maybe I should switch to water as well."

Kai shrugged. "I don't care if you drink."

Quade bent down and spoke into Kai's ear. "I have better things planned than passing out before midnight."

"Glad we're on the same page," Kai whispered.

He stared at Quade's back as his lover made his way through the crowded room. Quade was definitely giving Daniel Craig a run for his money in that tux.

"So," Wyn interrupted Kai's thoughts. "How long are you planning to stay?"

"I'm not really sure," Kai answered. "I don't have much going on until I leave for Australia in mid-February."

"Quade's booked on a flight the first week in February to go back to Hawaii," Wyn commented.

Kai already knew that, but how did these people? He wasn't sure he'd like the idea of everyone knowing his business. Growing up in Honolulu, the small town life-style was totally foreign to him.

Trying to be polite to Quade's friends, Kai nodded. "I'll probably wait and follow him back to Oahu."

"Have you given any thought to becoming a land-lover?"

"Wyn!" Ezra admonished. "Don't scare the man off." Ezra gave Kai an apologetic grin. "Wyn likes to fancy himself the town den mother."

Wyn smiled and slapped the giant man on the shoulder. "I'm curious. So sue me."

Kai didn't know what to say, so he simply sat in silence until Quade returned carrying a large plate of food. "I wasn't sure what you were hungry for, so I got you a little of everything," Quade informed him, setting the plate on the table.

"Thanks." Without preamble, Kai dug into his food. He wanted to get the eating out of the way so he could go back to kissing.

"Would you be interested in going back to my house when you're done?" Quade asked, putting his hand on Kai's thigh.

"Sure, but what about your friends?"

"They can go to their own houses. Mine only has room for the two of us," Quade joked.

Kai smiled. He'd missed Quade's sense of humour. "Will you get into trouble for not ringing in the New Year here?"

"No," Quade squeezed Kai's inner thigh. "And even if I did, do I look as if I'd care?" Quade's hand continued to travel upward until several of his fingers flitted across the bulge in Kai's pants.

Dropping his fork on his plate, Kai wiped his mouth with a napkin. "I've had enough food. Let's go."

Chapter Three

Kai stood on the porch of The Tall Pines with Quade's hand in his. "Wouldn't you just rather stay here?"

Quade's head tilted to the side. "Are you serious?"

The thought of risking his life again on the narrow winding mountain roads caused bile to rise in his throat. "I don't think I can drive down. God help me, I don't know how you people drive around in this crap, but my hands are still cramped from the white-knuckle trip up."

Chuckling, Quade lifted Kai's hand and kissed it. "I'll get you down. We'll figure out how to get your rental later."

"What if I barf?"

Quade started down the steps, pulling Kai behind him. "Then you'll clean it up. Just relax."

"Easy for you to say." He gripped Quade's hand like a life-line until his lover opened the passenger door to a huge white Escalade. "Nice ride," he commented.

"Thanks. Give me your keys, and I'll get your bags out of your rental."

Kai handed over the key ring. "I could've done it. I'm so freaked I didn't even think about clothes."

"Good. Let's keep it that way," Quade slid in.

Quade shut the passenger door and turned to the line of vehicles. Kai was sure it wasn't hard for Quade to pick out the rental, surely knew everyone in town and what they drove. Walking over to the SUV, Kai watched as Quade hit the automatic door lock on the key fob. After a quick glance at the front seat, Quade shut the door and went around back. Kai was slightly embarrassed when Quade began picking up his loose clothing and stuffing them into the large blue duffle. Had he known Quade would be the one handling his bag, Kai would've packed his dirty clothes back inside.

Quade walked back to the Escalade with a smile plastered to his face. He stowed the duffle in the back of his SUV and got in behind the wheel. Before pulling out of the parking lot, he leaned across the console. "Give me a kiss."

Kai was happy to oblige. Not only had he missed the taste of his lover, but a kiss would definitely stall the ride down. Maybe if he got Quade horny enough, his lover would agree to stay at the lodge instead of risking life and limb.

He took the kiss deeper, reaching over to the fly of Quade's tuxedo pants. As he ran his fingers over the soft material, the bulge in the older man's lap began to grow. Kai smiled to himself as he sucked on Quade's tongue.

Quade must have seen the slight smirk on his face, because he pulled back and studied Kai. "Darlin', as good as that feels I'm still driving down this mountain. If you'd rather I do it with my mind on my cock instead of the road, so be it."

Kai's hand stilled in the process of unzipping his lover's fly. "Why's it so important we drive down now?"

Quade pressed Kai's hand against his arousal once more before releasing it. "Because I've fantasised about you in my bed for damn near a year. It's New Year's Eve and I'd like to ring in the occasion with my cock buried in your ass. Is that reason enough?"

Removing his hand, Kai rubbed his own hard-on. "Drive, just...just be careful."

He received a playful kiss before Quade put the SUV into gear. "Of course I will. I'm carrying precious cargo."

* * * *

Quade was still chuckling as he pulled into his garage. Kai had ridden the imaginary break on the passenger's side the entire trip. Turning off the engine, Quade leaned over and pried Kai's graceful fingers from the dash. "We're here. You can relax now."

"I may never relax again," Kai choked.

Feeling slightly guilty, Quade extricated himself from the Escalade and went around to the passenger's side. Opening Kai's door, he helped the younger man out of the vehicle. "Let's get you inside and in front of a fire."

"Throw in a stiff drink and you've got yourself a deal."

Smiling, Quade led Kai into the house. He switched on the kitchen light, and turned to his lover. He hated to admit that he didn't even know what kind of liquor the man preferred. "What can I get you? I have beer, bourbon, wine and probably some vodka in the freezer."

"Beer."

With a nod, Quade released his hold on Kai's waist and opened the refrigerator. Deciding he'd had enough bourbon for one night, Quade fished out two cans, handing one to Kai.

"Thanks," Kai said, taking the can. "Is it cold in here, or is it just me?"

Beer in hand, Quade went to check on the thermostat. "Seventy-one, but I'll turn it up until we go to bed. Nothing's worse than trying to sleep under the covers if the house is too warm."

Quade knew there would be some adjustments he'd have to make to accommodate Kai's sudden visit, and he was more than willing to do them. He still couldn't believe the man he'd fantasised about for so long was standing in his kitchen. "Why don't we go into the living room, and I'll turn on the fire."

"Great house," Kai commented on their way to the living room.

"Thanks. I had it built after the first year I moved here." Quade turned to Kai and slipped the light jacket from his shoulders. "We'll have to get you a warmer coat."

Quade had a closet full of coats, but he knew all of them would be too big for Kai. After hanging up their coats in the closet, he turned back towards the man he'd fallen for all those months ago. Kai definitely hadn't changed in appearance. The man was still the most gorgeous surfer on the professional circuit. "You cut your hair," Quade observed.

Kai's long fingers threaded through the short dark brown locks. "Yeah," Kai bit off.

The way his lover said it, Quade could tell it was a touchy subject. The last thing he wanted was to make Kai uncomfortable. Quade gestured to the deep sofa. "Have a seat, and I'll get us another beer."

"Sounds good," Kai answered, taking off his tuxedo jacket, tie and vest. "You don't mind if I get comfortable, do you?"

"Not at all. I'll get your bag out of the SUV while I'm at it." Quade started for the kitchen, but stopped and looked over his shoulder at Kai. "Uh, just because I'm getting your luggage doesn't mean I want you to put clothes on."

Kai chuckled for the first time. Hopefully the anxiety caused by the ride down the mountain was starting to wear off. "Is that an invitation to get naked?"

"No invitation needed. I'm all about nudity when I'm home." Quade gave Kai a wink before leaving the room. He retrieved the duffle from the back of the Escalade and set it on the kitchen table. Quade noticed his hands were sweaty and wiped them on a dishtowel. *Why do I feel so nervous? I finally have the man of my dreams in my damn living room.* "Straighten the fuck up," he scolded himself.

While he was in the kitchen, Quade shrugged out of his jacket, tie and vest. At least he knew Kai had stripped down that far. He would've gladly stripped naked, but didn't want to assume anything too early in their reunion. A vision of Kai rubbing his cock in the car came to mind, and Quade immediately went hard. Yeah, hopefully they had the same game plan.

Stopping at the fridge to get another couple of beers, Quade strolled to the living room. Kai sat in a ball on the sofa with a blanket wrapped around him. If Quade wasn't mistaken, his lover's teeth were chattering. He wanted to laugh at the sun-worshipping god he'd found on the beach. Quade doubted Kai would acclimate to the cold weather anytime soon.

He went to stand in front of the couch and noticed a pile of black and white clothing on the floor. *Woo hoo.* They definitely had the same game plan. "Comfortable?" he asked, setting their beer down on the table.

"Cold," Kai managed around chattering teeth.

"I'd like to apply for the job as your personal furnace," Quade said smoothly. He unbuttoned his shirt, maintaining eye contact with the younger man.

Kai grinned and opened the blanket, spreading his thighs at the same time. The first look of Kai in all his bronzed glory in eleven months almost sent Quade to his knees. "Fuck, you're beautiful," he ground out.

Kai's long thin cock was semi-hard and resting on his flat stomach. Quade licked his lips as he unfastened his pants and let them fall to the floor. "You've waxed recently," he commented, giving in to his body's demands and dropping to the floor.

Chuckling, Kai nodded and cupped Quade's cheek. "Do you remember the swim trunks I like to wear?"

Quade closed his eyes and thought about the first day he'd spotted Kai on Waikiki Beach. The gorgeous man had been surrounded by both men and women. Quade had had to flip to his stomach to avoid public embarrassment.

The tiny red bikini bottoms were enough to make a grown man cry. Quade didn't dare approach the god signing autographs. He wasn't sure who he was, but the younger man deserved all the praise he got.

"I remember drooling so much the first day I saw you that there was a wet spot in the sand below my chin," Quade joked.

Quade opened his eyes and stared at Kai. "I still can't believe you brushed off all those people to come over and introduce yourself."

"How could I not? A hot guy was eating me alive with his eyes. Of course I wanted to take advantage of the situation."

Quade decided to ask the question he'd been stewing over since. "But why me? Surely you have hundreds of men ogling that fine ass of yours. Why approach a middle-aged man with a quickly receding hairline?"

Kai reached out and ran his hands down Quade's nude back to land on his ass. "I'm not the only one with a fine ass."

When Quade started to shake his head in denial, Kai continued. "It was an immediate attraction that I still can't explain. All I know is I glanced over and there you were, and I was hooked."

Deciding not to look a gift horse in the mouth, Quade bent and nuzzled Kai's balls with his nose, licking the soft skin just under the firm sac. Kai groaned and scooted further down on the sofa, giving Quade better access.

God he'd missed the smell and taste of his lover. Quade didn't know how long the younger man would remain interested in him, but he was sure as hell going to take advantage of the time he'd been gifted.

He let his tongue roam the thin skin of Kai's perineum as he wrapped a fist around his lover's cock.

"Oh," Kai moaned. "Missed you. Missed this."

Quade looked up the length of Kai's body. The question of Kai's fidelity was forefront in his mind, but he couldn't bring himself to ask. He'd never been in a monogamous

relationship, so how in the world could he expect to have one with a guy he hadn't seen in eleven months.

Knowing he had the beginnings of a five o'clock shadow, Quade ran his chin lightly over Kai's puckered hole.

"Oh yes, that, do that again," Kai panted, hooking his arms under his knees and pulling his thighs against his body.

Quade obliged his lover and ground his chin against Kai's hole, before sliding his tongue against the abraded skin to soothe. "Shall we take this into the bedroom?"

Kai nodded and Quade started to help the younger man to his feet. "Shit," Quade spat. "I didn't know you were coming. Please tell me you brought stuff?"

Chuckling, Kai nodded again. "In my bag."

Quade untangled his dress pants from around his ankles and kicked off his shoes. After making a detour to the kitchen to grab Kai's duffle, Quade led his lover into the master bedroom.

Quade pulled the down-comforter to the foot of the bed as he scrambled to get his black socks off. Kai wasted no time jumping to the centre of the California king mattress. "All kinds of room to play," Kai mused.

Tossing Kai's bag on the bed, Quade retrieved the bottle of lube from his bedside drawer. With a noise that could only be described as a giggle, Kai sat on his knees and unzipped the duffle. "Ta da!" Kai exclaimed, holding up the large box of condoms.

The look of discovery on Kai's face made him look like a boy at Christmas. Quade wasn't exactly sure how old Kai was, but he'd guess in his early twenties. God he hoped he was at least in his twenties. "How old are you?" he asked before he could think better of it.

Kai's face took on a look of surprise. "Twenty-six. Why?"

Quade shook his head and positioned himself between Kai's thighs, knocking the duffle to the floor. "Just wondering how big a pervert I really am," he commented.

Kai took the bottle of lube out of Quade's hand, getting his attention. "Is that what this is about? You into young men?"

"Hell no," Quade answered. "I'm into *you*. I guess I never realised I was twelve years your senior."

"Is that a problem?" Kai asked.

Quade didn't know whether to be honest or not. "Not now, but it could become one down the line."

He couldn't help but notice the dimming light in his lover's eyes. *Shit*. Quade tossed the lube to the mattress and wrapped his arms around Kai. "I'm sorry. I just need to be real with myself before I get in too deep. You've got your whole life in front of you, and I'm quickly approaching the downhill slide."

Kai pushed against Quade's chest. "What're you saying? You think because I'm young I don't know how I feel?"

That definitely wasn't the response Quade was expecting. Did Kai have genuine feelings for him? "I don't know how you feel. All I know is that I'm falling more in love with you every day. I tried to play it off as a vacation fling, but I haven't been able to get you off my mind since the day you drove me to the airport. I've been absolutely miserable without you."

"Well so have I," Kai interrupted. "Did you even bother to notice the way my standings continued to plummet as the season went on? You're all I think about. I may be young, but I sure as hell know what love is."

"My hair's starting to fall out," Quade reminded Kai.

"Yeah it is," Kai agreed. "Luckily I'm not in love with your hair."

Quade needed to put the brakes on this particular discussion before he made a complete fool of himself. He knew Kai meant what he said, but the man was also too young to make a lifelong decision.

Glancing at the clock, Quade saw that he had an hour to make things right between them. He couldn't bring himself to start the new year off on anything but a positive foot.

Chapter Four

Kai studied Quade as his lover seemed to take a mental time out. He couldn't believe Quade was making such an issue of twelve fucking years. There had to be more to it than that.

Maybe in time Quade would learn to trust him enough to be honest, because Kai didn't plan on going anywhere until he got his mind back on track. He'd followed his family's wishes and stayed in Oahu for Christmas, but that particular holiday was over.

As soon as Kai could arrange a flight, he'd taken off in search of answers. He'd had flings in the past, hell, tons of them if he were honest, but none of them left the aching impression the last one had. There was something about Quade that Kai couldn't seem to shake.

Quade's weather roughened hand ran down Kai's chest. "I'm glad you're here," Quade whispered, looking down at Kai.

"Really? Cuz I was starting to feel like a pimple-faced kid running after you."

The corner of Quade's lip curled into a rakish grin. "No need to run. I'm right here."

Kai shook his head. Did the man have any idea how sexy he was? He reached up and clasped his hands around the back of Quade's neck. "Come down here and kiss me."

Quade, once again, insinuated himself between Kai's spread thighs. He started to lean down for the kiss, but stopped and gazed into Kai's eyes. "I love you," Quade declared.

The words warmed Kai from the inside out. The expression on Quade's face told him the man was sincere in the declaration, so why all the baggage? Maybe Quade had been burned by a younger man in his past?

Kai decided to prove to his lover he was mature enough to handle a committed relationship. Closing the distance, Kai initiated the kiss he'd practically begged for earlier. He swept his tongue around the interior of Quade's mouth, groaning as he felt the evidence of his lover's renewed lust.

As the kiss became almost feral, he felt Quade reach for the dropped bottle of lube. Maybe this was the only thing that worked right between them for now, but he was

determined to ease himself into every facet of Quade's life. He'd make it so the man couldn't imagine living without him.

With a new plan in place, Kai wrapped his legs around Quade's torso. "Fuck me." He heard the click in the quiet room as Quade opened the bottle of lubricant.

"I was hoping to be inside you at the stroke of midnight. If I fuck you now, I won't be much good to you when the new year rolls around."

Kai heard the subtle insecurity creeping into Quade's voice. Glancing over at the clock, Kai reached out and yanked the chord from the wall. The clock dimmed, but continued to stay lit. "What the fuck?"

Quade chuckled. "Batteries. When you live in a town that often loses power, you go for the battery backup."

Huffing in exasperation, Kai threw the offending gadget across the room. "Now, we can celebrate the new year on our own time schedule."

He pulled Quade's head down for another deep kiss. "Happy New Year," he whispered.

Grinning, Quade placed his lubed fingers at Kai's hole. "Let's make it three minutes 'til. That way I can be in you when the imaginary clock strikes."

Kai gasped as Quade began stretching his hole. "Am I hurting you?" Quade asked, concern written in every line of the lovely man's face.

"No, keep going. It's just been awhile." He'd already told Quade he hadn't been dating, but truth was he couldn't even pleasure himself lately. Every touch he tried to bestow on his most intimate body parts left him feeling even more depressed.

Slowly, Quade continued to insert digits, peppering Kai's face and neck with kisses the entire time. "Think you're ready?" Quade asked.

"Beyond ready," Kai panted, reaching down to rub his erection.

When Quade pulled his fingers out to sit back on his heels, Kai felt suddenly lost. "Need you," he pouted.

"Hold on, babe. I've got to get suited up," Quade chuckled.

Kai watched Quade rip the foil packet open with his teeth before rolling the condom down that big fat dick he loved so much. How many dreams had he had about Quade's beautiful cock?

Before he knew it, Quade was back in his arms. "How do you want me?" Kai inquired.

"Every way I can get you, but for now, stay where you are," Quade commanded, guiding the head of his cock through the outer ring of muscles.

Kai took several deep breaths and pushed out to make his lover's entry easier for both of them. The burning sensation hit him first. Yes. God, he'd missed this. Once the crown was in, Quade rocked back and forth, easing his entire length inside.

"Yesss," Kai hissed. Within moments the burn was replaced with ecstasy. He lifted his hips to meet Quade's slow, deliberate thrusts. "Is it New Year yet?" he asked, opening one eye to stare at Quade.

"Not yet," Quade informed him.

Kai pulled Quade down fully on top of him, his cock trapped between them. The delicious feel of Quade's stomach rubbing against his erection threatened to spoil their festivities. "Better hurry or you'll be celebrating alone," he warned Quade.

Manoeuvring his arms under Kai's knees, Quade nearly split him in two in an attempt to plunge deeper. Kai welcomed the new position, groaning loudly as his lover's cock rubbed and prodded against his prostate. He felt his balls tighten. "Can't hold it much longer," he informed Quade.

"Yeah. Yeah," Quade panted, pistoning his cock hard and deep.

The erratic thrusts were the first sign Quade was losing his control. "Do it," Kai prodded. Tears welled in his eyes with the effort it took to stave off his orgasm.

"Happy New Year, love," Quade shouted, burying himself as deep as possible inside Kai.

Kai let himself go, feeling the climax wash over him in a tidal wave. He actually struggled to breathe as his cock continued to shoot seed between them. "Fuck!" he gasped, when air finally returned to his lungs.

The mind blowing orgasm left Kai completely limp. Had he ever come that hard? He knew the answer was definitely not. There was something about Quade and Kai's feelings for the man that created an unbelievable combination.

He licked his dry lips as Quade released his legs. "I may never walk again," Kai confessed.

Quade chuckled, and rolled to the side. "Good to know I haven't lost my touch," Quade boasted.

"You still got it, Kahuna," Kai said, calling Quade the name of the Hawaiian god of sun, sand and surf.

* * * *

The following Monday morning, Quade's alarm clock came to life. He reached over and shut it off. Snuggling against Kai's back, he closed his eyes once more. He'd been enjoying a delicious dream involving himself and Kai nude on a beach.

He couldn't keep the grin off his face when Kai began to wiggle that cute little ass against Quade's erection. Morning wood had been part of his life since the day he'd hit puberty. He wasn't one of those guys who enjoyed jacking off in the shower. Quade preferred to roll onto his stomach and rub-off against the soft sheets underneath.

Running his hand down Kai's chest, Quade teased the soft skin surrounding his lover's cock. "Mmm," Kai moaned.

"I have to go to work," Quade whispered against Kai's neck. "What do you feel up to doing?"

"Ummm, fucking?" Kai mumbled, the rasp of sleep still in his voice.

Quade smiled. They'd gone at it like rabbits since New Year's Eve, barely bothering to get dressed. "I meant after your morning fuck. When I have to leave."

"I don't know. Has the snow melted?"

A bark of laughter erupted from Quade. "This is Wyoming, Surfer Boy. The snow won't melt until well into spring. The best we can hope for is to keep the roads and sidewalks cleared."

Kai growled deep in his chest. "What do you people do when it's cold like this?"

"Ummm, live? We go on with our normal routine." Quade turned Kai around to face him. "I'll make arrangements to have your rental brought down from the mountain. Maybe you could come by City Hall and let me take you to lunch?"

Kai opened one eye warily. "How far is City Hall?"

"Not far, about three blocks, all flat roads."

"Ice?"

"Nope. You should be good to go." The question reminded Quade he'd need to teach Kai how to drive in the snow and ice. The thought stopped him. Here he was, spinning fantasies again. Kai was a sun lover. No way would the man be content to stay in Cattle Valley. His heart seemed to skip a beat at the realisation. *This is temporary*. Quade knew he had to get that through his hard head.

"I'll meet you. What time?"

"Eleven works for me. It'll give me some time to paw at that sexy body of yours before we venture into the lion's den for lunch."

At Kai's quirked brow, Quade explained. "Our resident chef, Erico, will try his best to steal you away from me."

"Not gonna happen."

"Wait until you meet him. The guy is sex on a stick and knows it. He'll charm the pants right off you given half a chance."

Kai opened his eyes fully and cupped Quade's face in his hands. "In the previous year I've been surrounded by men most would describe as sex on a stick. None of them were the least bit tempting to me. Don't worry."

Even though Kai's reassurance went a long way to put him at ease, Quade knew his lover was right. Kai could have almost anyone he wanted with just a snap of his graceful fingers.

Climbing on top of Quade's chest, Kai straddled him. "Is there a doctor in town?"

Alarmed, Quade searched Kai's face for any signs of distress. "Yeah. Is there something wrong?"

"Yeah. We're almost out of condoms, and I'd rather get tested than buy more." Kai looked out the window. "Unless of course you'd rather not," Kai's voice trailed off.

It was a big step in their budding relationship. Was Kai saying he wanted a strictly monogamous relationship? Did he trust the younger man not to stray when he wasn't around?

"Yeah, sure. There's a clinic downtown. I'll call and make us both appointments," he said, making up his mind to jump headlong into the trust game.

Kai swivelled his hips, grinding his ass against Quade's ever-present morning erection. "Do you have time?" Kai asked.

Quade's gaze drifted to the clock. "I'll make time. Carol will be screeching about something or other anyway. I might as well give the banshee some ammunition that's actually worth the trouble."

Kai laughed. "I can't wait to actually meet that woman. I follow the town newsletters that you put out. It seems the two of you are always on each other's case about something. Why don't you just fire her?"

Quade grinned. "Because I'd be completely lost without the old battleaxe."

Kai leaned over to the table and picked up the bottle of lube. "That's weird, dude."

"Yeah. I've been told that before by most everyone in town."

Quade took the lube from Kai. "Condom?" he asked.

Kai searched the bedside table, flicking the empty wrappers out of the way before coming back with one. "There's only two left. Guess we'll have to get another box after all."

"Damn straight," Quade agreed. "Two won't even last through the evening."

"You're insatiable," Kai cooed.

"Only with you," Quade pulled Kai down for a kiss.

Chapter Five

Bored out of his skull, Kai was trying to find something to watch on TV when the doorbell rang. Hopping up from the couch, he looked through the peephole. Two distorted men stood on the small porch.

After deciding neither of the men looked like serial killers, Kai unlocked and opened the door. "Hi," he greeted.

The much smaller of the two slid past Kai and entered the house. "I'm Nate," he introduced himself. "This is my partner, Rio." Nate pointed to the huge muscular man still standing on the porch.

Kai couldn't believe the guy just walked in without an invitation. "Can I help you?"

Nate grinned. "Nope, but we can help you." He produced a set of keys. "Quade called and asked if we'd drive your rental over."

Relieved that these two men must be friends of Quade's, Kai's mood lifted. "Oh, I'm sorry. Thanks," he said, taking the keys.

The big man on the porch started shifting from foot to foot. "Come in," he hastened to say.

"Thanks," Rio said. "I swear the temperature's dropping by the minute."

After Rio was safely on the large rug in the entry hall, Kai shut the door. "Can I get you something to warm you up? Coffee maybe?" It didn't matter that he knew nothing about the men, but was in need of company.

"If it's not too much trouble, coffee sounds great actually," Nate replied, sliding his feet out of heavy, snow-covered boots.

Kai grinned. *Nothing like just making yourself at home.* "No trouble at all. I'm bored as hell."

Kai looked at the big man still standing on the rug. Nate must have read his thoughts. "Don't worry about Rio. It's a major production for him to get his boots on and off. He'll be fine." Nate stood on his tip-toes and kissed Rio. "I'll bring you a cup."

Rio smiled and nodded, but said nothing. *Interesting.* Kai led the way to the kitchen. "I was just trying to find something on TV, but every channel is too fuzzy to watch," he said over his shoulder, as he prepared the coffee.

"Snow," Nate surmised. "It builds up on the dish and you can't get shit in the way of reception." Nate held up a finger. "Hold on. I'll be right back."

Nate disappeared as Kai finished pouring the water into the automatic coffeemaker. He silently wondered if everyone in Cattle Valley was as odd as the two men in the hall.

"Okay," Nate said, returning to the kitchen. "I sent Rio out to clean off your satellite dish."

Kai was shocked. "Oh, he doesn't have to do that. I can find something else to keep me busy."

Nate held up a hand. "Don't worry about it. He's happier when he has something to do."

Nate slid onto one of the island barstools. "So, exactly what're your intentions towards our mayor?"

Stunned, Kai's jaw dropped. "Uh, I met him on his last trip to Oahu."

"Yeah, yeah, I already know all that. Quade hasn't stopped talking about you since he got back. What I'm curious about is do you see this developing into something permanent?"

Kai wanted to be outraged by the question, but the earnest look on Nate's face stopped his blood pressure from climbing to new heights. Despite not being angry by the question, Kai still didn't know what to say to the older man. In the end, he decided to go with an honest answer. "I care a lot about him. Is that what you're asking?"

Nate seemed to study Kai for several moments. "It'll do. For now," Nate added with a wink.

A loud thumping noise brought Kai's attention to the window. "What was that?"

Nate shrugged and filled an empty cup with coffee. "Rio most likely."

All Kai could imagine was the giant man sprawled out in the snow after falling from the roof. "Should we go check on him?"

At that moment, a giant sheet of ice sailed past the window. Nate chuckled and took a sip of his drink. "He's fine. Rio's an ex-merc," Nate informed him. "It takes a hell of a lot to put him out of commission."

Kai nodded and refilled his own cup from earlier that morning. "I'm supposed to meet Quade at his office at eleven. How early should I plan on leaving?"

"Roads are good. Should only take you about two minutes to get there."

Hearing additional noises coming from the roof, Nate looked towards the ceiling. "Don't ask me what the hell he's doin' up there. I told him to clean off the satellite, but that should've been done ten minutes ago."

Nate stood, finished off his coffee and took the empty cup to the sink. "Thanks for the brew, but we need to get over to The Gym."

"There's a gym in town?" Kai asked, surprised such a small town would have one.

"Yep. Rio and I opened one to keep us out of trouble." Another bang from the roof rattled the windows. "As you can tell, it hasn't done much good," Nate snickered.

The thought of getting some exercise rejuvenated Kai. "If I were to stop by, could I just pay as I go, or would I need to get some kind of membership?"

"Quade's already a member. I'm sure he's got a stack of guest passes around here somewhere. Stop by when you can." Nate walked to the entry hall and stepped into his boots.

"I'll do that."

After Nate left, Kai decided to change his clothes for his lunch date. Digging into his suitcase, he shook his head. Why hadn't he thought to buy appropriate cold-weather clothing? Maybe Quade had something he could borrow?

Instead of assuming, Kai went to the bedside table and picked up the phone. His finger followed the scrolled penmanship of Quade's handwriting on the tablet beside the lamp. Punching in the number written down, Kai waited.

"City Hall," a woman answered.

"Hi. Is Quade busy?"

"Well, that depends on who's calling," the woman declared.

"Oh...um...this is Kai."

"You don't say. I finally get to speak to the man who's responsible for making my life miserable."

"Excuse me?" He knew by the sarcastic tone of the woman's voice, it could be none other than Carol, Quade's secretary. Quade had told him about Carol before, but Kai always thought his lover was exaggerating. Now he wasn't so sure.

"Oh, never mind, I'll put you through," Carol quipped.

"Hey," Quade answered, several moments later.

"Hi. Have I done something to offend Carol?" Kai asked, still reeling from his earlier conversation.

Quade sighed. "Why, what'd she do now?"

"Nothing really," Kai quickly answered. The last thing he wanted was to get the woman fired. "She just mentioned that I was responsible for making her life miserable."

Quade chuckled. "Don't take it personally. She's just had to put up with my grouchy ass since I got back from vacation."

"Do you still want me to meet you there? Because I don't want to cause any more trouble with her." Hell, Carol was scary enough on the phone. The last thing he wanted to do was give the woman a physical target.

"I'll tell her to be good. She's really not as bad as everyone thinks." Quade cleared his throat. "Well she is, but I can usually control her in the right situation."

"Cool," Kai responded. Remembering why he was calling in the first place, Kai looked towards Quade's closet. "Is there a place in town I can buy a few shirts and stuff? I got to looking and all I brought was T's and a couple of dress shirts." Kai chuckled. "I think I'm gonna need something a little warmer."

"Sure. There's a department store downtown. You remember Wyn, from the party?"

"Uh, which one was he?"

"Small, skinny guy sitting next to the guy who resembled Paul Bunyon."

"Oh, yeah, I remember him."

"Well he owns the shop. I'm sure he can get you all fixed up with whatever you need."

"Good." *Come on, just ask him.* "Do you think it would be okay if I borrowed one of your shirts until I can get some?"

"Of course," Quade said. "No need to even ask. Get what you want, but I'll warn you, my stuff is gonna be too big for you."

"Thanks." Kai glanced at the clock. "Let me get off the phone and get changed. I'll be there in less than twenty."

"Looking forward to it. I made us both appointments at the clinic, by the way."

"Oh, cool." Kai hung up the phone and ventured into Quade's huge walk-in closet.

Looking through the large rack of casual shirts, he pulled a red and black checked flannel from its hanger. Shrugging into it, he quickly determined Quade had been right. His much smaller frame was practically swallowed by the over-sized garment. Making do, Kai rolled the sleeves up a couple of times and left it unbuttoned. With his white T-shirt underneath, it looked more like a jacket, but it would have to do.

After running a brush through his hair, Kai picked up the keys and pulled on his borrowed coat and boots. Looking at himself in the hall mirror, he shook his head. It was a damn good thing he was in love, because he doubted he'd go through this for anyone other than Quade.

Bracing himself against the cold, Kai opened the door. He was locking up when he realised he'd forgotten to look for gloves. "Shit." Kai thought about going back inside, but nixed the idea. Hopefully they wouldn't be outside much. He could just stick his hands in his coat pockets.

By the time he got to his rented SUV and fastened his seatbelt, he was starting to rethink his decision. His hands were beet red and stiff. Cupping them in front of his face, Kai blew warm air into them like he'd seen people do on television. He was surprised how much it helped.

Pulling out of the driveway, Kai drove the three blocks to City Hall. Despite what Nate had told him, Kai didn't find the roads to be clear at all. The dry crunch of packed snow under the tires proved it. He decided to take his time and drive at a speed he was comfortable with. It wasn't until a car horn sounded behind him that he realised he'd only been travelling at fifteen miles per hour.

After what felt like a long trip, he pulled into the parking lot. He decided he might be better off walking home. Maybe he'd just turn in the rental. No sense in paying for something he was too scared to use.

Walking up the steps, he opened the front double doors. A plaque on the wall pointed him to the mayor's office. Bracing himself, he stepped into the reception area and came face to face with the dragon lady.

"You must be Kai," Carol said, looking over the top of her glasses at him.

"Yes, Ma'am," Kai replied, blowing on his hands again. The first order of business was to get a damn pair of gloves.

Carol came out from behind her desk and looked Kai up and down. "You're even cuter than your picture," she commented.

"Uh, thank you?" He didn't know what else to say. *What picture?*

"In here, Kai," Quade called through the open doorway.

Kai looked towards the voice and saw Quade with his hand over the phone's mouthpiece. With a brief nod to Carol, Kai tried to make his escape.

"Don't hurt him," Carol warned, walking back to her desk.

Kai stepped into the office, and Quade motioned for him to shut the door. Glad to put a barrier between himself and Carol, Kai immediately did as asked. He stayed where he was and looked down at his snow covered boots.

"Okay," Quade said into the phone. "Get back to me when you find out." Quade hung up the phone and smiled. "Come here."

Kai pointed down. "I'm all snowy."

"Don't worry about it." Quade stood and met Kai halfway. "How was your morning?" Quade asked, before giving Kai a kiss.

"Good. I met your friends Nate and Rio."

Quade chuckled. "Quite a pair, aren't they?"

"They seemed nice. Though I didn't get much of a chance to talk to Rio. I mentioned that I couldn't get reception on the TV, and Nate sent the poor guy up on the roof to knock the snow off the satellite."

"Typical," Quade remarked.

Quade reached down to hold Kai's hands and stopped. "What the hell?" He lifted Kai's frozen hands and placed gentle kisses on each one. "You couldn't find any gloves?"

Kai shrugged. "I forgot about gloves until I was outside with the house already locked up. I figured I'd just stick them in my pockets."

Quade's brow quirked up. "And do you still think that was a wise decision?"

"Let's just say gloves are my first priority on the shopping list."

Releasing him, Quade walked over to his desk and looked in a small book. "I don't have any meetings scheduled this afternoon. I think I'll take an extra long lunch. We can stop at Wyn's on the way to the restaurant. Your bits are too precious to get frostbite."

Kai wasn't exactly sure what frostbite was exactly, but it didn't sound like anything he wanted to happen to his bits. "Definitely clothes first, then."

Chapter Six

"So, do you feel like walking to the Canoe, or would you rather I drive?" Quade asked, leading Kai down the steps of City Hall.

Kai seemed to weigh the pros and cons of both. "I think we should drive. At least until I can get some gloves."

"Shit, babe, I'm sorry." Quade took off his gloves and handed them to Kai.

"I'm not gonna take those," Kai declared, shaking his head.

Quade pressed them into Kai's hands and kissed him. "Yes you are. I'm used to the cold. You're not."

With a roll of his eyes, Kai eventually slipped the gloves on. "Sorry," Kai mumbled.

"No need." Quade kissed his lover again. "I'd give you the shirt off my back if you needed it."

Kai chuckled and pulled at the collar under his coat. "You already have."

"So? Walking?" Quade noticed Kai's entire body shaking from the unaccustomed temperatures. "No. I think we'll drive."

Kai nodded and they walked hand in glove towards the Escalade. "I know I said we'd go to the Canoe, but I just got an idea. Why don't we go to Deb's Diner for lunch, and I'll take you to the fancier digs for dinner?"

"Sounds fine to me," Kai answered, getting into the SUV.

Quade managed to find a parking spot in front of the diner. "Rock Star parking," he chuckled.

Deb acknowledged Quade as soon as they stepped foot in the door. "Back booth's open," she yelled over the crowd.

With a wave, he pulled Kai along behind him to the booth. "It gets kinda crazy in here around lunchtime," he mentioned, as Kai sat across from him.

Kai smiled and opened a menu that was already sitting on the table. "What's good?"

"Anything. Everything," Quade added. "You can never go wrong with the special of the day. Monday is meatloaf day. You can either have it cold on a sandwich or hot with potatoes and gravy."

Kai's nose scrunched up. "Do they have any fish?"

Quade should've known Kai wouldn't enjoy anything heavy. The man was an athlete. "I wouldn't suggest the fish here, but the Canoe has quite a few fantastic seafood items on their menu."

Kai nodded, still pouring over the menu. "I think I'll just stick with soup and salad." Kai reached down and rubbed his stomach. "Save the big meal for later."

A pain shot through Quade's chest. He didn't know why it bothered him so much that Kai didn't appear to care for the food choices at Deb's, but it did. Maybe he wanted the younger man to fall in love with Cattle Valley as he had on his first visit. The cold weather was already a different strike against the community, and now it seemed the food was another.

"Is something wrong?" Kai asked.

"No," Quade answered.

"Well, you look like someone snaked your wave. Would you rather I try the special?"

Quade reached across the table and entwined his fingers with Kai's. "Not at all. You get what'll make you happy."

"It's just a salad, dude. Can't say the lettuce or the meatloaf will make me happy." Kai lifted and kissed Quade's hand. "You make me happy. The rest is just filler."

His lightening mood was interrupted by Deb, order pad in hand. "Hi, Sugar, what can I get the two of you?" the middle-aged woman asked.

"I'll take the special, sandwich-style, with a Dr. Pepper and side of fries." After he ordered he thought better of it. "Change the fries to a side salad."

Deb's eyebrow shot to her hairline as she amended his order and turned to Kai. "What can I get ya, Cutey?"

As Kai ordered his lunch with the dressing on the side, Quade made a new resolve, if he was going to keep up with the younger man for the next thirty or forty years, he needed to start eating healthier. He wasn't out of shape by any stretch of the imagination, but Quade

knew he could do better. The closer he crept to forty, the more he realised exercising a couple of times a week wasn't enough.

After Deb hurried off with their order, Kai slid out of the booth and stood next to the table looking down at Quade. "Would you mind if I sat beside you?"

Surprised, Quade shook his head and scooted over. "Not at all."

How many times had he watched couples enjoying each other's company in this very diner? With Kai's warmth pressed against his side, Quade felt truly at peace for the first time in a long time. He lifted his arm and wrapped it around Kai's shoulder, giving the man a sideways hug. "This is nice."

"Yeah," Kai agreed. Kai's eyes roamed around the room. "People seem pretty nice here."

"They are," Quade stated. He shifted in his seat when Kai's hand landed on his thigh.

"What're you thinking so hard about?" Kai asked.

Quade shrugged. "Stuff. It's hard to believe you're actually here. Do you know how many lunches I've spent at this very booth, wishing I had you beside me?"

Kai leaned over and placed a soft kiss to Quade's neck, just below his ear. "Do you know how many times I sat on the beach, looking out at the sunset, wishing I had you there to enjoy it with me?"

"I do love a nice sunset." Quade felt relieved that he wasn't the only one pining during their months apart.

"I know." Kai snuggled even closer to whisper in Quade's ear. "I'm sorry I'm not fitting in like I wanted."

Quade's eyes drifted shut. He evidently wasn't doing such a bang up job of hiding his disappointment. "It's not your fault. You were raised in a completely different environment. It doesn't help that you came to visit at possibly the worst time of the year. Who knows, you might really enjoy the other three seasons?"

Kai smiled. "Yeah. I'll definitely have to make a trip back in the summer. The rodeo you've talked about sounds awesome."

There it was, that stab of pain again. Kai wasn't planning on staying. *Hell, I already knew that.* So why did it hurt so much to actually hear Kai confirm his fears?

Deb set their food down in front of them, and Quade tried to push the oncoming depression away. There would be plenty of time to mourn Kai when he was gone. Best to enjoy what little time he'd been given.

* * * *

Holding the cotton ball to the crook of his arm, Kai waited for Quade. He grinned as Quade's face scrunched up with the needle insertion. He hadn't known how much his lover hated all things hospital until they'd arrived at the clinic. The fact that Quade was willing to undergo a blood test spoke volumes to Kai. *He really does love me.*

He hated the haunted look in his man's eyes over lunch. As much as Kai loved surfing, he was starting to believe his feelings for Quade were even stronger. Was he actually thinking about giving up his career?

"All done," the technician announced.

"Whew!" Quade exclaimed. "I thought I might pass out there for a minute."

Chuckling, Kai put on his coat and waited by the door. "Where to now?" he asked, as they left the clinic.

"Wyn's is right down the street. Feel up to walking?"

"Sure," Kai agreed.

Before they reached the store, Quade's cell phone rang. He looked at Kai apologetically. "Sorry."

"No problem."

Quade answered his phone as they walked. "What?" Quade yelled, sticking his finger in his ear to block out the traffic noise. "Shit! Okay, I'll drive over."

Closing his phone, Quade pointed towards their destination. "Will you be okay by yourself for a while? We've had a water-line break and the city engineer seems to think the whole damn pipe needs replacing."

"I'll be fine," Kai assured Quade, giving him a quick kiss.

"Stop by my office after you're done shopping."

"Sounds good," Kai said. "Oh wait, take these." Kai removed the borrowed gloves and held them out.

Accepting them, Quade gave him one more kiss before pulling away. Kai watched his lover jog down and across the street to his Escalade. Shaking his head, Kai opened the door to Wyn's Department Store.

* * * *

As he stood on the sidewalk an hour later, Kai couldn't believe the difference proper winter clothing made. Suddenly the day didn't seem nearly as cold as it had before. Looking up and down Main Street, he decided to do a little window shopping before heading back to Quade's office. He promised the clerk at the store he'd be back to pick up his bags before they closed, so until then, he was free to do as he pleased.

A store across the street caught his eye. *Flowers*. He missed seeing them. Deciding to get a bouquet of them for Quade as a surprise, he checked traffic before jogging over. A little brass bell over the door signalled his arrival upon stepping foot into the shop.

Kai was greeted by a kind face with sad brown eyes. "Hi," Kai greeted.

"Hello," the man said in return. "Is there something I can help you with?"

Kai's eyes roamed the store. Besides flowers, there were plants, vases and other small decorating items on display. "I'm visiting a friend of mine and thought I'd surprise him with flowers."

The brown-eyed man stepped from behind the counter. "You must be Kai. I'm Tyler," the man informed him, holding out his hand.

Kai shook it, puzzled. "Word must travel fast. I've only been in town for a couple of days."

Tyler smiled. "I could chalk it up to gossip, but the truth is, I had a meeting with Quade earlier and he mentioned you were here." Tyler motioned towards the refrigerated display case. "Is there something in particular you're looking for?"

"Tropical? I thought it would help Quade ready himself for his vacation." Kai perused the flowers on display. There didn't seem to be many things with a tropical feel. "Of course I could always go with something more traditional."

Tyler crossed his arms and tapped his finger to his chin, evidently thinking. "How about both? Like the combination of you and Quade."

Kai had no idea how daisies and tropical flowers would mix, but he decided to trust the expert. "If you think it'll look good, sure."

He watched as Tyler began taking buckets of flowers out of the cooler and setting them on his work station. "You might want to take your coat off if you're going to wait," Tyler said. "Or I can always deliver them for you?"

Kai inhaled the sweet perfume of air. "Do you mind if I watch, but still have you deliver them? I'm on foot, and I'm not sure how long they'd survive out in the cold."

Tyler grinned, selecting a vase from off the shelf. "Probably a lot longer than you would," he teased. "But yeah, I'd be happy to have the company."

"Not much business this time of year?" Kai inquired.

Tyler shook his head. "Practically dead. If it weren't for Hearn and his weekly standing order, I'd probably just shut down for the month."

"Wow. Someone buys his partner a bouquet every week? That's true love," Kai remarked.

Before he'd even finished his sentence, Kai noticed Tyler's eyes tearing up. "I'm sorry. Did I say something wrong?"

Tyler stared off into space for several moments before blinking the tears away. "No. Sorry." Tyler cleared his throat as he began to build the bouquet. "Hearn puts flowers on his deceased partner's grave every week."

"Oh. Oh, crap. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound insensitive," Kai apologised, wanting to kick himself.

"You weren't," Tyler assured him.

With the air in the small room suddenly a whole lot thicker, Kai dug out his wallet. "I just remembered that I'm supposed to meet Quade back at his office. Can I go ahead and pay for those before getting out of your hair?"

"Sure," Tyler replied, trying to smile. "Would you like to fill out a card?" Tyler pointed to the small rack.

After writing a short note to Quade, Kai paid for his purchase. "It was nice to meet you."

"You too," Tyler said.

Kai's hand was on the door handle when movement out the window caught his eyes. There, standing not ten feet away, was Nate kissing a man who most definitely wasn't Rio. *Dammit.* He'd really liked Nate, too.

"Is everything okay?" Tyler asked from the counter.

Kai didn't want to call any more attention to the cheating couple on the sidewalk. "Yes. I was just psyching myself up for the cold."

Tyler chuckled. "Good luck with that."

As he spoke to Tyler, Kai watched as the two men on the sidewalk separated and went in opposite directions. With a sigh of relief, Kai opened the door and headed to Quade. The long-haired man Nate had been kissing walked about a half of a block in front of him. Kai studied the man as he made his way to City Hall.

Whoever the hell Nate was cheating with seemed to be a member of the Sheriff's Department, at least according to the back of the guy's coat. Kai watched him warily until he turned and entered the police station.

He couldn't help but to feel sick to his stomach. There was just something about cheating men that he despised. Never had he considered cheating on a guy. It didn't matter if the fling lasted a weekend or a month.

Climbing the steps to Quade's office, he wondered if he should mention it to his lover? He knew Nate and Rio were Quade's friends. The last thing he wanted was to destroy a relationship, but on the other hand, Rio seemed like such a gentle giant, and Kai hated to see the big man duped.

Maybe he'd wait and discuss it with Quade over dinner. It would at least give him more time to work up the courage. Hopefully, Quade wouldn't take the news of his friend's infidelity too badly.

Another thought struck him. *What if Quade knows and isn't doing anything about it?* Kai shook his head. No. If Quade knew he'd definitely do something about it. If he didn't, he wasn't the man Kai thought he was.

Chapter Seven

"Look at you, Mr. Lumberjack!" Quade exclaimed, as Kai entered his office.

Kai took off his coat and hung it on the rack. "You approve?" he asked, striking various modelling poses. He made sure to give Quade several good views of his ass.

"I likey." Quade pushed his chair away from his desk. "I assume Carol made you take off your boots at the outer door?"

Kai rolled his eyes and pointed towards his socks. Chuckling, Quade held out his arms. "Shut the door and come over here."

Without turning around, Kai shut the door. "Should I lock it?"

"Naw. Carol knows she'd burn her retinas if she were to barge in." He winked. "Isn't that right, Carol?!" he yelled.

"Shut up!" Carol screamed in reply.

Kai shook his head. "You two have got the weirdest relationship on the planet."

"Yeah, but we look out for each other." Quade spread his thighs and cupped his cock. "My lap is lonely."

"You don't say." Kai sauntered over and curled up on Quade's lap. "How'd the water thingy turn out?"

Quade ran his hands under Kai's ass and squeezed. "Do you really care?" he asked, lips touching Kai's.

He knew he could be supportive and tell Quade that everything he did concerned him, but the truth was he couldn't care less at the moment. What he did care about was the bulge growing behind his lover's fly. Instead of answering the question, Kai closed the distance and kissed those sweet lips in front of him.

Quade opened to Kai's exploring tongue on contact, and Kai took full advantage, sweeping the interior like a man dying of thirst. Without thought, Kai began to unbutton Quade's shirt, needing the warm feel of his lover's skin.

Quade's hands joined Kai's in hastening the task. Kai moaned into the kiss as he ran his hands over Quade's muscled torso. "God you feel good," he said, pulling out of the kiss. He

scooted off Quade's lap and licked his way down his lover's neck to suckle first one nipple before moving on to the other.

Kai felt the rumble in Quade's chest as the man groaned. "You make me feel like a king," Quade panted, as Kai's hands began unfastening his pants.

Quade lifted his hips, as Kai's hand gripped the stiff erection hidden inside. "You're my Kahuna," Kai whispered, kissing his way down to Quade's lap. Before he could wrap his lips around the large bulbous head, a stream of pre-cum ran down Kai's fist. "Mmm," he moaned, licking the salty essence from his fingers.

Kai's eyes remained transfixed on another large drop of pre-cum poised to fall. Before it had a chance to cascade down the heavily veined shaft, Kai sucked the crown into his mouth. Relaxing his throat, Kai impaled his mouth on Quade's cock. It took two attempts, but Kai was able to swallow Quade's entire length.

"Aahh, fuck!" Quade howled, grabbing the sides of Kai's head.

Giving up control, Kai groaned as his man began fucking his throat in earnest, the sounds of their mutual pleasure reverberating through the office. Kai reached down and unzipped his jeans, fisting himself.

"Love you," Quade groaned, hips snapping, grip on Kai's hair tightening.

Bracing himself for his prize, Kai was rewarded with a flood of cum. The first shot went straight down his throat without giving Kai the chance to taste it. Backing off Quade's length, the next volley landed on his tongue. The flavour exploded in Kai's mouth, triggering his own release.

He started to pull off his lover's cock too soon and ended up shot in the face. Kai grinned and looked up at Quade, cum dripping down his lips and chin. "Got me," he chuckled.

With heavy-lidded eyes, Quade pulled Kai back up to sit in his lap. With his hands still buried in Kai's hair, Quade licked his own cum from Kai's face. "Fuck that's hot," Kai whispered.

Quade followed the tongue bath with a deep kiss. "That was better than any fantasy I've ever woven in this office."

"It could be better. I could let you bend me over your desk and fuck my brains out," Kai informed.

"I can hear you," Carol called out in a loud, sing-songy voice.

Kai looked at Quade. "Oops."

Quade started to laugh, before long, Kai joined in. A loud banging on the wall had them laughing even harder until tears sprung to Kai's eyes. He knew he should be embarrassed, but with all the crap Carol seemed to enjoy dishing out, she deserved a big plateful in return.

Drying his eyes, Kai stood. "I need to go. I promised I'd be back to pick up the clothes I bought." Besides, he didn't want to be there when Tyler delivered Quade's flowers. He'd never sent a lover flowers and didn't know what Quade's reaction would be.

Quade's eyes were riveted on Kai's cock as he tucked it away and zipped up. "Will you come back to your place and pick me up, or are you gonna make me brave the streets again?"

"Oh, so you were the one who was blocking traffic earlier?"

"One car. It was one car," Kai shot back defensively. "What'd the guy do? Call you?"

Quade started to laugh all over again. "I was totally kidding. You just busted yourself, babe."

Exasperated, Kai swatted Quade on the arm. "Kiss me quick. I'm leaving."

Quade pulled Kai down for a kiss, but it was anything but quick. It was Kai's turn to have the interior of his mouth explored. Kai wondered if Quade was searching for remnants of his own seed.

"Wow." Kai stood and did an all-over body shake, trying to dispel the sudden surge of lust. "So? Pick me up? I'll make it worth your while," he cooed.

"I'll be home at five," Quade answered, zipping his pants. "Be naked. We can eat a late dinner."

Kai shook his head. "No way. Dinner first. Otherwise we won't ever leave the house."

Quade rubbed his chin. "Okay, deal. But you'll owe me," Quade added.

"More than you'll ever know," Kai said, and opened the door to the outer office.

He tried his best to ignore the growl coming from the desk across from him as he slid into his boots. Bundled against the weather, he turned and gave the secretary a playful wink. "He should be in a good mood for the rest of the day. If you wanted some time off or a raise, now's the time to ask."

"Damn. I'm glad I made reservations," Quade said, finding a spot on the side of the restaurant to park.

"Is it usually this busy?" Kai asked, looking at all the cars. Hell, he didn't even know there were this many people in Cattle Valley.

"Fridays and Saturdays, yeah, but not normally during the week. Everyone must be sick of being stuck indoors."

Kai got out and walked beside Quade around the side to the front of the Canoe. A scene in the window caught his eyes and his steps faltered. There, right behind the plate glass, was Nate and that guy he was kissing earlier. Kai couldn't believe Nate would be as bold as that with an affair.

"Cute, aren't they?" Quade asked, taking notice of the pair Kai was staring at.

"Cute?" He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You think that's cute?"

Quade flushed. "Okay, hot."

Even more stunned, Kai spun away from the cheating view and walked up the steps to the restaurant. Did he know the man behind him at all? How in the world could Quade think infidelity was hot?

"Hey." He heard a deep familiar voice come up behind him.

Kai glanced over his shoulder to find Rio climbing the steps. Shit. "Hey," he said, turning to block the door. He didn't know how he was going to manage it, but he had to get Rio away from the restaurant. The last thing the big guy deserved was to come face to face with the nightmare inside.

"I think they're all booked. Why don't you try the diner, or the lodge?" he offered, trying to think on his feet.

Rio gave him a confused expression. "That's okay. I've got reservations. But thanks."

Kai looked around Rio to Quade and begged him for help using his eyes instead of his mouth. When his lover just looked at him like he was crazy, and Rio tried to move past him, Kai's hand shot out and braced itself on Rio's chest. "Seriously, you don't want to go in there."

Rio glanced down at Kai's hand and shot him an unfriendly look. "Is there a problem?" Rio asked.

Quade tried to step between the two men. "Kai? What's going on? Let the man go inside."

Could this get any worse? "Do you really want him to go in and see Nate and that other guy?" he whispered in Quade's ear.

"Yeah," Quade said innocently. "That's why he's here."

Quade removed Kai's hand from Rio's chest. "Sorry about that," he said to Rio.

At a complete loss, Kai stepped back and threw up his hands as Rio squeezed by him. In utter disgust, Kai started back down the steps towards the SUV.

"Wait!" Quade called after him. "Where the hell are you going?"

Quade caught up with Kai at the bottom of the stairs. "I can't go in there," he declared, crossing his arms.

"Why?"

"I can't stand by and watch what'll happen when Rio sees Nate and the other guy."

Quade's attention went to the window behind Kai. "Why do you have such a problem with it? Of all people, I'd think you would be open about something like that."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kai yelled, giving Quade's chest a push.

Quade's face turned red. Kai could tell the push had pissed the man off, but at that point, he couldn't have cared less. Reaching out, Quade took Kai by the shoulders and spun him to face the window. "Now you tell me, what the hell is wrong with that? Those men love each other!"

Kai's eyes almost crossed at the scene in front of him. Rio, Nate and the other guy were all sitting at the table sharing kisses and holding hands. "What the fuck," he mumbled. "Rio's not pissed to find his partner on a date with another man?"

A bark of laughter erupted over his shoulder. Kai turned and looked up at Quade. "What's so funny?"

"I can't believe I didn't catch on earlier. Come with me," Quade ordered. He led Kai by the hand back up the steps and inside the restaurant. "Hold that thought," he said to the host at the door.

Quade pulled Kai to stand by the table they had just been outside ogling. "Kai, I'd like you to meet Sheriff Ryan Blackfeather, Nate and Rio's *partner*."

"Partner?" Kai squeaked. "Aww, damn. I'm sorry." God he felt like such an ass.

He felt even worse when Ryan stood and stuck out his hand. "Great to finally meet you, Kai. I've heard a lot of good things about you."

Kai shook the tattooed man's hand, but couldn't quite meet his gaze. He glanced over at Rio. "I'm sorry for earlier. I didn't know the three of you were together. I...didn't want you to get hurt."

"Oh my God he's so cute," Nate declared, standing to wrap his arms around Kai. A deep throat cleared from Rio's direction, and Nate released him. "Be nice. He was worried about you," he scolded the big man.

Kai felt two inches tall. He'd humiliated not only himself, but probably Quade as well. He reached out and took his lover's hand. "Sorry if I embarrassed you."

Quade leaned in and kissed him. "You didn't. I agree with Nate. You are cute."

* * * *

Quade looked across the table at the love of his life. Despite what Kai had thought earlier, Quade was proud of his lover. It was comforting to know the younger man felt so strongly about infidelity. It spoke volumes for a future relationship, even if it had to be a long-distance one.

He watched as Kai's perfect pink tongue slid out to lick his lips. "The food was fantastic," Kai commented.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Your scallops were okay?"

"More than okay. Thanks for bringing me."

Quade stretched his hand across the table and was delighted when Kai held it. "I love you," Quade declared.

Kai smiled, the candlelight dancing in his lover's eyes. "I love you too."

Quade stood enough to lean over the table and placed a soft kiss on Kai's lips. "Ready?"

Before Kai could answer, his cell phone began playing Wipe Out. The younger man looked surprised when he glanced at the display. "Do you mind if I take this? It's my dad."

"Not at all. I'll take care of the cheque." Quade watched as Kai rose and put the phone to his ear as he walked towards the restrooms.

He signalled to the server for their cheque. As he waited, he wondered why Kai's dad would be calling. From the previous weekend, Quade knew that Kai called daily to check in with his folks. A thought struck him. *Shit*. He hoped nothing was wrong with Kai's mother, brother or sister.

After paying the bill, he finished off his bourbon. It was another fifteen minutes before Kai returned to the table. His lover had a lost look on his face.

"What happened?" Quade asked, standing to pull Kai into his arms.

"Can we talk about it when we get back to your place?" Kai mumbled.

Quade's chest felt so tight he could barely breathe by the time they climbed into the Escalade. He started the SUV and turned to Kai. "Tell me," he begged.

Kai looked at Quade with tears in his eyes. "I think I need to go home."

"Why, what happened? Is someone sick?" Quade asked feeling frantic.

"No. My dad gave me a message. Van Duggins called my parents' house looking for me. Dad took his number and promised I'd call right back, so I did."

"And? Who is this Van guy?"

"The greatest surfer Hawaii ever produced. He's a transplant, like me. Grew up on the island and learned to surf like a native by the age of ten."

Quade reached over and lifted Kai to sit in his lap. "What did this guy want?"

"To teach me. He's only done it a time or two in the past. Those that he's taken an interest in have gone on to win every tournament they've entered. It's been over ten years since he's trained someone, but for some reason, he chose me." Kai's tearful gaze met Quade's. "It's the chance of a lifetime, but it also means leaving you."

"When exactly? I mean, you don't have to leave now, do you?"

Kai's chin dropped to his chest. "Couple days, probably Friday. The season starts the third week in February with an Australian tournament. That only gives me a little over a month to soak up everything I can from Van."

Friday? Quade hugged Kai tightly to his chest. He didn't even want to think about his lover leaving him, but what kind of man would he be if he stood in the way of Kai's greatness. "Go," he finally said, feeling tears escape his eyes.

Chapter Eight

Friday came too damn soon for Quade. He tapped his fingers on the steering wheel as he waited for Kai to return his SUV at the rental agency. He tried like hell to memorise every feature of the younger man as he stared at him through the glass. *I'll see him again within a month.*

After the night Kai had told him about Van, Quade had gone online to look the guy up. That's when his real worries had started. Though older than Quade by almost eleven years, Van Duggins still looked amazing. The fact that the man was an idol to Kai made it even worse. What if the teacher tried to teach more than surfing techniques to his student? Would Kai be able to resist?

"Sorry that took so long," Kai apologised, climbing into the passenger seat.

"Don't worry. Your flight doesn't leave for another two hours," Quade said with a heavy heart.

Kai's hand landed on his thigh. "If you don't want me to go..."

Quade threaded his fingers through Kai's and squeezed. He wanted so much to get on his knees and beg his lover to stay. He'd thought all week about doing that very thing, but he kept coming back to the same conclusion.

If Kai didn't take advantage of this opportunity, the younger man would come to resent Quade for it. The last thing Quade wanted was to see the 'what ifs' in Kai's eyes for the rest of their lives. "No. You need to go. I'll join you soon."

Quade lifted Kai's hand and kissed it. "Just remember how much I love you." *And please don't fall in love with Van,* he added silently.

Putting the Escalade into gear, Quade pulled out of the parking lot. "I thought we might have time for a drink before you have to go through security."

"Okay," Kai responded, gazing out the side window. "I can't believe how much snow falls here," Kai murmured.

"We don't always get this much. The blizzard that blew through was the first of its kind in over twenty years," he defended.

Kai simply shrugged his shoulders without turning to face Quade. The hand on the steering wheel gripped the leather covered plastic until his knuckles were white. Why did he feel the need to make excuses for his home?

Within minutes, Quade pulled into the airport and found a parking spot. He felt completely numb. A small part of him wished Kai had never come to Cattle Valley in the first place. Before New Year's Eve, Quade had been miserable, but it was nothing to the way he felt at that moment.

"This is it," he choked.

"Yeah," Kai agreed, making no move to get out.

"Will you call me when you get home?" Quade asked.

"Probably not right away. It'll be the middle of the night here," Kai answered, finally turning to face Quade.

Quade noticed the moisture pooling in his lover's brown eyes. "I don't care what time it is. I won't rest until I know you're safely on the ground."

Quade's chest hitched as his own tears started to form. He gasped for a breath as he pulled Kai across the console. "I love you so much," he cried, burying his face in Kai's neck to hide his tears. There was so much he wanted to say, but the words remained frozen in his throat.

Kai hugged him back. "I love you too." Kai kissed the side of Quade's head.

* * * *

"I'm worried about you," Carol divulged, sitting in the chair in front of Quade's desk.

Quade looked up from the stack of papers. "I'm okay."

"No, you're not," Carol returned. "You're not eating. You're not sleeping." She reached across the desk and touched Quade's hand. "It looks like you've aged ten years in the past two weeks."

"Gee, thanks," he drawled. "Kai should be super excited to see me next week."

Carol patted his hand several times. "Why don't you see if you can change your flight? I can cover for you an extra week."

Quade looked down at the papers. "Thanks, but these budget reports have to be finished before I can leave. It'll take me at least a week to get them done."

"Not if I help," Carol offered.

Shocked, Quade stared at his secretary. "Am I dying? Or hearing things?" he tried to joke.

"Neither. I'm just worried." Carol seemed to realise what she'd divulged. Before his eyes, she squared her shoulders and stood. "If you don't want my help, fine. Do it yourself."

She started to walk off, but Quade stopped her. "Yeah, I do. It would help a lot."

Carol spun back to face him. "Very well. Get your shit together, and let me know what I need to do. I'll be at my desk." With that, Carol turned and left the office.

Quade heard his friend's loud sigh as she took her seat. He couldn't stop the grin that replaced his earlier frown. He began sifting through the pages of numbers, trying to figure out how best to utilise the offered help.

As long as the days had been, the nights had been absolute torture since Kai's departure. He'd talked to his lover every evening, but Quade still wasn't sure if it helped or hurt the longing he felt for the younger man.

Kai would begin the calls by giving Quade a rundown of everything he'd learned that day. He'd go on and on about Van and how the legendary surfer was fine-tuning his skills. Quade wanted to hear about Kai's day, but every time his lover mentioned Van, Quade saw red.

He trusted Kai, he really did. Quade knew the younger man would never intentionally cheat on him, but things happened, unexpected situations popped up. *Stop it!* Quade admonished himself, scrubbing his hands over his face.

Shaking off the unwanted thoughts, Quade went back to his budget sheets. He'd work his ass off for the next couple of days and fly out, that was the best he could do.

* * * *

With his board on the beach, Kai went through the position again.

"NO!" Van screamed. "Where the hell is your head? I've shown you the correct stance three times."

Kai stepped off his board and turned to his mentor. "Sorry. I guess my head's not in it."

"Well shake off whatever's bothering you and get to work. You've only got two and a half weeks to get this right."

Kai nodded and resumed his training. He'd been out of his head with worry since the previous evening. Quade was always there for their nightly phone calls. Where had his lover been that he hadn't answered? Kai had even tried Quade's cell with no luck. He'd left several messages on both phones, but Quade still hadn't called.

Kai had heard the sadness in the older man's voice since he'd left Cattle Valley. Maybe Quade decided a long-distance relationship wasn't worth the pain. What if he'd moved on?

He was brought out of his worries when he was pushed off the board and into the sand. "That was a wave," Van ground out. "You'll never last against the Australian current if you can't plant your body properly."

Kai stayed where he was for a few moments. He was bruised, sore and damned irritated at the way Van coached. He knew Van was the best for a reason. Kai had begun to wonder if he wanted to win enough to continue the torture.

"Is there a problem?" a familiar voice asked.

Kai scrambled out of the sand to face Quade. "Oh my God. What're you doing here?" he asked, launching himself into his lover's strong arms.

Quade gave Kai a short but deep kiss. Pulling back, he gazed into Kai's eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I am now," Kai grinned. He could feel the tension in Quade's shoulders as his lover continued to stare at Van. "Just a lesson. No big deal," he excused Van's behaviour.

"Are you the reason I've been wasting my time all day?" Van asked, crossing his arms.

Quade glanced back at Kai. "Is something else bothering you?"

Kai bit his bottom lip and shrugged. "You weren't home when I tried to call."

Smiling, Quade kissed Kai again. "I was trying to get to the love of my life. I called as soon as I landed, but your phone is evidently off, so I took a chance you'd be here."

"You did."

"Aww, this is touching, but can we get back to work?" Van asked, sneering at Kai and Quade.

Kai wanted to scream no, but he knew he couldn't. He pulled Quade's head down so he could whisper in his ear. "Do you mind if I finish up here? It shouldn't take more than an hour or so."

"Not at all. I'd love to watch you." Quade gave Kai another kiss before releasing him.

Turning back to his coach, Kai nodded. "Okay. I'm ready."

* * * *

With his shirt off and his jeans rolled up, Quade reclined in the warm sand and watched Van put Kai through his drills. He hadn't lied when he'd told Kai he didn't mind watching, but not for the reason his lover thought.

Quade not only wanted to observe the way student and teacher interacted, but he wanted to be there in case Van decided to shove Kai again. He'd almost come completely unglued when he'd seen Kai hit the sand earlier. The surf-god was damn lucky he still had all those pearly white teeth in his head.

The play of Kai's muscles as he paddled out into the ocean, had Quade's cock taking notice. He rolled to his stomach, feeling the sand abrade his tender chest. With his chin resting on his hands, he watched Kai disappear and then reappear as he ducked himself and his board under the oncoming waves.

A nice-sized crowd had begun to gather on the beach to watch. At least Kai wore board shorts instead of those tiny flossed things he was fond of. Quade's gaze moved to Van. Standing on the beach with his bronzed hands on his hips, Van Duggins was quite breathtaking. He wondered if the man had made a play for Kai? There appeared to be tension between Van and Kai, but was it sexual?

The crowd started making noise, and Quade's attention went back to Kai. His lover was up and riding one hell of a wave. One thing was suddenly clear. Van was indeed helping Kai. The younger man's form and finesse were better than ever.

Once the wave died, Kai sat and straddled his board. Van gave him a thumbs up. After gaining his coach's approval, Kai appeared to look at Quade. Sitting up, Quade raised his hands over his head and applauded along with the crowd. He could see Kai's brilliant smile from where he sat.

"He's good," Van said, walking over to where Quade sat.

"Yeah. I know," Quade agreed.

Van stood above Quade looking down. "You being here gonna pose a problem?"

"No."

Van's eyes continued to track Kai. "He can have everything he's ever wanted if he commits himself. Kai doesn't have time for a relationship. It'll only drag him down."

"I won't get in his way. I know how much he wants to be the best. Right now I think that support means something to him."

"Maybe," Van mused. "But what happens when he's so busy thinking about you that his concentration slips and he eats the reef? Will he still think of you the same, knowing his career is over because of you?"

Quade tilted his head and studied the older man. "Are we talking about Kai, or you?"

Van eventually looked down at Quade. "We're talking about professional surfers. We're all alike in many ways."

Without another word, Van strode down the beach. "Tell Kai we're done for the day," Van yelled over his shoulder.

Quade watched Van until the older man rounded a stand of volcanic rock. He started to chuckle when water rained down on his heated back. Turning over, he smiled at Kai, shaking the salt water from his hair. "Van says you're done for the day," Quade informed.

"It's about time," Kai quipped. "Do you know how embarrassing it is trying to work out with a boner? All I kept thinking about was getting you back to my place."

Van's words came back to smack Quade in the face. "The ocean's dangerous. You should keep your mind on what you're doing."

"Sure, in theory. But it's not easy when all you're thinking about is having your lover's cock buried inside you." Kai held out his hand. "Come on. I've waited long enough."

As Quade rose from the sand, he hoped to hell he was doing the right thing. Even the thought of walking away from Kai tore at his heart. But if Van's words proved true, Quade knew he would. Risking Kai's career and safety weren't an option in his mind.

Chapter Nine

"Would you bring me another beer?" Quade asked from his position on the patio.

"I thought you might ask," Kai chuckled. He set the snack tray down on the small table and handed Quade a fresh bottle of beer.

"I still can't believe this place," Quade grumbled. "No wonder Cattle Valley seemed like hell to you."

Kai took his normal spot on Quade's lap and looked out over the ocean. His home wasn't fancy or large, but it had one of the best views on Oahu. "It serves as a reminder," he mused.

"Of what, babe?" Quade asked, rubbing Kai's stomach.

"Not to devote my entire life to surfing."

Quade chuckled. "Yeah, I can see that. You sit here looking out at the water and are reminded not to devote too much time to it," Quade joked.

Kai shook his head. "It's not that. This place was built by my friend, Mano. He's the man who taught me to surf. I was around eight when I first met him." Kai pointed towards the beach. "Right out there, actually."

He could still picture it clearly. Mano stood in the water up to his knees, looking out at the ocean. With his waist-length hair blowing in the wind, Kai had thought him some kind of Hawaiian god.

"He'd been a professional surfer, like me, and had done well enough to buy this place," Kai gestured to the surroundings.

"Problem was, he'd spent so much time and energy in the ocean, Mano didn't know how to relate to people on dry land. But he was my friend. My dad was always out on deployment, so Mano became like a surrogate father to me." Kai had silently wished Mano was his real dad, but he'd never told anyone that.

"I used to ask him why he didn't have a wife and kids. He'd usually brush me off, but once, when I was around sixteen, he told me he'd lost the love of his life because he'd put surfing first."

Kai wrapped his arms around Quade's neck and kissed him. "Mano told me nothing was worth growing old alone. He made me promise to treat surfing like a job and not my life." Kai shrugged. "When he died six years ago, he left me this place. So now, when I sit and stare out at the water, I think about him, and I remember."

Quade was silent for several moments. "You'll never leave it, will you?"

"I'll never sell it, no. But I'm not dead-set on living in it for the rest of my life either." Kai turned to straddle Quade's lap. He gazed deep into the eyes of the man he loved. "I'm sorry I left you. Sometimes I wonder if I'm cursed to end up like Mano, old and lonely."

"Not if I have any say in it," Quade declared.

"I wish I could fit into your world. Move to Cattle Valley and get a job, but I can't. I barely finished high school. Surfing is all I know."

Quade ran his fingers down the side of Kai's face. "What happens after the tournaments stop? What'll you do then?"

Kai had thought of that very thing many times. He'd never shared his ideas with anyone. If he didn't become world champion they wouldn't mean much anyway. "Promise you won't laugh?"

Quade actually looked hurt at the question. "I'd never laugh at you."

Kai jumped off of Quade's lap and went to the spare bedroom. Opening the closet, he pulled out the giant sketchpad. He hugged the well-used pad to his chest. *Please don't make fun of me*, he prayed.

Taking the sketches out to the patio, he handed them to Quade. "No one else knows about this."

With a questioning look, Quade took the binder and opened it. Kai bit his lip as he watched Quade flip from one sketch to the next. "I don't know if it'll work. I mean, I haven't built a prototype or anything," he defended, looking at the surfboards he'd designed.

"These are incredible."

"Really?" Kai smiled. "Of course they'll just gather dust if I can't make a name for myself on the circuit. No one will take a chance on a newly designed board from a nobody. But if I can win..."

"You'll have a name to attach to the new concept," Quade finished for him.

"And the money," Kai added.

Quade nodded and set the sketches aside. He pulled Kai back into his lap and sighed heavily. "You need to be here for that dream to work."

Kai knew what his lover was saying. Quade was right. Kai would never be able to move to Cattle Valley. Who would buy a surfboard made in Wyoming? He rested his cheek against the top of Quade's head. "We'll figure something out," he mumbled.

* * * *

Turning the page of his book, Quade's gaze drifted towards the ocean. He'd spent his entire first week on the island trying to figure out how to make a life with Kai work. When he'd realised his hopes of Kai retiring after a couple of years and moving to Cattle Valley wasn't going to happen, he'd been crushed.

The fact that his lover came home nightly with a new set of bruises didn't help matters. He was worried that Van's brand of training would be the death of his young lover, but nothing he said seemed to make a difference. Kai was determined to soak up Van's knowledge like a sponge.

Quade's curiosity had gotten the better of him, and he'd looked Van Duggins up on the internet earlier that morning. What he found worried him even more. It was no wonder Van hadn't picked another surfer to train in almost ten years. Quade wondered if Kai knew about his mentor's past?

"Thought I'd find you out here," Kai said, coming up behind Quade's chair.

Tilting his head back, Quade looked up at his lover. "Good day?"

"Okay." Kai grinned. "No fresh boobos for you to kiss."

"Oh, well then, I'll just have to kiss the old ones," Quade chuckled, standing to pull Kai into his arms. He closed the distance and drew Kai into a deep kiss. Quade wondered if he'd ever get tired of kissing this man.

Running his hands down Kai's muscled back, Quade slipped them under the waistband of his lover's board shorts. "Mmmm," he moaned, sliding his fingers down the sandy crack of Kai's ass. "Someone needs a shower," he commented, breaking the kiss.

"Someone needs you more."

"We could compromise and shower together," Quade groaned, reaching around to cup Kai's balls.

"Sounds like a plan," Kai agreed, diving back in for another kiss.

Quade broke the kiss and buried his face in Kai's hair. Inhaling, he smiled. His lover always smelled like sunshine and salt water. How would he survive even a day without that smell?

Kai stepped back and tugged Quade's hand out of his swim trunks. "Shower," he reminded Quade. "The sooner all my bits are clean, the sooner I can impale myself."

Quade let Kai lead him into the house, shedding clothes as they went. "I talked to Nate earlier. Cattle Valley's hunkering down for another blizzard. That's two already this year."

"Bet you're glad you're here," Kai commented, turning on the water.

"Yeah," Quade said, looking at the sweet curve of Kai's bare ass. "I feel kinda bad for Carol though. In a town the size of Cattle Valley it's usually up to me to coordinate the clean-up between the road crew, electricity company, sanitation department..." Quade exhaled. "The list goes on and on."

Kai turned, tilting his head to the side. "You love it, don't you?"

Did he? He usually spent all winter bitching about the added work, but in that moment Quade realised he did indeed love it. "Yeah, I do. I honestly can't imagine doing anything else."

After several quiet moments, Quade gave his head a slight shake. "Water warm?"

Kai spun around and stepped into the shower. "Yep. Coming in?"

"You bet your sweet ass," Quade replied, and removed the rest of his clothing. Before entering, he took the time to study his lover. "Christ. You really are amazing," he whispered.

Kai pulled his head out from under the spray. "Huh? Did you say something?" he asked, reaching for the shampoo.

Quade grinned. "I said don't hog all the water." He slipped inside and closed the glass door, as the younger man took a step back.

Kai handed Quade a bottle of shower gel. "Feel up to washing my bits?"

Quade took the bottle and poured some of the sporty fragranced soap into his hand. He started with Kai's chest, feeling the dark brown nipples pebble under his touch. The expression on Kai's face when Quade's hands roamed south was one of love and need. He

wondered if his face showed the desperation he felt, not only for Kai's body, but for his heart as well?

Quade spun Kai to face the tiled wall. He pressed himself against the warm curves of his lover and hoped his insecurities hadn't been on display. After obtaining a fresh supply of gel, Quade sunk to his knees. "Your ass is incredible," he groaned, sliding his slick hands over and between Kai's butt cheeks.

Kai braced his arms against the wall and spread his legs. "Kiss me," Kai begged.

Quade knew what his lover wanted. With a hand on each cheek, Quade spread Kai open to the spray of water, removing soap and sand. He buried his face, twirling his tongue around the ridged opening. How many times had he fucked this ass in the previous week?

As Quade pushed his tongue inside Kai's heat, he knew it didn't matter. He was well and truly addicted. The big question was what would the withdrawals do to him?

"Fuck me," Kai panted, lifting his foot to rest on the soap alcove.

"Squirt some gel into my hand," Quade commanded.

Kai's body accepted Quade's fingers easily. No surprise there. Hell, the two of them couldn't be together without fucking. Within a few minutes, Kai was stretched and moaning. Quade stood and positioned his cock. "You ready for me?" he teased, inserting his crown before withdrawing it.

Kai tilted his head back to land on Quade's shoulder. "Give it to me."

With his hands on Kai's waist, Quade grunted. "Put both feet up. I won't drop ya."

Kai rewarded him with a trusting nod as he put his other foot in the niche cut into the wall. Pressing the head of his cock past the outer ring of muscles, Quade used his hands to stabilise Kai. "It's all yours," Quade began. "Show me just how hungry that sweet little ass is."

With a loud groan, Kai impaled himself on the entire length of Quade's cock. "Fuck!" Quade yelled at the almost spontaneous envelopment. He tightened his grip on Kai's narrow hips as his lover used his footholds to fuck himself with Quade's dick.

Quade's eyes roamed Kai's powerful back muscles as they danced and twitched. Never had a lover's body been more perfectly matched to Quade's desires.

"You sure you got me? Cuz I'm gonna let go," Kai panted, picking up his pace.

"I'll always have you, babe," Quade answered.

With a breathless chuckle, Kai fisted his cock with one hand, while the other reached behind Quade to pull him in for a kiss. Quade opened to accept his lover's tongue as it slid deep into his mouth.

Despite the water temperature dropping dramatically, Quade's forehead broke out into a sweat at the erotic scene reflected in the mirror over the sink. "Love you," Quade declared. "No matter what happens, I need you to remember that."

Kai's body jerked in his arms, the younger man crying out as his orgasm overtook him. Knowing Kai was satisfied, Quade allowed himself to let go, his seed shooting in long spurts deep into his lover's body. He felt his knees begin to tremble at the intensity of his climax and lowered Kai to the floor.

As the cool water rained down on their overheated bodies, Quade held Kai in his arms. Quade knew if he lost Kai, he'd never love again. It may not last forever, but he was determined to do right by the trusting, younger man.

* * * *

Kai woke to the sound of rattling dishes. Opening his eyes, he watched as Quade set the table. "You cooked?"

Quade jumped, almost upsetting the wineglass and turned around. "You're up?" The older man glanced back at the table. "Yeah, I thought I'd fix a little pasta. Hungry?"

Yawning, Kai ran his hand down his naked torso to scratch his balls. "Starved." He swung his legs over the side of the couch and sat up. "I'm sorry. I can't believe I just crashed like that."

"Must've been a hell of a workout," Quade commented, setting several bowls onto the table.

"It was." Kai stood and stretched. "I can't believe how much I've been doing wrong. It's amazing I've gotten as far as I have."

He heard Quade huff a sound of disagreement before quickly covering it with a cough. "What?" Kai asked. "Something bothering you?"

It took several moments, but Quade eventually pulled out a chair and sat down. "Come here." He held out his arms and waited for Kai to join him.

Uh oh. Kai grabbed his robe from the chair and shrugged into it. "What's going on?" he asked, sitting on Quade's lap.

Quade smoothed the short silk robe over Kai's thighs. "I know you think Van is wonderful, but I did some research and found something disturbing."

About Van? Wait a minute. That's beside the point. "Why were you checking up on Van?"

Quade shrugged. "Jealousy. After I met him, I needed to know something about the gorgeous guy who was spending long days with you."

Kai rolled his eyes. Van's apparent indifference towards Kai when they were together was definitely not a secret. "Some days I don't think the guy even likes me as a student. You don't need to worry about him trying to get into my pants."

Shifting, Kai straddled Quade's lap. "I love you. If all I wanted was to get laid, I could sure as hell find someone younger than Van."

Quade narrowed his eyes. "I'm gonna pretend you didn't just make a crack about the guy's age."

"All I'm saying is...I don't want anyone but you."

Quade gave a subtle nod. "Did you know his last protégé was killed during a tournament?"

"Sure. Everyone in the surfing community knows what happened to Blain Hardesty."

"So you know that he was trying to execute a manoeuvre Van had perfected when he won the championship years earlier? That the judges interviewed said Blain was in no way ready to perform such a manoeuvre?"

Kai gave Quade's chest a push and tried to stand. Quade's muscular arms tightened around him, preventing his escape. "Yeah, I know all that. Did your little research trip tell you the two of them were lovers? That Van completely shut down after Blain's death? Or that Van held Blain's body as he took his last breath?"

Quade's face paled. "No," he had the decency to admit.

"What about the fact that Blain's brother Bryan was there too. That Bryan and I had been lovers at the time, so we were both there cheering Blain on?"

Kai closed his eyes and rested his head against Quade's shoulder. "That tragedy ruined so many people's lives." He sat back and gazed into Quade's eyes. "I'm not Blain. He was a selfish, conceited prick who used Van to get ahead. I'm not like that."

"I know you're not," Quade added. "I fucked up. I'm sorry. I was worried."

"Don't be." Kai leaned forward and placed a soft kiss on Quade's lips. "Surfers always make the comment that if they're going to bite it, they want it to be in the water." Kai shook his head. "Not me. I've seen what it does to the people left on land. I listen to what Van teaches me because he knows what the hell he's talking about. Blain's accident wasn't Van's fault."

Quade crushed Kai against his chest. "I can't lose you. I'm not sure how deep Van's feelings were for Blain, but it would kill me if you got hurt."

Kai knew he'd overreacted. The mention of Blain brought up too many bad memories. Brian had been Kai's first lover, and he fancied himself in love. The tragedy destroyed anything that might've been between him and Brian. His young lover had snapped. Brian sank into such a pit of anger and depression, his family eventually admitted him into a psych ward.

Yeah, he'd definitely seen first-hand what dying on a board did to the survivors. "I won't ever do something out there that isn't safe. I promise."

Quade tilted Kai's chin to face him. "That's all I can ask." He gave Kai a deep kiss. "Our dinner's getting cold."

Kai grinned. "Can't have that. I'm a growing boy."

Quade reached between them and ran his hand over the length of Kai's cock. "In more ways than one."

Chapter Ten

"Okay, I just sent it," Quade said, phone to his ear. "Tell Ryan to give Guy Hoisington the heads-up that Brewster's is under new ownership."

"I still can't believe that asshole got away with everything," Carol fumed.

"We couldn't very well prosecute him without going after David. Guy made it perfectly clear to the prosecuting attorney all he wanted was restitution for the damage done to The Tall Pines." Quade moved Kai's keyboard to the side of the desk and put his feet up. "So what else is goin' on?"

"Um, let me think. Snow, snow and more snow, jackass," Carol chuckled.

Quade looked out the window to the bright sunny day. "I hear ya. It's chilly here today as well. I think it's down to eighty degrees."

"Fuck off."

Smiling, Quade thought of Kai. "Okay I can do that. It's time to pick Kai up anyway. Call if you need anything else."

"I miss you, you turd. Things just aren't the same without you around bugging the shit out of me."

Quade made a smooching sound into the phone. "I love you too. I'll be back on Monday."

"I'll alert the press," Carol joked.

Quade hung up the phone and got to his feet. He couldn't believe he only had three days left to be with Kai. What would it be like to wake without that sweet mouth wrapped around his morning wood?

Thinking about their morning ritual, Quade's cock began to fill. "Not yet," he crooned, petting the front of his shorts.

After grabbing Kai's keys from the coffee table, Quade roared out of the driveway. He always made it a point to leave at least an hour early so he could watch his lover in action. Quade hadn't had any more run-ins with Van, but the two of them did their best to keep their distance from each other.

Quade knew Van didn't approve of Kai getting into a serious relationship. Although Kai hadn't said anything about Van giving him a hard time, the younger man sure hustled Quade off the beach as soon as the lesson was over.

Finding a spot to park wasn't easy, but Quade managed one a quarter of a mile down the beach. By the time he found Kai and Van, he only had twenty minutes to watch his lover surf.

Trying to stay far enough away in order not to distract the lesson, Quade settled in the sand. Kai was on his board paddling his way out to catch a wave as Van looked on from his position on the beach, barking orders.

Quade had seen a remarkable change in Kai's style over the previous ten days. Quade knew his lover's ranking would rise dramatically after the first tournament in Australia. What he didn't know was how many seasons Kai would have to maintain his ranking in order to make the surf board manufacturing dream viable.

Just when Kai caught a wave, Quade's cell phone rang. He thought about ignoring it in favour of the view, but his conscience got the better of him. Digging the phone out of his short's pocket, he looked at the display. Shit. Quade's thumb hovered over the button for two more rings. With a resigned sigh, he pressed the key. "Hi, Mother."

"Hello, dear. I need you to come home. The doctor admitted your father into the hospital this morning."

Quade sat up and brushed the sand from his torso. "What's wrong?"

"Nelson hasn't been feeling well so Dr. Thrumbolt gave him a complete physical. Nelson's blood pressure is elevated and he didn't do well with the stress test. The doctor thought it would be best to admit your father for further testing."

"He's a businessman, Mother. Of course his blood pressure is high. Father probably wouldn't be able to function at the pace he does if it wasn't," Quade quipped.

"Nelson Quade Madison, I'm surprised at you. Your father has sacrificed everything for his family. The least you can do is pay your respects by coming back to Charleston."

Quade bit his tongue. His father didn't sacrifice anything for his family. Nelson Madison was a cheating son-of-a-bitch, who thought nothing of his wife and child. It had always been that way. More than once his dad had missed an important family event due to work or his mistress-of-the-month. Quade knew it, and he was certain his mother also knew

it, but it wouldn't fit into Lorraine Madison's views on social niceties. Instead his mother looked the other way, giving Nelson free reign.

"Dear?" Lorraine prompted.

"I'm in Hawaii, Mother."

"So, it will take you a little longer to get to Charleston. When can I expect you?"

"We don't even know what's wrong. Why don't you let me know if the doctor finds something, and I'll consider flying back then?"

"Because I need you here, now, that's why. There are things that need looking after in your father's absence, business things. We both know he would expect you to take care of Madison Industries."

"Why are you talking about him like he's already dead? Hell, Mother, by the time I get there, he could be out of the hospital and back to work."

"Not this time," Lorraine said.

"What aren't you telling me?" Quade's gaze landed on Kai as he stood on the beach talking to Van.

"There's something to do with his white blood cell count. I'm not sure what it means, but Dr. Thumbolt didn't seem pleased."

Quade knew an elevated white cell count usually signalled an infection of some kind, but was it enough to drag him away from the man he loved? That was the big question. His father had always been aloof, more interested in his own business and social life. Quade couldn't remember a time when Nelson's family had ever come first.

"I'll think about it," he finally said.

"Please, son," his mom pleaded.

How many times had he held his mother's hand after one of his father's affairs had come to light? "I said I'd think about it and I will. Call if Dr. Thumbolt finds something."

Lorraine sighed dramatically. "I can't believe you're being so selfish about this."

"I learned from the best. Talk to you later, Mother."

Kai started towards him, and Quade ended the call. Shoving the phone back into his pocket, he stood and met his lover halfway. "You looked good out there," he said, greeting Kai with a kiss.

"Thanks," Kai said, pressing further against Quade.

Chuckling, Quade pulled back and looked down at his now wet shorts. "People are gonna talk," he joked.

"Let them." Kai nibbled Quade's lower lip before soothing the sting with his tongue. "Who were you talking to?"

"My mother," Quade divulged, running his hands down Kai's back to land on his ass. "My father's in the hospital. She wants me to fly to Charleston."

"Is he going to be okay?" Kai asked with a note of concern.

Quade shrugged. "Who knows. Maybe his fast paced life finally caught up with him."

He released his hold on Kai and pulled his lover's board from the sand, settling it under his arm. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah," Kai said, following. "So, uh, you gonna go?"

Quade manoeuvred the board around several people before answering. "Not sure. I told her to call me if the doctor found anything."

"You never talk about your parents," Kai mused.

"Not much to talk about. They weren't around much while I was growing up. Hell, I think my nanny loved me more than either of them ever did."

"What was her name?" Kai asked.

"Gloria," Quade said after a few moments. "She was the kind of woman every child wished was their grandmother. Gloria was the one to pick me up from school, take me to the park, and tuck me in at night while my parents went to whatever social engagement was more important."

Talking about the older woman caused a hitch in Quade's breathing. "She had a massive stroke when I was around thirteen. I remember getting worried when she didn't pick me up from school. I called home but no one answered. Then I called my father's office. He yelled at me. Told me to take the bus and stop acting like a pussy."

They arrived at Kai's Jeep, and Quade loaded the bright yellow and red board into the back. "By the time I got home, Gloria was dead. I found her on the kitchen floor with a grocery list still in her hand." Quade shrugged and got behind the wheel. "After her funeral my parents informed me that I was old enough to take care of myself, so I did."

Kai's lips whispered across Quade's jaw. "I'm sorry. I can tell you loved her."

"Yeah," Quade sighed. "She was probably the only person I've ever loved besides you."

"And that's why you're afraid something will happen to me," Kai said, finishing Quade's thought.

Quade realised Kai was right. "Yeah, I guess so."

He pulled out of the parking space and headed the jeep to Kai's house. "So, what do you feel like for dinner?" he asked, quickly changing the subject.

* * * *

Kai set the plate of seafood leftovers by the side of the house. He had no doubt the neighbourhood stray cat would be by within minutes to eat up the tasty offering. Before rejoining Quade, Kai wandered down to the beach.

They had talked over dinner, and Kai was pretty sure Quade would do as his mother had asked and fly to Charleston. Kai knew Quade was doing the right thing, but it didn't make saying goodbye any easier.

Warm arms wrapped around his chest. "Beautiful sunset," Quade murmured.

Kai had been so lost in thought he hadn't even noticed the bright coloured blazes in the sky as the sun slowly dipped into the ocean. "It is," he agreed.

Quade sat down and pulled Kai into his lap. "Care to share it with me?"

Kai had seen thousands of Hawaiian sunsets. He chose instead to nestle against Quade's strong chest and look at his lover's face. How long would it be before they could be together again? "I'm gonna miss you," he blurted.

Quade's gaze drifted from the view down to Kai. "Me too. You have no idea how much."

"Maybe I can skip a tournament or two and make another trip to Cattle Valley?" Kai slipped his hand under Quade's unbuttoned shirt to run across his lover's chest. The days Quade had spent lounging on the beach had turned the skin under Kai's fingers a light golden brown colour.

Quade's hand covered Kai's, stilling his wandering touch. "We both know that you can't do that and still maintain your rankings." Quade closed the distance and swept his tongue through the interior of Kai's mouth. "We'll find a way. Hell, I've never been to half the places you're going this season. Maybe I'll sneak away and join you in Fiji or Australia."

"What time is your flight?" Kai asked.

Instead of answering, Quade stood with Kai still in his arms. "I've got fourteen hours left to worship this beautiful body of yours."

Kai nodded. He could still see the last glimmer of the setting sun around Quade's shoulder. "I called Van and told him I'd be taking you to the airport. He said it would probably be better to skip practice all together. That I'd be distracted."

Quade carried him into the cool interior of the house, through to Kai's bedroom. "Promise me you won't let anything distract you from staying safe? The two of us will be together somehow, but you worrying about it can be dangerous."

Kai grinned. "Now you sound like Van." He pushed his shorts and underwear down over his hips and stepped out of them.

Quade stripped out of his clothes and pulled Kai down on the bed. "I've been keeping a close eye on that guy. Despite the rough way he talks to you, I think he does indeed have your safety in mind. Listen to him."

"I will." Kai ran his foot up the strong muscled thigh to wrap around Quade's lower back. Having Quade's full weight on top of him made him feel more loved and protected than anything else.

The two of them had made love so many times over the previous month, Kai didn't even need to ask for what he wanted. Quade picked up on Kai's body language and reached for the lube on the nightstand.

The insertion of Quade's fingers caused gooseflesh to pop out on Kai's skin. "Promise me we won't drift apart," he blurted when Quade introduced a second finger.

"Never," Quade vowed, exchanging his fingers for the crown of his cock. "You're mine, and I'll do everything in my power to keep it that way."

Kai's head pressed deeper into the pillow as Quade slowly entered him. He liked hearing Quade refer to him as his. "Love you," he moaned, accepting Quade's full length.

Quade rose to his hands and looked down at Kai. "You're everything to me. Remember that."

Quade pulled out and surged back inside, somehow getting even deeper. Kai watched the twin veins in his lover's neck pulse as the rhythm increased. Hitching his legs even

higher on Quade's back, Kai turned every ounce of control over to the wonderful man making love to him.

"Mark me," he gasped, needing something to remind him of Quade after his lover left.

Quade's mouth latched on to a portion of skin above Kai's heart. The faster Quade's hips pistoned as he drove himself in and out of Kai's body, the harder he sucked.

"Oooohh," Kai moaned, feeling the bruise raise on his chest.

Quade groaned as he pulled his mouth from Kai's skin and gazed down at his handiwork. "Roll to your side," Quade grunted, plunging deep once more before withdrawing completely.

Kai did as asked and waited for Quade to spoon against his back into their favourite morning position. *Why like this? Why now?*

After applying more lube to his cock, Quade re-entered Kai in one thrust. He curled his body around Kai's and buried his face in Kai's neck. "I'm not gonna make it," Quade choked, slowly moving in and out of Kai's body.

"That's okay. We've got all night," Kai answered, turning his head to steal a kiss.

Quade slowly shook his head. "I mean I'm not gonna make it without you in my arms every day."

It was then he noticed the tears running down Quade's cheeks. "Shhh," Kai soothed. "This isn't the end. We'll figure it out."

Kai turned his face into the pillow, trying to believe his own words. He knew how much Quade loved his little Utopian town. Was building surf boards more important than being with the man he loved? Hell, for that matter, was surfing worth it?

Quade's thumb rubbed against the new bruise on Kai's chest as the intensity of their coupling became almost frenzied. Kai pushed back onto Quade's cock. "Fuck me," he begged, wrapping his hand around his own shaft.

Fucking him like a man possessed, Quade opened Kai further with a forearm under his knee. "Don't. Want. It. To. End," Quade punctuated each word with a deep thrust.

"It won't." Kai believed that, he had to. Giving up the man he loved wasn't an option.

Chapter Eleven

Quade was already out of sorts when he arrived at the hospital after a twenty hour day. The long plane ride combined with hours spent lurking around airports waiting for connecting flights had given him too much time to think.

"It's about time," his mother greeted sarcastically, as Quade walked into his father's room.

Quade stopped and dropped his luggage just inside the doorway. "Do you have any idea how far I've travelled, Mother?"

Dismissing the disapproving glare, Quade turned his attention to the bed. "How is he?" he asked, walking over to look down at his sleeping father.

"They have him scheduled for an angioplasty in the morning. Dr. Thrumbolt thinks the years of stress have finally caught up with your father."

Quade noticed his mother never rose from her chair in the corner of the room. He wondered if she'd even held his father's hand since he'd been admitted. Was she here out of duty, or love? He knew he was there strictly out of duty. His father had never been around enough for Quade to form a real bond with the man. "What do you need me to do?" he finally asked.

"I can take care of things here, if you'll make sure the office is still running. Those people probably think they're on vacation without your father around. Make sure they know it's business as usual."

Business as usual? "I don't know the first thing about running Madison Industries."

"Well it's time you learned. Your father has spent his entire life breathing life back into that company after your granddad nearly lost everything."

Unconsciously, Quade began grinding his teeth. It was an old argument, one he didn't care to have at the moment. "I'm going back to the house to grab a nap and a shower. I'll head into the office later if there's still time."

"You should at least call the office. It wouldn't hurt to let them know you could pop in at any moment."

Quade rolled his eyes, refusing to answer her request. He gave his father one last glance before walking over to pick up his luggage. "Will my key still work in the lock?"

"No," Lorraine stated. "The housekeeper will need to let you in."

Quade looked at the keyring in his hand. He'd been carrying around five extra keys for years for nothing? "Why'd you change the locks?"

Lorraine looked at him like he was crazy. "Because you moved out."

"What? Why? Did you think I was going to break in and steal something? Jesus, Mother!"

Crossing her arms over her chest, Lorraine's chin lifted. "You're the one who left."

Deciding it wasn't worth the argument, Quade shouldered his carry-on and flung open the door. "Call me on my cell if there are any changes."

* * * *

With a towel around his waist, Quade sat on the guest bed and called Kai. The completely redesigned bedroom said a lot about his relationship with his parents. He briefly wondered how long they'd waited before packing all his boyhood stuff into storage.

When the call went directly to voice mail, Quade sighed. "Hi. I just wanted you to know I finally made it. I'm getting ready to lie down. Call me when you get in. Love you." Quade hung up and dropped his towel before sliding between the high thread-count taupe sheets.

He was turning over the idea of shirking his familial duties and flying back to Kai, when his phone rang. Reaching over to the ornately carved bedside table, Quade smiled when he looked at the display. "Hey, babe."

"Hi. How's your dad?" Kai asked.

"He'll be fine I guess. Mother didn't let me stay long at the hospital, so I thought I'd come back to the house and take a nap. How'd the training go?" Quade snuggled back under the covers with the phone tucked between his chin and shoulder.

He noticed Kai didn't answer his question. "Kai? Did something happen?"

"No. Well, not really. Had a pretty good wipe-out, but I'll be okay."

Quade's entire body tensed. "You'll be okay? How bad were you hurt?" He mentally calculated the time difference and how long it would take to get back to Oahu.

"Relax. Just a few new bruises, nothing major. Although my ears are still ringing after Van chewed my ass for being so careless."

Quade could very well imagine the choice words Van would have used. "I'm glad he's looking out for your safety. How'd it happen?"

"I still don't know. I guess my head just wasn't in it."

The thought of his lover doing something to hurt himself almost sent Quade over the edge. "Were you thinking about us?"

"Of course. You're never far from my thoughts."

"Listen, babe. You have to promise me you'll be careful. I'm doing enough thinking and worrying for the both of us. You just concentrate on the wave and let me deal with the rest."

"I miss you already," Kai murmured.

"I miss you too." Quade ran his hand down under the covers. He gave his filling cock a quick stroke before wincing. "My dick's still sore," he chuckled, thinking about the hours they'd spent in bed before his departure.

"Yeah? You should feel my ass," Kai quipped.

"I'd love to feel your ass." Quade imagined his cock buried between the tight globes of Kai's ass.

Kai giggled. "Not today you wouldn't."

"Any day, any hour, any minute." Quade felt his breathing hitch in his chest as he tried to imagine the long weeks and months until he could be with Kai again.

"Mmmm. That sounds nice," Kai replied.

Quade yawned, the long trip catching up to him.

"Why don't you take your nap, and call me when you wake up," Kai said.

"By that time it'll be the middle of the night for you. I'll wait until you wake up in the morning."

"Love you," Kai whispered.

Quade drifted off to sleep with Kai's name still on his lips.

* * * *

Quade strode into the offices of Madison Industries after a fitful nap. How long had it been since he'd last walked through the heavy glass doors? Five years? Six? He stopped at the reception desk to introduce himself. "Hi, I'm Quade Madison. My mother asked me to stop by. Does Paul Quirk still work here?"

"Yes, Mr. Madison. Would you like me to call him for you?"

Quade shook his head. "I'll surprise him. Is he still in the same office?"

"I'm not sure where he used to be. I've only been with the company for a year, but you'll find Mr. Quirk in Suite four-sixteen."

"He's a Vice-President?" Quade asked, more than a little shocked. He'd gone to college with Paul and had helped him get the job in marketing when they'd both graduated.

"Yes, sir," the receptionist said, trying to ignore the incessantly ringing phones.

Quade tapped his palm on her desk. "I'll find him, thanks." He walked to the bank of elevators and pushed the up button. Paul a Vice-President? He still couldn't believe it. He wondered why his father had never mentioned promoting his old friend.

The doors opened and Quade stepped inside along with a few other employees, none of whom he recognised. He was a little ashamed of himself for going so long between visits. There was a time when he'd roam the halls of Madison Industries at least once a week. Of course it was the only way he saw his father.

Stepping off the elevator onto the executive floor, Quade nodded to a few familiar faces as he made his way to Paul's office. "Is he in?" Quade asked the secretary, sitting outside Paul's door.

"Is he expecting you?" the cute little blonde asked.

"No. I'm Quade Madison. Paul and I went to college together." He started to walk towards his friend's door, but the woman stopped him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Madison, but Paul likes everyone to be announced in case he's in the middle of something."

"Oh. Okay." Quade waited while the secretary did her job.

"You can go in," she said, hanging up the phone.

With a slight shake to his head, Quade opened the door. The man sitting behind the large desk was still as good-looking as Quade remembered. "Hey, Mr. Vice-President," he greeted.

"Quade, you old dog, what brings you to Charleston?" Paul stood and shook Quade's hand.

"Mother asked me to come. My father's in the hospital," he divulged, not surprised that his father's employees knew nothing of his health. With Nelson Madison, it was all about work. Nothing else was worth discussing.

"Nelson's okay, I hope," Paul said, motioning Quade to sit.

Settling in the black leather and chrome chair, Quade nodded. "He should be fine in a day or two."

Quade glanced around Paul's office. "I can't believe you're one of those muckety-mucks we used to joke about in school."

Paul looked briefly offended. "I'm very good at my job."

"Of course you are. My father wouldn't have promoted you if you weren't the best. Just surprised me is all." Quade suddenly felt ill-at-ease. "So, what's been going on? You married?"

Paul scoffed and waved his hand. "Divorced. Twice actually. Wives require too much of my time. I'd rather exert my energy and attention here where it'll do me some good. What about you? You still living in that town out west?"

"Cattle Valley, yep. I'm Mayor Quade Madison to the people of the community," Quade boasted.

"Good for you. I guess there's no need to ask about a wife," Paul chuckled.

A picture of Kai came to mind. "My partner's name is Kai. He's a professional surfer living in Oahu at the moment."

Paul whistled. "Boy when you do it, you do it right. Maybe I should try a long-distance relationship. It'd be a lot easier to make time for phone calls during the day than trying to get home in time for dinner."

"Well, we're not long-distance by choice. Our jobs just happen to conflict with our living arrangements," Quade excused.

"I hear ya. People don't understand how important careers are to a man. Well worth giving up a nightly piece of ass for, wouldn't you say?" Paul laughed.

Quade wanted to shout NO! He looked at his friend, really looked at him for the first time. Paul appeared...old. Quade wondered if it was trying to keep up with Corporate America or the lack of someone to love. He thought of his father. Last time Quade had seen him his father looked much older than his sixty-two years.

"Listen," he said, standing. "I'll let you get back to work. I need to see if anything requires attention."

He said his goodbyes and left as fast as he could. Quade walked to the other end of the hall to his father's office.

"Quade!" Louise, his father's long-time secretary said, throwing her arms around him. "You're so handsome." The older woman stepped back to look him up and down.

"Aww, I bet you say that to all the boss' sons." He winced as Louise pinched his cheek.

"You still have that mouth on you I see?" Louise remarked, turning the pinch into a pat. "How's Nelson?"

"I'm not really sure to be honest. Mother hustled me out of the hospital quickly after I arrived. She said father was due to have an angioplasty performed in the morning." Quade sighed. "To be honest, I'm still not sure why she needed me to cut my vacation short and fly down here."

Louise tapped her chin and retook her chair behind the desk. "I've my own theory on that."

"Care to enlighten me?" Quade asked, leaning on the edge of the desk.

Louise's eyes scanned the surrounding area before speaking. "He's made no secret of wanting you to take over when he retires. The company has been run by a Madison for the past eighty years."

Quade shook his head. "I've told him a million times I wanted nothing to do with the company."

Louise nodded her head sympathetically. "He's getting older, Quade. I think he realises he didn't do right by you when you were growing up. He wants you here with him so he can teach you what he should have taught you years ago."

"It's too late," Quade ground out. "Family business or not, I would never have put this place above spending time with the people I loved."

Quade had to brace himself against the desk as the words sank in. *Fuck! I'm doing the same thing. Only instead of depriving a son, I'm depriving the man I love.*

Pounding his fist against the cold surface, he stood. "Sorry, Louise, but I need to go."

"Is there something wrong?"

"Yeah," Quade realised. "But now that I know what it is, I can make it right." He leaned over and gave the older woman a kiss on the cheek. "Take care of yourself. Don't let them work you too hard."

"Pssh," Louise waved him off. "I wouldn't still be here if I let these barracudas get to me."

Quade ran out of the building, eager to set in motion the path that would lead to his happiness.

* * * *

Suitcases in hand, Quade entered his father's hospital room. "How is he?" he asked.

Lorraine glanced up from a fashion magazine, before returning to whatever article she happened to be reading. "He's awake. Aren't you, Nelson?"

Nelson Madison's eyes opened to stare at his son. "How're things at the office?"

Quade sighed, knowing it was too much for his father to greet him properly. "Fine, I guess. Aren't you going to ask how I've been?"

"No problems with the Henderson account?"

Why do I even bother? "None that I heard about."

Quade watched as his father's lids closed once more, obviously dismissing his only son. "I'm leaving," Quade declared.

Nelson's eyes shot back open. "What? You can't. I'll be in here at least another couple of days. You need to keep an eye on the office, report back to me."

Scrubbing his hands over his tired eyes, Quade kicked himself for giving these people any of his precious time. "I don't give a fuck about Madison Industries. I'm going home to Cattle Valley. There are a few things I need to take care of before moving to Oahu."

"Oahu? What the hell has you abandoning your responsibilities to move half-way across the globe?"

Squaring his shoulders, Quade looked his father in the eyes. "The man I love."

Nelson's face turned red as a beet. "I didn't work my entire life to have you shirking your duties to run after some queer boy."

Leaning over the bed, Quade grabbed the lapels of his father's blue-striped pyjamas. "You watch your mouth, you selfish sonofabitch."

"Quade!" Lorraine gasped, putting her hand to her chest. "What has gotten into you?"

Quade released his father and gazed at his mother. How many years had he prayed, hoping that someday his parents would love him? "Love, Mother. For the first time in my life someone truly loves me."

"Love doesn't pay the bills," his father broke in.

"How the hell would you know? Have you ever actually loved someone, or do you just equate love with a quick fuck over your lunch hour?"

Nelson flinched as Lorraine let out another loud gasp. Rolling his eyes, Quade looked at his mother. "Don't play the innocent, Mother, it doesn't suit you."

He walked over to the door and picked up his luggage. "You're two of the most self-centred people I've ever met. I ought to hate you both for the way you did or didn't raise me, but I don't. The fact is I really don't feel much of anything for either of you. But I do need to thank you. Coming here has cleared up a lot of questions. I know now that if I let my job interfere with my love life, a job is all I'll ever have."

Quade opened the door and glanced back over his shoulder. "I hope your procedure goes well, Father. I'll be in touch."

Leaving the hospital room, Quade felt as though a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He was thirty-eight-years old. It was about time he followed a new path in life.

Chapter Twelve

Quade heard the door to the outer office open and close. "Carol?"

His secretary's head popped around the door jamb to his office. "Quade? What're you doing back so early?"

"Getting stuff cleaned up. Would you mind grabbing us a cup of coffee and coming in for a visit?"

"Sure," Carol answered, suspicion lacing her voice.

Quade heard the rustle of fabric as she took off her coat, hat and scarf. "Do you already have coffee brewing in there, or should I make a pot?" she asked.

"Got some, but it's almost gone." While Carol fussed around in her office, Quade continued to work. He took a new folder out of the box next to him on the floor and added a label.

Carol walked in with a cup in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other. "How long've you been here?" she asked, refilling his cup before making a new pot.

"Too long," Quade replied, tossing down his pen. He took a tentative sip of the hot beverage. "I've been trying to get some files in order."

Carol's steps faltered. "You? What's going on?"

"Have a seat."

Setting her cup on the edge of Quade's desk, Carol sat. "Are you dying?"

Quade began to chuckle. Leave it to Carol to come right out with it. "No, but I'm leaving."

"What do you mean you're leaving? You just got back."

Quade took a deep breath. He knew talking to his old friend would be the hardest part of the transition. He set his own cup on the desk and leaned forward, looking Carol in the eyes. "I'm stepping down as mayor and moving to Hawaii."

Carol sat up straighter in her chair, her eyes as big as an owl's. "Wow! I...I don't know what to say. I can't imagine this town without you."

"I know it's sudden," Quade began.

"Don't," Carol interrupted. "You don't have to explain yourself to me. I know how much you love that boy. It's just a shock."

Carol reached across the desk and squeezed Quade's hand. "What do you need me to do?"

Quade couldn't believe his friend was taking the news so well. He'd had visions of her screaming at him, telling him he was crazy, but she seemed fine with it. Unless... "What's going on? Why're you so calm?"

Carol sighed and released his hand. "Because I've seen it coming. Once upon a time, this job, this town, meant everything to you. That was until your vacation last year."

She shrugged. "You came back different. I tried to tell myself it was just your dick talking, but as the months wore on and you showed no interest in any other men, I knew."

"That I was in love," Quade contributed.

"Yes. Seeing Kai here..." She shook her head. "Well, the man was literally a fish out of water."

Quade felt warmth invade him. Despite all their petty arguments, Carol was the best friend a man could have. She understood him. "So you'll help me? I need to get the office in order."

"We'll need to schedule a council meeting to discuss a replacement," Carol added.

"Yep. And I'll need to get my house up for sale." There were so many things to do before he could join Kai again. "How're we gonna get it all done and still run the city?"

Carol stood, rolling her eyes. "I'm actually a lot more efficient than I've ever let on. I can deal with the day to day things as well as get your desk sorted."

She picked up her coffee cup and took a sip. "You're going to be busy trying to explain to your friends why you're leaving." Carol turned to leave, but stopped before she left Quade's office. "It's okay, you know. I'd do just about anything to find that special someone or someones as the case may be."

"You will." In his weaker, drunker moments, he'd complimented Carol on her curvaceous figure and long auburn hair. Of course as soon as he'd sobered, he'd denied ever having the conversations. The woman was too damn strong-minded as it was. The last thing he needed was to put up with a conceited secretary.

He wished others could see past her brash personality to the sensual woman he knew was hidden underneath. Unlike most of the women in Cattle Valley, Carol wasn't a lesbian. She'd moved to town with two men, who subsequently decided they'd be better without a woman in the middle. Quade had met her only briefly before the affair ended, but he knew enough about her, to see the change the betrayal caused.

"From your lips to God's ears," she called from her office.

Quade's eyes began to sting as they filled with tears. Maybe paperwork wasn't the only thing he needed to take care of before he left.

* * * *

"You look like shit," Van muttered in mid-stretch.

"Thanks," Kai snorted. He felt like shit.

Van stopped exercising and put his hands on his hips. "You trying to make yourself sick? You leave for the land down under in less than a week."

Kai looked at his mentor. Although showing weakness wasn't usually something he did, Kai dropped to the sand. "I'm a fucking mess. I can't eat. I can't sleep." He shook his head. "I live my entire day for a sixty-minute phone call."

Van mumbled something under his breath before sitting next to Kai. "What'll it take for you to get your head on straight? Because there's no way in hell you can surf in a tournament in this condition."

"I don't know," Kai confessed. "Maybe I can find a way to spend time with Quade between tournaments?"

"You won't get as much training in if you do."

"I know." He felt horrible for wasting Van's time. "So maybe I won't be as good as I could be, but I'll be happier. Shouldn't that count for something?"

Van's hand landed on Kai's shoulder. "In the sport of surfing? No. But in life?" Van seemed to ponder the answer for a few moments. "I think you'll be better off in the long run."

"You do?" Kai asked. Van was infamous for his work ethic. The man did nothing if it didn't involve surfing.

Van nodded. He picked up a handful of sand and let it fall through his fingers. "This? The beach, the ocean, it'll always be here, but it loses something when you don't have someone to enjoy it with."

Van shifted in the sand, clearly uncomfortable with the topic. "Competing is fantastic, but you'll always be a surfer, points and tournaments can't take that away from you. Take it from an old surfer, there needs to be more than that." Van grinned. "Loneliness sucks."

Kai couldn't help but to laugh. "I think that's the first time I've ever seen anything close to a smile on that handsome face of yours."

Van stood and brushed the sand from his hands. "Not much to smile about."

Before his mentor could walk off, Kai reached out and grabbed his hand. "Blain didn't deserve you."

Van shrugged. "Maybe not, but I deserve the guilt I carry for what happened."

"You didn't kill him."

"I didn't save him either." Van pulled his hand away and walked over to Kai's board. "You ready to do this?"

* * * *

Quade glanced around the table at the surprised faces. "So, that's that. We'll need to fill the mayoral position in the interim until we can hold a special election the first Tuesday in April."

The city council members still appeared to be in a state of shock. "I'd like to nominate George Manning." Quade looked across the table at the town's fire chief. "I know you have other duties, but with Carol still on staff, I think you'd have time for both."

A single black brow rose in response. "I'm not sure how well I could work with her. She doesn't seem to like me much."

Quade waved George's concerns away. "Don't take it personally. It's a self-defence thing she has going. Once you get to know her, you'll love her as much as I do."

George looked from Quade to the rest of the council. Quade was surprised by the blush blossoming on the tall man's cheeks. Was he embarrassed by the nomination, or was it something else? *Hmmm.*

"Winters are usually pretty slow at the firehouse. As much as I hate to see Quade leave town, I think I can step into the job for a few months. That is, if you all agree?"

"All those in favour of making George Manning interim mayor raise your hand?" Quade asked the council.

"Well, it looks unanimous," Quade declared. Watching as Asa Montgomery, Ryan Blackfeather, Palmer Wynfield, Pam Gleason, Jeb Baines, Sam Browning and Ryan Bronwyn lowered their hands.

Quade stood and reached across the conference table to shake George's hand. "Congratulations, Mr. Mayor."

George smiled and returned the handshake. "Who's gonna break the news to Carol?"

"I'll call her when I get home. Don't worry. You'll do fine."

Quade felt like jumping up and down with glee. Not only had he solved the major obstacle for his departure, but if he didn't miss his guess, he might have solved the problem of his lonely best friend as well. He sure as hell hoped he wasn't reading George's signals wrong. The man had always been pretty open about the fact he swung both ways, maybe Carol would get lucky and George would swing her way.

After the meeting, Ryan pulled Quade aside. "Care to have a drink before you head home?"

Quade looked at his watch. "Sure. Kai'll be training for another hour or two," he answered, following Ryan down the steps. "I'll follow you."

Starting his Escalade, Quade began to get nostalgic. The drive down Main Street brought to mind all the good times he'd had since moving to Cattle Valley. Maybe he could talk Kai into returning to the small town a couple of weeks a year. He smiled. He'd love to see Kai's face when the rodeo came to town.

Pulling up in front of Brewster's, Quade joined Ryan on the sidewalk. "Have you heard if the new owner is gonna change the name?" he asked, pointing at the bar sign.

Ryan chuckled and opened the front door. "With a name like Sean O'Brien I imagine the new owner will change more than the name. I think we might be in for a genuine Irish pub."

Quade laughed in return. "Yeah, I guess you're right." He gestured towards a booth. "Grab us a table while I get us the first round."

Ryan nodded and pulled out his cell phone. "I should probably call and tell the boys I'll be a little later than usual."

Quade grinned and walked towards the bar. The new owner was leaning against the scarred wood surface talking to Ben Zook. Quade had only met the man briefly when he'd returned from Charleston the previous week, but he hadn't forgotten him. The guy was pretty unforgettable. Quade imagined Sean must've been a professional body builder of some kind before moving to Cattle Valley. The man was huge, with a chest as wide as a barn. The slight red tint to his otherwise light brown hair would've given away Sean's heritage even if his name hadn't.

"Aahh, Mayor Madison," Sean greeted. "What can I get you?"

"Two bottles of Michelob, please." He decided not to tell anyone about his resignation until the formal announcement the following day.

As he waited, he looked around the bar. Was it busier than normal for a weeknight? He knew it probably had something to do with the new owner. Who could resist watching the muscles under the tight T-shirt dance as Sean worked?

The bottles landed in front of him and Quade pulled out a ten. "Keep the change."

Sean nodded. "Thanks."

Quade carried the bottles over to the booth and joined Ryan. "How long did the boys say you could stay out?" he asked.

Ryan grinned. "Well, when I told them the news, they decided to get dressed and join us. They should be here any time unless they get...distracted."

"The two of them? Naw," Quade joked. He took a sip of his beer and gazed at his friend. "I'm gonna miss you."

"You sure you're doing the right thing? What'll you do in Hawaii?"

"Fuck the man I love," Quade shot back before getting serious. "I'll find something to occupy my time. I've got enough money to travel with Kai for a couple of years. He's hoping to eventually open a surf and body board manufacturing shop. Just a small one, but I'm sure it'll be enough to keep us both busy."

"Does he know you're coming?"

Quade bit his bottom lip. "No. I'm worried that it'll throw off his concentration."

Ryan took a swig of his beer. "Surprises aren't always what they're cracked up to be. I think you should let him know you're coming at least. You don't have to tell him you're moving there if you don't want, but that's up to you."

Quade thought about it. "You may be right. I'll consider it."

Freezing cold hands covered Quade's eyes from behind before a pair of soft lips whispered against his ear. "I heard you think the scenery in Hawaii is prettier than here."

Quade grinned. Nate knew very well how pretty he was, but he was also very much taken. "Staring at the scenery in Hawaii won't get me killed," he answered back.

Laughing, Nate placed a kiss on Quade's neck before bumping him with his hip. "Scoot over."

Quade did as asked and wrapped his arm around Nate's neck, rubbing the man's perfect hair with his knuckles. "What will I do without you around to torture me?"

Nate slapped Quade's hand away and fixed his hair. "Suffer I guess."

Across the table, Ryan and Rio were challenging each other in a game of tonsil hockey. "I'll admit I'll miss not being in such an open environment."

Nate crossed his arms and cleared his throat until the two lovers broke apart. "Do you mind? We're trying to have a little going away party here."

"Sorry," Rio mumbled, wiping his mouth.

Quade leaned over and bumped shoulders with Nate, nearly knocking the small man out of the booth. "So, you gonna run for my position?"

"Mayor?" Nate asked with his hand to his chest.

"Of course you'd have to learn to deal with Carol," Quade added.

Nate chuckled. "I can handle Carol. I'm good with women."

Ryan choked on his beer as he and Rio roared with laughter.

Nate narrowed his eyes and reached across the table to run his finger up Ryan's forearm. "Would I have to challenge the sheriff on certain issues?"

"Occasionally," Quade said with a smile. "Does that interest you?"

"Mmmm, yes."

Ryan grunted and Nate giggled. Quade would vote for Nate in a heartbeat. He strongly suspected there were a lot of other people in town who would do the same. Oh to be a fly on

the wall of those Sheriff's Department budget meetings. He'd definitely have to return to Cattle Valley, even if it was only once a year.

* * * *

"Oh my God. I can't believe you're finally here," Kai said, peppering kisses to Quade's face.

Quade gave Kai an enthusiastic kiss before stepping back. "Maybe we'd better save the rest of our hellos for someplace a little more private?"

Kai looked around at the other passengers standing beside the luggage carousel. "You're probably right," he agreed, taking Quade's hand. He couldn't believe Quade had managed to get enough time off work to fly with him to Australia at the end of the week.

"Are you tired?" Kai asked. Quade had missed his connecting flight in LA due to weather delays getting out of Wyoming. The resulting changes had added an extra four-hour layover in Los Angeles.

"Wiped, but not too much to give you a proper romp when we get home," Quade informed him, discreetly brushing their joined hands across the front of Kai's shorts.

"Oh good," Kai chuckled. "I'll admit I was a little worried."

Quade released Kai's hand when his suitcase came into view. *Man that's a huge piece of luggage*, Kai thought. He was further surprised when Quade hoisted another bag from the carousel.

Pushing his way through the crowd, Kai reached for one of the suitcases. "Man, did you bring me lots of presents or what?" Kai chuckled. Instead of trying to carry the bag, he pulled out the handle and rolled the suitcase back through the crowd of people.

"Something like that," Quade answered.

Presents? Kai loved gifts. He led the way to his jeep. After getting the over-sized bags stuffed into the back, he swung up behind the wheel. "Are you hungry? I can stop somewhere on the way home?"

Quade shook his head. "I bought a meal on the plane. I figured we wouldn't wanna take the time to eat."

"You figured right," Kai agreed, leaning over to steal a kiss. "Mmm," he moaned, thrusting his tongue deeper. He felt his cock harden painfully in his shorts. Breaking the kiss, he grinned. "If we don't leave now, I'll probably let you fuck me right here in the parking lot."

"Then drive, because another kiss like that and I probably will try to fuck you right here."

Feeling happier than he had in almost a month, Kai drove home. He kept his hands to himself until they carried the bags inside. Dropping the heavy suitcase on the floor, Kai began stripping his clothes off. "Naked. Now."

Kai was naked in no time and went to work on Quade's jeans, as his lover shucked his shirt and toed off his shoes. Easing the faded denim down Quade's hips, Kai was rewarded when the fat cock he loved so much sprang free.

Without waiting for an invitation, Kai's mouth immediately enveloped the head of Quade's erection. The taste of his lover's pre-cum burst with flavour on his tongue. "Mmm," he moaned, taking more of Quade's length into his mouth.

"Fuck," Quade grunted, fisting Kai's hair. "God I missed your mouth."

Kai smiled around the large cock and nodded. He reached out and clapped his hands on Quade's ass cheeks, pulling his lover closer, taking even more of him.

"It's been too long, babe. I won't last if you keep that up," Quade panted. He began a shallow thrust in and out of Kai's mouth.

The declaration only made Kai want it more. He pressed a finger against Quade's tightly puckered hole until the tip slipped inside.

"Aaahhh," Quade roared, coming down Kai's throat.

Kai continued to suck the softening cock until Quade pulled out. Kai was grabbed under the arms and lifted up into Quade's embrace. "That was one hell of a welcome."

"Oh, you ain't seen nothing yet. Wait 'til I get you into bed," Kai crooned, batting his lashes.

The luggage tossed onto the floor caught his attention. "So. Tell me what you brought me?"

Instead of opening the bags, Quade led Kai to the sofa. Kai settled himself on Quade's lap in his favourite position. "Well, aren't you gonna tell me?" he asked again.

Quade gave Kai a lopsided grin. "I can't believe it, but I'm suddenly nervous as hell."

Confused, Kai placed a kiss on the tip of Quade's nose. "Don't be nervous. I'm sure I'll love anything you brought."

"Yeah? What if I told you I brought you me?"

Kai reached down between them and cupped Quade's balls. "I think I've already proven how much I love this gift."

Quade gave a slight shake to his head. "That's not exactly what I meant."

"Oh? What then?"

"I quit my job. I thought I'd move to Oahu and become a surf groupie," he blurted.

Stunned, Kai sat back and gazed into Quade's eyes. "What? You love that job. Hell, you love that town."

"Yeah, but not nearly as much as I love the man in my arms. Going home to Charleston opened my eyes to a few things. Namely, that absolutely nothing in this life is more important than showing the people you love the attention they deserve."

Kai was so overcome with emotion he couldn't speak for several moments. Quade was right. "I can quit surfing. We can move back to Cattle Valley."

"No," Quade said, giving Kai a soft kiss. "I've done what I needed to do there, but your career is getting ready to take off. I'd like to make the journey with you if you'll have me?"

What an incredibly unselfish man he'd landed. "The journey wouldn't be nearly the same without you."

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.

Email: carollynne@carollynne.info

Carol loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

Also by Carol Lynne

Campus Cravings: Coach
Campus Cravings: Side-Lined
Campus Cravings: Sacking the Quarterback
Campus Cravings: Off-Season
Campus Cravings: Forbidden Freshman
Campus Cravings: Broken Pottery
Campus Cravings: Office Advances
Campus Cravings: A Biker's Vow
Campus Cravings: Hershie's Kiss
Campus Cravings: Theron's Return
Campus Cravings: Live for Today
Good Time Boys: Sonny's Salvation
Good-time Boys: Garron's Gift
Good-time Boys: Rawley's Redemption
Good-time Boys: Twin Temptations
Cattle Valley: All Play & No Work
Cattle Valley: Cattle Valley Mistletoe
Cattle Valley: Sweet Topping
Cattle Valley: Rough Ride
Cattle Valley: Physical Therapy
Cattle Valley: Out of the Shadow
Cattle Valley: Bad Boy Cowboy
Cattle Valley: The Sound of White
Karaoke at the Tumbleweed
Legend Anthology: Healing Doctor Ryan
Joey's First Time
Between Two Lovers
Corporate Passion

Total-E-Bound Publishing



www.total-e-bound.com

Take a look at our exciting range of literagasmic™
erotic romance titles and discover pure quality
at Total-E-Bound.