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Roughstock: And a Smile - Season One

TOP SHELF

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Author Note

Hey, y'all! The Roughstock world is a labor of love for me. Cowboys are my weakness, after all, and Texas is my great love, so it's very important to me to be as true and honest to it as I can. With that in mind, I just want to say that, despite the best efforts of my editor, I take a great many liberties with grammar in *And a Smile*, as well as all of the upcoming Roughstock books, both in narrative and in dialogue. I felt I really needed to portray the rough and tumble world of bull riding as I see it, instead of trying to polish it up and make it fit a more literary style. So, any and all mistakes in the text are mine, and mine alone.

Cowboy up, y'all! I hope you enjoy *And a Smile - Season One*.

Prologue

Coke rolled his shoulders, shifting his weight from leg to leg, bouncing.

He liked Phoenix -- it was hotter than the hinges of hell, but he was a Texas baby, born and bred, and hell, there was something about them dark mountains in the distance. He wasn't sure he could live out here, but...

Wally's shoulders went tight and pulled the rope, the gate swinging open and Bubblegum came whirling out, Danny's boy sticking like Super Glue. Lord have mercy, that kid rode with pure balance, no strength required. Jase was going to win the world one day. Coke knew it. He'd known it since Jason's first ride.

Counting in his head -- six, seven, eight -- he nodded and moved into place as the whistle blew. "Come on, Jase!"

The bull turned left instead of right and suddenly he found himself behind those kicking legs instead of near the shoulder where he'd planned to be. He dug in, hollering for Nate to come on, move. Go.

He hadn't finished his first steps before Jason's legs swung around, the sound of Jason's head hitting Bubblegum's horn like a crack.

"Bubblegum! Here! Here!"

No.

Not Jason. Not Danny's boy.

He ran, pushing his body between the bull and Jason and Andy Baxter, who was right there. Staring.

Silent.

Please, Jesus. Please, no.

Not Jason.

Chapter One

Dillon Walsh wiped sweat off his forehead and slid his hat back on, giving it his little trademark finger flip when he did. It was almost time for the short go, which meant it was almost time to get behind the barrel and stay quiet, for the most part.

That was good. He was freaking tired, a little grumpy, and he wanted to kick back and have a beer and let his calf muscles stop cramping. Of course, the short go was when he got to sort of wander and watch Coke work.

That was always a good thing. Really, really good.

There were bullfighters and then there was Coke Pharris, the Fearless One. Wide shoulders, square jaw, big old hands, calves like... shit, did anyone on Earth have calves like those men? Coke wasn't scared of shit and the man knew those bulls like no one else.

Nate and Fred waved him over to huddle, get pumped up. Dude. Coke touching. Nate Walker clapped one arm over Coke's shoulders, the other dwarfing Fred's skinny ones. Nate towered over the other two, but it was Coke giving direction, Coke calling the shots.

Had been that way since long before he'd joined the tour.

Rumor was it had been since before John and Lefty retired.

His mouth watered a little, and someone squawked over his headset, telling him to dance, to get the crowd pumped up again. The first rider was taking too long to set up.

Pasting on a smile, Dillon cued the music, letting his sore legs warm up with a few seconds of bouncing before going into a full-on Charleston routine.

He had to stop mid-step as the chute came open, Sam Bell sticking like a tick to a dog.

There was something about watching one of the veterans, one of the ninety point club members. They just sat those bulls like the rookies couldn't imagine, even when they bucked off at six seconds, like Sam did.

Damn it.

Coke grabbed Sam by the collar, hauling him up and out of the way, flinging Sam toward Fred as Nate grabbed one horn, turning Blaze's attention. Look at those bullfighters work. Look at Coke laugh and slap Sam's shoulder. It made his stomach hurt, how beautiful that man was.

It didn't take long -- Ronaldo and AJ went down hard, Alan and Rick and Balta stuck. Beau Lafitte though? Damn.

The whole place went quiet until the 93.5 came up on the screen and the confetti went flying.

Dillon trotted over and patted Beau on the back. The little banty-rooster man was on fire this season, now that Jason Scott was out of the running. No doubt about it.

Beau tipped his hat to the crowd and shook Adam Taggart's hand as the safety man rode by, grinning at him and Coke and nodding. "Thanks, y'all."

"Look at you, Cajun!" Coke jogged by, winking at Beau. "This mean you're buying the beer tonight?"

Beau laughed and nodded, waving at Nate, who tossed over his rope. "You know it, chere. I owe you a couple from last month, yeah?"

"You bet. We'll all meet at the hotel." Coke winked at him, at Beau, then slapped Nate on the back. "Come on, Nattie. We're up. The young'un's slowing down on us."

The grin Coke gave Nate was self-depreciating as hell. Fred was covering for Cooper Riley and the little Australian was almost like a new puppy, trying desperately to get the big dogs to let him in the pack, play with him.

"Yep. It's hell so be young and full of energy." Nate bounced along next to Coke, shaking out his hands and arms, and Dillon couldn't help but laugh as he made his way back behind the barrel.

God, he loved his job. Even more now that Coke was back from delivering Andy Baxter and Andy Baxter's busted leg to Texas.

The rest of the rides went easy as pie, Beau taking the round and the event, the crowd milling around and heading down for autographs. Coke and Nate leaned together, forehead to forehead, giving thanks, just like every night. Fred wasn't in that circle. None of the others were, either.

Dillon always felt a little dirty, watching that and thinking about anything but prayer. Shaking it off, he headed for their locker room, wanting out of his sweaty costume, looking forward to that beer Beau had mentioned.

Coke had mentioned.

Whatever.

The bullfighters came tumbling in -- Nate and Fred running and laughing, Coke chasing them, the man soaking wet. "Gonna kick y'all's butts!"

Nate hooted. "Didn't know that cooler dealie was full, Hoss, honest."

"Liar." Coke pounced, tackling Nate to the ground.

Oh. Oh, good God in Heaven. That was kind of like watching porn, and Dillon turned his back, not joining in like he usually would. He was a little too stiff for that. In certain places.

A noogie later, Nate was rolling out from under Coke, leaving the man a little like a turtle on his back. The man'd been broke so many times there wasn't much bending to speak of. "Dillon, son, gimme a hand."

"Sure." Pasting on the same smile he had for the crowd, Dillon turned and gave Coke his hand, hauling the man to his feet.

"Thanks, son." Coke patted his arm, eyes warm and shining. "You coming to have a beer with us?"

"I'd love to." His grin stretched into something real, Coke always making him feel good. "I was just out there thinking how I needed one."

"Yep, I hear you." Coke's shoulders rolled, the outer shirt coming off, then the vest, exposing a scarred, solid chest covered in mass of curls.

Dillon nodded, but he wasn't really sure what Coke had even said. He was too busy staring at the little brown nipples. Good God, what on earth was wrong with him tonight? Usually he could be cool if he needed to.

There was this little scar, curling down from Coke's ribcage down into the tighty-whities. Yum.

"How's Jason and Andy, man?" Fred still sounded more like Australia than anyone on tour but Packer. Even Adrian said 'y'all' sometimes.

Nate and Coke shared a quick, weird look, then Coke shrugged. "They're both in rehab. Messy business, huh?"

Something about the little exchange had Dillon forgetting all about the shirtless thing, making his nose twitch like a hound on a trail. He was Jason Scott's biggest fan, and the man had been hit damned hard...

"Real messy," Dillon agreed, giving Coke a look.

Coke's cheeks went pink and Nate stepped in between them, puffing up a bit. Oh. Oh, man. Something was up. Something big.

Everyone knew everyone told Coke everything.

Everything.

Dillon backed off, though, pulling his own shirt off and heading for the shower, wiggling and dancing to show he'd forgotten all about it. Nate wouldn't let him in that charmed circle for nothing. Nate defended Coke like a pit bull defending a bone. He'd have to get Coke alone.

Coke and Nate had been working together for years -- way longer than he'd been with the tour -- and while he was higher up the rungs than anyone else for the boys, those two were locked tight. Hell, Nate's Tracy had named their first baby Coke.

Most of the time Dillon didn't even mind it. Sometimes, though? Sometimes he wished he and Coke were a little closer.

A lot closer. Like, rubbing and bouncing and sweating together closer.

Speak of the devil, in walked Mr. Coke, solid as a stone, heading for the hot water. From the back he could see the effects of a back surgery, a dozen or more hookings, an arched scar from a hoof, and a tattoo. Hell, even now there was a big assed bruise, right over one kidney.

"No Tylenol for you tonight, buddy," Dillon said, handing over the big bottle of shampoo they could all agree on. Just made it easier to have one locker room ditty bag for all of them.

"Huh?" Coke turned instinctively, even though the man's neck didn't swivel a bit, trying to see.

"You got a big old bruised kidney." His fingers trailed right over Coke's skin, his brain not even processing it. "Right there."

"Mmm." Oh, fuck him, that was a fine sound, pure male. "Good to know, son. I'll have to drink it away."

"Oh, yeah, that will help." He laughed, too, letting himself enjoy all that tanned skin. All of it. Coke's ass wasn't blinding anymore. "You got some sun out at Jason's, huh?"

"Yeah. Yeah, we went swimming in the pond." There was a little hint of something there, just a bit. Sort of like the little cow skull tattoo on Coke's shoulder that nobody ever saw, with a feather for every finals he worked. Just a hint that things weren't exactly like they seemed.

"Well, I know how you love to swim." Every hotel, every pool and hot tub, even if it was too damned cold to go out there. Of course, he knew from the polar bear club more than Coke did.

"I do. There's nothing like the water. This was just a little pond, but it was nice."

He'd push a little more later, after beer. "Well, at least you're not signaling alien beings anymore."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. My ass is gonna get a complex, the way y'all go on about it."

His mouth opened to tell Coke what a fine ass it was, but Fred came trotting in, so he just laughed it off. "Well, if it glows, the bulls can see it better."

"Butthead." A handful of suds slapped against his chest.

"I am not. People would look at me way weirder." He pushed back, just a little, slapping his chest against Coke's arm.

Coke got to laughing, buzz cut hair actually looking brown while it was wet, cloudy hazel eyes sparkling.

Dillon felt a little stirring down below again, and he had to dunk under the water and turn it to cold, just about making him shout.

"Hoss, man. We eating at the hotel?" Nate took the shampoo from Coke.

"Yeah. Beau's buying beer and I could use a steak in the worst way. You coming, son?"

"I am. I'm just gonna go get dressed." He slipped out of the damned showers, feeling like the worst kind of perv. Coke was obviously not interested. Son. Jesus.

Fred followed him, getting dressed quickly, splashing on the smell-good. "There's some fine Sheila buckle bunnies heading for the after-party. You sure you aren't interested in that? You don't have to hang out with Gramps and Nate, you know."

Chuckling, he rolled on some deodorant and pulled on his soft boxer-briefs. "I'm not that much younger than Coke, you know."

Besides, it was one of those buckle bunny types who'd finally caught Dillon's ex, David and married him, and that put him off after-parties for near a year.

"No way." The kid looked shocked. "So does he look old or you look young?"

"I look *good*." That was always his response, but even his mom said he was looking old around the eyes these days.

"Hell, our Dillon looks like a teenager, has to, to compete with them Wrangler butts." Coke smiled at him, patted his ass on the way by.

His cheeks heated right up, and Dillon ducked his head. "You know it. Besides, everyone is looking at my legs, not my face."

"Well, you keep it all covered up in makeup, son." Coke bent over, tugged on some tighty-whities.

"You know, I'm not your son." He snapped it out. Didn't mean to, but all of that talk about Coke being old was depressing.

He got a shocked, wide-eyed look, then Coke turned red and nodded, tugging on his jeans. "Sure. No offense meant."

"I'm out of here, guys." Fred looked between all of them, shrugged. "What time tomorrow, Boss?"

"Noon." Coke nodded over, grabbed a shirt. "Have fun, kid."

"Always do, Gramps."

Dillon waited for Fred to close the door, and made sure Nate was still bellowing Waylon in the shower, before he clapped Coke on the back. "Sorry I snarled. You're not that old, though, you know?"

"No big deal. I get familiar. It's the Texan in me." Coke dug out a ball cap, dumped his wallet out of his boots.

Bumping hips with the man, Dillon grabbed his shirt, laughing, trying to lighten the mood. "Well, if you want to get familiar, that's cool, but I don't see you as fatherly."

"I don't mean nothin' by it. I'm the old man of the group -- well, me and Thicket on the camera crew, we got everybody beat by a year or two."

"Yeah, yeah. But you make it up in stamina." Gracious. Listen to him, flirting like an idiot.

"Hell, yeah. I ain't bendy no more, but I can go the distance."

"I always thought so." Clearing his throat, he pulled on his jeans. "So. Do I need to get a cab, or can I ride with you and Nate?"

"Shit, so... man. There's room for you in the truck. Always."

"Thanks." He gave Coke a bright smile, trying to keep things light for a while. "Thanks, Coke. You always make a bad night better."

Coke patted his back. "It's my job. I fix shit and keep them bulls from running us into the ground."

"You do." Now, if Coke would just buy a clue and see that Dillon wanted to jump his old bones, life would be perfect.

Looked like that one he'd just have to take one day at a time.

Chapter Two

Lord have mercy, he was wore. He'd taken a hit that sent him flying around the arena and half of Tulsa. Coke headed back behind the chutes, shoulders rolling.

"Coke, man!" AJ waved at him, wagging a phone at him. "It's Bax. Wants to talk to you."

"Wants to mess with me, I figure. That pretty gal of yours doing good?" He climbed up the chute, reached for the phone.

AJ nodded, the big old boy grinning like the fool he was for his Missy. "She's good. Here you go."

The little phone felt warm and tiny in his hand, the rail cool where he was holding it, but Andy Baxter sounded large as life on the other end. "Hey, Coke."

"Howdy, friend. How's the leg?" The poor bastard had busted it but good. It was hard to keep your mind in the middle when you was worrying about things.

Serious things.

"It's still there. How you doing?"

"I'm good. Took a bit of a hit." Which is why Andy was calling, of course. "Did it look good on the TV?"

"Looked like you were never gonna land. Jason said he could hear it."

"No shit? Anything... anything new there?" Please, God. Say yes. Say a miracle happened and the boy's eyes were right again.

"No." The word was flat, not leaving a lot of room for hope. "Nothing new. He's missing the road, too."

"Damn. 'kay. I'll come out at the break, huh? Work some." He'd hung a bunch of hopes on Jason Scott, he surely had. Nothing'd been the same since the son of a bitch had fallen, broke his damn fool head and lost his sight. Still, he thought, if they worked it...

"Thanks, Coke. That's real good of you. Real good." Andy sounded tired. Almost fuzzy now. 'Course with a busted up leg, it was hard to stay awake more than a few hours at a time.

"Yeah, yeah. I gotta go. AJ's staring at me, wanting his phone back."

"Okay. See you soon, huh, Gramps?" He could hear the please that Andy'd never say.

"Yeah. Yeah. I'll be there." He clicked the phone off and tossed it over to AJ, shaking his head at the curious look he got as he climbed over and down back onto the dirt.

Damn it.

"Everything okay?" AJ tucked the phone away, moving out of the way when one of the ground crew pushed at him.

"Same old same old. It's cool if I come to yours for the break?"

"Shit, yeah. You know you're welcome, old man." AJ clapped him on the back. "You know that the family loves to see you. Daddy's asking after you too. Has some idea about building him a smoke pit for get-togethers. Jase told him you were the pit master."

"Good deal." He grunted as his shoulder twinged. Man, it was hell, getting old.

"Sorry." AJ frowned. "You need to see the doc?"

"Nope. I'm good as gold." Or at least really fucking cheap tin foil. "Gonna head to the hotel, man. Two more stops, then we're off a while."

"Yeah. I'm missing the kids." He got a sunny smile, AJ heading off, letting him breathe a minute.

He hung back until he knew Nate and them would be gone, then he headed back to the dressing room to change. The sound of water running told him someone was in there. The sound of melodic singing told him it was Dillon. Nate and Fred couldn't carry a tune in a bucket.

Dillon, though, that man could sing.

He leaned a little, slowly working his shoes off, listening. It made a man happy, that voice.

That ass.

That fine smile.

Fuck. Be good, Coke.

The song changed to something more upbeat, the water sounding like rain, and he could just imagine that tight butt shaking. Wagging.

That gave him a serious happy and he closed his eyes, listening. Going with a quick little fantasy about that pretty ass, right in his hands.

He was a little wrapped up in the fantasy. So much so that he missed the water turning off. Missed the sound of the singing getting closer. He couldn't miss a very wet Dillon popping up right in front of him, though.

"Boo!"

"Oh!" Oh. Oh, God. Oh, God. He turned around, quick as he could, swaying with it. "Sorry. I was..."

Fantasizing.

Thinking about you.

Needing to jack off.

"Dozing."

"Oh, hey. I didn't mean to scare you." One warm hand landed on his shoulder, thumb rubbing his neck. "Sorry, Coke."

He groaned, head going forward a touch. So good. He was so damn sore.

"Oh, someone's got a bad spot." Damned if Dillon didn't move in behind him, both hands on his poor neck, rubbing long and slow.

"Oh, sweet Christ." He braced himself on the wall, the massage too good to stop.

"Yeah? Good? God, how do you stand this, babe?" Dillon had good hands. Real good hands.

"Ain't got a choice, I guess." Don't stop. Not yet. Please.

"I guess. You're like frozen rope, though. I should know, too. Everything freezes up my way." Dillon didn't stop, kept on rubbing, giving him something to live for.

"Yeah, so I hear. My place is on the other side -- all heat and swimming pools and hot tubs."

"That sounds pretty damned good, huh?" Warm, damp, and good, Dillon leaned against his back, rubbing harder.

"I. Uh-huh." He was hard enough to cut glass, his prick aching with it.

"Hell, the hotel has a hot tub. We could go soak." He could feel Dillon's breath, right there on the back of his neck.

"I. We could. I. You... you hungry? We could stop and grab something on the way." Hell, he could stop, grab his prick in the bathroom, just for a second. Wouldn't take long.

"You know me. I'm always empty like a worm." Dillon worked harder than just about anyone out there, all night long, full out.

"I hear that." He let his eyes close again, took a deep, deep breath. "Thanks, Dillon. I was stiff."

Still was stiff.

"No problem. You go get clean, I'll get dressed, and we'll go have food." Patting his ass, Dillon be-bopped past him, shaking that heinie for all it was worth.

That barely covered by a towel heinie.

"Okay." Uh-huh. Okay. Damn. He headed for the showers at a run, thanking God and all the angels that no one was going to see him tug off, thinking about that.

Chapter Three

Food. They were going for food.

Coke had let Dillon touch. That beautiful man had let him rub those poor stiff shoulders, had let him soothe that creaky neck. They were going to sit in the hot tub together. Dillon bounced, checking his jeans and T-shirt and cowboy hat look one more time while he waited for Coke to get done. He was ridiculously nervous; this wasn't a date.

Coke wandered out, dressed and looking easy in his bones. The jeans and button down made Coke look more cowboy and less crazy bullfighter, the pointed toed boots almost strange. He was used to seeing Coke in lace-up shoes.

"Hey! You ready to go?" Okay, way to sound casual and shit. Dork. Dillon knew he sounded freakishly loud.

"Yup. I'm starving, man. *Starving*." Coke smiled at him, beamed at him.

"Me, too. So I'm thinking not a burger joint, huh? We need a real meal." That way he could watch Coke eat.

"Steaks? Barbeque? Italian?" When Coke said it, it sounded like, "Eye-talian."

Dillon chuckled. When you were from Idaho you sounded more Canadian. Everything with him was "eh". "How about Italian? We can get steaks there, if we want, and I can carb load."

"Ah, you and Balta, all into that nutrition stuff. I could have a lasagna, yes sir."

"Yeah. That deep fried Twinkie I had for lunch? Real nutrition." Dillon smacked Coke's arm. "I just like pasta. Come on."

"Oh, man. That's nasty." Coke followed, whistling a little. The sound followed him and, if he didn't know better, he'd say he could feel Coke's eyes on his ass.

That was probably wishful thinking. Still, he gave a little slink before climbing into Coke's truck.

Wait.

Wait.

Was that a moan?

He peeked over his shoulder, hoping against hope that Coke was looking. Hell, he'd never seen any sign that Coke was attracted to anyone, let alone a guy.

Coke's eyes slid away, the man hurrying around the bed of the truck. Well, well.

Coke's phone was ringing as the man climbed in, Garth Brook's *Fever* playing. "It's Jase. Just a sec. Hey, cowboy. How's it going?" Coke went still, blinked. "You did what to Andy's truck? Where? When? Just now? I talked to Andy not an hour... Good lord, son!"

Oh, sure. Jason Scott had to call when he was... wait. Jason. "How is he? Coke. How is he?" He poked Coke's arm.

"He's... well, Andy's gonna beat him, but he's recovering." Coke grinned over, then shook his head. "Huh? Dillon. We're fixin' to go eat. No. No, we ain't yet. I wasn't sure if it was cool. Want to, though. Nate? Yeah. Over the break. No, Nate's got to go home and see the baby, but I'll come help."

It took everything he had in him to not poke harder, more. To growl and demand information. He waited, though.

"Yeah. Yeah, no. No, if I were you I'd apologize and go hide behind Benji."

Okay, well, he knew who Benji was, so Bax and Jason were at AJ's. The last he'd heard, they were at Jason's momma's. He needed to know what was going on.

"Yeah. Yeah, son. I know. I know. Hang on, huh? Through the break. I promise you."

There were a few mumbles left, then Coke was nodding one more time and muttering a gruff, "You too, son," before hanging up and starting the truck.

Dillon waited until they got away from the arena, waited until they were out into traffic, before he put a hand on Coke's leg. "You're gonna have to tell me sometime. I'm with you entirely too much."

"Yeah." That single word surprised him, more than a little. "You just ain't easy to get alone, son. I swear to God."

"I blame Nate. He thinks I have terrible designs on your person." That popped out like the occasional F bomb did when his mic was on.

Coke snorted a little, face shadowed by the hat. "Little shit oughta know better. You could do way better than this old man."

"You think?" Dillon tried not to sigh. Now was about Jason. He had to focus. "Tell me about Jason and Bax, Coke."

"I... Well, first, son. I gotta know that you understand this is just ours. You, me, Nate, AJ. That's it. Cain't nobody else know."

"I can keep a secret, Coke. You know I can, when it counts." He wasn't hurt, though. He knew a man had to say.

"I know you can, else I wouldn't even say nothin'." Coke sighed, stopped at a red light. "Andy's gonna be fine. His leg's broke, but he's okay. Jase, though... Shit."

"He hit hard. I knew something was up, the way Bax hasn't been talking, and you and Nate have been pow-wow'ing."

"He cain't see." The words didn't make sense.

The truck jerked back into motion, and Dillon shook his head, not following. "His eyes were fine, Coke. No blood, no orbital bone damage."

The line of Coke's shoulders were stiff, tense; the man's mouth was drawn down into a miserable bow. "The doctor -- not Doc, mind you, he don't know nothin' 'bout it -- says it's his brain. His eyes can see shit, but his brain don't. I. Me and Andy. We're training him to ride again. Not for fun, for the big tour."

Dillon blinked, then blinked some more. Shook his head. Mulled over those words. "Riding blind. Jesus. That's gonna take more than you and me and Nate."

"There's AJ, Andy." Coke's jaw was set, stubborn. "Jason stole Andy's truck tonight. Drove it into a ditch, but he drove it damn near a mile, then walked home."

"You're fucking kidding me." Blind and driving a truck. Dillon burst out laughing, the sound a little hysterical. "He might be the only cowboy who could do it."

"He can. We're going to fool them all, but we're gonna need you, when he gets back onto the big tour."

"Yeah. Yeah, I can see that." The wheels started turning and spinning, Dillon thinking of all the ways he would have to work the arena when Jason was out there.

Coke didn't say anything, focused on the road, driving.

"We'll have to get some of the arena guys on it, too. There's no way we can have them all in the dark." His fingers drummed on Coke's leg, his thinking translating into movement.

"We'll have to talk to Jason. He don't want people knowing. I don't know how we're going to manage it, but we will." That leg was hard as a rock, the muscles strong enough to get through his thoughts.

"Sure. Sure. I know, he's a stubborn cuss, and I get that he wouldn't want everyone and his neighbor to know, eh?" Oh! Sicily's Pasta House. "Turn, Coke. Left."

That big old truck swung around, crossed three lanes of traffic and popped into a parking lot, slick as snot. "He's something else. It's... It's something, I guess."

"Yeah. Well, now that I know, I can help plan." The place smelled like heaven, even from the outside.

Coke nodded, sliding down out of the truck. Dillon could see him babying one shoulder, being careful. There would be ice and heat packs, as well as the damned hot tub when they got back to the hotel, and he wouldn't let Nate interfere and drag Coke off to bed. The man needed a little pampering.

"How's it feeling?"

"Huh? Telling you? Good. You were on the short list."

He chuckled, letting the little glow that gave him flow through. "No, I mean your shoulder, but I'm glad you guys trust me."

"Oh, it's just sore. You know. Normal shit." Coke held the door open for him and the smells of garlic and red sauce and shit hit him in a wave.

"I know normal shit. This looks more sore than that, man." Of course, it could be he was just selfish enough to want to touch, and if Coke needed patching, it would be hands on.

"Shh. Doc's got ears everywhere. Man, I could eat a water buffalo raw. Two, please, honey. Non-smoking."

"Hey, if I can doctor my sister's barrel horses, I can doctor you. They're worth way more money." They settled in, ordered drinks, and attacked the garlic bread.

"Them horses are something else. You heading back that way for the break?"

"I guess?" He really should, and Coke was going to AJ's to help Jason, which he would bet he was emphatically not invited for.

Coke nodded. "I have to go help the boys. We got to make a transition to the bulls and shit. And, I'm not for sure, but I'm thinking Missy's knocked up again. AJ's all bouncy."

"Good Lord. They'll populate the whole state." Missy was a wonderful woman, putting up with AJ.

"That's AJ's plan, I think. Andy's just trying not to kill Jase."

"Shit." He snorted, debating between chicken parm and a big, boufy alfredo. "He won't. He loves that man to distraction."

"Yeah." He could see Coke relax, see some tension ease. "What looks good to you?"

"The chicken parmesan, maybe. I like the red sauce." The salad looked good, too. Maybe some cannoli.

"I'm gonna get lasagna, I think, maybe a beer."

"I can drive back if you want a few beers, huh? I think I'm sticking to pop."

Coke's head tilted, forehead wrinkling. "Sticking to... Oh. Oh! I get it. You're gonna have a Coke."

"I wish." Okay. Time to stuff his mouth with bread.

He got a surprised look, then Coke shook it off and he could see the man convince himself that Dillon didn't mean it. His cheeks heated, his cock jerking in his jeans, and Dillon almost choked on a damned sesame seed. Shit. He wanted...

"You okay, son?" Coke leaned over, big old hand patting his back.

"I am. Mostly." Meeting those hazel eyes, Dillon grinned. "Got me thinking things, is all."

"You gotta watch that thinking thing. It leads to trouble."

"So I hear. Blindness and hairy palms, too. Oh, look! Fried artichokes." He'd lost his mind. Really.

Coke started laughing, the sound starting low and then ringing out. It wasn't an unfriendly sound, just full and tickled. Dillon stared a moment, then laughed, too. That was part of what made Coke so cool. The laughter. Dillon was good at that.

They ate artichokes and bread, pasta. Dessert. Good lord, Coke could eat. The man enjoyed himself, too, chatting and gossiping, listening and laughing at stories.

"So then, Fred says, 'What do you mean, it came out of a frog?'" Dillon waited, watching Coke double over again, and it sent him off to laughing again, too.

"Good lord. I tell you what, I'm gonna have a stitch in the morning. You want coffee?"

"Sure. I bet it's good here." He really wanted to go rub Coke's kinks out, but coffee worked, too.

"Yeah, or I could make a pot at the hotel. Well, if Nate's not in bed already."

"What? We're here." No way did he want to worry about Nate.

"Yeah, we are." Coke chuckled, relaxed back in his chair a little, crossed his legs at the ankle and waved down the waitress. "Two coffees, please."

"Sure, honey." The girl smiled at Coke, looking at him like she would her grandpa, and it made Dillon a little pissed.

The whole fucking world treated Coke like the man was eighty. Shit, Coke was what? Forty?

Well, it was time that someone started acting his age. Dillon figured he could help with that. Starting tonight.

Chapter Four

Dillon Walsh was going to drive him up the fucking wall.

For two weeks the man had poked and touched, shimmied and goofed off and teased and had always been right there.

It was crazy-making.

It was silly.

It was hot as hell.

Coke jogged up and down the arena, warming up, looking as the roadies got shit set up. The sound guys started up their check, and Dillon popped out from the back, checking his mic and doing a little pre-show boogie. Just for Coke, it looked like. That grin said all sorts of things.

He chuckled, thumped himself a little and kept jogging. "You ready for the show, son?"

"I am." He got a little extra wiggle. "I'm kinda pumped. How's your shoulder?"

"Solid as a rock." He rolled his arm, the joint moving for him, finally. "Thanks for all your help with it." Even if the rubbing was like torture.

"No problem. I like rehabilitating you." Something flashed in those pretty eyes, something dangerous, and Dillon patted his ass before trotting off.

"Good lord..." He was seriously fucked.

"Hey! Coke!" Sam Bell sat on the rail, the pocket cowboy waving hard. "You heard from Jason? How's his head?"

Fuck a duck. "He's got some recovery, still."

Beau Lafitte wandered over and whacked Sam on the back, nodding over. "If he needs us, tell him to holler."

"I will." Lord knew that Beau and Jase used to be real close. Coke had a couple guesses why they weren't now, but nothing firm. Still. "I'll tell him."

"Thanks." Sam and Beau said it together, like twins or something, and it made him chuckle. Made him laugh harder when Dillon streaked through with a water gun, shooting Sam right in the face.

"Oh, you little fucker!" Sam flew off the top of the chute, landing right behind Dillon in the dirt.

They both took off, and it was a damned near thing. You could tell which one of them had played football in high school by the end. Dillon just managed to get his ass away in one piece.

He leaned against the chutes, laughing his ass off along with Beau. "Oh, Christ. Dillon's going to have to watch it for a couple days."

"Yeah, chere. He'll have icy hot in his shorts or something." Beau shook his head. "Dillon's full of piss and vinegar. Good to see."

"It is. You're riding good, Cajun."

Sam picked up a chunk of dirt, winged it at Dillon's ass.

"Thanks. I'm just trying to have fun, you know?" They watched Dillon and Sam race back and forth like they was watching a tennis match.

"Y'all heading anywhere cool over the break?" He was heading to Central Texas.

"We're just going to Louisiana." Beau shrugged a little. "You know me and the bayou."

"Yup. Good food that way, though."

"You know it." He got that quiet, glinting grin that Beau was famous for. "Sam will even eat my gumbo."

"So long as he leaves me my bowl's worth, Cajun." Beau's gumbo was stuff of legend.

"You bet." They ducked when a shot from Dillon's water gun got too close, the stream shooting over Coke's hat.

"Son, don't make me put you over my knee."

Dillon stopped dead, staring over at him, mouth hanging open. "You would?"

He just stared back, then Sammy started hooting, clapping Dillon on the shoulder. "Shit, you ever seen the size of Coke's hands, buddy? Our old man'd make you cry like a Yankee."

Coke didn't know whether to shit or go blind. God, he had to stop using that phrase, sure as shit he'd say it to Jason.

Dillon laughed, doing that little double fist pump down on one knee motion. "I *am* a Yankee, according to you guys."

"Well, if the foo shits..."

They all got to laughing, which was good, because, damn, he didn't need to be thinking the shit that Dillon and that amazing ass made him think.

"You guys gonna play all day, or are you ready to work?" David and Mark came down to the announcer booth, both of them looking crisp and pressed, hands full of papers and shit.

"I'm thinking I'll just play, y'all." Sam winked at Beau. "What about you, Coke?"

"I reckon I'll have to work." He sighed dramatically.

"Some of us make money doing both." Moon walking a little, Dillon bounced over to shake hands with the announcers, smiling and joking.

"Brag, brag, brag." He chuckled, noticing the way Sam and Beau looked at Dillon, at each other.

Weird.

"Hey, I love my job." Dillon ran by back, patting him again, making him jump. "Time to go get the make-up on."

"Shaved legs and makeup. Our manly man." He chuckled, laughed as Dillon flipped him off.

Goofball. Beautiful, hot goofball.

"He freaks me out a little bit." Beau chuckled, watching Dillon go, elbowing Sam in the ribs.

"Does he freak you out a little bit?" Sammy and Coke answered together, all of them cracking up, the old joke as comfortable as worn jeans.

"Come on, y'all. Go get your heads on straight. I gotta warm up my team." He waved and jogged off to the back. Time to get it on.

Chapter Five

Dillon sat on the little bench in the locker room, looking at his legs.

They kinda looked like they'd been shot at and hit. Black and blue and purple all over. Hell, he hadn't even been in the way. Really. He'd been back behind the cage, and the bull had come flying around the arena, completely in the wrong direction.

Adam Taggart, the safety man, had roped that stupid bull and Dillon had made for the cage and then the catastrophe happened.

Rope, meet Dillon. Dillon, meet rope and cage.

Bam.

Some days, he was just forced to remember that his job was a teeny, tiny bit dangerous.

"Put 'em up." Coke's voice was husky, sympathetic.

"Huh? Gonna rob me?" Look, he could still try for funny.

"Rub, not rob." Coke straddled the bench and patted the muscled thighs, a tin in his hands.
"Come on, son. This'll help."

Blinking, Dillon lifted his legs, resting his feet on Coke's thighs. "Okay. Rub away."

The stuff that came out of that tin was gray and slick and stinky, but Coke pulled out a huge finger full, rubbed it between those huge hands and then started working his legs. Oh. Oh, sweet bleeding Christ. That was amazing.

He moaned, his head falling back as his toes curled. "Oh. Damn, Coke. Wow."

"Yeah. It's good stuff. I always keep it around." Those thumbs dug into his calves, pushing hard, working the muscles.

"You're the good stuff, Coke." That was the God's honest truth. Coke was a good man, and he had the best hands.

"Thank you. Poor legs. My damn heart stopped when that rope snapped."

"Yeah. You should have seen Adam's face." It had been almost comical. Poor Adam looked like something out of *Ghost Ship* or something.

"Yeah. He's all worried about you. I bet Bryan's riding safety next week."

"You think?" Frowning, Dillon made a mental note to call Adam. The man had been good to him when... well, when David had done his thing. All the Taggart boys were decent men, even if you couldn't tell the triplets apart.

"Yeah. He's okay; he just hated that he hurt you." The massage moved to his feet.

"I might have to thank him." That felt like heaven. Hell for him would be someplace really cold, with no Coke.

"Hmm?" Coke rolled one of his feet, and then the other, working his ankles.

"Nothing. I'm kind of a puddle of goo." Goo. Just... woo.

"Goo is good. That means I'm doing my job." Those hands moved up.

"You are. You so are." It really wasn't even sexual. It was just the care Coke took. No one in sports medicine would treat him so good.

He got a warm, weirdly gentle smile. "Have to make sure my people aren't hurting, you know?"

Pushing up on one arm, Dillon leaned up and touched Coke's wrist, smiling. "Am I one of your people?"

"Well, of course you are."

"I like that idea." He really, really liked that idea.

"Yeah?" The touch of those hands slowed, Coke's massage turning into a gentle caress.

"I do. Been thinking about it a lot lately, in fact." He must be really relaxed. Things were slipping out of his mouth.

"Yeah? About..."

"You. Me. Being people. To each other." Oh. Oh, that touch, right on the arch of his foot.

"Oh. That's..."

"Dillon, man? You need a ride to the hotel?" David Donaldson leaned into the dressing room, looking at them.

Coke scooted back a little, gave him room.

He rolled his head over and stared, trying not to snarl. It wasn't deliberately bad timing. He knew that. David was a good bud. But not now.

"If you could give Nate a ride, Coke says he'll wait for me."

Coke nodded. "I can take him, man. I'm just helping his legs."

"Okay, then. Holler if you need me, huh?" David flashed them a genuine smile and wave, and headed out.

Damn, sometimes it sucked to be a bitter old bastard. Still, he had Coke to think about.

"Let's get your legs wrapped up. I'll give you another rub down at the hotel."

Dillon almost whimpered. "Sure. Okay. I can live with that."

"You can have a soak in the hot tub in between, if you want. Or even a hot bath." Coke pulled out long assed elastic bandages, started carefully wrapping his leg, fingers so damn hot on his skin.

"I'll soak if you come with me." Their last hot tub soak had been brief, and short on privacy. Half the guys had showed up. This time, they would all be on the road. It was only the bullfighters and announcers staying on until morning.

"You know my position on hot tubs, son."

The touch on the inside of his thigh didn't feel fatherly at all.

"Uh-huh." God, what he would give to see Coke's position in hot tubs. Still, his legs thought he might want to just flirt. Even if he was pushing into Coke's touch like the slut he was.

"Tell me if I'm hurting you. This should feel good."

"It does. You have no idea." His cock was telling him that the pain in his legs was fading, the sensation much more pleasurable.

"Good." Coke started on the other leg, and Dillon could swear that was another moan. Maybe that was him. He wanted to babble. To wiggle. He settled for pushing against Coke a little with his legs, the warmth seeping through him.

"Okay, honey. Let's get you to the hotel and in some hot water."

"Okay." He held out a hand, letting Coke pull him up. Then he leaned on that solid body, hands on Coke's arms.

"I got you. They hurt bad?"

"Not really." He had to be honest. "I told you. Melty."

"Melty is good." One hand rubbed his lower back, nice and gentle, over and over.

"It is." Indulging himself, Dillon leaned harder. "Really good. I like the way you feel, Coke."

That little rumbling sound was a moan.

It was.

"Come on, Dillon. I'm parked close."

"Close is also good." Knowing no one was around, he allowed himself to wrap an arm around Coke's waist.

Coke eased him out, moving slow and careful. Dillon hummed a little, trying not to dance, because that would make Coke all, 'you can walk on your own.' That was not in the program. Walking on his own would mean not rubbing on that thick thigh, not noticing that heavy erection.

And he noticed. Oh, he noticed. He might even have rubbed on it a little when Coke helped him into the truck. Just with his ass.

Yep. That was a fine, fine moan.

Dillon settled his sore legs, grinning over when Coke got in the truck. "You okay, man? You hurtin' any?"

"I'm solid as a rock." Garth Brooks filled the air as the engine turned over.

"Oh. Just wanted to make sure." Yeah. Coke was rock solid. Even in the low light from the dash he could see that. His mouth watered, and Dillon wanted to touch.

"You, uh. You want something to eat before the hotel?"

"No! I mean, uh, no. I would rather just get something sent up, you know? I'm not sharing this trip, so you could come eat with me."

"Yeah? Works for me. Nate's in a mood."

"Is he okay?" Sometimes Dillon wondered, but Nate was married and lovin' it, so he never asked.

"His little boy's got a vicious cold and his lady is pissed that he's not flying home tonight."

"Ah. We could probably get him out, if he really needs to." It would suck to miss the hot tub, if they had to take Nate to the airport, but you did what you had to.

"Nah. He's got a flight at like five a.m. He'll be there early. That's why he was heading to bed." Coke winked over. "No interruptions from the old guy."

"What? Wait. What old guy?" He shook his head, not knowing if Coke was talking about Nate or himself. Somewhere he'd gotten confused.

"Uh. That would be me, son. Remember?"

"No. See, I told you, you're not old." Throwing caution to the wind, he reached over and pressed his fingers to Coke's fly. "Not even close."

"Oh, fuck." Coke's hips bucked, pushing right up toward his touch, the truck weaving.

"No killing us, Coke. We have to get back to the hotel." Now that he was touching, he couldn't let go. He rubbed.

"No. No killing. Dillon, Dillon, tell me you ain't stoned or nothing." That fat cock throbbed, pushed back against his touch.

"No drugs, and you know I haven't been drinking." Tracing that big bulge with his thumb, Dillon worked at the tab of Coke's jeans.

"Dillon." The sound of Coke's voice in that strangled cry was definitely better than 'son'.

"Oh, I like that. Like that sound. No running off the road, babe." He was going to explode.

"You gotta stop. I can't drive and think with your hand on me. I *cain't*."

"Okay." One last push and he let his fingers slide slowly away. But only because he saw the sign for the hotel on the horizon. "Hurry."

"You gonna change your mind?" Coke signaled, pulled off,

"No. No, I just want to make sure you don't." If one of them was gonna get cold feet, it would be Coke.

"Only if it's gonna make things weird between us. I don't want that."

"Never gonna happen." Even if Coke never wanted to do it again, they were friends first. Always. "You're important to me, Coke."

Coke slid into a parking space, turned to face him, eyes deadly serious. "I done told you. You're one of my own."

He reached up and touched that stubbly cheek, loving the feel of Coke's skin. God knew he'd stared at it long enough.

"Come on. Let's get your legs inside and into a tub of warm water, hmm?" His heart damn near stopped when Coke leaned into his touch.

"I'm all for it." And anything else Coke wanted to do.

Even if that ended up being nothing.

Chapter Six

Coke turned the corner, truck bouncing along the drive toward AJ's rambling old house. Good Lord, it'd been a long couple weeks -- what with Dillon being out with his poor legs, Nate's boy getting pneumonia and the bulls being mean as shit. He was ready for a few weeks off, helping the boys, sleeping in, seeing the kids.

Not wondering whether he'd done the right thing by letting Dillon fall asleep in the hot tub that night while he ordered room service. By the time things were settled, Dillon'd needed Doc and the man was gone home to Idaho. Boom.

It was prob'ly for the best, really. Dillon'd been out of it and no one needed to have to explain shit and...

He parked, turned the lights off on the truck and tried to decide whether to wake Missy up or just sleep in the truck or what. Coke didn't have to ponder on it too long. Before he could even rest his head on the steering wheel, someone was knocking on his window, AJ's fool face grinning in at him.

"Hey there, son. You got a room for an old man?" Dork.

"I sure do. Come on. The boys are still up, having a beer."

"Excellent." He grabbed his duffle out of the back, humping his gear easily. "How's the family?"

"Okay. Everyone is over the ear thing that went around. Missy's doing good." AJ led the way, babbling until they got inside. Then he hushed a little.

Jason was laughing; he could hear it -- a full, deep sound that made him grin.

"He wakes that baby and Missy will kill him." They detoured through Missy's bright white kitchen and got a beer before heading to the front room.

"Coke." Missy's smile was warm, welcoming.

"Hey, old man!" Andy Baxter waved at him from that monstrosity of a couch, man still looking about as mean as he could be. "How's it hanging?"

"It's hanging. Y'all been working hard?"

Jason smiled through that mat of hair on his face. "You know it, man."

"Hardly workin', is more like it." Bax looked better every day. Jason still looked damned skinny. Tiny. Like he could just blow away.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." He headed over, eased himself down, the worn cushions cradling his ass. "Good to be outta that truck, yessir."

"I bet. You been on the road a bit." They all stared expectantly at him, watching and waiting.

"Yep." He nodded. "Dillon's in. We got a floor team."

"Well, there you go." Bax shook his head. "Even if he does freak me out a little."

"Just a little?" They all laughed, even Missy, who never traveled with them, got the joke.

"So, we got Dillon and Nate." Bax bit at his thumbnail. "Mini's doing pretty good."

"You been on more bulls?"

Jase shrugged. "A couple. I been driv... riding."

"Driving the truck, too, huh?" Bax elbowed the man, giving Coke raised eyebrows. "Asshole nearly did her in."

"I did not. I did good!"

AJ and Missy looked at each other. "For a blind guy."

Lord have mercy on them all. "Well, why did I need to bring everyone in on this if you was just gonna kill yourself, then?"

"I *didn't*, goddamn it. I thought... For a second there I could. Fuck." Jason's lips went tight, cheeks dark red.

Oh, fuck a duck sideways. That shit wasn't fair.

Bax grabbed Jason's hand, and Missy suddenly had to go check on the baby, and it was AJ who broke that ice. "Well, now we know what Jason will do when his sight comes back. He'll go to Disneyland!"

Coke looked at AJ, then he started laughing, deep, hard belly-laugh.

Bax and Jason joined in, and soon enough they were all howling, slapping legs and all but spilling their beer. Which was, naturally, when Benji came in, rubbing his eyes and blinking.

"Uncle Poppy?"

"Hey, buddy." He opened his arms and got a hug and a kiss on the cheek before the sweet boy went to Jason, pushing into the man's lap like he belonged there.

Jason didn't even stiffen a moment, just pulled Ben right on up on his thighs, kissing the bright head. "Hey, kiddo. Did we scare you?"

"Uh-uh. Just woke me up."

Man, that boy had Jason's number.

"Well, buddy, you can sit here a bit with me."

"Okay." Benji snuggled in, and Coke thought it was a shame for a minute, how Jase would probably never have kids. 'Course, that little bit of decency only really shone for Benji. The rest of the world got the growl and snap.

"So, somebody tell me there's going to be burgers on the grill tomorrow." AJ looked hopeful and Missy chuckled, swatted him.

"Sure." Bax waved a hand. "You're the grill master, Aje. You do it."

"I'll help. I haven't gotten to grill since I left here." He thought for a second about his pool, his hot tub, his big-assed fancy-pants grill. Man, he missed home.

Come to think of it, he missed Dillon, too. He could picture that man in his hot tub, for sure. He'd bet Dillon would be a hoot -- hell, he'd seen it, that hard little body all bubbly and wet and...

Man. Coke. Ease up.

"You okay, Coke? You went away there for a minute." Bax didn't miss nothing.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. Woolgathering." Fantasizing. Whatever.

"You tired, man? Missy made up the green room again." AJ smiled at him, looking all sympathetic.

"I can sit and jaw a little. I more got road doze, yeah? How's that baby girl doing?"

Missy beamed. "She's walking, Poppy. I imagine she'll crow to see you. Although, I have to say, Andy's her favorite."

"Andy? Uncle Candy?" That was a hoot. Who woulda guessed that little Daisy would pick the crotchety-est rider ever.

"Yup. She follows him around, tugging on his jeans. It's sorta cute, so they tell me." Jason's lips twisted a little, went tight.

"Unca Candy is funny when he looks at her," Benji piped up. "He looks like he hasta go to the bathroom."

They all blinked, then stared, then Missy just cackled. "I think that's love, son. I do."

"No, that's how Daddy looks at you, Momma." Benji made the most extraordinary face, all AJ when he looked on his woman.

Missy looked at Benji, then AJ, eyes getting all teary. "He's a good boy."

"He is, huh? Okay, bub, time for bed." AJ went and plucked Benji out of Jason's lap, smiling down into that little face. He was a good daddy. Of course, that girl was right behind her man, eyes looking on him like AJ was pure magic. It sort of blew Coke's mind, but he reckoned there was someone for everyone.

"Y'all going back to the guest house, or am I gonna get to have one more beer with you?"

"Shit, Coke. We'll have a beer. How's things?"

He smiled at Jase, even if the man couldn't see him. "Lord. Billy got himself a gal -- one that ain't his wife, mind you -- knocked up, Kynan got real drunk in Cheyenne and picked a fight with a carny, got his nose broke..."

Bax and Jason both cracked up over that, and they talked for a bit, distracting him from his wandering thoughts and unruly body. Thank God.

By the time the beers were done, he was about ready to fall into the bed, crash like a lead balloon. "I'm off, y'all. I'll see you in the morning."

"Night, Coke." Bax went to help Jason up, both of them waving, Jason's just a little off.

Coke nodded, wandering back to the green room to unload his pockets. His phone was blinking with one of them text-dealies and he flipped the thing open, fumbling with it.

There was a little message on the screen once he got it open, the letters tiny enough that he had to play trombone to read them. They said, "Miss you. Boo. D."

It took him a god damn hour to reply. "Me too. Use your salve. Boo back. Night. Coke."

Still, he hoped it made Dillon's night better to hear from him, just like Dillon's message had done for him.

Lord, lord. Maybe there really was someone for everyone.

Chapter Seven

Dillon heard his phone beep, and he shot up in bed, his legs still protesting any sudden movement. It was ridiculous, how two weeks after the damned accident with Adam's rope he was still feeling the pain. It sucked to get old.

The text message window was blinking at him, and he bounced, pushing the little buttons and getting to the text from Coke. It had to be from Coke.

Sure enough, there was a little admonishment to use his salve, which he had, and a 'me too', which meant Coke missed him. His Coke. He'd definitely started thinking of the man as his. Oh, he'd fallen asleep in the hot tub and missed his chance, but there would be another, and God knew he'd been hurting bad. Something about little shaved off pieces of bone.

Dillon hadn't mentioned the bone thing to Adam when he'd called to kind of kick the man in the ass about his guilt. Adam Taggart was the best safety man in the game, and it had been pure chance, that rope sawing around across the top of the cage in the center of the arena.

"So are you sleeping with Coke?" Adam had asked, and Dillon had sputtered.

"What? No. I mean, not for lack of trying, but it hasn't come down the way I want it to."

There was something about Adam that made you tell him the truth. Maybe it was because the man was so blunt about everything, not ashamed to admit he got around and did what he damned well wanted.

"Well, get with it, boy. Neither one of you is getting any younger."

"I... Jeez, Adam. I'm on it, okay? After the break."

He'd been pretty much told to take it easy until after the break, and they'd put some ridiculous Blues Brothers fakers in his place for the last show before everyone went home for awhile. Dillon had been pissed as hell, maintaining that he'd do the show in a motorized wheelchair if he had to.

Of course, after that show, Ace had told him never to get hurt again. The crowd wanted him. Period.

Dillon hoped no one would think he was an asshole if he felt vindicated.

"I'll hold you to it," Adam had said. "I'm real sorry about your legs, Dill. You know that, yeah?"

"Don't be any stupider than you have to be, Tag. I love you more than my luggage."

Everything had been right with him and Adam after that.

He hoped to hell everything was right with Coke, too. The text message was a good sign, but it had been a rocky road so far. Maybe he needed to make a plan.

Nah. Dillon had already learned that he flew better by the seat of his pants.

pharris: hey cowboy. hows you

brrlman: good. miss you. how's blind and gimpy?

pharris: loud. glad im stayin with the kids

brrlman: LOL. it snowed a few days ago

pharris: no shit. like snow-snow

brrlman: three inches. bizzare-o land

pharris: only in yankeeland is three inches a good thing

brrlman: you're kind of sick. i like it. has jason ridden any?

pharris: yeah. couple times. gotta keep his eyes open or he pukes.

brrlman: oh gross. poor jase. buy him a beer

pharris: bax sez no beer

brrlman: ominous. next time i come with you

pharris; really? Id like that. lots.

brrlman: yes. no more running off without me

pharris: its a deal. we should go have

pharris: ice cream

brrlman: burgers. sex

pharris: ok when soon

brrlman: one more week

pharris ok i guess ican wait *wink*

brrlman: see you then, babe

pharris: ok cowboy. be good.

brrlman: i'll be as good as i can. wait for me, huh?

pharris: always. you got my word

Chapter Eight

The break was over, and Dillon had never been so glad.

Usually he loved to putter around at home, riding his horses and working on his fence line. This time, though, he'd been restless, bored, and looking forward every day to Coke's text message.

God, he was a dork.

Really. When was he ever gonna learn that he had to stop pining over the guys he couldn't have? Clearly the universe was against him when it came to Coke. Something always happened. Like in that freaking hot tub, where he'd been all ready to do the sexy kitty dance and instead his legs had swollen all up and turned Technicolor. Like, terrifying, fall off colors.

They'd had to carry him back to his room. Freaking embarrassing.

Dillon sighed, dropping his bag at the hotel desk and smiling. "Checking in."

The little gal at the front desk winced a little. "Uh. Well... I'm afraid..."

Coke's low chuckle sounded, right by his side. "There's been a flood on the west side. All the rooms are booked; they sent all the big names over to that big, fancy-assed resort. You and me? We're at the La Quinta. They got Fred and Nate there, too, starting tomorrow."

"What do you want to bet they ask me at the show how I like the resort?" He gave Coke a one-armed hug. "Wait. Does this mean I'm bunking with you?"

"Yep. There ain't a choice for you, man. One room. One bed. This place is balls up with folks."

Oh, sweet Jesus. Yes. Dillon resisted the urge to do a fist pump in the air. "Well, I can live with that, eh? My legs? Way better."

"Yeah? Good deal. Jase and Andy say hi, by the by. They wished you well." Uh-huh. He bet they did. Teasing assholes.

"They bitched about how much I freak them out." That was okay, though. Sometimes it was good to be weird.

"Yep. Come on. You're looking good." They headed toward a truck, Coke wandering slowly.

"You okay?" Man, that would suck, if he was raring to go and Coke was sick.

"I am right as rain. Had a nice break. Missy spoiled my ass, letting me cook." He got a quick grin, a nod. "Just wandering."

"Oh. That's cool. Just wanted to make sure." He'd eaten a lot of chili out of a can. "Next time you'll have to cook for me on the break."

"I can do that. I like it. I'm hoping to be at my own spread, next time. Pool. Hot tub. Grill."

"That sounds like heaven. It'll be cold up my way, time we get another break..."

"Shit, you ought to come down. It'll be great weather at home." Coke unlocked the truck. "Hotel ho."

"Can I hop a ride with you? I took a cab here." He knew Coke would say yes, but he'd also learned he'd get called a Yankee if he didn't ask. Well, maybe not by Coke, but still.

"You know it." Coke grinned over. "I thought I'd asked already. Come on."

"Any time you want to ask me to ride..." His cheeks heated when he said it, which was ridiculous, but he did mean it.

"Get in the car, son." That wicked, naughty grin was so not fatherly.

"Right. Hotel." The smile made him hot, all through, and Dillon hopped into the truck, bouncing a little. The day was getting better all the time.

"There's no restaurant or nothing at the place, but there's a Denny's next door, so we won't starve."

"Hey, I'm all for Denny's, huh?" He liked the low brow sometimes. The big places were expensive and kinda froofy.

"Yep. They got burgers and pancakes and decent coffee." Three days.

Three days he'd get to eat with Coke.

Bunk with Coke.

With one bed.

Someone was looking out for him.

He said a little prayer that nothing happened to either of them. Damned if he didn't add a little thank you in for the hurt legs, because sometimes something bad had to happen for something good.

"So, how's Missy? And Benji? I feel awful, but I can't remember the rest of AJ's kids' names."

"They're good. I wouldn't be surprised if that gal don't turn up pregnant again. She's home schoolin' the lot of them." Everyone always talked about Missy like she was the most fertile woman alive.

"She's a tribute to her sex. I would have killed AJ and run screaming by now." Pregnant. Yikes.

"She's stupid about that boy and more patient than Job." Coke started the truck up, ACDC screaming on the radio. The man jumped, turned the radio down. "Sorry."

"No problem." He could stand a little *Back in Black*. "She is something. Did you hear about Cooper's wife? She's flat on her back, trying to keep that baby cooking."

Coke nodded. "Lord. Women are something else." It didn't sound like a complaint, just a fond, confused truth.

"Yep. I sent her flowers. I put all of you guys' names on them." The bullfighters and him tended to do things as a unit.

"Thank you, man." Coke reached out, patted his leg. "I appreciate it."

"No problem." He put his hand over Coke's for a moment, loving the rough, hot skin.

Coke swallowed hard, looking at the road as the pulled out. "You ready to get back to work, shaking your heinie?"

"I am. I like to shake it. Good thing I get paid for it."

Coke looked a little like he'd been beaned with a line drive. "Get paid pretty damn good, too."

"I do." He'd never denied that. Laughing, he patted Coke's leg again. "And I give you a show, huh?"

"Now, now." Look at that blush. "I'm busy working."

Uh-huh. But in three years, Coke'd never once not commented on his show, his dancing.

"Oh, come on. You're usually not working when I'm really doing my thing." So he was pushing. So sue him.

"You sure? I'm a hard-working bullfighter."

"I know." That much was so true. "But I also know that you get water breaks."

Coke grinned, winked. "Yeah. I get one or two."

"Well, there you have it. You're sneaky." Either that or Coke was embarrassed because he hated Dillon's dancing and didn't want to admit it. "You don't hate it, do you?"

"Hate what, son?"

"My show. When I dance." That would suck.

Coke stopped at a red light, looked over at him. "How could anyone hate that? You've got an ass like no one else on earth."

"Well." He stared into Coke's eyes, hot on a whole new, as yet uncharted level. "Better than Balta's?"

"Hell, yes." No hesitation, no fluttering. Coke sounded damned sure.

"Wow." Balta Silva had that bubble butt... He grinned, feeling it stretch his cheeks. "I like yours, too. Of course, I really like your arms."

"Shit. I got white old man butt." Those arms, though? They flexed for him as the light turned green.

"You're not old." White, sure.

"Old enough, huh?"

"Coke, you're what? Two years older than me? Three?" Dillon set his jaw and waited for the not the age but the mileage crack.

"Shit, I gotta be older than that. Look at you."

His eyes crossed when he tried. "How old are you?"

"Thirty nine." Coke chuckled, pulled into the La Quinta.

"Well, see? I'm all of thirty five. So not old enough to call me son!"

"You've heard of the whole mileage thing, huh?"

"I knew you'd try that one." He gave Coke a smug grin. "I log about five miles a night."

Coke chuckled, shook his head. "You look good, huh? Real good."

"Okay, so we agree that we both look good. My legs are all healed. Do you have any nagging injuries that will require Doc in the middle of things?" He just wanted to be sure.

"Not yet. Tomorrow's a crap shoot." Coke was grinning like a kid let loose in a toy store.

"Then we'd better get busy tonight." He grinned back, starting to really get into the play.

"You think?" Coke opened the truck door, staring over at him, eyes lit up. "You sure that won't wear your ass out?"

"You might, but I am strong. My strength is the strength of ten men, because my heart is pure..." He did his best King Arthur impression. Errol Flynn. Whatever.

He could watch that beautiful son of a bitch laugh forever. Forever.

"Well, come on, then. We can leave the suitcases." Dillon paused. "Unless you have lube in your bag?"

Coke looked like he'd swallowed a frog.

A big, slimy frog.

Like one of the ones from Australia.

"In my ditty bag."

"Then we need your bag." He would grab his, too. So much for unencumbered. Eh, they had to check in, anyway.

It didn't take long -- especially with Coke growling about having to wait -- and they had two keys, coupons for ten percent off at the Denny's, and a third floor room. They hustled to the elevator, and Dillon knew better than to start there, because there would be no time to finish. That didn't stop him from teasing. Coke stared at him, the heat pouring off the solid body. Dillon moved close, letting his hip bump Coke's, breathing deep to catch Coke's scent. Oh, God. He was going to explode. He'd wanted for so long.

"You be good, now." Coke leaned in, those eyes green and gray and brown.

"Why? I thought we were going to misbehave. A lot." Please, God.

"Uh-huh. Not in the elevator. Where we ain't got to stop."

"I know. I'm being good." Good, damn it. He really was. Mostly. The elevator opened and they dragged their gear in down the hall, Coke hanging back a little.

He popped the key into the lock, glancing over his shoulder. "Everything okay?"

Those eyes were on his ass, and when they popped to his face, Coke turned almost purple. Oh.

Woo. Possibly hoo. The door resisted just long enough that he got frustrated, but Dillon finally got it open, grumbling a little. Then he pushed in and held the door for Coke, dropping his bag. Coke put his duffle down, then took the 'Do Not Disturb' sign and hung it on the handle. Score. He waited, hands hanging at his sides, not sure what to do next. Except stare at Coke.

"This is a little weird, huh?" It would be more weird if they both weren't hard as nails.

"A little, yeah. I'm just afraid if I touch you, something horrible will happen and we'll have to stop."

"I ain't much on being afraid, Dillon." One of those square hands reached out and snagged him, dragging him right into Coke's body.

Nothing horrible happened.

Nothing horrible at all.

Dillon moaned, feeling that solid body press all the way up and down his. Yes. God. He leaned in, pushing his mouth against Coke's, needing to taste. Coke moaned for him, then those hard, square hands landed on his ass and pulled him into the kiss. Pushing back with his butt, Dillon pushed forward with his chest, moving into the kiss even more. Oh, that felt good. Tasted good.

He couldn't fucking believe people thought this man was old. Dried up. This wasn't dried up at all. Hell, this was sex at its prime. He could feel Coke, hard against him, and dried up was the last thing he'd say about that. The very last.

He could feel Coke's muscles, tensing and jerking under his touch. He pulled at Coke's starched shirt, needing to have some skin, not wanting to rush too much, but... Damn.

Coke's belly was flat, hard, and fuzzy, and when he touched it, those hands on his ass squeezed hard.

"Look at you. I swear, you're gonna make me crazy, Coke." It was like a moveable feast. He kissed Coke's neck, pushing the shirt all the way off. Coke moaned for him -- the sound was deep and raw and vibrated his lips. Someone liked that. His fingers wandered, happily, pushing into the hair on Coke's chest to find the little brown nipples. He rubbed them with his thumbs, setting the edge of his teeth to Coke's collarbone.

"Dillon. Honey, you'll make me. It's been a... Oh..." The edge of desperation made him grin.

"Been a while? I hear that." Hell, it had been what? Over a year for him, and Coke was the most exciting thing he'd ever seen. Still, he wanted to take time to savor it a little.

"Yeah." Coke nodded, stepped back a little, and tugged at his T-shirt. "Let me see?"

"Uh-huh." Pulling away a tiny bit more, Dillon struggled out of his shirt, tossing it aside. He wasn't as heavily muscled as Coke, but he did okay.

"Oh, sweet Jesus." Those callused fingers trailed down his belly, those eyes burning. "Ain't you fine?"

That had him preening, loving the feel of Coke's hand on him. Dillon smiled, leaning into the touch. "I love the way you feel."

Coke didn't answer, just lifted his other hand and touched the line of Dillon's waistband, feather-light.

"These, too?" The jeans were way too damned tight anyway. They had to go.

"Yes." Well, that was straightforward. Not as straightforward as the way Coke popped his button, though. Wiggling, Dillon undid his jeans and pushed them down, skinning out of his boxer-briefs, too. There. It was all hanging out.

Coke grinned at him, looking a little nervous. "Not bad. Not bad at all."

Well, he sure hoped not. Not bad, that was. He was hard enough to pound nails. "Now you."

One hand reached out, wrapped around his cock, thumb sliding over the tip, the calluses rough. Hips rocking hard, Dillon moaned, just letting that touch wash through him like a tidal wave of pleasure. Oh, yes. Coke went to work, like that man'd been waiting to touch him, stroke him off.

Dillon closed his eyes for a second, letting everything focus on that touch. Then he opened them up and stared right into Coke's eyes. "I want to see the rest of you."

"Mmmhmm." Someone wasn't listening.

"Coke." His balls were drawing up, and he was very afraid he'd bust. Leaning in, he kissed the corner of Coke's mouth. "Your pants."

Coke turned, mouth meeting his fully, free hand fumbling between them. Hell, yes. It was about damned time. Dillon remembered he had hands about that time, too, pulling at Coke's jeans, wanting in. He wanted to smell and taste... oh. Taste.

Coke's cock matched the rest of him -- heavy, stocky, full and strong. He was surprised at the heavy curls crowning it, so much darker than he'd expected.

"God." Fighting off Coke's hands, Dillon dropped to his knees, giving that amazing cock a closer look. Much closer.

"Dillon." Coke stared down like he was a mirage or something, fingers opening and closing, over and over. "Oh, damn."

"I got you, Coke. Promise." Grinning, he leaned in and rubbed his cheek against Coke's skin, feeling how hot and damp the man was.

"Gonna hold you to that." There were fascinating scars, heavy ropy ones from bulls, tiny neat ones from surgeries, all of them teasing his fingers.

"No problem." Testing, Dillon licked along one hipbone, tasting Coke's skin, enjoying the salt.

Coke's prick bobbed, jerked hard, and the rich, male scent got stronger.

"I can smell you, Coke. So hot for me." He didn't waste a whole lot more breath before he was licking at Coke, sucking the head of Coke's prick into his mouth.

Coke cried out and he jerked forward for a second, pushing deep, before pulling back. "Sorry. Sorry. It's just so good."

Breathing deep, Dillon rocked back enough to nod, stroking Coke's hips with his fingers. "You're not hurting me."

"Good. Good, 'cause I wouldn't." Coke arched a little, bones creaking, entire body begging for him.

"I know that." It was a little cool and a little sad that Coke was so worried, so concerned. Dillon licked some more, easing his way to sucking this time, then sealing his lips tight around the shaft.

Coke hollered again, the sound sharp and harsh, then those little, jerky movements started up again, rubbing Coke's heavy prick on his tongue. Sucking harder, Dillon tried to give Coke what he needed, remembering his hands again just in time to reach up and cup Coke's balls, rolling them gently. He hoped to hell it was working for Coke, because it was so working for him.

Of course, the rate the salt was dropping on his tongue, he didn't really have to worry. One of Coke's hands landed on his shoulder, Coke shifting a little, spreading for him. That was the ticket. Dillon breathed in deep through his nose before pushing all the way down, taking Coke to the root. Goddamn, but he could still do that. And with Coke, it was fucking amazing.

"Dillon!" He heard Coke's head thunk against the wall. He'd never heard his name sound like that. Never. And all sorts of people called his name. This was a million times better.

Coke stretched up, tight as a bow, balls drawn tight. He wanted it all, every bit, so Dillon pulled harder, his hands coming up to grab Coke's hips. So hot. So damned hot.

"Uhn." Coke made this damn near broken sound and came for him like a ton of bricks.

Dillon took it all, took every bit, licking and pulling until Coke stopped shuddering and started shaking. Then he pulled free and kissed Coke's hip.

"D...damn." Coke blinked down at him, looking stunned.

"Uh-huh." He was grinning, feeling damned good, even if his hips were rocking, his whole body trying to get some friction.

"C'mere." One of those hands reached out for him. Dillon took it, letting Coke haul him up so he could rub and love on that hot skin. Coke was just solid as all hell. Coke's hands landed on his ass, dragging him off his feet a little, moving him against that flat, fuzzy belly.

Gasping, he bucked, testing Coke's strength without meaning to. Not that he needed to worry. The man held him like he weighed nothing. All those muscles to play with. Hump. Climb on. Coke was like a studly little jungle gym. Dillon liked the gym. Jungle or otherwise. He lifted his face for a kiss, wanting more.

Coke took his mouth like it was the last kiss on Earth, tongue fucking his lips, stealing his breath clean away. He climbed up Coke's body, wrapping his legs around Coke's waist and humping. Dillon was far beyond waiting for anything more dignified. Coke never wavered, not even a bit. Those hands moved him, wrapped around his ass like they were meant to be there, squeezing and rubbing.

Dillon moved faster and faster, his cock squeezed between his body and Coke's, these desperate little sounds coming out of him. Mainly, "Please."

"Come on. Come on, honey. Gimme. I need to see you."

"Okay." His head fell back and his hips punched forward, and Dillon came like a ton of bricks, his whole body sawing back and forth.

Coke held him, panting, eyes burning into him. So hot.

"Coke..." He could run up three level stadiums in seconds and hardly breathe hard. Coke made him pant.

"Mmmhmm. Got you."

"Thank God." The wait had been worth it. So, so worth it. Now he just had to find a way to make sure it happened over and over again.

Coke walked them over to the bed, sitting carefully. "This okay?"

"Yeah. This is good." The urge to wheeze passed, and he kissed Coke's jaw. "You good?"

"I think I might be way better than good, honey."

"Way better. I might have to keep you." He meant it, but he kept it light, not wanting to scare Coke off.

"Mmm. 'kay." Coke cleaned them off a little, got them settled on the bed. "What's your position on naps?"

"I like them. I'm all for them." Stop. Babbling. Sleep.

"Cool." Boom.

Snoring.

Wow.

Dillon pulled back a little to stare at Coke, looking at the spiky eyelashes, the still flushed cheeks. Well. Who knew? Dillon filed that little tidbit away in his Coke cabinet. 'Passes out after sex'.

That was kinda cool

Almost as cool was being close enough to see the tiny scar on Coke's chin, one that was almost invisible. Almost as cool as being able to touch it, feel the stubble on his fingertip. He traced the lines, the scars, smiling when Coke shushed him a little, like hush, sleeping.

There was a spot for him, right on Coke's shoulder, sort of Dillon-shaped, and he took it, settling down.

He'd nap a little. Then they'd find some food, and maybe they'd mess around some more. Maybe they wouldn't. One way or the other, it wouldn't be boring.

Chapter Nine

Man, Nate needed to get home more, if the man was going to snuggle like that.

Really, because that was damned personal and...

Wait.

Him and Nate had had to share more than a couple times and he'd never had Nate's hands... there.

His eyes popped open and he saw tousled blond hair and the finest ass in bull riding.

Dillon Walsh.

Fuck him.

Well, it'd been blow him, but still, he'd. They'd. And it'd been good and he was thinking that he'd sure like to do it again, especially with Dillon's hand all wrapped around his cock and rubbing up and down, even though the man was still asleep.

Dillon snuffled when he moved, following him with that hot little body, hand staying right where it was.

Coke's toes curled, hips rolling without him being able to stop them. A low moan sounded, Dillon shifting, thumb rubbing the underside of his cock. Just like he liked. God, yes. He dipped his chin, rubbing against Dillon's temple as he moaned.

"Mmph. Coke?" Well, hello and yes for that, too. Dillon knew who he was, even asleep.

"Mmmhmm." He let one hand slide down Dillon's back, as far as he could reach.

"Hey." Dillon snuggled harder against him, pushing that hand up and down. Those pretty eyes opened, and Dillon smiled for him.

"Hey. Good nap?" His eyes crossed a little as Dillon did that thumb-rub thing.

"Uh-huh. I told you I was all for naps. Wake up all refreshed and ready to go." Dillon pressed against him, and he could feel ready against his thigh.

"I'm a fan of ready." He pushed his leg against Dillon, rubbing back.

"I can tell. I do love how you get prepared." Dillon squeezed, making his breath hitch.

His shoulders tightened, rolling a little, his neck only letting them move so much.

"You okay?" Pausing just a moment, Dillon waited for his nod before kissing him hard.

There was lots of shit he hadn't expected to really happen -- having Dillon Walsh fuck his lips with that wicked tongue was definitely on that list. It was happening, though, and it was better than he'd ever dreamed. Dillon was kinda... oral. Tactile, too, touching him like he was made of gold.

Pushing into the kiss, Coke stopped worrying about what he'd thought or what he'd worried about or... Oh, damn. More.

Dillon started humping his thigh, that hand making him crazy, moving in time with Dillon's body. They were really heating up, Dillon starting to sweat just a bit, so hot off the mark. He rolled and moved Dillon, getting the man settled above him, their cocks lined up.

"Oh." Dillon's eyes went wide, heated, and the man started dancing for him, rocking on top of him. They got going good, really moving.

He could spend a month of Sundays doing this, maybe longer. Hell, yeah. He could feel Dillon's cock, dragging up along his own, the tip leaving wet kisses. Looked like Dillon could do it a good long while, too. The man rubbed and rocked and hummed some kind of song. He braced his legs and started moving a little harder, finding a rhythm that matched Dillon's and just going to town.

Bracing those hands against his chest, Dillon stared down at him, smiling. "Feels good, Coke. Hot."

He nodded, still not quite believing that he had Dillon's ass in his hands. Panting, bouncing, Dillon gave them the friction, gave them everything they were gonna need to get where they needed to go. Or something like that.

He tried to lean up a little, kiss Dillon's shoulder, Dillon's throat. His neck didn't move like that, though. "C'mere, honey."

"Hmm? Oh. 'Kay." Bending, Dillon presented him with a fine canvas of flushed skin, all within reach of his mouth.

"Good." He moaned and his lips fastened on salty, heated skin. Oh, God. Dillon tasted good. It made him want to know how the rest of Dillon tasted.

"Mmm." Someone liked that, especially when he sucked a little, pulling enough to sting. Oh, yeah. Dillon jerked and moaned twisted on top of him. He kept his mouth moving, sucking here and there, tasting every place he could reach.

"Coke. Oh, damn. Do that again. Right there." He wasn't sure if Dillon meant the little bite or the pulling down on that tight ass. So he did both -- biting a nipple this time and tugging that tight ass close.

"Yes!" Dillon bucked hard, their skin sliding together so hard that it made him yelp, but only in the best damned way. Coke grunted and bit again, cock throbbing, balls aching. Dillon's eyes rolled for him, and that ass started moving like Dillon was dancing, a slow bump and grind. Christ. He'd never watch the man in the arena again without knowing this. Never.

Oh, sweet fuck.

That thought mingled with the flavor of Dillon in his mouth and he jerked and shot, crying out against Dillon's chest.

"Coke. God Almighty." Dillon breathed it like a prayer, watching him for long moments. Then the man started humping hard, working toward the end, coming seconds after he did.

He held on, watching Dillon all the way. God, he was a fine, fine man.

"Hey." Dillon blinked at him, smiling. "That was a great way to wake up."

"No shit." He grinned up, tickled as hell.

"Is it still night time?" Glancing at the clock, Dillon bounced. "I could call in a carry out order with Denny's."

"Works for me. I'm empty." Wait. Did that sound pervy?

Must have, because Dillon gave him an arch look. "Anytime you want to change that, let me know."

His lips parted and he stared. Did that mean what he thought that meant?

"Or you could do me. I'm pretty easy. I mean, I would love for you to. I'm babbling." Dillon kinda, well, hid against his chest.

His cock actually jerked and he had to remind himself he was too old for this shit. He stroked Dillon's hair, trying to remember how to breathe. "I think we could manage that, honey. Both, I mean. Together." Shit.

"Oh. Well, good. I mean, eventually, we'll have to do more than me using you as a jungle gym, huh?" He could feel Dillon's laughter against his belly and chest.

"I don't know. I think I make a damn good jungle gym. Of course, it'd be easier in the pool." Oh. Pool sex. Oh...

"The pool?" Dillon glanced up, looking intrigued. "Huh."

"I got a great big pool and hot tub set up at home. I. Uh. Spend a lot of time there." A lot of time.

"Man, that sounds like heaven. We'd get to use a pool at home like, a month." Grinning, Dillon rolled to one side, snuggling some.

"Mine's in use all year, barring cold snaps." He kept Dillon right there, fingers sliding up and down lazily. He could use a swim right now, really. Work out the old muscles.

"Yeah? That would be awesome." Sometimes Dillon sounded so much like a Yankee it hurt. Good thing he thought it was cute.

"You should come and see, huh?" Was that too much? He'd've asked, whether or not they'd got busy. He *liked* Dillon.

"I should. I'd like that. Heck, it's not like my place needs a lot of maintenance." Dillon was just grinning like a fool, so it must be a good thing.

He nodded, grinned back. "So, tell me. What all from the Denny's do you want? I'm thinking I need a burger and possibly pancakes."

"I could eat the side of a barn. How about an omelet and some French toast?"

"Works for me." He rolled, grabbed the little hotel book and the phone.

Dillon tickled him while he was ordering, fingers moving up and down his ribs. Butthead. He reached back, swatting Dillon playfully, hand connecting with a swack. Jumping, Dillon cackled, wiggling for him. Hell, time he was done ordering, Dillon was up and dancing for him, laughing like a loon.

He was laughing too as he hung up the phone, throwing a pillow at Dillon's head.

"Hey! Don't damage the merchandise." Dillon sank down on the edge of the bed. "How long before we pick up and how late is the pool open?"

"Twenty minutes and..." He grabbed the little hotel book, squinting. "Eleven."

"Cool and cool. We have plenty of time." Dillon's cheeks heated. "I mean, I know we can't, you know, in the pool here, but I know you like to swim."

"I do. You? I never see you in the pool at the hotels." He got up, headed for his gear to find his trunks.

"Oh, I kinda freak the guys out a little. Not to mention the pale. I like it, though." When he straightened up Dillon was watching him like a hawk.

"I know all about pale." He didn't cover his cock, not at all, but the temptation was there.

"You've got nothing on me. In fact, you're all tanned now." Finally, Dillon got up and went to get some swim trunks out.

He caught himself following, wanting to touch, to feel Dillon's ass again. His hands moved without his permission altogether. The moment his fingers connected with Dillon's skin, the man moaned for him, pushing into his touch. It had to be mutual.

"You've got the prettiest ass on Earth, honey. I swear, I've had dreams..." He rubbed a little, admiring.

"I like dreams. As long as they're not those 'oh man, that guy has spinach in his teeth' dreams." Lord, sometimes Dillon made no sense.

"No. No, they're not." They were way more... explicit.

"Well, that works, then." Sliding around, Dillon wrapped both arms around him, squeezing tight.

He held on a second, leaning a little. It was weird, but good.

"Come on, honey. Let's do a lap or three."

"Sounds good." They headed out, Dillon grabbing a room key and a wallet, so they could go get the food. Looked like the night was going to be even better after the nap than it had been before.

A man couldn't ask too much more than that.

Chapter Ten

Dillon listened to the squawking in his earpiece, trying not to let the smile slide off his face. It had been a brutal night, and AJ had just taken a stunning blow to the chin. Luckily, it was only going to need stitches and he was a little concussed, that was all.

Still, AJ was a good guy, and Dillon knew it would upset Coke something fierce.

Look at him, worried about what Coke was thinking.

He shook out a little, ready to hit his cue when the music started, determined not to worry about Coke being distracted. The man would kick his ass for the very thought.

The bull finally came out of the chute, wheeling and spinning, throwing Joaquim off into the dirt and turning to stomp the man. Coke was right there, pulling Joaquim off and going down in almost the same motion.

The crowd gasped and Coke popped up, snarling, heading right for that black monster. Coke swacked the bull's hip, then reached for the horn as Ballbuster turned. Dillon could see Nate mouth, 'Oh, fuck me.'

Dillon didn't know whether to scream or laugh. Right now he was hoping he could laugh about this. He'd seen Coke get mad and go after them more than once. His feet moved before he could stop them, though, and he found himself out in front of the cage, too far from his barrel to do any good. The bull ducked down and caught Coke right in the breadbasket, the son of a bitch going flying, hitting the ground with a dull thud and that bull was on him, hooves flying. Coke stood up, blood pouring down his face, and went back at the bull again, snarling at Nate when the man tried to help.

The crowd was going crazy, David and Ace in the box, mouths open.

And Coke went at the bull again.

Snapping his own mouth shut, Dillon dove for the cage when Coke and Ballbuster came his way, Adam Taggart's horse a solid wall there all of a sudden. Damn that Coke, he was gonna be sore as hell. Assuming the man didn't get broken again, of course. Asshole.

Adam got the bull roped about the time Nate was wading in, with or without Coke's say-so. Coke stood there, breathing hard, blood pouring down his face.

The gate closed behind Ballbuster about the time David started talking, telling the crowd what a nut Coke was, how that bull had really gotten to him. Dillon rolled off the cage and went to slap Coke on the butt, making sure his mic was off.

"You lost your mind?"

Coke spit blood, tried to mop his face, a flap of skin kinda... dangling. "Don't. I'm still pissed."

"Okay. Here comes Doc. I'll take us into break." The music started up, David hollering in his ear, and Dillon went to work, doing a running jump to his barrel and standing on top.

Doc led Coke back, the man talking ninety miles a minute, cussing Coke for being an idiot.

His sound man started playing some old fashioned funk and Dillon made himself get with it and get down, moving his butt, waving his arms to get the crowd with him. They followed along, hooting and hollering, shaking signs at him. The tension eased up and they got with it, Coke not coming back out from the back.

Shit. He hoped to hell the man hadn't hurt his neck or back. That would make him furious. Scared. Shaking it off, Dillon backed off, the next bull flying out of the chute, business as usual.

The bulls were on fire, taking out Sam and Donny next, before heading for the camera man. That had Nate storming to the back during one of his commercial breaks, the steam nearly visible as it came out of the bullfighter's ears.

Dillon desperately wanted to know how Coke was, but commercials were his golden time, and he knew the crowd didn't give a shit what he was worried about. "Give me the music for the gymnastic thing, Rob," he murmured, starting off with a little front flip.

The crowd was into it, clapping as he shook it, popping his ass and riding the pony. When Nate came back out, Coke was right there, stitches black and nasty above one eye and down one cheek.

The music faded away, and Dillon allowed himself to study Coke from across the arena, almost missing it when David asked him what he thought they needed to do to turn the night around.

Cueing his mic, Dillon chuckled. "We need someone to ride a bull, man. You know? You guys remember how to do that?"

One hand down, one up, and Dillon did his best bull rider impression.

The crowd laughed and he thought he saw Packer Stevens flip him off as the guy pushed his hat down farther over those huge bat ears. Packer rode that bull, though, didn't he? He did the last two seconds hanging half off the side, but he did it.

The hat went flying and the man bounced over to him, grinning like a fool. "You see that, mate?"

He clapped Packer on the back, nodding and grinning. "You did good, buddy. Way to fire it up."

"Too right. I stuck 'im."

He turned his mic on. "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!"

Packer and the crowd - at least some of them - hollered back. "Oi, oi, oi!"

Packer nodded to Nate, got a pat and his rope from Coke, and he went to give away a leather bomber jacket and a pair of tickets to the Final weekend.

It really was just another night at the office.

Hopefully, when it was all said and done tonight, he could make sure that Coke's day ended better than it had started.

Chapter Eleven

"Coke, I need to take you for x-rays on those ribs, man." Doc tugged on his arm and he shook his head, growling as that made his stitches pull.

"Nope."

"Coke."

"I said no." He was a grown man. He knew if his bones were broke.

"Nate? Will you talk to this stubborn asshole?" Doc threw his hands up, going to look at Hank, who was packed in a metric fuck ton of ice.

Nate just shook his head, letting Shaun wrap his bent up finger. "Cain't tell the boss nothing."

Coke rolled his eyes, winked. "I'm out of here."

"You can't drive. You can not *go*, damn it!"

"Nattie?" He didn't need this shit.

"I got you, Hoss." They played this game well, one of them running interference, the other running like hell.

Doc was trying to get back to him, and damned if it wasn't Hank who saved the day, grabbing Doc's arm and yelping like a big old hound. "Doc! Don't leave me, man."

He nodded once to Hank and skedaddled, bee-lining it for the dressing room and his bag.

He'd just about made it, too, when Dillon popped up beside him. "You okay, Coke? I haven't been able to get back until now."

"Yeah. I'm good." In a hurry. Running from the doc. "You looked good tonight." Hurry. Hurry.

"Thanks." Tilting his head like a puppy hearing a whistle, Dillon grinned at him. "Doc's coming. I'll meet you at the truck?"

"Yes." He tossed Dillon the keys. "By the big doors, huh?"

"You bet." Good man. Dillon motivated out of there, heading out to get the truck, hustling like he did in the arena.

He didn't look at himself in the mirror, just grabbed his shit and boogied. He could change at the hotel.

AJ saw him in the hallway. "Nate says these are yours."

A packet of pills landed in his hand, Doc's scribbly handwriting on the paper. "If you cough blood, piss blood. Call."

AJ looked pretty rough himself, a goose egg rising up, all purple and red.

"Thanks, buddy. You got a ride?"

"Yeah. I'm solid. You'd best get on; you know Jase'll call to bitch."

"No shit on that." He waved and went, pulling out his phone and turning it off.

No interruptions. Hotel. Pool. Food. Shower.

The truck was right where it was supposed to be, Dillon behind the wheel, the big engine idling. The window slid down, the man himself giving Coke a smile. "You want to drive?"

"You can." He slid in, real careful. "Stop in a drive-thru for food?"

"You bet. I was thinking roast beef sandwiches, huh? Less greasy and salty."

Oh. Someone was thinking about his poor split lip.

"And a milkshake, honey. Please. Maybe two."

"Sure." Dillon patted his leg and pulled out, heading to the local Arby's. He knew they'd passed one on the way from the hotel to the arena.

Coke closed his eyes, let Dillon drive, As he chilled out, shit started hurting. For the most part, Dillon was quiet, too. He hummed with the radio, but didn't ask a lot of questions or anything. Which was good.

Food. Drinks. Shakes. And all of the sudden they were parking and he was thinking many he'd just sleep here in the truck rather than move.

"Don't you fall asleep on me. I can't carry you." Hopping out, Dillon grabbed all of the crap and came around, standing like a crutch to help him down.

"I'll hump my stuff. I will." He reached for his duffle.

"No. You'll take the food and stuff. Come on."

"I will?" He did.

Okay.

It was the longest walk he'd had since he'd walked into Miz Scott's house and seen little Jason, blind.

"Almost there, Coke." They were upstairs, the open elevator doors making him blink. He didn't even remember going up.

"Jesus. I ain't even took them pills yet." Lord, he was reverting into AJ. The thought made him chuckle.

"Well, just think how well you'll sleep when you do. Uh. What room are you in?" Somehow they'd booked him up with Nate, even though he and Dillon had tried to get them a room together.

"Three something." He stopped, closed his eyes a second. Shit. Nate had the working key and he needed a little fortification before he faced that harpy at the front desk again. "Tell you what, man. I'll just sit down there in the lobby for a few, eat."

"Shit, no. Come on. I'm in three oh eight." Dillon took him down the hall, leading the way and letting him in to a blessedly dark, quiet room. "Ta da."

"Oh, thank God." There was a chair, a place to sit and he stumbled over, getting the food onto the little table before he crashed down.

"Shit, Coke. Are you sure nothing's broken?" A little light appeared, Dillon turning on the smallest lamp and coming to help him get his shoes off.

"Pretty sure. I liked the new bit with the booty shaking." His shoes popped off and he curled his toes.

"That was pure panic. I was worried as heck about you." There was no real heat in it, no accusation. Just the truth, and a touch of warm concern.

"Yeah, I sorta lost it. Asshole bull." He reached out, cupped Dillon's face a little. "Hey."

"Hey." Dillon smiled, searching his eyes for a moment. "You hungry?"

"I am." He nodded, thumb moving, petting some. "Guess we oughta eat, huh?"

"We ought. Before you fall over." A soft kiss was pressed to his thumb. "Not that I want to rush you."

"I just want to be at the house, in the hot tub, with you." Did he say that out loud?

"Man, that sounds so good. We have two weekends off coming up." Dillon got up and gave him a soft kiss, bustling around after to get the table set up, get him a hot washcloth... Taking care.

"Come back with me?" He took one of the pills that Doc'd given him, washing it down with some milkshake.

"You know it. I kinda already asked someone to watch my place. Figured it would be easier than not, if you asked." This whole thing between them was so new that they were both afraid to ask, sometimes.

"Yeah? Good deal. I'll have to trade off with you, next break." Maybe. Or not. Whatever Dillon wanted.

"Sure. You'd love fishing up by me, eh?" Sandwich, fries, the other shake, they were all set right by his hand.

"I do like fishing. I got a little bass boat for the pond. Nothing fancy."

"I'll take you fly fishing." Warm fingers found his shirt, pulling and tugging until Dillon got it off him.

"Ain't never done that." He looked down at the bruises. Damn.

"You want some ice, too?" Dillon was staring at his chest.

"I'll be okay, honey. No worries." He tried to flex, but damn.

"Well..." Looking skeptical, Dillon went ahead and ate, stealing looks at him every few seconds.

He managed the shake and a bit of the sandwich before he gave up. "Can I borrow your shower?"

"You want me to come with you?" Popping up like a jack in the box, Dillon came over to help him up.

"I'd love that." He nodded, took Dillon's hand, feeling about ten thousand years old. "Remind me why I take on them bulls again?"

"Because you love your job, you're good at it, and sometimes you get stubborn." A tug and a smile, and Dillon led him to the bathroom, which seemed bright as hell once the light was on.

"Shit." He saw himself in the mirror and winced. "Jesus, I look like Frankenstein. Turn the light off."

"I'm blind as a bat, Coke. How about we compromise and turn that weird heat lamp thing on?" The soft red glow was better, even if it made the walls look bloody.

"You wear contacts?" He loved all the weird little details.

"I do, and my night vision is for shit." That lean body appeared as Dillon stripped down.

He got the water going, then slipped his shorts off and stepped in.

"God, Coke." Dillon touched him, gentle as anything, tracing around the bruises.

He nodded, head under the water. "Feels good, you touching and all." It felt more than good. Hell, it was like magic.

"Then I'll keep on keeping on." The man moved even closer, hands sliding up and down his back, easing things.

His hands landed on Dillon's hips; he loved the unexpected solid feel of the man, the heat of him. Dillon guided him back under the water a little farther, getting it really falling on him. Damn, but that un-kinked his muscles. He stretched, hearing things crack and pop. Shit, he was getting old. Still, he reckoned it was better than the alternative.

"I got you. Here, turn around." They shifted, Dillon moving him to get to his back, which was the least tore up. Then he got him a massage.

There was this sound that poured out of him, loud enough that it startled him.

"Is that bad?" Not that Dillon stopped. No, sir. Those hands kept moving, fingers digging in to make him like an overcooked noodle.

"No. Not bad. Jesus, honey, I'm fixin' to have to keep you."

"Oh, good." Dillon really worked him over, and the hot water hit his chest and belly, and damned if his knees didn't get weak.

"Don't stop." He wasn't sure if he said it out loud, and it felt so good he didn't care if he did. Those hands were pure magic.

"Not going to. You know I have stamina." Little butthead. Dillon lived up to his claim, though, massaging him into a puddle.

"Shit. I'd like to see you carry my heavy ass."

"Well, for all I said I couldn't a while ago, I bet I could. Of course, right now you're all slippery." The water started to cool off a bit, and Dillon was right there, turning it off, getting a couple of towels.

He let Dillon help him climb out of the tub and they set to drying each other off.

"There. Come on, Coke. You still have some shake left, and then you can crash, huh?"

"Now, I could hold you for a bit, you know."

He got a bright smile, Dillon looking tickled as anything. "I can do that, babe. I really can."

That little nick name made his belly jump, his cheeks heat. "Sounds good."

Babe.

Damn.

Dillon led him to the bed, letting him sink down and propping pillows behind him. Lord, it was like having a day at the spa. Only without all the strangers and wax and shit.

Coke got Dillon settled in close, tucked in nice and easy, and handed over the remote. It was damn near perfect.

Even when Dillon turned on some Japanese game show called Ninja something or other. That boy could be plain weird.

Good thing Coke liked him.

Chapter Twelve

Dillon put his contacts in, then tucked his shirt into his jeans, the crisp white looking okay against his neck and face. As long as no one had to see his fish belly, he'd be okay. Clapping his cowboy hat on his head, he tucked his sunglasses into his pocket before checking his look in the mirror next to the bathroom.

Coke had woken stiff and sore, but feeling much better, and Dillon had conned him into breakfast and going to the little science museum that wasn't far from their hotel. They had plenty of time to do that, come back and have a swim and a nap, and get to work on time.

Woo.

The museum had a huge model train thing that kids got to play with. Dillon figured he qualified as a kid.

"Coke! Come on, babe. Move your bones!"

"My bones are *old*, honey."

Coke came out, looking like anything but old in a fine, blue button-down, creased jeans and a straw hat that hid the bruised, swollen set of stitches on the man's face. When the sunglasses went on, the man looked amazing.

"God, you're hot." He bounced over and took a kiss, letting Coke know he wasn't old at all.

Coke's arm wrapped around his waist, holding him close as the kiss went on a little longer.

"Mmm." He pulled away, feeling a little bruised himself, but only in the best way. "You ready, babe? I could eat a horse."

He saw that quick grin, the stitches pulling visibly. "Only a horse? Man, I was hoping for water buffalo pancakes." He got a soft swat on the butt. "Let's hasta."

"Yeah." He just hoped they didn't run into anyone. Maybe it was kind of selfish, but he wanted Coke to himself.

There was a little '80's themed diner about three blocks off -- Pat Benatar and Michael Jackson posters on the walls, teal and hot pink decor, and odd, gourmet things on the menu. It was almost full, but there weren't any familiar hats, so Dillon counted himself lucky.

Besides, they had eggs and bacon and pancakes, too, so it was a fit. He got settled across from Coke, grinning from ear to ear, fingers tapping out a rhythm on the table.

They were playing Duran Duran. God, those videos had been *hot*. Coke put his sunglasses on the table, looking up at the waitress with a smile. "I need a large orange juice, please ma'am, and a big-assed coffee."

The waitress cackled, glancing at him. "What about you, hon?"

"Coffee and a glass of chocolate milk." He wanted some sugar. Maybe he'd have chocolate chip pancakes.

The girl nodded, looking at Coke again. "Did you get the number of the truck that hit you?"

Coke nodded. "Yes, ma'am. J-3721." That number was branded on Ballbuster's ass.

Dillon cackled. "Yeah. It was moving fast, too."

"Apparently. I hope so. Put some vitamin E on those, huh? Otherwise they'll scar."

"Good idea." Dillon gave Coke a look, thinking about all the ways he could rub in some cream or something.

Coke nodded, eyes hot and dark, staring at him. "Yeah. We'll have to get some."

The waitress popped her gum and left to get their drinks.

"We'll have to stop by the drug store, huh?" Man, the things they could get at the drug store.

Oh. Dark blush. Hot. "Works for me. We could get some... stuff."

"We could. Do that thing we were talking about before. Either direction." He could ride and ride. Coke would feel amazing inside him.

"Or both. Directions, I mean. You gonna have waffles?" Oh, this was *fun*.

"Nope. Pancakes. With chocolate. I'll get a good buzz on." He winked, slid the toe of his boot up the side of Coke's ankle.

"I'm going have an omelet. Bacon. They come with little pancakes, it says." Coke spoke calmly, but the man's breath hitched as he played footsie.

"Yum." He'd have to have a protein shake later, but he wanted undiluted pancake and sausage joy. Drinks came, they put their order in, and Dillon set about really making Coke blush.

He watched Coke pour sugar in his coffee.

And pour.

And pour.

And pour.

Well, well. Someone was an addict. Dillon grinned. "Looks like you're getting all jacked up, too."

"Huh?" The spoon went into the black sludge. "I got a little sweet tooth in the morning."

"Uh-huh. Just a bit." That much sugar would make his eyes cross. Said the man who was sucking down a chocolate milk. "Have you ever tried M&Ms?"

"Like the little candies? Sure."

"No, I mean in your coffee." He couldn't see Coke going to Starbucks, but he'd bet the man would like a coffee with chocolate morning.

"Huh? No..." He could see those wheels turning, the lines around Coke's eyes flashing as the man grinned. "I bet that's something."

"It is. We'll try it tomorrow." Nate had checked in with them late last night, but hadn't said a word about anything, which was decent. A good thing, too, as Dillon fully expected Coke to stay with him tonight, too.

"Okay. We got to stop at the store anyways. We could get some snacks for tonight. For after... For late."

"Sure. Keep us from having to put clothes on to answer the door for room service." That was a sound plan. Oh, pancakes.

Coke gaped at him, then the plate landed on the table and he could hear Coke's stomach growling.

"Tuck in, babe." Slathering his plate with syrup, Dillon started in, moaning at the little bursts of chocolate.

Coke watched him a second, a damn near gentle smile on his face, then started in on the omelet, peppering it heavily. Dude, that would make him sneeze. Chuckling, he chomped through the sausage, loving the sticky syrup taste.

It took about ten minutes of silent eating before they started slowing down, breathing, starting to chat together again. "Where is it you said we were going? A museum?"

"Yep. The science exploration doolie. I can't wait." He hoped there were some of those optical illusion things.

"Sounds good to me. I'm thinking, at some point during the long break, I need to go take AJ's older ones to a carnival or something, in between training Jase up."

"Yeah? Doesn't AJ have like, eighty of them?" Missy was always popping buns out of the oven.

"Six, although if seven's not on the way, I'll be a monkey's uncle." Coke stopped, fork half-way to his mouth. "Well, I guess I'm Uncle Poppy, no matter what..."

"Poppy..." Blinking, Dillon laughed, chugging the last of his coffee and pouring more from the carafe.

"Yep. I'm Poppy, Andy Baxter is Candy."

"What does that make me? Uncle Dill-weed?"

Coke's laugh rang out, filling the air and making the other diners turn, look, smile.

They finished up, both of them sitting back and groaning. "Damn, that was good. I'd help, if you wanted. I don't freak kids out near as much as I do the guys."

"I want. You're going to have to come see Jase. Learn how to deal with him." Coke leaned forward, eyes serious. "Andy and me got him on some ranker bulls. He can still ride good; it's the get-off and get out of the way that's a stone cold bitch."

Dillon still couldn't believe that they were planning to get Jason riding in the arena again, but if Coke said he could do it, he could. "I get it. I'm distracto man. The crowd, the other guys. Right?"

"Right. And I think we need to work on how to get him back out the gate. Andy or Aje can take him from there, but it'll be you and me and Nate moving him in the arena."

"Okay. Okay." Dillon pondered that. "We'll have to train him to really pick out sounds. I know this guy back home; he's a teacher who works with blind and deaf kids. I can ask him some questions. He wouldn't have the first clue why."

"Oh, man, that would be cool. Andy and me keep trying to figure shit out, but Jase, he don't want us letting anyone know, so lots of the government stuff is outside what we can figure." Coke said it 'gub'ment'. That was adorable.

It also had him nodding. Hell, he was from Idaho. There were almost as many do it yourself survivalists there as there were in Montana. He understood not wanting traditional assistance. "We can do it."

"Thank you, man." Coke looked suddenly serious. "I mean it. This means a lot to me, getting that boy all set up for the rest of things. He's like a son to me."

"I know. I'm a fan, you know that." He looked Coke straight in the eye, trying to get across how serious he could be, too. "I'm in. Whatever it takes."

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm in it for the long haul." Suddenly he thought maybe -- maybe -- Coke wasn't just talking about Jason anymore.

His heart sped up, his cheeks going hot. He hadn't even let himself think about that, about Coke and him together like that. God knew he wasn't a one night man, but he was used to the leaving. It happened eventually.

"That sounds good, Coke. Really good."

"Yeah." Coke nodded once, like that was that. "Good."

"So." He was grinning so hard his face hurt. "Museum?"

"Hell, yes. We'll go make your hair stand up. I got my camera."

"Well, let's go! I want to see you on the earthquake floor." Dillon grabbed the bill before Coke could and flagged down the waitress. Time to go play.

Chapter Thirteen

He lugged the cooler and let Dillon get the sacks of snacks, leaving the duffels locked in the truck. His ribs were too damn sore to carry using the shoulder straps and they were in clean clothes, showered, and planning on being naked.

Coke had had what was probably the best day of his life. He'd played with Dillon for three hours at the museum, both of them acting like new born fools, then they'd gone shopping, eaten a quick little something, and headed out to work. The bulls were good, the boys were solid and Sam won the event, which good lord knew the man needed bad.

Not only that, but Dillon's backside shook through the whole damn event.

Too fine.

"Man, I might need more sugar." Dillon still looked like his legs were made of springs, though, the way they bounced.

"There's candy and stuff. Or I could walk to the Denny's and get you some pancakes."

"No, candy is good. I like Snickers. M&Ms. Though we should save those for coffee. Hey, you want some coffee?" The man almost skated around the room, touching this and that, hands always moving.

"Sure, honey." He started unpacking, whistling a little under his breath. Jason and Andy had called already, and things were... solid.

Dillon rinsed out the coffee pot (the man said his sister had worked as a hotel maid, and said never, ever use it without) and started opening packets and shit. Lord, look at that smile.

"You did good tonight." He'd said it every night for years; he didn't reckon that was going to change.

"So did you. Didn't get whapped, huh?" He could tell Dillon didn't like it when he'd gotten hit the night before. He hadn't harped on it or anything, but it had come up.

"Nope. Didn't get my shorts in a wad, neither." He touched the stitches on his face. "You reckon Doc'll notice if I take the stitches out before ten days is up?"

"I bet he will." Suddenly right there, Dillon touched his cheek, under the cut. "He did a good job."

He couldn't ignore the little flutter in the pit of his belly. "You don't think it's gonna be Frankensteiny?"

"No. I think it's going to be one of those hot scars. You know, like Raul has on his chin?" Dillon went up on tiptoe and kissed his face.

"Yeah?" His hands landed on Dillon's waist, fingers tracing the scars that were along one side from where Dillon's barrel'd broke.

"Uh-huh. Sexy. A little badge of honor." Their mouths came together, Dillon pressing against him, loving on him.

His cock filled right up, almost hurting where it pushed against his zipper, trying to get to Dillon. The man was like a furnace against him, setting him on fire.

"Mmm. Oh, man. Coke. Babe." Dillon all but crawled up his body, holding on, trying not to hit his bruised shoulder, which he did appreciate.

He couldn't help the little shiver, the soft groan. That was something, that name. "Yeah."

"Come on, babe. Let's get horizontal." Crowding him back, Dillon pushed him to the bed, working away at his clothes.

"I thought you were hungry..." He grabbed Dillon's ass, moaning low. So fucking fine.

"Oh, I want some chocolate. Some coffee. Some Coke, first, though." Dillon crawled on top of him, still dressed to his mostly naked.

"You can have whatever you want, honey. The door's locked and I ain't answering the phone." He spread his legs, cradling Dillon and rocking a little.

"Good. I'm greedy." Yeah. Lord, that mouth. It could talk a mile a minute, and it could latch onto his skin, just like that, Dillon sucking hard on his collarbone.

Oh, sweet Jesus. He felt his eyes rolling as his throat worked. Oh, God. Him and Dan'd loved on each other some, but he'd not ever been with someone so hungry for him. Laughing, Dillon moved up to kiss his mouth, lips and tongue working him over but good. He moaned, one hand sliding up to cup the back of Dillon's head, just hanging on. Dillon bounced on him, jeans rough against his skin, sweet nothings pushing into his mouth. Hot as a two dollar pistol.

Jeans. Off. They should, but. Damn. He pushed his tongue against Dillon's, tongue fucking those hot lips.

They finally broke to breathe, Dillon staring down at him, chest rising and falling hard. "Wow."

"Uh-huh. Jesus, honey, you..." He didn't have any words. Not any good ones.

"Want you."

Now, Dillon's words and actions didn't seem to match up, because the man hopped up like his ass was on fire. He was only going to get the stuff from the store, though.

"You got too many clothes on, honey." Way too many. He wanted to see.

"Oh. Here, hold this." The little bag landed on the bed, and Dillon started stripping off like there was no tomorrow.

He'd have unloaded the little bag, but he got to watching. Dillon shaved his legs and had a smooth, flat little belly, not all fuzzy like him. It was that belly that got him every time. Well, and the ass. Dillon had a nice, solid prick, too.

"I want you." He found himself scooting, hand reaching for Dillon, for that hard cock.

"Well, that's good." Dillon moved close enough for him to reach, moaning when his fingers made contact.

His hand slipped up and down, fingers sliding on the thin skin, trying to imagine the length of it inside him, filling him up.

"Mnh." Dillon didn't look like he was thinking at all, just feeling, loving Coke's hand on him.

Coke hummed softly, thumb rubbing the ridge around the swollen tip, nudging the slit a little.

"Coke!" Grunting, Dillon moved up on the bed, crawling up on him, skin on skin.

"Yeah. Yeah, c'mere." He dragged Dillon closer, moaning as they started rubbing.

"Good. So good." Dillon's cock pushed against his, his hand still there, stroking both of them, somehow. It was damned amazing, but he wanted more.

"Need you, Dillon." He wanted that ass tight around him.

"Okay." Open, generous, Dillon smiled and grabbed the bag of goodies, pulling out the condoms and handing them to him, keeping the lube and struggling to open it. He managed to get the rubber open, slick it down over his aching cock without completely embarrassing himself.

Which was better than a very gooey Dillon had done. The little tube was squished, and there was slick stuff all over.

He looked over, started chuckling softly, tickled and fond. "Lord, lord. We're gonna be like greased pigs, you and me."

"Sorry." That bright grin didn't fade a bit, Dillon using both wet hands to wet down his rubber-covered cock. "This way we won't stick."

"W...works for me. Damn, honey..." He groaned and bucked up, hands landing on Dillon's hips with a slap.

"Oh." Wiggling, Dillon groaned for him, cheeks going even brighter. "Here, have some lube."

"Uh-huh." He slicked his fingers up, sliding back behind Dillon's balls to touch. Oh, God. That was something...

"In. In, in, in." Dillon all but chanted it, begging him, pushing back with that fine ass.

"Don't want to hurt you, honey." His fingers pushed in and he moaned at the squeeze, the clench that Dillon gave him.

"Not hurting. Well, my dick is kinda achy." That laugh made those muscles around his fingers do the most amazing things.

He reached for Dillon's cock, stroking it in time with the pushes of his fingers inside that tight ass.

Dillon's whole body jerked for him, lean muscles flexing under Dillon's skin, which was flushed a deep pink. "More. Oh, babe. More."

"Uh-huh. So pretty. Been wanting." Look at that man. Dillon just made him goddamn crazed.

"Me, too. You know I have." Pushing back, Dillon took more, pushing him to get that hot, tight hole ready.

"I. Please. Please, honey, I gotta know, now." He needed to see Dillon riding him more than he needed to breathe.

"Yeah. Okay, yeah." Crawling up his body, Dillon settled astride his hips, ass pressing against his cock.

His mouth opened and he made himself stay still, stay quiet, so that Dillon could take it nice and easy. Not that Dillon took anything the easy way. No, sir, the man slid right down, taking him all the way, ass landing against Coke's lap.

His shoulders tried to leave the bed, his broken ribs and stiff back reminding him that he wasn't eighteen anymore. Not at all.

"Coke." Dillon held him down, grinning into his eyes. "You let me do the work."

Then the man started moving.

Oh, sweet lord. Yes. He reached for Dillon, adding his strength, too, letting them find a hard, steady rhythm that he could keep up all night. Grunts and soft moans filled the air, Dillon as mouthy as always, urging him on. Those hands were all over him, his chest, his belly, Dillon pulling at his nipples.

He bent his knees, changing the angle until he heard that sound, that gasping, shocked, needy sound that meant that he was right where he needed to be. Dillon went a little crazy, rubbing up and down, taking him in, then letting him almost out, slamming down so he hit that sweet spot every time.

He managed to let go with one hand, get his fingers wrapped around Dillon's cock to squeeze.

"Fuck. Yeah. Babe. That's... harder."

It amused the hell out of him that Dillon liked it a little dirty. A little rough. He groaned and pushed harder, really tugging on that pretty cock, giving Dillon all he had.

"God!" Dillon bit the shout off, but it came out loud and hearty anyway. Then the man came for him, hot spunk spilling over his belly, that ass clamping down on him like to kill him dead.

He humped up a few more times, driving through the pleasure, the pressure, letting the smell of sex and the shocked, wide-eyed look on Dillon's face send him over.

Dillon watched him the whole time, bending to kiss his lips when he stopped shaking. "I'm going to feel you for days."

Didn't that give him a wealth of satisfaction? "Good." Damn good, in fact.

"Mmmhmm." That was an utterly content sound, Dillon sinking down on his chest a moment before laughing, sniffing. "Coffee's ready."

"Mmm. Coffee." He kissed Dillon's temple. "Let me get cleaned up and we'll have a hotel feast."

God, Dillon smelled good.

"Sounds good." Easing off him, Dillon bent down and gave him a proper kiss, lips and tongue hot and wet against his.

Between this and the promise of chocolate in his coffee, Coke reckoned he was heading into an amazing goddamn night.

Chapter Fourteen

Coke leaned back and floated, eyes closed, the water holding his sore-as-fuck back up. He'd tied it up with Ringo and ended up on the wrong end of a hoof. That had been on the second ride of the night and he'd muscled through another forty three.

And four re-rides.

After letting Nate take the stitches out of his goddamn face and then getting shit from Doc, Shaun and Jonesy about it.

Lord, you'd think he was a friggin' underpants model or something, the way they carried on. Squawking cusses.

All the guys had had some celebration thing, but he'd snuck out, not even telling Dillon goodbye. Now his happy ass was in the hotel, in the tub, in the hot water, considering death as a viable option.

The knock came, soft and tentative, not on the outside door but on the bathroom one.

"It's not locked, Dillon. Did you have fun?" He hated to be a party-pooper, but he was getting old.

"It was okay." Dillon bebopped in, standing by the tub and staring at him, all concerned-like. "Face looks good. You gonna make it?"

"I'm taking it under consideration." He reached up, stroking Dillon's thigh. "You had a good night out there. The crowd was rocking." He loved this part and he'd missed it tonight -- the talking about the event, letting Dillon know he watched.

Dillon grabbed his hand and sat on the edge of the tub, kissing his beat up knuckles. "You did some damned good work, babe."

"Mmm. Thanks." That little 'babe' sent a zing through him. His eyes closed, cock filling right up.

"You're welcome." Dillon let go of his hand for a moment, and he heard the sound of cloth hitting the floor, the now-familiar sound of contact solution being squirted into them weird little tube deals. When he opened his eyes, Dillon was dipping his toes in the bathwater.

"Come in?" He held his arms open, wanting himself a touch.

"You bet." Naked and sleek, Dillon slid right into the water with him, kinda floating right on over to him, easing up against him.

"You get yourself something to eat, honey?" Damn, his man smelled good.

"I did. It's all good." They rocked with the water, their bodies touching all up and down, but not hurting.

He let his hands travel, exploring all that skin. "You ready to come home with me for a few days?"

Andy said Jason wasn't in the mood for training, so he and Jase were talking about heading to Miz Scott's. Either that or hanging around and torturing Aje.

"I am. I so am." Dillon chuckled, eyes closing as Coke's hands traveled down to squeeze Dillon's butt. "I'm ready."

"Me, too. We can cook and swim and goof off for a little while." Get to know each other outside the arena and shit.

"Sounds like a plan." It was funny. Dillon could be a hell of a prima donna in the arena, but with Coke he was easy as pie.

He nodded, floating a little, humming underneath his breath as his fingers slid up and down Dillon's spine.

"So what are you going to cook me?" Fingers trailing along his new scars, learning them, petting them, Dillon wiggled a little, getting settled better.

"Mmm. Brisket and chicken wings and pork loin. Banana pudding and brats and borracho chicken." Oh, yeah. "Lots of meat on the grill. There's no better way."

"I like protein. Banana pudding I'm not so sure about." This from the man who loved sugar?

"No? You don't like bananas or pudding?"

"It's the combination." Dillon lowered his voice to a whisper. "The slime."

"Ah. Well, we'll make pie instead." That was easy enough. He liked his bananas.

"I've never had it homemade, though. Just from a buffet."

Huh. That might just be un-American. "Man, that's nasty. You know that, right?" Of course, Dillon lived where it snowed. On purpose.

"I know! Maybe you should make me some." Dillon was leaving a trail of tiny kisses down his neck.

"Okay." Wait, didn't Dillon say he didn't like pudding? Oh. Oh, that felt good.

"I mean, just to see if I like yours better." One of his hands got plucked out of the water, Dillon massaging it for him.

"Uh-huh." Okay. Anything. He was easy.

"You like that, huh?" Those blue eyes twinkled for him, Dillon taking up his other hand to give it the same treatment.

"Like." Hell, it obviously made him stupid.

"Enjoy? Want me to do it some more?"

Turkey.

"Uh-huh." He wanted a lot of stuff. Maybe everything.

"Cool." That lean body shifted, Dillon sitting up so the man could reach more, rubbing at Coke's arms.

He watched the water slide down Dillon's belly. Dillon's smooth, ripped belly. "Look at you."

Dillon glanced down, eyes crossing. "Nope. I'll just look at you instead. I mean, it's way cooler."

"I'm an old man; you're... damn." He stroked along the muscles, touching.

"Stop that. We've discussed it, and decided you are not old." Winking, Dillon bent and kissed him, sending every other thought out of his head. He moaned, lips parting, his heavy five 'clock shadow caught by those lips, the little hairs tugging. Dillon gave and gave, loving on him, kissing and touching until he thought his head might just pop off.

"Dillon." He couldn't breathe, couldn't quite focus. God knew he wasn't hurting any more.

"Right here, babe. Whatever you need."

"You." And wasn't that the God's honest truth.

Drawing back, Dillon stared him right in the eye. "How do you want me?"

"Take me to bed, Dillon. Make love to me." Damn, that made him sound like all sorts of a girl and lord knew he'd never let anyone in before - not Danny, not Adam, no one - but...

Well, hell. This was Dillon.

This was special.

Not only that, he had himself one of them fake cocks at home and he liked that well enough.

"I can do that, babe." Water streamed off Dillon when he stood, holding a hand down to help his tired body up out of the water.

There was a perfect hoof print bruise on his side, dark and black and u-shaped, the blood dotting the skin as they dried each other off.

"Oh, fuck, Coke. You've got to be hurting." Dillon blotted at the damned thing gently, barely brushing at the bruise.

"I was. I'm better now." He was damn near perky.

Head tilting, Dillon paused to consider that, then nodded. "Well, okay then. I get to fuss after, though."

"I can handle that. I'll let you and not bitch a word." He'd even like it, if Dillon'd give him what he needed first.

"Woo." They stepped out of the tub, and once they were out of the slick, wet bathroom, Dillon started hauling him like a tugboat with a barge. "Mine, mine, mine."

"You're sure about that, are you?" He was chuckling, happy deep down.

"Pretty sure." All of a sudden Dillon looked a little unsure. "I mean, you said you were keeping me."

"For as long as you'll have me, cowboy." He stepped right up close, all laughter stopped. "This ain't no little thing for me, sir. Not at all." He'd be Dillon's until Dillon wanted something else and then he'd count himself lucky for what he'd had.

"God." He landed on the bed hard when Dillon tackled him, kissing his chin, his cheeks. His mouth. The kiss liked to pop the top of his head right off. Boom. God help him, he didn't want it to stop. It didn't for a long while, Dillon only pulling back long enough to breathe before diving back in. Oral man. Everything faded away -- bulls and bruises and all. All he was left with was Dillon and the scratchy coverlet.

Those lean hands smoothed over his skin, thumbs rubbing at his nipples, fingers finding the hollows of his hipbones. They even went over his back so Dillon could trace the heavy, ropy scars from his surgery, petting each and every one. They drove him higher all the time, until he was flying.

Coke found himself spread and shifting, moaning like a fool, begging wordlessly for this whole thing not to stop. Dillon finally started moving down, licking at his neck, sucking at the tiny mark that seemed to be ever present on his collarbone. Avoiding the bruised side, Dillon worked down, licking at his nipple, nibbling at his hip.

"Damn. Damn, honey. Need you something fierce." His hands creaked as he opened and closed them.

"Anything you want, Coke. I swear. Anything." Dillon glanced up, eyes shining at him for a moment. Then the man started working on his cock.

Fuck him. He opened his mouth to holler, but nothing came out, just a shaky, needy little moan.

Lips and tongue pressed against him, Dillon licking him up and down before sucking strongly at the tip. The man needed to pick up Hoover as a sponsor. Coke reached out, fingertips brushing through the soft, shaggy hair, loving on Dillon right back, the best he could. Humming, Dillon moved up and down, sucking from tip to base and back again. God, that was good. Warm fingers traced his belly, his thighs, working their way down to his balls.

Spreading out a little, Coke forced himself not to tense at all. It was easier than he'd thought it might be, because it was Dillon touching, Dillon letting him feel all this. Those fingers stroked him gently, rolling his balls. Then Dillon pressed two fingers behind them, right on that strip of skin that no one had ever touched, pushing, testing.

His eyes popped open -- hell, he hadn't even known they were closed. Electricity shot up his spine and his toes curled. "Oh, damn. Again."

Dillon pulled off his prick with a wet pop. "Here?" Dillon had calluses. Who knew? They brushed against that tiny patch of skin, making his nerves scream.

"Uhn. Uh-huh." His legs shook a little, heels digging into the sheets.

"Hot. Your skin is so hot, Coke." Pushing his thighs farther apart, Dillon lifted his ass with both hands and put that hot mouth right on the same strip of skin.

"Oh, dear Lord..." He was gonna light afire, right here, just burst into flames.

Licking, kissing, Dillon worked him over but good, that tongue moving over him, wet and right. Got even better when Dillon bent a little more and licked at his hole.

His balls drew up tight, and his cock slapped his belly. God damn. God *damn*.

"Mmm." The sound vibrated against his skin, Dillon giving him what for, tongue pushing right inside. Inside him.

He went a little crazy, hips bouncing and rocking, the bedsprings ringing. He'd never.

Not *ever*.

God damn, he was going to do it again, though.

One of Dillon's hands closed around his cock, stroking up and down, and he didn't think he was going to make it to the actual ride. He was just gonna explode.

"Oh. Oh, damn." He started panting, moaning low. "I'll... You're going to make me..."

"Mmmhmm." Coke could feel Dillon smile against him, Could damned well feel it against his skin.

He sorta chuckled, sorta groaned, then Dillon started stroking him again and his balls drew up. It'd take a better man than him to hold off. One finger slipped inside him, Dillon pushing deep but not hurting, that sweet mouth easing the way.

"Oh..." Coke let his eyes fall shut, let himself sink into it.

A low moan echoed against his skin, Dillon pushing him and pushing him, making it feel so damned good he wanted to scream. That man had talent.

"Gonna keep you. Damn. Damn, honey. Please." He never babbled. Never.

Not 'til now.

Dillon eased away, popping up after he let go, reaching for the stuff in the bag by the bed. "Is this okay, Coke? I... I want to."

"I want you. C'mon." He nodded, kept himself spread and relaxed.

"Oh, good." This time Dillon didn't have one bit of trouble with the lube, getting it open and getting those long fingers wet.

This little sound escaped him, and if he hadn't been so damn horny, it'd've embarrassed him.

The grin he got was wide and white, Dillon nodding. "Yeah. Me, too. Okay, gonna get you ready."

Luckily, he was already pretty ready, and Dillon's fingers slid in like nothing going. Coke found himself moving, riding the touch like he was made for it, rocking up and down and making the

springs sing. Dillon watched him like he was made of gold, those pretty eyes like blue fire. Those fingers moved inside him, searching, curling, and lightning shot through him, making him shout.

He groaned, eyes rattling in their sockets like thrown dice. "Oh, honey. Honey, *damn*."

"Smell so good. Feel so hot. I have to..." Those fingers went away, and Dillon fumbled for a minute, finally coming up with a condom, striking a pose after it was on that made him laugh out loud.

Didn't keep it from being hot when Dillon muscled between his legs, though, settling into place.

His legs fit right nice over Dillon's, the man solid under him, hot as a tin roof in August. That long prick nudged at him, Dillon holding him open good and wide, sliding in a scant inch at a time. Then the man was in him, like his body had sucked Dillon's cock right inside. Like it was meant to work that way.

"Oh." Oh, damn. So much better than slick plastic. So right.

"Uh-huh." Dillon stopped right there a minute, face red, puffing like he'd made one of his famous runs to the very top of the bleachers. "Coke. God, you're tight."

He nodded, swallowing around the lump in his throat. "I ain't never, not with a person, I mean. So good."

He got this weird, waggly-eyebrow look, but Dillon didn't say nothin', just started moving, holding his hips tight and sliding in and out. It was the most amazing thing ever. He reached out, hand sliding around Dillon's waist. He needed to touch.

Dillon blinked, sucking in a deep breath. "Oh, feels good. You're fucking amazing, Coke. I just... damn."

"Yeah." He nodded, hand trailing up, counting ribs, touching a nipple.

A short, sharp thrust answered that touch, Dillon losing his perfect rhythm for a moment. Someone liked that. Coke felt it in the way Dillon throbbed deep inside him. Coke focused, petting the little dark nipple, then pinching, seeing what Dillon needed.

The pinch had Dillon crying out, that blond head falling back, Dillon's hips setting a hard pace now. "More. Oh, Coke. More."

"Yeah. Yeah, honey." Look at that. Oh, sweet Jesus, look at that man. He shook with it, his rough old fingers pinching hard, tugging as best he could.

"Fuck." Those eyes went wide, Dillon's hips popping once, twice more, and then that was all she wrote. The man was coming for him, reaching down to grab Coke's cock like it was the only solid thing in the world.

Dillon pulled once, twice, then that thumb rubbed the tip hard, just like he liked it and he squeezed hard, working Dillon's cock inside him. Muscles jumping and twitching, Dillon pulled at him, moaning long and loud. Lord love him, he'd be scaring the neighbors soon. It seemed to take for fucking *ever* to come, but when he did, he did it with everything he was, bones rattling with it.

"That's it, babe. Look at you." Smiling down at him, Dillon leaned a little, belly pressing against his so they could have a nice, sloppy kiss.

He moaned happily into the kiss, tongue fucking Dillon's lips.

They both sort of melted, their bodies relaxing against one another. Dillon hummed, kissing his chin. "That was a hell of a ride, babe."

"You know it. Perfect." He held on, petting some, fighting the urge to just doze off. "You are free to fuss and fret now."

"I'll have to have a nap and some sugar, but then you can count on fussing." They were kind of settling into a routine. It was as fun as it was a little scary.

"Mmm. I bought you Snickers, just like you like."

"Oh, you rock. I love the nuts." Cackling, Dillon rolled off him, sliding gently out of his body. "I like your nuts, too."

"Good." He reached out, stroked Dillon's cheek. "I can't wait to get you home."

"Yeah? I'm looking forward to seeing you in your pool." That cheek was hot and damp under his palm, flushed from their round of gymnastics.

"You know it. Pool. Hot tub. My bed."

"Mmm. I like beds. You'd probably like mine, too. You can't come when it's cold, though. Well, unless I keep you inside and warm."

"I reckon we could find things to do."

"I could bundle you up like the Michelin man, take you riding. I bet you'd like the mountains in the snow." Sounded pretty, even if his joints would hate it.

"We've got the long break. There's only so much I can do with Jase, you know."

"I know." Forehead wrinkled up with thought, Dillon lay there for a minute, as quiet and still as he ever was. "I'll need to work with him in the arena. Start small in AJ's ring."

"Yeah. We'll bring Nate, too. Get it down. We can't let the fucking sponsors know, you know?"

"I know." Dillon nodded once, kissing his cheek. "I've got your back. We'll keep it quiet. God knows it's not like I can't say I need practice in the barrel."

"We'll all need practice. Shit, we'll need luck more than that." He chewed on his bottom lip. God, this whole thing was all landing on his head. Hell, it was his idea.

"Yeah, but I mean it won't look weird if it's my whim, asking you and Nate to come somewhere and practice with me."

He nodded. "It couldn't hurt any of us, to get things better practiced." Hell, Dillon needed to keep himself safer.

"Well, that's a date, then, but we'll have holidays." Grinning, Dillon snuggled back in, like it was all settled.

"We will." We. Coke liked the sound of that.

"Cool." Dillon was quiet so long that Coke thought he'd fallen asleep. Then that blond head lifted off his shoulder and Dillon smiled for him. "Wanna share my Snickers?"

Chapter Fifteen

Dillon liked Coke's place. A few acres of land, a simple ranch house with non-breakable furniture, pictures hung everywhere on the living room wall from twenty-three years of cowboy protection. A pool.

Oh, what a pool. Dillon hadn't even been in it and he could write odes to it. Two tiers of water, rough cut stone all around, solid lounges propped up and tied to the fence to save them from the Texas wind. There was an outdoor kitchen set up that made some kitchens he'd seen look paltry. Hell, Coke'd shown him the thing like it was a new baby - running water, a fridge, a smoker, everything. And that didn't even count the hot tub.

Oh, sweet Jesus, that amazing hot tub.

They just had to wait for the filter to cycle through, and they could go in.

He couldn't wait.

Bouncing a little, he made another circle of the living room, dancing a little, just because it felt good. He wondered if Coke had weights. He hadn't seen the whole house yet. If not, he'd put on some music and run in circles or something. A clown had to stay in shape.

"You want the tour, honey?" The bags were still waiting, the air conditioner starting to whirr, cool the place down. Coke pointed to a big old wardrobe-looking thing, hulking and dark in the corner near the bay window. "That's where the movies live. I got a lot of them, 'cause we don't have cable and I gotta do something with that big assed TV that Beau give me."

"Yeah? Do you have popcorn or will we have to shop?" Dillon bounced over and kissed Coke right on the mouth, grinning into those surprised eyes.

"I. I have popcorn, but we'll need real food." Coke's hands landed on his hips, strong as all get out. "I seem to remember a request for hot wings."

"Oh, yeah. You said you could *make* them. I didn't know you could do that." Swaying, he rubbed a little, happy as a pig in shit.

"I can. I got the great barbeque thing." Yeah, as simple as Coke's house was, that patio was swanky, huge fans, a long dining table, cushioned chairs, pool of joy. Hot tub.

It bore thinking about over and over. Coke. Hot tub. Nakedness.

Roorrrrwwl.

Grinning, he bumped their hips together. "So. What does your bed look like?"

"It's big and it's remote controlled for when I'm stiff. The Taggarts brought it for me. Grab your bags, honey. I'll show you 'round."

A remote control bed. That had serious possibilities. Especially if Coke was stiff... Woo. He grabbed his duffel and followed, staring curiously at everything.

There were photos all over the walls in every room, not just the one -- family and folks he knew from the tour, something that looked like a baby Coke. Too damned cute.

Coke showed him the bright, white and yellow kitchen with its little round table and ancient old chairs with Texas flags painted on the back. There was a long hallway, then what Coke called the blue room, the guest bed and bath, as normal and simple and neat as could be. The office was next -- with a little writing desk and a big assed weight machine and one of those inverter deals that hanged you upside down, stereo speakers on the wall.

He didn't offer to put his bag in the blue room. No, sir. He was holding out for the master. Oh, yeah. The master took up half of the house, with a big-assed bed, a whirlpool tub, a flat screen TV that put the one in the living room to shame. Oh, now. Look at this. It was like sensualist heaven.

"You could... There's room in the closet and dresser for you, if you want, honey..."

"I do want. I want all sorts of stuff." Look at that blush. Coke was a joy, and Dillon figured he needed to remember to slow up a little. They'd come a long way really fast.

"Well, then. There's nothing but a couple boxes on the right hand side of the chest of drawers." Coke's hand slid over his back, almost feather light. "Make yourself at home, son. You're welcome here."

"Coke, we've talked about you calling me son." That just wasn't gonna work. Pressing his leg against Coke's crotch, Dillon leaned close for another kiss. To prove he wasn't feeling childlike.

"Mmm. Force of habit, cowboy." Coke leaned closer, stubble tickling his lips before one soft kiss turned into a second long, deep kiss.

"Damn. You feel good." This was surreal. Here, in Coke's house, finally getting what he'd wanted. Again.

"I do. This is like a damn dream." Those hands were fascinated by his ass. It rocked.

"A good one, right?" Dillon pushed his ass back, let Coke get a good grip.

Those fingers dug in, squeezing him good and firm. "Yeah. Yeah, Dillon."

"We could go get groceries a little later. Occupy ourselves while we wait for the pool to filter." Only if Coke wasn't too sore from driving.

"We could." Coke's tongue slid along his bottom lip, slow and sexy as could be.

Oh, yay. Wrapping his arms around Coke's neck, Dillon nibbled, his tongue teasing Coke back. They scooted toward the bed, one slow step after another, taking it slow.

Coke's legs hit the bed first, the quilts sliding a little, and Dillon held on, just to make sure the man kept his balance. He didn't want anything to ruin this. He got a quick little grin and Coke settled, drawing him down onto Coke's lap.

"Hi there." Straddling he was good at, even if he wasn't a bullrider. He used his thigh muscles a lot more than twenty-four seconds a weekend. Dillon kissed Coke's lower lip, pulling at it a tiny bit with his teeth before heading to kiss that jagged scar that was starting to lose its puff and bruise.

"Mmm. Hey." He felt Coke jerk beneath him, felt the way those strong muscles went tight. "You're so fine."

"Yeah? Most of the guys think I'm silly." That was okay, too, but damn it was nice to know Coke thought he was good to look at. To rub on.

"No. No. So damn hot." Oh. Oh, yeah. That, ladies and gents? That was a possessive, horny little growl that was all his.

"You're a stud, Coke." There was not a bit of irony there. He really thought Coke was the shit. Dillon rewarded the growl with another kiss, then another. Coke worked his T-shirt up, baring his belly, fingers sliding right down to play with his short hairs.

Damn. All of a sudden he was shaking, his hands scrabbling at Coke's clothes. Slow and easy wasn't an option anymore.

"Mmm." He got himself a low, happy groan, Coke's chest bared for him, wide and solid, a spatter of little bruises across the collarbone.

Dillon kissed each bruise, licking his way across the fuzzy expanse, then down so he could suck a little on one nipple. So pretty. So hard with muscle.

"Oh. Oh, damn. Honey..." Coke started vibrating for him, that tiny bit of flesh going stiff for him.

"You're the hottest thing I've ever seen, babe." Biting a little made Coke moan more, made that hard body jerk. It was addictive.

"Dillon. Dillon, honey..." Coke started working his belt open, hunting his fly. Every movement made Coke's pecs jerk and shiver.

"Uh-huh. Love the way you taste." Nuzzling right in, Dillon worked Coke's nipples back and forth, loving the sounds Coke made, jonesing on the way those little brown nipples went rock hard.

"You're gonna set me off. You... Your mouth." Coke growled at him, then rough, callused fingers wrapped around his cock.

"Your hands." He leaned a minute, his brain on overload while he pushed into Coke's hand. That man's calluses had calluses.

"Uh-huh. Look at you." Coke's eyes burned down at him, that hand working him so good that he could scream.

Dillon broke away from that stare just long enough to do what Coke told him. He looked down and saw Coke's hand around him, the tip of his cock appearing and disappearing, Coke's grip so good that his slit made an 'o' with each thrust up. It made him cry out, his back arching hard.

"Shit, yeah." Coke nodded, free hand catching him, solid as a rock. "I got you."

"I... you do. Christ." His hips rocked and rolled like he was out in the arena, dancing his ass off, but thank God he wasn't. This would make the newspapers. Coke was going to drive him into utter fucking insanity. That hand kept moving and moving, thumb nudging the tip on every upstroke.

"Coke. Babe." Wasn't he supposed to be doing something? "Oh, God. Right there."

"Like this?" That thumb pushed again, nail barely snagging him, just enough to make him catch his breath.

"Like that. Oh... Damn." That was. Yeah. Woo. He was flying.

"Yeah. Yeah, honey." Coke just gave it up for him, rubbing him hard, harder.

Dillon moaned and wiggled and humped, riding that hand for all he was worth. Jesus, he'd never been so fast off the mark. Never. Not until Coke.

Of course, no one'd ever stared at him like Coke did, like he was a pure magic. No one had ever touched his cock like they had to, like they might die if they didn't. Just Coke. The last pull from base to tip had him pushing and grunting, coming like a ton of bricks.

When that heavy, callused hand lifted up, though, and Coke licked it clean -- he could have come again.

Dillon sagged against Coke's body, holding on tight. "God Almighty. You... Damn."

"Uh-huh." All flushed, panting, Coke was shifting against him.

His hand moved, shaking a little, but moving, and he pushed against Coke's fly, thumb dragging up and down. "Hot."

"Yeah. Yeah, honey. For you, huh?"

"Good." Good thing he had stamina. Breath control. Good muscles. Because Jesus, he was melted. Still, he could do for Coke; he wouldn't leave the man hanging.

Coke leaned back, wincing a little as he landed on the bed.

"You okay, babe? You need something else massaged before I ride you into oblivion?" There was no way he was gonna do this if Coke was hurting. They could just go take a shower.

"I'm good. Just a little stiff." Coke chuckled, eyes rolling a little. "Pun intended."

"Mmm. 'Kay. Now, you said something about lube?" He worked at Coke's clothes, wanting them gone.

"I did. You see that little drawer? It's in there. I'll get it."

"Nope. I got it." He was facing forward anyway. Dillon scrambled, opening the little drawer and kind of staring. Just a little.

There was well-used tube of KY and a dildo all wrapped up in a plastic bag (which, okay, gave him joy). Better than that, there was a picture. Of him.

Coke slid away from him, and when he looked, the man was flushed dark red.

"I'm sorry, cowboy. I told you... I been looking."

Oh. God almighty. His cock jumped, thinking about Coke jacking off to him. For him. That little blush made it... Uhn. "Why are you sorry, babe?" Crawling back over, Dillon patted Coke's chest.

"I just... it makes me feel like a perv. I just... You make me all..." Coke gestured to that hard, heavy cock. Yeah. Yeah, he did that.

"You do it to me, too. So where's the perv?" That deserved a kiss. Oh, yes it did. Dillon took one, loving on the man.

Coke opened up to him, moaning right into his lips, relaxing for him. Jesus, Coke wanted him better than anyone had. Licking at that scarred lower lip, Dillon got the condom open, got it on Coke, listening to the best moans ever.

"I want you... something fierce." Coke pushed up into his touch, panting into his mouth. "You... Let me watch you get slick? It might kill me, but it'd be a perfect way to go."

"Might kill you? We don't want that, but I do want you to watch." Lube. Fingers. Ass. He could do this. He was flexible.

Coke's hand wrapped around his cock, rubbing on it, jacking him nice and easy, encouraging him to fill up again, to get on the pony and ride. The whole while, he could feel those eyes, watching him. Reaching back, he pushed two fingers inside his body, moaning as his back arched, the scrape and burn of it surprising him. It had been awhile.

"Dillon..." He'd never heard his name sound quite like that.

He hoped he'd hear it again and again. That look on Coke's face was like fucking paradise. Dillon rode his fingers, pushing himself, wanting on that sweet cock. Coke's hips were moving in time with his fingers, humping the air a little, pushing up with each thrust. It made Dillon drool, which sounded gross, but there it was. Made him pull his fingers free and straddle Coke's body, too, ready to go.

"Please. Please, honey. Tell me you're ready."

"I am. I am so, so ready. Come on, babe." His back arched, and he bore down, ready to take Coke in. Hell, he rose up, settled himself right *there*.

Coke got lined up, one hand on his hip and easing him down, one hand reaching up to cup his jaw. "Now, then."

That heavy cock pushed in, stretching him wide. Nodding right into that touch, he moved his hips, wiggling a little to get comfy. The shift sent pleasure slamming through him so he almost screamed with it.

"Oh." Coke's eyes rolled a bit, but that hand on his hip stayed strong and steady.

"Uh-huh. I... Wow." That was inadequate as hell, but it would have to do. He needed his breath for moving.

They got to rocking, Coke's hands both getting in on the action, moving him up and down like he was feather-light.

"Strong." Dillon remembered that he could do some serious riding of his own, and he set to making Coke crazy. Oh, yeah.

Coke grunted for him, eyes locked on him, staring him down like he was the center of the fucking earth. Moaning, he braced on that wide chest, loving on the man, his fingers finding the tiny nipples and pulling at them.

"Dillon." Oh, he did love a man who needed, who felt as much as Coke did.

"Yeah, Coke. More. Yeah." Up. Down. Wiggle. Hoo, yeah. Dillon went to town, giving it his all.

"Gonna. Oh, honey. I cain't hold off..." That was the tightest belly he'd ever seen.

"So don't." That way he could act like he wasn't about to go off like a firecracker.

He got one of those grins -- wide and wild and pure happy -- then Coke started pulling him down harder and faster, fucking him but good.

His head fell back and he humped, his hand falling to his cock to pull. "Coke. Damn. Yeah."

"Dillon. Fuck. Now." Coke growled, cock swelling, throbbing inside him.

"Christ!" everything in him boiled over and he came like crazy, hot come spreading on Coke's amazing belly.

Coke pulled him down into a kiss that went on and on forever.

"Mmm. You rock my socks, Coke." Did he still have his socks on? That might be tacky, especially if they were the skull and crossbones ones.

"Uh-huh." Coke stroked his back, up and down. "So damn good, honey."

"You know it." He leaned, his eyelids drooping. He should take out his contacts. "You tell me when the pool is ready."

"I will. You just rest now. I got you."

"Okay." There was something about Coke that was as comforting as it was sexy, and Dillon let himself go boneless.

They could go float later.

Chapter Sixteen

Coke turned the burgers, humming a little under his breath and letting the sun beat on his bare shoulders. Dillon was sleeping hard and Coke hated to wake the man, so he'd potted.

He'd got the pool cleaned and the salt levels in the water set. Sprayed the cedar off the a/c unit. Swept the ceramic tiles. Dusted some.

Oiled the four wheelers.

Chased a copperhead out of the smoker.

Started burgers.

All-in-all, he was wearing down and feeling righteous, all at once.

Especially since he kept wandering by his bedroom door and looking to see Dillon in his bed, his granny's quilts all bunched up around that fine fucking body.

Damn.

On his last pass-by, he found Dillon with the covers thrown off, ass up and head down, snuffling a little. Oh, God, that was cute. Not to mention that Dillon's ass was enough to give a man palpitations.

He put the two plates of burgers and tater tots aside on his little bedside table, then did what he'd been needing to - fingers sliding, careful as could be, over that tight, sweet ass.

"Mmm. Coke..." Dillon wasn't even awake, and the man was moaning his name. It was like really good porn, if such a thing existed.

"Mmmhmm." He leaned down, the tip of his tongue barely tickling the top of Dillon's crease. This was what fantasies were made of.

"Oh. Hey." Pushing up, Dillon looked over his shoulder, sleepy eyes warm and happy. "Something smells good. 'Course, you feel better."

"Hamburgers. You hungry?" He licked again, humming low at the salt and musk.

"Uh... Is that a trick question?" Up, down, Dillon's hips worked against him, giving him a feast.

"Nope." His fingers worked the little strip of skin behind Dillon's balls, tongue sliding down.

"Oh... Coke. Babe. I. What were we talking about?" That lean body was working, Dillon's back arching, muscles moving smoothly under bare skin.

He shivered, tongue teasing Dillon's hole. Fuck, that made him all gaspy, when Dillon called him that.

Spreading wider, Dillon gave him everything. That tight hole, those heavy balls, all of it was just there for the taking. He took it -- all of it. He licked here and sucked there, fingers and tongue all working together to love on Dillon, explore the man and get more of those hungry sounds.

"Coke." Dillon sounded like he'd swallowed a frog, and the prettiest flush was starting to stain that pretty skin, dark pink and amazing.

It was all for him and he moaned, spreading Dillon with his thumbs, letting his tongue push in. His.

Heck, Dillon had done it for him, and he wanted to see if Dillon liked it, too. Looked as though like was a pretty mild word. Coke groaned, pushing harder, giving Dillon everything he could, wetting that tight hole because, God help him, he wanted in. Again.

"Come on, Coke! Faster." Those strong legs moved restlessly, Dillon pushing up and up into his touches, against his mouth.

He pushed harder, faster, but only for a minute because then he needed some, needed in, and he pushed up, cock nudging Dillon's hole. "Let me?"

"In. Yeah. Come on, Coke." Wiggling, Dillon groaned, the noise low and happy and needy.

"Uh-huh." He pushed forward, moaning low, then his eyes flew open. "Oh, fuck. Condom. Sorry, I..."

"Shh. S'okay. I promise." Well, Dillon wouldn't lie to him none, and he knew he was good. Doc insisted on testing.

"I'm sorry, honey, but I wouldn't hurt you. I swear to you." His hips rocked, the sensation around his cock the most perfect thing ever.

"I know that. Dork." Reaching back, Dillon grabbed his hip, pulling him closer, tighter. Moving him faster. Greedy man.

"Not a dork." He wrapped his hands around Dillon's waist, dragging the man back onto him, harder and faster.

"Uh-huh. Sure." That laughter made everything better, bright and breathless and happy. Dillon moved like he was dancing, grinding and bumping back on him.

Pushing in deep, he searched for that spot that would move Dillon from laughing to groaning.

"Oh!" That was it. He could feel the zing that went through Dillon, could feel the muscles around his cock clamp down. Without the rubber it was inferno hot, every little movement making him crazy.

He bit down hard on his bottom lip, focusing on hitting that same spot over and over.

"Coke. Jesus fuck!" Dillon's back arched, the line of the man's spine almost elegant looking, sweat rolling down the smooth skin.

"So pretty." He groaned and grunted, his back screaming at him. He wasn't going to stop, though, no fucking way. It was too good.

Dillon rose up a little, reaching down to stroke himself. That changed the rhythm, got them going faster, got Dillon squeezing down on him.

Oh, sweet Jesus, he was fixin' to blow like some Hawaiian volcano deal.

"I... Oh. Damn." Dillon bucked, almost throwing him off, and he could smell it when Dillon came. Boom.

Thank God. He closed his eyes, head rolling as he whimpered, balls drawing tight. Oh, fuck yes. So good. Around him. He only had a moment to hope that he was only babbling inside his head as he came, his bones rattling.

Flopping down, Dillon groaned, mumbling something about his sheets. Which, yeah, they might need to change soon.

He nodded, humming softly, too melted to move.

"You okay, Coke?" Those blue eyes met his when Dillon strained to look over his shoulder.

"Uh-huh." Better than.

"Mmm. Man, that was hot. Uh. Is it terrible to say that I'm starving? Something smells good."

"I made burgers. Tater tots. Right there." He motioned to the plate. He wasn't sure he could move.

"Dude. You rock." Somehow Dillon wiggled out from under him like a landed fish or some such, bounding out of bed, everything bouncing. "I'll get us a beer. You stay here. Rest. Be right back!"

He nodded, stared for half a second.

Old.

He was really old.

Really.

Chapter Seventeen

Dillon struck a pose on the diving board, loving that Coke had a real pool, like in ground, and all the stuff that went with it. Once he made sure he had Coke's attention, he bounced a few times and dove in, showing off a little. The belly flop for laughs had been tempting, but he was naked, and that might hurt the business.

He popped up to the sound of applause, Coke stopping to watch and hoot. The man was like magic in the water -- relaxed and flexible, moving like a teenager.

That was worth any amount of red skin. Speaking of which... "Time to put on more sunscreen."

"Already? Cool." He'd discovered that his own personal bullfighter was exceptional at lubing him up, not to mention satisfyingly eager about doing the job. He'd also discovered that salt water pools were way easier on the eyes.

"Hey, I might be tan by the time we get back to work." Probably not, but it was worth a try.

"Maybe. I'll make sure to keep you oiled up." Coke grabbed the lotion. "Out of the water, honey."

"Okay," This was his favorite part. Dillon hauled his white ass out of the pool and headed to one of the fancy lounge chairs. Coke hummed softly, straddling him, the heavy cock snuggled right against his thighs. Then the rubbing and touching and coconut-smelling good started.

Dillon moaned, letting Coke touch him, soaking up the sun and the heat from that sturdy body. Damn. Good. Coke's hands worked him hard, thumbs sliding up and down his spine. It made his toes curl, made his back arch, and he hummed with it, letting Coke know it was good. Really good.

"You're hot, honey." Coke leaned forward, kissed his shoulder.

"I am. Oh. I mean, yes, it's hot, but if you think I'm attractive, then that's good, too." Shut. Up. Dillon.

Coke snorted. "Honey, I think you're the finest thing the good Lord ever put on earth."

His cheeks heated, along with everything else he had, and Dillon found himself grinning, wiggling. "Yeah? Well, that's good, I guess. I mean, since I'm stupid about you."

"Is that good?" Coke scooted down, rubbing the sunscreen into his ass.

"Yes." That was so damned good it was almost obscene. His hips started a slow roll, his butt pushing right up.

Coke's thumbs spread his thighs, just a little, working the lotion into the crease where thighs met ass, into the tight strip of skin behind his balls.

"Damn. Oh, damn." He was starting to shake, his skin rising up with goose bumps. "Right there, Coke."

"Yeah? I can do that, honey." Fuck yeah, Coke could.

And did.

Over and over.

By the time the sunscreen was good and absorbed, Dillon was moaning and thrusting, his cock caught between his belly and the chair. Coke, the asshole, moved down, doing his legs, his feet. It didn't seem to matter, though. Not really. Every little touch made him tingle.

"Gotta do the rest, honey." Coke's thumbs slid over his arches.

"The wha'?" Oh. The front. Oh, yum. He flipped like a pancake, letting Coke have him.

Coke started at the bottom, massaging his calves, his knees, then the insides of his thighs. His cock was standing at hard attention, his balls all pulled up from Coke breathing on him, touching him. "You've got good hands."

"Thank you. You look... Damn." Coke's fingers got to his balls, slicking them, stretching them out, a little bit.

"Like a greased pig?" That was so not sexy, but he needed to back it down or he'd come. Right now.

"Nope." The tip of his cock got a thump -- not hard enough to hurt, but hard enough to drive him out of his mind.

His eyes rolled back in his head, his hips pushing up and up. "Coke..."

"Mmmhmm?" More lotion was squirted on his belly, his prick, one hand rubbing up along his abs, the other fingers wrapping around prick.

"Making me crazy." The sun beat down on his belly and chest, the cool lotion giving him the best kind of shivers. It was Coke who really made him crazy, though.

"Good. Slicking you up, honey." Those hands kept working him.

"Uh. Uh-huh. Gonna do me, Coke?" Dillon spread his legs, pushing up, showing off. His cock pushed through Coke's hand, begging more.

"Think I am, honey. After you're all protected from that there sun."

"Oh. I can help." He held his hand down, letting Coke squirt some lotion on it. He rubbed it up over his chest, really getting into the spirit of it, pinching his nipples right up.

Coke moaned, lips parting, eyes hot on him. "Damn, Dillon..."

"You're not lubing, babe." He grinned, panting, writhing on the damned lounge.

"Sorry. Sorry, I got distracted." Hell, yeah. Coke's hand tightened, working his prick again.

"I know! What's up with that?" Not that he wasn't hellacious distracted, too. He rubbed the last of the lotion into his skin before reaching for Coke, stroking the man's neck. "We should get you up here, so it's more comfy. I can ride."

He knew from the corded muscles under his hand that Coke would be hurting some, holding himself up. "You can come in the water, honey."

"Oh, that's a good idea." That weightless thing worked so good for Coke. He needed to remember that.

Coke finished his shoulders, his arms, then swiped lotion over his cheeks and nose. "Let's do it."

"Okay." He rolled up and planted a sloppy kiss on Coke's mouth before slipping off into the water. Letting Coke chase him a little.

Coke, though, the man could move, sliding into the water and moving toward him like a shark, cutting through the water. Sweet. Dillon wasn't that good a swimmer. Good, but not that good. Took Coke no time to grab him and pull him close, and he hung on and let himself be caught.

"Hey." Coke moaned for him as their skin rubbed together. "You got no idea how bad I been wanting to try this."

"Hey, I'm all about trying stuff." His legs wrapped around Coke's waist, his arms around those amazing shoulders, and he took a kiss, lips and tongue begging for Coke to let him in.

Coke groaned and opened right up, holding him up, rocking them together like he weighed nothing. One hand was on his ass; the other one was on the back of his neck, tugging him closer.

The cool water made his skin feel like it was steaming hot, which was a delicious contrast. Coke shifted him so that Coke's prick rubbed all along his crease, the head nudging him, over and over.

"Damn. Damn. Coke. How can we... I need you in me." He clutched at Coke's slick skin, trying to get closer.

Coke shifted him, tilted him until that hard cock nudged him, just a little. Oh, yeah. He bore down, opening up as best he could. He'd let Coke in, just like that. In a heartbeat. The touch scratched all the way in, so good, Coke pushing in little, random rocking motions.

"Coke!" His body clamped right down, trying to keep Coke out for a desperate moment before letting him in until they were fused together. The water lapped at his shoulders, wetting his hair when he put his head back, his eyes staring up at nothing.

"I got you. I got you, honey. Fuck, but you're hot." Coke was breathing like a bellows, arms and legs like iron bars where they held him up.

"Me? Gonna make the water steam, Coke. You're amazing." His hips were moving of their own volition, going in little circles, his ass bouncing.

Coke chuckled, took a couple steps into the deeper water, then leaned forward and kissed him so hard that he might as well be drowning. They almost submerged, but Coke's strong legs kept them up, and the tiny spike of panic only made his heart beat faster. His cock knew better. It trusted Coke enough to get even harder. His own personal bullfighter never even wavered. Coke found his balance and took him like a fucking machine, the water giving that poor back the buoyancy it needed. All of it, the sun and water and Coke's body against his, it all conspired to make him shake. He kissed Coke with all he had, lips bruising right up.

Those hazel eyes looked deep into him, Coke moaning into their kiss.

"Mmmhmm." Yeah. Like that. Dillon started working with the water moving enough that it slapped him back against Coke in waves.

Coke's hands wrapped around his waist, adding that strength to his and to the water's. They rocked, both of them breathing hard now, his ass on fire, his legs shaking. Dillon was so close. So close. He just needed a little friction.

"Come on. Touch your cock, honey. I wanna see." Coke's cheeks were dark red, the words whispered.

"Yeah." Leaning back and letting the water carry him, Dillon reached down and grabbed his prick, stroking it hard and fast. He wanted Coke to have a show.

"Dillon. Oh, Christ." Coke whimpered softly, hips smacking his ass, the water splashing.

"Coke. Coke. Gonna fly." He loved that. Loved the way Coke looked just before he came. Dillon grunted, his cock jerking madly in his fist.

"Come for me, honey. Need it." He believed that, too. One hundred percent.

So he did. He came so hard he drew blood biting his lip, his body rocking like a kiddy tub toy on a good bath night. Coke was fucking amazing.

"Mmm." He could feel Coke's prick, jerking inside him, the strong arms never wavering.

Dillon let the last tremors wash through him, let Coke have everything he needed. Lord, that felt good.

"Oh, man. That... You're better than any fantasy."

"Good." He liked the sound of that. "Not that I don't want you to fantasize about me when I have to be away. I do."

"I ain't sure I could stop."

That had him grinning, his cheeks hot from a lot more than the sun. "Wanna float awhile? I can get the lounge chair."

"Sounds like Heaven, honey."

"Cool." Making sure Coke was buoyant, he paddled off to get the big double floaty Coke had bought on the way to the ranch.

He might have to bring the sunscreen, though. He'd read that heavy physical activity might lessen its effectiveness.

Chapter Eighteen

Lazy and happy, Coke checked the chicken, made sure the potatoes weren't burning and closed the grill, grabbing a couple of beers from the outside little fridge before heading back to the hot tub. The bug zapper was working away, the tiki torches were burning and life was good.

He slid into the water, humming along with George, and handed Dillon a beer. "Happy?"

"You know it." That bright smile came far more frequently, and reached Dillon's eyes a lot more, now. Like the everyday stress was melting away. "You?"

"Mmm." He was warm, home, naked with the man on the top of his 'get naked with' list. Life was good.

"I do love the hot tub. Though I might have to dip in the pool soon. It's getting lobster-y in here." Poor Dillon wilted a little in the heat sometimes.

"I'll come with. I spend a lot of time going back and forth."

"It's a thing." Dillon stretched, the little sunburn he'd gotten starting to fade into a tan. Oh, he was still pale as all get out, but light gold was a good look for him.

So were the freckles.

Coke was nut brown, even his butt, which would make Jase and Andy cackle.

"What are you grinning about?" Dillon's toes floated up to the top of the water, wiggling madly.

"My butt." Weird, but true.

"I grin about your butt all the time." Dillon's toes were doing a little salsa dance or something, bump, bump, bump.

"I was thinking about how it wasn't so white now. The boys like to josh me about it some."

That was sorta fascinating, those toes.

"Nope. It's brown, now." The toes finally sank under, but the rest of Dillon popped up, all shining and wet. "Pool time."

"kay. I'll check the food." He slid out of the water, heart beating a little fast from the heat, and headed for his grill. Everything was still cooking low and slow, so he turned back just in time to see Dillon do a somersault into the pool. Crazy man.

Coke chuckled and headed for the stairs, dipping under to push through the water, let it wrap all around him and shit. They played for a bit, Dillon giving him something to chase, that ass flashing above the water like a shark fin. Man needed to learn to keep his butt down. Finally he needed to rescue supper, grabbing the little terrycloth shorts he kept out here to cover up the bits that you kept covered at the table.

Dillon popped up beside him like a seal. "Need some help?"

"Surely. Pick some salad dressing and grab the bowl." Four chicken breasts and four potatoes went on a platter. Some for now, some for later.

"Yum." It was amazing, how at home Dillon was in his kitchen, indoor or out. Salad, dressing, crusty bread, butter and sour cream appeared. "You want barbeque sauce? Worcestershire?"

"Worcestershire. There's ice cream for dessert." Peach.

"You do know the way to my heart." Bebopping around, Dillon got plates and shit set out before grabbing a little robe and slipping it on. "You'll spoil me."

"Good." He liked taking care. He was good at it. Hell, it was sorta his job. He grabbed Dillon on the way by, kissed the man good and hard, just because, and then went on with shit.

Blinking, Dillon stared at him a bit, then laughed and danced a little before settling at the table. The man did express himself with his whole body.

Chicken and salad, potatoes and bread -- it was all good. The ice cream was best, though, when they got around to dessert. It was like porn, watching Dillon eat it. He kept his hand across his lap so he didn't look like a raging horndog. After all, he wasn't all about the sex.

Really.

Dillon leaned back finally, patting his belly. "That was damned good."

"Mmmhmm. It's one of the best parts about being home." He liked to be able to eat real, simple food.

"It is. We have some good potatoes and cheese and stuff up my way. I should make you stuffed potato skins." He'd found out that Dillon could make great homemade junk food. Even if the man didn't know hot wings could be done right in the kitchen.

"Mmm." He could go there. "I want to see the snow, huh?"

"Well, then you'll have to come." Those eyes cut to his, for a second, before sliding away. "Maybe Thanksgiving, if you don't have a lot to do somewhere else."

"I'll tell Missy and Miz Scott that I've got plans." He could so do that.

"That would rock. I'm actually good at deep frying turkey. Beau sent me a deep fryer one year..."

"No shit? You ever had Beau's turkey? It's not bad at all." Man, he had a date for Thanksgiving.

"I try to avoid Beau's cooking." One eyebrow went up, Dillon giving him this look.

"What?" Folks got all weird about the little Cajun. He didn't mind Beau at all.

"Oh, I don't think he's all that bad, but he makes everything so spicy you poop fire for days."

"Huh." He had a cast iron stomach, sorta like a goat. "He makes good gumbo."

Gagging audibly, Dillon put his hands to his throat and bugged his eyes out. "Well. If you like his gumbo, my cooking will seem gourmet."

"I like food and I'd let you cook for me." Hell, he'd eat it even if it was nasty. He'd eaten the eggs Sam cooked, hadn't he?

"Excellent. I promise not to make you eat oyster stuffing." The face Dillon made told him volumes about who really didn't want to eat stuffing.

"Uh. I don't think fish goes in stuffing, honey." Oh, gag.

"Tell that to my mom." The dishes got cleared away with quick, efficient motions, Dillon bustling around.

He wasn't sure he could do that, because damn, he'd been raised right, still... He liked the thought of meeting Dillon's folks. "How's your sister doing?"

"Not bad. Not bad at all, all things considered."

"There something wrong?"

"Huh? Oh, not really. She's just not doing so well with the new barrel horse." He got a grin, a shrug. "He's young."

"Oh, man." He knew a little about that. "You like to ride?"

"I do." Oh, look at that. Dillon brought him a beer. "I'm not as good as a lot of folks."

"I'm okay at it. Takes me a little to get on." Was this sounding pervy?

"Well, I know once you get on, you do a great job with stamina." Okay, it must have been pervy, the way Dillon was grinning.

"I like to finish what I start, honey. You know that." Yep. Definitely pervy.

"I do." Those cheeks went right pink on him, Dillon licking his lips.

His cock was swollen, aching a little in the best possible way. "You got wicked thoughts in your eyes."

"Do I? You bring it out in me, huh?" Moving close, Dillon touched him, hand sliding on his chest.

He flexed a little, nipples going hard like they were trying to get Dillon's attention.

"Beautiful man." Those fingers traced the line of a scar down his ribs, following the jagged trail.

"Pshaw." He was kinda old and crusty.

"I don't think I've ever heard that word out loud."

"No shit?" He chuckled, wriggling a little, shifting in the chair.

"No shit. I mean, we have a lot of crazy words in Idaho, but wow." Dillon pounced on him.

He caught Dillon, dragging him right on in and kissing that pretty mouth but good.

"Mmm." Wrapping around him like an octopus, Dillon kissed him back, sharing the flavor of peach ice cream.

His hands found that tight little ass, squeezing and rubbing away, sorta jonesing on having it right there.

"Hey. Kiss me again?" Those hot hands clutched at him, pulling him right against Dillon's chest.

"I can do that." He dragged Dillon in, kissing the man good and hard. They kissed deep, Dillon pushing into his mouth, tasting him all over. Those hands were moving now, sliding against his back.

That touch felt good on places that never did nothing but hurt and he moaned, the sound pushing into Dillon's mouth. He felt the tiny smile against his lips, felt how Dillon loved to make him feel good. Damn, but that man was so much more than folks gave him credit for. It was a shame,

because the man was smart -- from computers to current events to music, Dillon knew fucking everything. Those strong fingers found his lower back, digging in a little, easing the pressure from standing at the grill. He was just gonna melt like butter on corn.

"Dillon." His head fell back, his mouth open.

"Uh-huh. Love touching you, babe." Those fingers worked magic, making him hot, making him not hurt a bit.

He was gonna explode into a zillion happy bullfighter pieces. No shit.

Dillon moaned, licking the corner of his mouth. "Better?"

"So good. Your touch is so goddamn good."

A soft chuckle sounded, and Dillon went back to work on him, fingers sliding all up and down his spine in a slow glide.

"I want you." It was easier and easier to say.

"Well, we should get somewhere more comfy, then, huh? Bed or pool?"

He thought about that. "Bed. We could watch movies after." Snuggle.

"I like movies. I like you. It's a plan." Bouncing a little, Dillon hopped up and eased him out of his chair.

He followed like Dillon was the Pied Piper. Damn, that was a fine man. They got to the bedroom and Dillon dropped the robe before turning back the sheets, motioning for him to come on. "Lose the shorts, babe."

"Uh-huh." His cock jerked and he shimmied out of them, the shorts dropping to the ground.

"Woo hoo. Shake it, Coke." He thought it was very sweet how Dillon never mentioned that his shake didn't have a lot of rock and roll.

"You are the king of shaking it, honey. I pale in comparison."

"I know what I like." They sat together, Dillon helping him lean back like he was made of glass, or gold, but it wasn't smarmy. Just hot.

"I'm real glad." He looked toward that drawer where Dillon'd found the picture. Dillon knew what he liked now, too. Hell, Dillon knew about the picture *and* the dildo. Lord, lord. Dillon caught his eye, laughing a little, and damn, it was good to be alive.

Coke grinned, winked, then grabbed Dillon, tugging him down for a hard kiss. They smacked together, Dillon's lips landing on his hard and needy, pulling at his mouth like he was a much better dessert than any ice cream.

One of his legs came up, cradling Dillon some, moving them together.

"Mmm." Dillon's little moan sounded like music. The kisses made him want to sing a little, too, even if he would bellar like a motherless calf. Dillon had a mouth that men would kill for.

They still smelled a little like sunshine and chlorine and smoke; it was a damn good smell, all male and strong and fine. Dillon was a little wet under his hands, against his body, sweat and lotion making him slickery. That was a damned fine thing, too.

"You're fine." He rubbed at the dimples at the top of Dillon's ass, pushing in hard.

"Oh. Good." Bucking against him, Dillon pushed and pushed, rubbing them together fast and dirty.

His eyes rolled and he tried his damndest to push back. His mouth opened, sounds tearing out of him.

Bending, Dillon nipped at his throat, the tough ridge of Dillon's teeth bringing up what was sure to be a bruise. That sharp, bright little pain mixed with the pleasure of their cocks finding each other, sliding alongside.

"Fuck." His eyes popped open, hands sliding to Dillon's hips to drive them together.

"That's it." Those pretty blue eyes looked right into his, Dillon driving them higher and higher.

"Dillon." There was all sorts of shit he wanted to say, all sorts he didn't have words for.

"Uh-huh." A long, low moan told him all manner of shit about what Dillon wanted to say, too. So did the way that body bucked.

His whole body shuddered, cock swelling, balls all drawn tight.

"I... Coke. Babe. I need to." Dillon stared at him, asking with those eyes, damned near begging.

"Come on. It'll make me." Just the smell alone would push him over.

"Oh. Oh, damn." Dillon came for him, shooting across their bellies, hot and wet and musky.

"Dillon." He moaned, shooting so hard that it hurt, balls-deep.

Sweet and hot, Dillon sank down on him, licking at his mouth, kissing him slow and easy.

"Damn, babe."

"Yeah." Oh, hell yeah. Much with the damn.

Dillon nuzzled his throat, humming. "I could get used to this. Have I mentioned that?"

"Mmm. Maybe. You can whenever."

"You rock." That lean body was getting heavier by the minute, Dillon just leaning on him.

"No. That's your job. I just keep folks put together."

"That's it. You make me fly apart sometimes, huh?" Dillon's fingers traced little patterns on his chest.

"That's a good thing. We'll go with it, you and me."

"We will. I almost don't want to go back to work."

Oh, now, he knew that was bull. Dillon loved to perform. "Uh-huh. You'll be ready and so will I. We got the best jobs on Earth."

"We do." Grinning, Dillon cuddled close. "We also get the best time off. I say it's a win-win."

"You know it, cowboy." He patted Dillon's ass, just happy with the whole goddamn world.

Hopefully he could stay that way. At least for a little while.

Chapter Nineteen

Coke was napping.

It was a good look for him, head back, sunglasses on, a quirky little smile on his face... When he wasn't snoring.

Dillon had slathered on the sunscreen and snoozed with Coke for a little while, but now he was ready and rarin' to go, his usual nervous energy asserting itself. He needed to bounce. He got up on the diving board and stretched tall, reaching for the sky. He bounced a little on his toes, feeling the sun beat down on his naked, and now almost brown, thank you, body.

He thought he heard something -- something dinging or ringing or something -- but it stopped and Coke never twitched, so he figured it must not be anything. It didn't matter anyway. This place was like an oasis. Quiet, simple, easy.

He bounced a little more, the diving board balanced so damned well that he could probably use it like a trampoline. Huh. Maybe he should try it.

Sproing.

Sproing.

Sproing.

Oh, God, this was fun.

"Jesus Christ, Jase! Dillon's here, and he's naked!"

The shout made Dillon miss his footing on the board, and he flew out over the pool, arms and legs flailing. He landed in a spectacular belly flop that might just have ruined him for life. Poor Coke. He'd never get fucked again.

"...God and Greyhound, what are y'all doing here without calling? You prob'ly killed the beautiful son of a bitch and I just got him tanned up pretty and he's gonna take me to see snow come Thanksgiving!" Coke was bellaring as he popped out of the water.

Oh. Oh, Jesus. He doubled over in the water, almost drowning himself as he howled, holding his belly. He barely managed to keep afloat by kicking his feet.

Andy Baxter was leading Jason over to a chair and that... well, that stopped his laughter like someone's slapped a lid on it.

Blind.

Jase was really, really blind.

Somehow it had felt like a sick, stupid joke, like it couldn't possibly be the truth, even though he knew Coke, knew the man didn't lie.

Dillon was suddenly glad that he had to swim to the edge of the pool and grab his towel, which gave him time to think about what to say, what to do. He studied Andy and Jason from under his lashes for a moment. Bax looked tired. A little drawn, but so much better than when he'd broken his leg. Jason looked... skinnier. A lot more angular. Still, he was grinning a little, hands dangling between his spread knees, just like when he sat on the fence at the events.

Clearing his throat, Dillon chuckled. "Well, hey, you two. Looks like you made it just in time for the how not to dive class."

Coke laughed and Jason rubbed the back of his neck, looking sheepish as hell. "Looks like. You know, there's benefits to this whole not-seeing thing. Only problem is, I'll have nightmares featuring you flopping."

"Yeah? I would say that's more of an erotic dream." Dillon winked at Bax, who went a little green around the gills.

Coke chuckled, grabbed four beers out of the mini fridge. "So, what's up? I thought you was going to your momma's"

"AJ." Jason looked like his eyes were following Coke from under the brim of the straw hat; it was fucking creepy, because the man didn't see the beer held in front of him. Hell, he didn't move until Coke put the cold one against the bare arm showing through the T-shirt. "He's on Missy like a tomcat."

Andy nodded and took his beer from Coke, the John Deere cap bobbing. "Jack took Jase's momma and Granny Peters to Colorado on vacation. She was so tickled..."

"We couldn't tell her, you know? She'd have stayed home. Jack was getting hotels and everything." Jason leaned forward, elbows on his knees, bottle dangling between his fingers. "We had to come out, Gramps. We did. Benji's been sleeping with us for a week."

"Ah. Well, we promise not to crawl in bed with you." Jesus, what was his problem? Nervousness, no doubt. Making sure his towel was secure, Dillon walked over and shook Bax's hand, then grabbed Jason's arm and squeezed.

"Good to see you up and about, man. Last time I saw you, I was fucking scared to death."

"Yeah, that's what they tell me. Coke says you know, huh? You're gonna help?"

He stopped, stared a second.

A beard.

He'd never seen Jason Scott with a beard.

Coke poked him, and he jumped. "I am. I can do a lot for you, Jase. Run interference with the media, with the guys. I can deal with your sponsors. I have a good head for that."

Andy was nodding thoughtfully. "I never thought once about you doing the sponsor thing, Dillon."

"Yeah, they've started calling again. I... it's cool, that we're here, huh, Coke?"

Coke smiled, eyes wrinkling right up. "Don't be an idiot, son. Y'all can have your blue room, just like always; it's got the private bath and all. You want in the pool?"

Andy grinned and slapped Jason on the knee. "As long as there ain't Dillon cooties."

"Y'all be nice, now, or I'll beat you both to death." Coke winked at Dillon, swigged at his beer.

"You and what army, Gramps?" Jason's eyes rolled, looking at the sky, the pool, Andy.

Dillon bit back his instinctive snarl that Coke was no grandpa. Jason didn't need someone sniping at him.

"Shit, son. I got Dillon at my back. Y'all want steaks or sausages for supper?"

"Oh, God. I told you, Bax. Coke is the man. Steaks, please." Jason's eyes crinkled up at the corners and that smile was honest, happy. "AJ got a case of Elgin sausages on the way home."

"That cool with you, Dillon?" Coke brushed one hand over his shoulder, giving him a quick, apologetic look.

"Sure. I can help out." He smiled up at Coke, letting the man know it was okay. God knew, he wouldn't put Jason out just because he was a greedy bastard.

"I'll just pull the meat out to defrost and get a suit, so's as not to offend the kids." Coke nodded, headed toward the house.

The kids. Dillon frowned. Andy Baxter frowned back, the expression complete with wildly exaggerated eyebrow movements.

"Coke's not old, you know," Dillon said, as casually as he could.

"Huh?" Jason's head tilted, the look comically confused.

"I said, he's not old. He's not that much older than me." Listen to him, growling on Coke's behalf. "You guys want another beer? Some pop?"

"Some whut?"

"A Coke, dumbass." Andy whacked Jason playfully.

"Ah. Nah. We'll grab our stuff. We brought a cooler full of stuff for Coke - Cokes, beer, milk. Oh! Hamburger meat! Coke, we brought you hamburger fixin's. For lunch, huh?"

Andy nodded. "We brought a bunch of grapefruits and cantaloupe, too."

"Cool. Grab your swim trunks, too. We spend most of our time out here." Jason could use the sun, too.

"Yeah, I know. I was here when he built it. He had my ass hauling rocks for days."

Coke stood at the doorway, looking over at Jason, the weirdest look in his eyes. "Yep. Now you get to enjoy your labors. Get moving, son."

Andy and Jason headed back out to the truck, giving them a minute, and Dillon grabbed at it, going to wrap his arms around Coke's waist. "You okay?"

Coke leaned into him, nodding. "Yeah. Yeah, I was just enjoying this, with just you. I wasn't ready to get back to work yet."

He hugged Coke tight, smiling a little. He got that. He so did. "I hear you. It's been amazing. Can't tell Jase no, though, huh?"

"No. Never have been able to. Shit, his daddy was my goddamn hero."

"Yeah?" Tilting his head back, he blinked a little. "I never knew that."

"Man, Daniel was an all-around cowboy -- from roping to riding, roughstock, team events. When I was a kid, I wanted nothing more to be like him. I'm not built right for it, though, no matter

how I tried, I couldn't stick on them bulls. Dan tells me, Coke, man, you ain't scared of nothing. Let me introduce you to Punch and Zeke, they'll set you up."

Christ, Punch and Zeke had been working the arena way back when, before John Dalton, Lefty, hell, even Tanny Martin, the barrelman that he replaced, hadn't been working that far back. Dillon had his own heroes, just like that, so he got it. Coke had just started way earlier than him. Dillon took a quick kiss, cutting it off before he lost his towel. "That's a good hero to have, babe. I'm going to put on some shorts."

"Okay, honey." Coke stroked his back, just a little.

"Mmm." Dillon wiggled, just a little in return, wanting Coke to know he was happy, and that he still wanted to be there. "Don't worry, babe. They can't be with us every hour of every day."

Coke chuckled softly. "Nope. They'll spend a lot of time locked in the blue room."

"There you go." He could hear Andy's distinct voice getting closer, the man teasing Jason about the blind and the dumb. He grinned, kissing Coke one more time. "Be right back."

"Kay honey." Coke opened the fridge again, the low whistling starting up.

Rubbing his sore belly, and wishing he was naked so he could rub everywhere else, Dillon headed off to get some clothes on. Damn, but he and Coke had been having fun.

Too bad he had to worry about Andy Baxter's delicate sensibilities.

Of course, now he had something to tease Bax with unmercifully. Looked like the situation wasn't all bad.

Chapter Twenty

He got the burgers started, listening to Dillon and Jase and Andy play in the pool. Jase had been balky about getting in, but Andy'd just tumped him in with a crash and there you go. Now Dillon was playing Marco Polo with the man and damn, Jase was good at it. Made him feel good because Jase needed to be able to do this -- listen and follow. More than that, though, Coke liked that Dillon jumped right in, teaching and helping without being weird about it.

God knew he wanted to cry sometimes, seeing them blank eyes.

"I'm real sorry, Danny," he said, for what had to be the ten thousandth time. "I swear to God, I tried to get there in time. I did."

"Who are you talkin' to, Coke?" Andy dangled off the lip of the pool, legs kicking idly.

"Huh? Nobody. Just woolgathering." Just trying to make his peace.

"Smells good."

Dillon was diving, swimming right up behind Bax, hands reaching out.

"It does." Jason was walking along the wall, head tilted. "Bax, watch your butt."

Andy turned just in time to get a face full of water, Dillon popping up and hollering, "Boo!"

They all laughed, Andy tackling Dillon and chasing that fine ass around the pool. Jase stayed close. "You good, Coke?"

"You know it, son. I'm solid as a rock."

"Cool. I had to get away for a while, you know? Just away." Yeah. Jason was looking a little haunted around the edges.

"You know you got a place with me, son. Always."

"I know. I know, man. Thanks. You having a good season so far? The announcers never say on the tube."

He turned the burgers again, then sat so they could talk shop.

Andy drifted over, leaning on the wall again, and Dillon hopped out of the pool, shaking like a wet dog. "It's not bad, huh, Coke? Kynan's going to get himself killed."

"Only if he keeps pushing AJ's buttons." Course, didn't none of the bullfighters like that little son of a bitch none.

"AJ's not the only one. Good thing Carreio don't speak better English than he does," Bax grumbled. "Aje says the little shit is saying Carreio's new baby ain't his."

"That boy needs to get his head out of his ass." Coke didn't hold much with assholes.

"I'm waiting for someone to actually stuff it up is ass." Dillon did one of his Shazaam moves, arms pumping.

"Now that would be something." Jase's look got a little fierce. "You know he called me on my cell? Saying thank you when he won Baton Rouge?"

Oh, fucker.

Andy opened his mouth, looking like a thundercloud, but it was Dillon who piped up first. "I'll rip his arm off and beat him over the head with it. I promise."

Coke nodded. "You don't worry on it, son. You wait until you win the whole shebang and then you can tell him thank you."

"You know it." Bax grinned, his love for that idea clear on his face.

"Shit. I'm still thinking on riding one bull eight seconds..."

Coke growled a little in his throat. "No. You'll win it. You could before, you will now."

Dillon was starting to bounce a little, and Coke was finding that meant that things were getting awkward. Time to flip meat.

He got the burgers turned. "So AJ's happy to be home, huh?"

Jason groaned and Andy hooted. "Lord, Coke. He's like a tomcat."

He could imagine so. That man loved Missy to distraction. She loved him right back, and they were solid as a rock. Still, he could see why the boys wanted to get gone awhile.

Laughing, Dillon wiggled suggestively. "AJ's got his groove on."

"Ew." Jason sank into the water, bubbling a little and he just cackled.

Lord have mercy, this group of boys...

Suddenly he was feeling the weight of it again, the weight of knowing it was their job to keep these kids safe and whole. It didn't matter none, if they were on the dirt or off. He knew his calling. When he looked over at Dillon, the man was staring at him, head tilted like a puppy hearing a whistle. Those blue eyes held a knowing look, and Dillon moved close, just sort of standing next to him. Offering support.

"Hey." It helped. He didn't know why. Didn't care either.

"Hey." Looking back to where Andy was helping Jase, who was floundering a bit, Dillon patted his ass. "You okay?"

"I'm good." Now. He was real good. "Glad you're here, cowboy."

"Me, too, babe." Those cheeks went pink, and Coke didn't think it was the sun. "We need the boys to take a nap after, huh?"

"Yep. We could... visit. You and me." Visit, up close and personal.

"We so could. I think we might *need* to."

"Uh-huh." His body tightened, his cock actually filling a little. He leaned down, whispered low. "I'm all about needing you."

Now those cheeks went dark red. "Well, that's good. I mean, since it goes both ways."

"Yeah." He got to smiling, his mood perking up like his prick. "Let's have our burgers and get these boys settled, huh?"

"You know it." Dillon gave himself a discreet thump. "You guys ready for food?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm always ready for a Coke-burger. God, I can't remember the first time you cooked for me."

"You were three." He'd been nineteen and full of piss and vinegar.

"That was before you were fighting bulls, huh? You were still roping and riding back then."

He nodded to Jason. "I was young and not real good at it."

"Well, you found what you're good at." Dillon was frowning again, sort of staring at Jase.

"I did. It's what I was put on earth to do." He believed that, bone deep.

"Look! A tomato that looks like Mr. Ed!" Dillon held up a grossly misshaped tomato, grinning a little wildly.

He stared over, Andy laughed, and Jason just rolled his eyes and held out his hand. "Lemme see."

Dillon passed it over, and it sure enough looked like a horse head with teeth sticking out.

Jason's fingers moved over it and Andy moved close, whispering hard, moving Jason's fingers. Coke turned away, fixing plates and making all four burgers up like they all liked them.

"Okay. Potatoes are done!" Dillon all but shouted it, and there was a bunch of splashing and choking behind them.

He got tickled, started laughing good and hard, and by the time the young'uns were sitting, he was feeling almost normal again. Soft chuckles and an even softer touch to his ass told him Dillon was right there. Lord, it was nice to know.

They finished eating and he gathered dishes up. "Boys, I'm going in for my siesta. You can find your room okay?"

Bax reached out and touched Jason's hand, fingers brushing that tanned skin. "I bet even Jase can find it. Thanks for the meal, sir."

"Anytime, Andy." He met Dillon's eyes across the table. "Dillon? You coming?" He didn't blush or look down or nothing. He knew the rules, but this was his house and he wasn't ashamed.

"You bet. You guys keep it down, huh?" Dillon didn't look ashamed, neither, laughing and grabbing his hand.

"Go *away*, you two." Jase was making gagging sounds, laughing hard as they headed in.

"Hey, that was easier than expected, huh?" Sometimes Dillon was five, swinging his hand like they was in high school.

"Yep. Good things come to good people." He pulled Dillon around, taking the kiss he'd been needing for hours now, making sure his clown knew just what was what. Those strong arms wrapped right around his shoulders, Dillon slamming against him and kissing him until he felt like his bell'd been rung. Lord.

"More." He groaned the word against Dillon's lips as his hands dropped and he got himself a double handful, pulling Dillon closer so he could feel every inch.

"Mmmhmm. Now." Those lean hips rocked against his, like Dillon was dancing in the arena, all slinky and hot.

He tugged hard, started driving Dillon into him as those feet left the ground and he held on, gave Dillon something to rub against. Dillon gave him what for, too, humping up on him, hard through the tiny swim trunks. Hard and hot and ready.

"Dillon." He bit the word out, fingers squeezing convulsively. The whole heat-now-hurry thing blew his mind like nothing else.

"Uh-huh. More, huh? Want you." They pushed back against the wall, letting Coke brace himself, and Dillon shimmied up against him, hips grinding against his.

"Got me. Damn, honey." He laughed, the sound all gaspy and rough in his head.

They were gonna bust into flames, once Dillon's hand dipped between them, shoving their trunks down so their cocks could rub, bump together. One of Dillon's hands closed around them, pulling them together, thumb rubbing up over the head of his cock. Just like he liked it. He bit out a curse, going up on his tiptoes a second, muscles straining to get more, right there. Right fucking there.

"Coke. Oh, God. Touch me some more." Dillon was rockin' and rollin', moving against him, leaning up to bite the skin under his jaw.

He nodded, taking Dillon's weight with one hand, free hand moving to slide up, fingers counting ribs before finding one little nipple.

"Oh." That sound was pure happy, Dillon's hips bucking against him like there was no tomorrow. Hell, at this point he didn't care if there was tomorrow. Now worked just fine.

"Uh-huh." He pinched a little, whimpering when their pricks moved together just right. "We'll do this, then we'll find the bed, cowboy, and tear it up."

"You damned betcha." Dillon pulled his head down for a kiss, mouth hot and damp against his. That talented tongue found his, teasing, touching.

He shot, just like that, body and soul, his entire universe going a little shiny and sparkly around the edges. Dillon watched him, so close that he could see little streaks of gray in those blue eyes. Then Dillon's spunk was pouring over his cock, his belly in long, hard pulses.

His knees got a little weak, his belly muscles jerking and leaping under his skin. "Damn. Damn, honey." Leaning in, he got himself another kiss, the thing going soft-edged and sloppy as they came down.

"Yum." Laughing for him, Dillon kissed him again. Then again. "Bed?"

"You know it. Bed." He laughed, squeezed one more time, loving the give of that muscled butt. "Then we'll do that recover, tear it up thing and scare the boys."

"Sounds good, babe." Sliding to the floor, Dillon took his hand and led him to the bedroom, the whole place cool and inviting and looking like a nap might be fine.

They settled in, Dillon on the side that Coke thought he might think of as Dillon's for a long, long time, and rested.

Chapter Twenty One

Dillon hummed, flipping eggs like a machine. He wasn't so fab with the grill, but he could make eggs and toast and bacon, so he'd left Coke in bed for some well-deserved rest and gone to make breakfast. Besides that, it was a joy to work in Coke's kitchen; the place well-used, well-loved, not fancy at all.

He was flipping the last egg when the scrape of a chair being pulled back made him jump, and he turned to find Jason's sightless eyes on him. That was still weird as hell.

"Hey, Jase. How's it hanging?"

"It's going okay, man. I smelled bacon. Thought Coke was cooking. Is there coffee?"

"There is. Want me to get you one, or you want to try?" He wasn't above plain old asking, which Jason seemed to appreciate.

"I want to try, but I need a little help, huh? Making a mess is cool; burning important bits is not."

"Sure. I doubt Coke's moved anything much since you were here last." Luckily, Dillon considered himself a pretty good teacher. "Here. Get up and walk three steps to your left."

He moved the eggs off the heat and went to meet Jason there.

Jason nodded, taking three steps. He could tell Andy'd been working on it, because Jason just moved, trusting him, not taking little mincing steps. "No, but it's been a while and, man, you don't know how different things are, like this."

"No, I imagine I don't. You're good there. Now, the coffee pot is at basically ten o'clock, on your left. Don't feel out and up, you'll burn yourself. Start at counter level and feel along to the base."

"Is the handle out toward me?" It felt surprisingly good, how Jason followed what he said, didn't second-guess him.

"It is. Turned a little to the right, not straight up where the pot is. Once you got a bead on that, the cups are in the cabinet directly in front of your face, and Coke doesn't stack things, so you can just grab a handle."

"Cool. Thanks, man." Jason managed, using his fingers to make sure he didn't overfill. "You want a cup?"

"Yeah. That would be great. Oh. I make mine a little different than Coke does. I hope that's okay." Never let a cowboy make the coffee. Well, not a Texas one, anyway.

"I'm easy, man. Do I smell eggs, too?" Another cup came down, Jason filling carefully.

"You do. Bacon and toast and fried potatoes, too. Want?" He got the milk out and set it on the table. "Milk's in front of your seat at the table, sugar's the big glass jar on the lazy susan in the middle.

"Yeah. I want." One coffee cup was held out, sort of in his direction. "So, tell me the truth. Is this whole thing for real? I mean, with me and the bulls. It's not just Coke and Bax... blowing sunshine up my skirt?"

He took the coffee and let Jason sit before he went back to the stove. "Coke would never do that. You know his whole mission in life is taking care of you riders. He loves you, Jase."

"I know. I just... you don't. And you've got more to lose than anyone, money-wise, so I figured you're the one to ask."

Dillon made two plates before he answered, giving that the thought it deserved. It had never occurred to him to even think about his own sponsors, or his paycheck. Thinking about it told him he'd help, no matter the cost.

"Well, I think you can do it. So does Coke. Andy wants to believe it with everything he is, but he's also really crazy about you, so he worries. We can pull it off."

"Okay, then." Jason started feeling around the table, touching idly.

"Here, man. Have some food. Move your coffee off to three o'clock." He waited for Jason to move the cup before putting down the plate, the food carefully arranged. "Coke told me where to put the egg and toast and all. The potatoes are at the top right, okay?"

"Cool. Thanks." Jason found his fork, fingers sliding around the edges of the plate. "Sorry for busting in to y'all's... uh... break."

"No worries." He chuckled. "I sound like Packer, huh?" Packer was everyone's favorite Aussie rider, and he actually said things like 'no worries'.

"Dude, you ain't got ears like that man." Jason laughed, the sound good, real. "I heard he's fighting his shoulder again, huh?"

"Yeah. He's probably going to get surgery after the finals." Dillon put the platter of food in the microwave for Bax and Coke to heat later, and sat with his food. "Okay, we need to talk sponsors, Jase."

"How so?" Jason managed to use his fork and the toast to get eggs.

"Well, I said I'd help go between with them, so we need to come up with an official story. You can't put them off forever, or they'll start calling around to find your doctor." He'd seen that with Ace's old buddy, Steel Flanagan, when he broke his face.

"Well, me and Bax have been talking on it. I might be able to do a little event in a month or two, maybe. I've been on ten bulls or so."

"That many?" Goddamn. Dillon munched some toast, pondering. Oh, buttery goodness. "Well, maybe we ought to get some pictures of you on a practice bull. That would tell your sponsors you're working up to it."

Jason nodded. "That'd be easy. I'm more worried about the commercial stuff. I ain't facing a camera."

"Not yet, no. But there aren't so many at the minor events." They'd have to make a plan for dealing with the video cameras.

"But what about the sponsors? Like the Nuva folks? They want a TV spot."

"We'll come up with some sort of montage. You can do a voice over." That kind of shit was what Dillon knew he was good at. Coming up with media shit.

"Oh." He grinned as Jason sort of slumped in pure relief. "Oh, that works."

"Sure it does. We can tell them that you're just not up to live camera work, that you want people to see you at your best." Dillon sopped up some yolk, pondering. "And the potato chip people could do some sort of bag prize instead of that big tour they wanted. For now, anyway."

"Yeah. Yeah, they'd prob'ly do that." Those eyes skittered all around, damn it was unnerving. "Dillon, you think we should tell Ace?"

"I think we should, yes." Everyone was iffy on that, but he knew they would have to. "Maybe not until you win your first minor league event. Or even a rodeo."

"Yeah? I say no. Bax says we gotta because Ace'll kill us all if we don't."

"What you got to remember is that it may be all corporate now, but the league is Ace's baby. If we don't tell him, he could kick us all out when he finds out. And he will."

Ace needed to know.

"He'll kick me out one way or the other." Jase chewed on his bottom lip. "But I wouldn't fuck you guys over, not for anything."

"He's not going to kick anyone out when you win the title." Jason *would* win the title. "So that just leaves us with Latigo jeans. What do you have on your plate with them?"

"They wrote me a check for twenty thousand dollars two weeks before I got hurt. I haven't even cashed it. Haven't told nobody. It's in my wallet."

Oh, man. "Okay. Well, I'll need to see the contract. Do you think Bax can email it to me on the road? Then we can call them."

"Yeah. I may have it in my duffle. I don't know if Bax took anything out."

Jesus, didn't anyone take care of these kids? Dillon stopped, grinned. That sounded like Coke in his head. Now he could see why a little.

"We'll look later. Eat up before it gets cold. Oh! Orange juice?" He loved orange juice. And apple.

"Sure. The bacon is real good. Thanks." Jason chuckled. "Man, I don't want to know what you did to Coke to get him to sleep so late."

Dillon grinned, bouncing in his seat a little. "Nope. You really don't. You'd make the 'ew' face."

"Yep. He's family. Not... Not in the whole... sexy range." Jase shuddered.

"To you, maybe." To each his own, right? "I've been looking for a long time."

Jason nodded, the motion slow, but sure. "I get that."

"I bet." Hell, he could tell that Bax and Jason had taken that last step, one he hadn't been sure they'd ever come around to. "Man, if the guys don't get up soon I'll eat their breakfast, too."

"I'm up. Don't you eat my eggs, now." Coke wandered in, scratching his belly, stretching some, hand landing on Jason's shoulder in greeting. "You sleep okay, son?"

"Yeah, Coke. I did. You?"

He got a smile -- slow and heated, almost wicked, Coke's eyes laughing. "Yep. Just fine."

Dillon almost chortled, but he settled for hopping up and kissing the corner of Coke's mouth. "Sit. Jase and I were talking business. I'll get you some coffee and your food."

"Business, huh?" Coke nodded for him, hand curling around his hip for a minute, squeezing him. "Anything exciting?"

"Sponsors, mostly. Ace, some."

Coke winced. "Yuck."

Jason's laugh filled the air again. "No shit."

"I think we have to tell Ace," Dillon said, sliding the warmed up plate and coffee in front of Coke on the table, chuckling as Coke started pouring the sugar in. Glug glug glug. "But Jase and I already talked about that. Mainly now I need Bax to see if they have the jeans contract."

"Thanks. The jeans contract? Lord, son, didn't y'all do anything about that yet?"

"I been busy, Coke. You know, being blind and all?"

Dillon grabbed Jason's coffee mug for a refill. "I'll deal with it before we hit the road again if you have it here."

"I'll ask Bax. He'll know." Jason reached for the orange juice and Coke moved it right into the path of his hand.

Coke was going to have to stop doing that.

They were going to have a confab, him and Bax and Coke. Jason needed to learn, and he was willing, too. Better now than after he started riding again.

Coke started eating, watching Jason carefully. "You want some jelly for your bread, son?"

"Nope. I'm cool." Jason was managing. It wasn't perfect, but it could be passable in a restaurant soon. In a bar. They'd have to be able to have Jason out in public, where folks could see him.

Dark glasses would help a lot. With a head injury as bad as he'd had, a lot of folks would accept light sensitivity as a symptom, and at little outdoor venues he could wear them before and after his ride, too.

Coke stood up, started gathering dishes about the time Andy wandered in, looking rode hard and put away wet. Jase perked right up, smiling, and it amazed Dillon that the man knew Bax's footsteps without the ring of boots that usually came with them. They so had it bad.

"Breakfast is in the microwave, Bax." Dillon grabbed another cup and filled it for Andy.

Jase's grin lit up the room. "You get enough sleep, cowboy?"

"Some, yeah." Bax sounded like a frog, too.

Dillon handed him coffee. "You just get too much sun, or are you coming down with something?"

"He don't look sunburned, really." Coke looked the guy over, but who could tell, with all that tanned skin.

"I'm fine. I ain't gonna give y'all nothin'." Andy looked put out, now, cheeks going red.

"Bax, come sit." Jason patted the chair next to him. "Dillon does good eggs. Is that jeans contract in my duffle?"

"Yeah. I think it is. I'll get it after I eat." Andy finally sat, scooting his chair close to Jason, and Dillon stared. Surely that wasn't a hickey...

"Cool." Jason nodded, leaning back in his chair, T-shirt stretching over the flat belly. Those eyes never *moved* from Andy. Not once.

While he was up, he heated up Andy's food, letting his fingers trail over the back of Coke's neck as he went by. He understood how Jason felt. He really did. He stared at Coke a lot. Of course, Dillon could see. They were probably going to have to talk about that, too. Jase couldn't stare at Andy in public. It'd be weird. He'd bet they could train Jason's eyes, since they still worked. It wasn't like someone who had no actual sight. Or whatever.

Bax tucked into breakfast just fine, so maybe his sore throat was just from... vigorous activity.

Okay. That was a little gross.

Coke started doing dishes, warbling some country song that Dillon couldn't recognize on a dare. Andy powered through breakfast, staring at Coke like he'd lost his mind. Dillon thought the singing was cute as hell.

Coke finally stopped, looked at Bax. "Whut?"

"Huh? Nothin'." Stuffing his last piece of toast into his mouth, Andy shut up, which was probably a good thing.

Maybe it was time for Dillon to sing. He broke into an impromptu rendition of a popular Tim and Faith duet, guaranteed to make the kiddies gag. Coke looked at him, then the man hooted, applauding wildly and cackling.

He held the last note about making looooooooooove as long as he could, before breaking off and taking a bow. Bax looked about to choke, but Jason was laughing, clapping along with Coke.

"Man, you should add that into your act. The buckle bunnies would love it." Jason wiped his eyes, all flushed and grinning.

"You freak me out a little, Dillon." Andy was even grinning a little, now, the perpetual joke making everyone hoot again.

"Oh, I won't let the big, bad, entertainer of the year hurt you, Andy." Coke grinned, that little smile pure devil. "After all, he'd just hire someone to do it for him..."

"You know it," Dillon agreed. "My hands are worth more than your whole hide." They were back on familiar ground, back to smiling and laughing. It was good.

"Actually, clown-boy, I think it's your legs that are worth the money." Jase snorted. "You could run amok without hands."

"I could, but I'm so much more expressive with them." Dillon reached out to flip Jason's cowlick, just to see what the man would do, with something coming at his face.

To his utter shock, Jason caught his hand.

Coke and Bax went quiet, staring, and Dillon snorted. "Good catch, man. You want more coffee, I made another pot. You know where it is."

He held his breath, wanting Jase to show the guys even more.

"Yeah. I'll take another cup. You want one, Dillon?" Jason stood up and Coke moved to get a chair out of Jason's way. He shook his head, held one hand up.

"Sure do. There's a chair in front of you, man, don't trip over it."

He got a nod and he handed Jason his cup. Jason managed, just fine, even finding the handle without burning himself. Coke stared, moved over, slowly waved his hand in front of Jason's face. The kid never flinched. Never even *noticed*.

Dillon took Coke's hand and led him away, trying not to let the excitement that faded into sadness get him down. "Repetition is good, huh, Jase?"

"Yeah. I'm getting better about stuff, right Bax?"

Coke looked at him, and he could see the confusion, the worry.

"You sure are, Mini. I swear, soon no one will be able to tell." Bax was smiling, at least, not worried a bit, and Dillon nudged Coke and nodded toward Andy.

Coke looked at Andy, lips wrinkling. "Okay, explain it to me, y'all. How come you catch Dillon's hand and you cain't see me?"

Jason's head did that tilt-thing again. "Whut?"

Bax grunted. "He can get some stuff if it's fast, Coke. Like his body's natural defense, you know? Or if it's off to one side. Peripheral, or some shit."

Jason nodded. "If it's fast it's like... what's that thing where Doc hits your knee with the rubber hammer?"

"A reflex test." The temptation to whack Jason on the knee was tough to resist, but Dillon did it. Manfully.

"Right. Reflexes. That's all it is. It's not real."

Coke frowned thunderously. "Why isn't that real, son? What's not real about it?"

"Well, I mean, it's not *seeing*?"

"So?" Oh, man, he knew that temper. "It's still real. It's still something you can use, Jase. Hell, that's something we can all use to help you."

Andy chuckled, stretching his legs out and pushing his plate away. "Not only that, but he can see in his dreams, huh? He has instant replay on his rides, built in."

"Sort of." Jase shrugged, blushed. "I cain't tell, for sure, if it's real or not. Like I knew Bax's cast was blue, but I dreamed he had a beard, when he didn't."

"Well, Coke's right. We can use it." Dillon nodded, slipping an arm around Coke's waist from behind to stop him pacing. "We've got more to work with than we thought."

Coke nodded, leaned into him a little bit, enough to make Bax stare. Dillon puffed up, staring Bax down enough that Andy had the grace to look away, a little puzzled frown on his brow. The boys would just have to get used to it.

"Dillon, man? Where'd you go? I got your coffee."

"Thanks, Jase." He only took a few steps, enough to get around Coke, letting Jason come to him.

Jason moved toward him, coming careful, stopping when he nudged the chair, and moving around it. Dillon waited for Jase to hold it out, mostly in the right direction, before saying, "A little to the left, man."

Coke and Bax looked at him like he was Simon Legree, but Jason would have to learn to be precise. Follow the voice commands.

"Thanks." Jason found his hand, managed to only splash the tiniest bit. The look of satisfaction on Jase's face sort of made him sick to his stomach a little.

"Good job." Not a bit of his upset came out in his voice, and he was proud. "Now comes the hard part. Get me the milk?"

"Is it on the table still or in the fridge again?" Smart boy.

"On the table. Bax moved it, though." He held up a finger, trying to get Bax and Coke not to speak.

Coke was vibrating, wanting to help, so bad.

"Well, then, clown-boy, give me a hint." Jason was actually grinning.

"It's at almost twelve o'clock from Bax's left hand." Bax had sat on Jason's left side, so it would be a ways over from where he'd put it down to begin with.

Jason's forehead wrinkled and Dillon could swear he could see the gears working. Then Jason went right, taking the shorter route, following the table around to Bax. "Hey, you."

Bax's arm got a quick caress, then Jason followed it down, sliding to Andy's fingers and then to the milk jug.

Smart Jason. "You won't be able to get away with that in public, but it works."

"I don't know what to do in public yet. Or with the cameras. Fans." The milk bottle shook a little, then stopped.

"Well, you're learning fast." Dillon took the jug when Jase finally handed it over, pouring some in his coffee before handing it back. "Here you go."

"Where do you want me to put it?"

"In the fridge, son. In the door." Coke's eyes were dark, devastated, but Jason wouldn't hear it in the easy words.

Jason found the fridge easily enough, got the door open, and fumbled a little with the milk to get it into place. Damn.

"You want to take a swim, Bax?"

"Sure, Mini. I'm all for it." Bax had perked up a bit with food and coffee, and grabbed two water bottles out of the fridge before taking Jason's hand. "Come on. Y'all coming?"

"I'll be out in a while. I need to shave." Coke turned and headed down the hall, shoulders up by his ears.

Sighing, Dillon waved Bax and Jason off. "You guys go ahead. I'll clean up in here and stuff." And go give Coke a little massage in the shower.

Jason shook his head. "No. You oughta go with Coke, huh? Me and Bax can break dishes real good."

"Thanks, Jason." Dillon patted Jason's arm on the way by. "Just watch the knife in the sink, okay? I used the bread knife to cut toast."

He trotted down the hall, his footsteps sounding loud after a morning of working with Jase.

Coke was sitting on the edge of the bed, face in his hands. Shit. Dillon shifted from foot to foot, biting his lip. Then he went for it, going in and sitting next to Coke. "It's kind of shattering, huh?"

"I just. If I'd got to him in time. If I'd only been faster."

"Coke." Oh, no. No, no, no. Dillon turned and wrapped his arms around the man, holding on tight. "You couldn't have done any more than you did. You have to stop that thinking if you're gonna help."

"It's my job. It's my job to save 'em and now he's blind and I just keep thinking about his daddy, how disappointed he'd be."

"Coke. I bet even his dad would understand. I mean, it happened so damned fast. How could any of you be there that quick?"

"I don't know." Those sweet, devastated eyes stared at him, hurting so bad Dillon could feel it. "I don't know, cowboy, and I'll have his back the rest of his life, but I'd give damn near anything to have reached him five seconds sooner."

"I know. I know, Coke. You think Bax doesn't think the same?" He laughed, the sound a little desperate. "Look at how fast Bax got to him. The slowest man ever. It has nothing to do with want to."

Coke leaned into him, letting him hold on, not looking at him. "You're it, you know. What I wouldn't give up for Jase."

"I'm selfish enough to say good." He kissed Coke's cheek, the side of Coke's jaw, gentle touches meant to comfort. "I'm in it for the long haul, Coke."

"Good." Coke sighed, nodded. "Come take a shower with me? Touch me a little?"

"You know it, babe. I would so love that." He helped Coke up, helped get the soft shorts and tank top off.

Coke helped him, too, hands sliding over his skin, petting him. They walked to the bathroom together, arm in arm, and Dillon got the water going. By now he knew what Coke liked, and was glad they coincided. The shower was like heaven -- the little molded seat that was big enough for two, the huge shower head.

There were even little ledges for soaps and shit. It was adorable.

The steam rose from the water, and Dillon guided Coke to the seat. He wanted to rub those tight shoulders.

"You spoil me."

"You do the same for me. It's all good." He got a little bath oil, which he had a feeling Coke usually used for something else, and rubbed it between his palms.

Coke's nostrils flared at the smell and, yeah, this wasn't used for soaking in. Grinning a little, Dillon started at the top and worked down, with long, gentle strokes. He had to be careful with Coke's poor neck. Coke's head fell forward a little, just a little, but enough that he knew Coke was feeling it.

His fingers moved, slow and sure, rubbing in the oil, rubbing the tension out. Damn, but Coke felt like frozen rope.

One callused hand landed on his thigh, sliding slow and easy, thumb stroking.

"Mmm. That feels good, huh?" It felt amazing, It always did when Coke touched him.

"It does." The tension started melting away, those broad shoulders easing.

Dillon worked at Coke's shoulders next, knowing he had to soften them before starting on that abused spine. The man had more scars than anyone his age ought to, but Dillon thought they were hot.

That hand slid up, gently cupping his balls, rubbing him right back.

"Uhn." Toes scrabbling for purchase, he pushed his foot against the floor of the shower, his other knee still planted on the bench next to Coke. It wouldn't do to fall.

"They're so goddamn soft and you smell good down there. All man."

"Coke." Sometimes Coke said things that made him want to come, just like that. Without any thought.

"Yeah." Coke leaned a little more, lips brushing his ribs as that hand touched and tugged.

Gathering his thoughts, Dillon started touching Coke again, his hands sliding around front, fingers plucking at Coke's nipples.

"Dillon." He loved that shocked little look that Coke always gave him, like Coke thought nipples were only decorative.

Nipples were a wondrous thing. Coke's especially. Dillon did love them. He twisted them a little, thumbs rubbing. That let him watch Coke's thighs part, the heavy cock bobbing as Coke shifted. Yum. Turning, he sat on the shower seat next to Coke, his hand sliding down over the flat belly, fingertips grazing that amazing prick. "So hot, Coke."

"Your fault. You make me." Coke's hand slipped around his back, finding his ass.

"I like that, babe. I like that it's me." Pushing in close, Dillon took a kiss, his lips pressing to Coke's, slick with water.

Coke moved him like he weighed nothing at all, drawing him around to straddle those thick thighs and snuggle in close. Their cocks pushed together, and suddenly the whole thing was familiar, right, where Dillon got to ride and Coke was smiling for him. So much better than the tense frown.

"Mmm. That's about right." Coke's hand found his ass, the other cupping their pricks.

Rocking, Dillon held on to Coke's shoulders, locking his feet against Coke's shins. Leverage was good.

The water hit him, right in the small of his back, right where Coke's hands were.

That had him moaning, arching, letting his hips roll. God, Coke could make him forget everything. Even what he was supposed to make Coke forget.

"Look at you." The words were low, rough, Coke's eyes sharp and dragging over him like a touch.

"Me? Oh, babe." He kissed Coke hard, lips mashing against Coke's, but his eyes stayed wide open. He'd much rather look at Coke.

Coke's tongue pushed in, moving with the same rhythm as that hand. He grunted and pushed down hard, slamming their cocks together, way beyond needing a gentle touch. Way beyond. He needed a hard, fast rubdown.

It looked like Coke was right with him, stroking and rubbing him, jacking him faster.

"Coke. Babe. I... Oh." His head fell back, the water hitting his hair, and Dillon burst out with a desperate laugh, figuring he looked like something in a porno movie.

"Yeah. Yeah. Come on, cowboy." He heard Coke groan, felt that rough hand squeeze. "Come for me, now."

"Now." All Coke had to do was ask. Dillon came like there was no tomorrow, his balls aching, his cock jerking in Coke's hand.

"Sweet lord." Coke hunched a little, hips leaving the bench seat.

"Now you, babe. Yeah?" He let go of one of Coke's shoulders, but he didn't reach for that sweet cock. Nope, he went for the left nipple, pinching it hard.

"Yes." Coke jumped, shooting for him, seed spreading between them.

Whoa. Smell that. Dillon breathed them in, the water washing it all away almost too fast. It was a good thing, though.

"Mmm. Hell of a better start to our morning."

"You know it." Grinning, he leaned in and took a kiss, loving on that man for all he was worth.

Coke's arms wrapped around him, holding on. Loving on him right back.

They'd make all this work, no problem. They had each other. That would make all the other stuff easy as pie.

Chapter Twenty Two

Jesus, Fort Worth was loud.

Coke shook his head, bouncing back and forth on his toes. Christ. They'd had two hang ups and little CB got his ass *trounced*. He looked over to Nate; the man sported a huge black eye. "Love Texas dates."

"No shit. The bulls are fresh as daisies." Nate leaned from one side to the other, stretching his legs.

"Yep." He waited for the gate puller to walk by, then bent at the waist. Stretching. "Who's up next?"

"Beau Lafitte." Nate winked, then rolled his eyes.

Yeah. They'd have to be on top of their game because Beau was in the lead now that Jason was out, having blown by Kynan like nothing going.

"Lord love a Cajun." He jogged over to the chute, grinning up at Sammy. "Get him out of the chute quick, Sammy, huh?"

Sam Bell, Beau's traveling partner, grinned his amazing little grin and nodded. "Yeah. Won't do to have him in there too long."

"Nope." He winked and jogged back, shoulders moving. There was something in the air, always was at this event.

Nate was still bouncing, and back behind in the back-up position, Cooper Riley was back with them, stretching and rolling his neck.

"Okay, boyos. Three more on this group, then we get a drink." The gate open and Beau went spinning, little bitty legs spurring like mad.

Five, six, seven... Score. Beau flipped off to the back, and Coke and Nate moved in, waving and shouting. Bossman was a bull who knew his business, though, heading right for the gate.

"You go, Cajun." He hooted, clapped Beau on the back, grinning at Sammy who was hollering as the 92.25 score came up.

Dillon came bouncing over to give Beau a punch on the arm, and Beau grinned at all of them, taking off his hat and waving to the crowd. Man had manners, after all.

Things went a little easier after that. Hell, even Sammy rode for a respectable 88.75. The crowd was with Dillon, waving signs and singing, a sea of cowboy hats bobbing along.

Dillon was really having at an old Bon Jovi song, stalling a little for Don, who couldn't seem to get out of the chute. Bushmaster wanted to go over the top, not out the gate. He walked over, grabbed one horn and jerked it. "Come on, you ass. Look over here."

Don grinned at him, teeth missing. "Thanks, Coke."

"Anytime."

They got the bull straight in the chute, which mattered not one whit, because Don came down in less than two seconds. Wham, bam, thank you Bushmaster.

Coke grabbed hold of Don's collar as Bushmaster turned back, horns lowered. He swacked at the big snotty nose. "You get back."

Bushmaster snorted, but flipped his tail and headed for the gate. Don popped up like a rubber ball, laughing like a loon.

"Lord have mercy. Get on and wave to your fans, son." He chuckled, swinging back to grin at Nate. Lord, those bulls.

Don nodded and waved to the clapping crowd, watching the playback on the big screen. The kid grimaced when he saw how close that old bastard's hooves had come to his head.

"You gotta watch that, man. You need that brain."

The exit gate swung open again, Adam Taggart's horse backing up quick, head tossing. Bushmaster came whirling back out into the arena, heading right for Nate, whose back was turned. "**Nate!**"

Coke jumped in, grabbing ahold of Bushmaster's tail, pulling hard to give Nate that extra second or two. His heels dragged but hard through the dirt, and for a second it was like he was surfing the floor. Then those hind legs came up, catching him in the chest and sending him whirling in a somersault. Oh, he did not think so.

He rolled up, banging into Don with a slap. "Git out! Are you stupid?"

Bushmaster roared, the sound more lion than bull, and turned back to go for Adam's horse. The safety man spurred out of the way, and Nate shot through the middle, drawing the bull after him. But Nate wasn't going to find the pocket.

God damn motherfucker.

He dug in, slamming against Bushmaster's side, enough to make the bull stumble and look toward him, eyes rolling. Come on, big boy. Play with the cowboy. Right here. You look right here. "Bushmaster! Come on! Here I am, now."

If he waved his arms any harder, one was gonna pop off.

Coke heard the whistle of Adam's rope, but it only hooked one horn, just enough to make Bushmaster kick back and turn the other way. Which pushed that hard-assed hind end into him.

He landed hard on his ass, bones rattling inside him, breath going out in a whoosh. Damn it.

Nate was hollering, screaming really, but Coke couldn't make out the words. His bell was rung, chickens scattered like a pen after a spring tornado, and he could taste blood in his mouth. Sucking copper pennies, Lefty woulda said. Their third bullfighter, Cooper, flew through the air, spinning like a rag doll, landing six feet to his right then laying dead still.

"Fuck me."

He got up on his feet -- or really his knees, because his ankles weren't cooperating a bit -- because there wasn't a choice. Coop was down and Coop was one of theirs and Coke had to get to him. Crawling across the dirt, he threw himself over Coop's body, hunkering down over the hooking that was coming.

Bushmaster came at them like a freight train, and he could feel the blow of hot breath and snot on his back when the weirdest thing happened. The bull turned right off him, hooves brushing his ribs, Coop's arm.

What the fuck?

He lifted his head, looking right at Dillon, who was waving his arms furiously, just inches away from the bull. "Dillon! Run! Nattie! I need you!"

Up.

Up, goddamn it, Coke!

Dillon's eyes cut to his for less than half a second before the man turned and ran. Shit, that boy could run like the wind, had been all star in track. Bushmaster caught up with him, though. Took about two steps.

Jason's last ride flashed into his head, Danny's boy caving to the ground, crumpled and broke and blind and... He roared, throwing himself at Bushmaster as that head lowered.

Just about the time he reached for that leathery tail one more time, Dillon shot up in the air, spinning like a kung fu movie character. The man hit the dirt like a rag doll, out before he even landed.

"No!" He whipped around, coming eye-to-eye with that sorry bastard, and bashed the bull in the nose, hard enough that he felt something in his hand crack.

"Coke, move!" Nate shouted it, and Adam's rope came down, wrapping around the bull's neck. That cow horse wheeled, Adam's quick fingers wrapping the rope around the saddle horn. Suddenly it was all over, Bushmaster running along head down, trying to get the rope off, heading right out of the arena one more time.

He got to Dillon, one hand moving to shake the man before he thought. "Dillon!"

Blue eyes popped open, Dillon's hands coming up to ward him off, like he was the bull, still there. "Shit. Shit. Coke?"

"Yes. Yes, what hurts?" Can you fucking see me?

"Uh." Laughing a little, Dillon grabbed his arm and levered to a sitting position. "My butt, for one."

"Get the doc out here!" He wasn't laughing, not at all. "Coop? You good?"

He could hear David, the arena announcer, calling for a longer break, asking the crowd to be patient and not worry, could hear the murmur of the crowd. Nate was creaking over to Coop, touching the man's back.

"M'okay. Just get me out of here," Cooper grunted, barely audible.

He looked over, closing his eyes, praying a second. Please, Jesus. Keep 'em whole. Please, Jesus, watch your cowboys. Please. "Nate? You?"

"Fine, boss."

Doc Madding and the sport medicine team sprinted into the arena, heading for Coop first, since he still wasn't up, wasn't moving.

"Come on, can you stand up?" His hand was throbbing, his head swimming like nothing going.

"Stand." Dillon contemplated that a couple seconds. "Yeah. I can if you can. Are you okay? Is anything broken?"

"I'll live. Up." The crowd was watching them all like hawks. "Come on, before Ace comes down here."

"Oh, God. Not Ace." Dillon unfolded, standing up, a little unsteady but not busted. Only bleeding a little.

"Wave to the crowd."

"My headset's gone." Dillon nodded to the crowd, one hand going behind his back to check for his battery pack. "So's my pack. I need a... I need. Coke, your hand is purple."

"Wave to the motherfucking crowd, Dillon." He got Dillon moving, knowing they had to get things going again.

"I am! Don't you yell at me." Maybe Dillon thought he was waving, but that arm was barely moving.

"Look. You fucking get in here and play with us? You play by our rules. You smile and wave and pretend it don't hurt." Dillon could have died -- no safety gear. No vest. No pads.

Dillon stopped a moment and stared at him, hurt flashing in those watery eyes. Then the man pasted on a smile and stepped away from him, raising the other arm and giving the crowd a big wave.

"Good man." He patted Dillon and headed for Nate without looking back, his hand a ball of agony. "You okay, bud?"

Nate nodded, looking like he'd been run over by a bus. "I'm all right, Hoss. You ought to have Doc look at that hand."

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Dillon head over to the announcer stand, getting suited up with a handheld mic.

"Shit, he looks at it, you're working without me and Coop." He knew better than that. He couldn't leave Nate on his own. "It'll keep 'til after."

"Yeah. Okay, yeah, boss. We don't have an alternate anywhere closer than tomorrow."

"Hey, you know what we need? We need you guys to get behind the next rider. Come on and pump it up!" Dillon was smiling, shouting, starting to jog around the arena.

Oh, good. Not hurt. Coke might beat the beautiful son of a bitch with a shovel.

The crowd started cheering, the music started playing again, and things started to get back to normal. Troy came walking over, clipboard in hand. "You boys ready?"

"Bring it on." The sooner they started, the sooner the fucking short go would be over.

Chapter Twenty Three

The rest of the show went by in a blur for Dillon. Luckily, the short go was usually a quiet time for him, because the brass believed firmly in letting the bulls and the riders be the stars.

Dillon had never been so damned grateful for that.

A handheld mic didn't go well with his style, for one thing. Of course, it made it easier not to pant into the microphone, which was good. The downside was that his one arm was pretty much completely numb, so he had to make do with his one good arm for everything. His ribs ached, his butt hurt, and worst of all, Coke wouldn't look at him.

At all.

He hadn't hurt so damned bad since that Boise football player had hit him at the all state championship his senior year. Considering that was nearly twenty years ago, that was a long time to go between hurting like this.

Once the check was presented, Dillon ducked right out of the gate, waiting for Coke and Nate, who were doing their little after the show prayer. He could see Coke's hand, huge and black, the fingers swollen all out of proportion, hanging over Nate's shoulder, and it made him wince.

"Hey. Let's take you to the back, get you checked out, huh?" Jonesy's hand circled his upper arm, leading him back to Sports Medicine.

"Wait. Jonesy. I need to talk to Coke." He tried to pull away, but Mr. Numb All Night Arm started screaming.

"Uh-uh. You come on. Now. Doc! Dillon's shoulder's dislocated, I think." Everybody in the back stopped, stared at him.

He saw Coke, who was coming around the chutes, stop, look at him, and go purely gray. "Oh, sweet Jesus."

Troy and Ace were right behind Coke and Nate and he heard the chute boss, clear as a bell. "Jesus fucking Christ, Pharris. Don't we pay you to make sure he *doesn't* get hurt? You know how much he's worth?"

Ace slapped Troy on the shoulder. "Lord, the rate we're losing guys, we're going to have to start docking their pay per injury."

Dillon swayed a little. "It's not his fault, damn it. I'm the one who got in the way. What's the first rule of the clown, guys?"

Everyone but Coke chuckled, and there was a chorus of, "Stay in the barrel, stupid."

"Come on, Dillon. Let's get you fixed up." Jonesy smiled at him, winked. "Let the bosses growl at the bullfighters. Coop's out for at least six weeks. He'll be able to go home to that new baby."

"Oh, well good for him. So Fred will be back up, huh?" He was babbling. He knew he was, but he couldn't... Wait. "Coke needs his hand looked at, Jonesy. It's all black."

"Coke knows whether he's hurt or not, man. Besides, if he doesn't want to come back, Nate will just run interference and they'll both bolt."

Snapping out of his haze, Dillon set his jaw and pulled away, managing to do it this time. "So I don't get the luxury of knowing how I feel? You going to baby me, Jonesy?"

One eyebrow went up, Jonesy's lips twisting. "Look, Dillon. We can do this one of two ways. You can be an asshole, I can get Doc, and we can make a scene and be unpleasant. Or you can remember that you're under contract tighter than anyone here *but* me and Doc, come and be nice, and we'll get your shoulder fixed."

"I just need to see Coke, Jonesy. Just for two seconds. Okay? Then I'll go quietly." Damn it, he wasn't asking too much, was he? He needed to see if Coke was okay, and apologize for fucking up.

"Ace has him, Dillon." Nate came over, rolling his shoulders, looking exhausted. "Coop's hurt pretty bad. They're shipping Coke to Montana with me in the morning, to work the big show. Ace is doing the arrangement thing."

He stared at Nate, trying not to scream like the damned diva they all accused him of being on occasion. Cooper was hurt. That should mean more than his own desperate need to make sure Coke was good, that they were good. Sighing, he turned to Jonesy.

"Let's go. Quicker we get this done, the sooner I can make some calls."

"You know it. Night, Nate."

Nate nodded to Jonesy. "Night, man."

"Night, Nate. Get some rest, yeah?" Dillon followed Jonesy to sports medicine, where ninety percent of the guys once again stared at him like he'd grown two heads.

David was there, right after he got settled, eyes dark and warm, concerned. "Lord, Lonnie. My heart stopped when I saw you. How're you doing?"

"Huh? Oh, I'm okay. My arm doesn't work." He grinned and did an Igor kind of shuffle walk, letting his bad arm dangle. Gross, but cool.

"Shit. God, don't do that. It's freaky." David helped him up onto the table and pulled out a handkerchief. "For your face. You and your damned makeup."

The tease was familiar, making them both smile.

"Hey, I used to do it for tradition. These days it hides the wrinkles." The grease paint came off easier than usual. He must be sweating up a storm.

Jonesy came over with a cupful of pills and a syringe. "Take the pills and then we'll get you this muscle relaxant."

"What kind of pills?" Pills could make him pretty goofy. He did stupid things. Like climb out on a fourth story balcony and sing "You Light Up My Life" to people who broke up with him.

"Percocet and Levaquin. You'll need 'em, Walsh." Doc came over, shaking his head. "This'll hurt. You done x-rays yet, Jonesy?"

"No sir. Fixin' to."

"Wait. X-rays?" He looked at David, starting to get a little panicky.

"Easy, Lonnie. Easy. What's up, Doc?"

Doc smiled a little. "No big thing. I just want to make one hundred percent sure it's just dislocated and exactly where things are. That way we pop it in quick and easy."

"Well, that sounds reasonable." David's buttery voice soothed him, calmed him down a little, even if he wished Coke was there. Maybe that meant he was well and truly over David, and one hundred percent in love with Coke.

In fact, he was pretty sure that was it.

"Take the pills, Dillon." Jonesy touched his hand. "The x-rays will take two minutes."

"Oh. Sure." Man, he wasn't good at cowboy up, was he? The guys were all determinedly *not* staring at him now, so he sucked the pills down and put on his show face. "Ready."

"Good man."

The little portable x-ray machine was wheeled over, David and everybody stepping back.

It was weird, how the x-rays didn't hurt like they had the time he'd broken his ankle ice skating. Dillon could see now how the guys could ride with a shoulder out. Oh, it wasn't pleasant, it hurt. A lot. But he made it through without screaming or passing out. Heck, he didn't even make a sound.

"Good deal. Now. I'll give you this shot and we'll put things back." The injection happened damn fast, and the rush of dopey hit about the time he realized scissors were slicing through his shirt.

"Shit! You could have taken it off!" His sponsors would shit a brick.

"You have more than one." He was going to whack Jonesy with a shovel.

"You have any idea how much... Uh. Jonesy? Is the world supposed to be blue?"

Dude.

"Yeah, Walsh. That's normal. David, you're driving him to the hotel, right?"

"I am." David nodded, coming to stand in his line of sight. "I'll get him settled. Y'all just have to decide when he can travel home."

"He's going to..." Jonesy looked at the x-rays, then handed them to Doc. "He's gonna be sick and sore tomorrow. Can you keep him in a room for two more days? Then he'll be feeling like traveling."

Doc made clucking noises, staring at the x-rays against the bright lights. "You're going to want to stay as still as possible, for sure, but nothing is cracked. Where else hurts?"

"My butt. And uh, my ribs, but they're not broken. I promise. Been there."

"Good deal. You're sure?"

"I am." That he could tell. He was sore as hell, but there wasn't that grinding horror when he tried to breathe.

Jonesy nodded, took hold of his arm. "If you're sure, that's good enough for me. Ready?"

"Ready." One last look at Jonesy, and Dillon closed his eyes, waiting for the big ow. It came, but it wasn't nearly as earth-shattering as he'd thought, more like his heart stopped and his head exploded and then it was better and his hand woke up.

"Wow. Evil hand." He flexed it, glad to see his little sausage-swollen fingers wiggle. "Man, Ace and Sandy would have my ass if I'd killed it."

"No killing it. Let's wrap you up." Jonesy's touch was gentle now, careful.

"You're good at that Jonesy. I can see why the guys like you better than Doc. Or Shaun." He'd seen Shaun stitching Beau up once.

"They like me because I make them take the good drugs."

"That, too." Man, he was going to have to get David to get him some food on the way back to the hotel. He was getting queasy as hell. "Has anyone seen Coke yet?"

"Ace has him, remember?" David's smile was gentle. "He's a tough old man, Lonnie. He'll see you at the hotel, I'm sure."

"Okay." Soon enough, Dillon was wrapped up like a mummy, including ice and plastic wrap on his ribs. "Can I go now?"

"If you can walk. David?"

"I'll get your gear, man, and we'll go. You hungry?"

"I could eat a little something." He stuck his tongue out at AJ, who he hadn't noticed sitting across from him, laughing like a loon at the way his knees didn't want to work. They were all wobbly and stuff, his joints going all over with bad angles.

"You heading back to the room, man?" AJ asked. "I'll let Coke know."

"I am. I think I might melt otherwise. Dribble right through the floor." He still had enough strength to flip Donnie off when he made blub-blub noises, though. "Happy Meal, here I come."

He headed out, swaying a little, David's lean body right there to lead him out so he could wait for Coke.

Chapter Twenty Four

"Man, you shoulda let someone fix your hand."

"Hush, Nate. I got ten minutes to get my shit and talk with Dillon and tell him I'm sorry before we head to DFW. I'll deal with it up north."

It was so swole it didn't hurt no more. Nothing did, except that place in him that said he'd fallen down on the job again, got someone hurt again. Fucked up again.

He handed his card key to Nate. "Help me, man."

"You're gonna play hell in a pressurized cabin." Nate took the card, though, and opened the door, the room beyond dark and cool.

"You can hold my head and comfort me." He whispered the words, in case Dillon was asleep. "Dillon? Honey?"

There was no answer, no movement, and it was Nate who jerked a thumb toward the bathroom from the doorway. "Water's running."

"Oh, man." He stepped over, good hand raised to knock when someone laughed.

Someone not Dillon.

He stayed there, hand up, hoping to hell he was mistaken. That laugh sounded again, smooth as caramel, weirdly familiar. Then he could hear Dillon.

"Dave-O. Stop that. I swear to God, I'm all melty."

That chuckle came again. "Lonnie... Lord, what am I going to do with you? You're slick."

David Donaldson.

Coke stopped, fingers curling into a fist before he thought and the jolt of pain had him stumbling a little. Nate grabbed his arm, steadied him.

"Let's go, Coke. You... I'll help you get your shit."

"Okay." He nodded, grabbed his bag. There wasn't anything in the bathroom he couldn't replace.

Well, that wasn't entirely true, but...

Yeah.

Nate made a quick circuit of the room while Coke waited out in the hall. He didn't want to hear anymore. Didn't want to accidentally see if Dillon and David came out of the bathroom. When Nate came out, tight-lipped and stony-faced, he figured he was glad.

"You ready, Nattie?" At Nate's tense nod, they started moving toward the elevator. "Did you tell me that your girl was coming up north this time?"

He'd love to see the kiddos.

"Yeah. Tracy's coming up. We're going on a big trail ride after the rodeo." They made it inside the elevator before Nate exploded. "I'll kick his ass, Coke. I swear to God."

"He got it trounced pretty good tonight." And hell, he'd fucked up, hadn't he?

"And he brought David to your room? Taking right up where he left off. Don't make excuses for that shit, Hoss." Nate's cheeks were dark red, the color rising all the way to the brim of his hat.

"What do you want me to say, man?" He stopped, frowned. "Where he left off? Him and David? But David's real married..."

"He is, yeah. They broke up when David got engaged." Nate was shifting side to side, like he was ready to fight a bull.

"Oh." Oh, sweet Jesus. There was no fool like an old fool. "I guess I didn't know about that, huh?"

"I'm not sure how, man. I mean, they never flaunted, and David dropped him like a hot rock when that little gal came along."

Poor Dillon. He sighed, his heart aching some. He knew a thing or two about loving someone you couldn't have none of. It was a hard thing.

"Let's get to the airport, huh? That rodeo starts at eleven in the morning."

"Sure, Hoss. You know me. I got your back." Nate shouldered his bag, leading him out to the cab and the next job.

Least he knew he'd always have his work.

Them boys would always need someone watching their backs.

Chapter Twenty Five

God, his shoulder hurt.

Dillon grinned over at David, who had showed up with room service at about ten thirty p.m. The man had a flight out at one in the morning, and Dillon would leave Wednesday afternoon. He wanted to go to Montana, but Ace and the CEO, Sandy, really wanted him to go home to Idaho. Luckily, he could take a commuter hop from one to the other pretty quick. Either way, he'd missed his original Monday flight out.

"At least my stomach is growling. I swear, that shot Jonesy gave me, what? Two days ago? Made me a complete idiot."

"It did. It was adorable. Any time you need someone to prop you up in the shower when you're stupid, just call. I'll check my schedule."

Dillon's smile faded a little, feeling kinda stiff. He knew David didn't mean it that way, but he didn't quite know what to do with offers like that from anyone but Coke. "I couldn't help it that none of my muscles worked."

"You couldn't. You should be back to rights in no time."

"Thanks for all of your help, Dave-O. I haven't been this dumb in a long time." Dillon met the warm brown eyes he'd always admired. "I saw Coke laid out over Coop and that bull bearing down, and I went a little nuts."

"You gotta let him do his job, Lonnie. There's never been one as good as Coke Pharris."

"I know. He's just so torn up about Jason, and I knew if Cooper got hurt worse, he'd be so guilty... That sounds crazy, huh?" It did when he said it out loud. It had made sense when he thought it.

"Jason's got the hardest fucking head on earth." David snorted. "I'm surprised he's not back already, at least to do appearances."

"Oh, I'm sure he will be. Coke just loves him like a son." Jesus, that was close. They would all kick his ass if he let it slip about Jason. Hell, he might jump off a bridge himself.

"Yeah. Coke's a good man." David gave him a look, a little knowing, a lot arch. "Surprised he didn't check on you, though, when he stopped and got his stuff..."

Dillon sat up straight, his ribs protesting madly. "Wait. You didn't see him? He didn't leave a note?" Coke had come and gotten his stuff? God, he'd been out of it.

"No, he must have come during the night, after I went back to my room. I noticed his bag was gone yesterday morning."

"Oh, damn it." That wasn't like Coke. Unless he tried to wake Dillon up and couldn't. Those drugs had been strong enough that he'd been out like a light before the door closed behind David Sunday night.

"I need to call him. You know where my cell got to?"

"I don't..."

I'm a Cowboy started playing and David grinned. "On the bedside table."

"Oh, cool." He grabbed it, flipping it open without even looking at the number. "Hello?"

"Where is he, Dillon? Momma and Jack said they can come out if y'all need. I didn't find out 'til five minutes ago, I swear to God." Jason. What?

"Wait. Jason, slow down. What are you taking about?" His heart kicked into high gear, throbbing against his ribs.

"Coke. Coke, man. What hospital's he in?"

"I... Hospital?" He thought he might puke. "What. What happened? I'm still in Fort Worth?"

"Lonnie? Lonnie, what's wrong, honey?" David leaned close, face concerned.

Jason, though, was quiet. Stone quiet.

"Jason?" He waved a hand at David, hoping he hadn't lost Jason. "Jason, please. What happened?"

He heard Jason talk to someone on his end of the phone, sounding confused as hell. "Bax. He don't know. He's still in Cowtown, with David Donaldson. He don't even know."

"Fucker." Bax's voice was flat, hard as steel. "Hang up the phone, Mini."

"But."

"Just do it. We gotta find Coke."

The line went dead.

Dillon sat there a moment, blinking, before shooting up off the bed. "I have to find Coke, Dave. He's... He's hurt. Somewhere in Montana, I'm sure. You have to help me."

"What? Who was that? What the *hell* is going on?"

"It was Jason. He said Coke was in the hospital." Oh, God. Please. Please let Coke be okay. "He heard you and... Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck."

"What? Coke? Call Nate. He's there with him, right?" David flipped his phone open. "I'll call Ace."

"Right. Nate." He hated to admit it, but he didn't have Nate programmed. "David, what's his number?"

David looked over at him, shook his head. "Dork. He's going to be fine."

"Don't. Don't try to calm me down. Not until I know what's going on." He didn't care if he was being a dork. Coke hadn't even said goodbye, Jason thought... Well, who knew what Jason thought, but he knew what Bax thought.

David pushed buttons until Nate's number came up. "Here you go, Lonnie."

"Thank you." He reached out and squeezed David's knee. The man was a good friend. Then he called Nate, praying the man would answer.

"What the fuck do you want, you two-timing bastard?"

"Nate? Nate. Where's Coke? Is he okay? What happened?" Oh, thank God. Someone who knew something. Nate had to. He'd been there.

"Why the fuck would I tell you? You go back to playing slap and tickle in the bath with David. Coke don't need you. We take care of our own."

"Nate!" He actually sat back on his butt, sorta blown out of the water. No way had Jason called Nate so fast. Even if Jason had, there was no way Nate would be so shitty without knowing the whole story. "I'm not slapping or tickling. What the hell?"

"Don't play stupid. We were *there* Sunday night. Me and Coke both. You asshole. And that silly, stupid son of a bitch Coke didn't have the sense to cuss you. He... I... Jesus, he was coming to apologize to you for letting you get *hurt*!"

Sunday night he'd been so doped up he had no idea what he was doing, and he sure couldn't have been doing that. "Nate, I don't know what you're talking about. Dave brought me back, sure, but I fell asleep waiting for Coke. Alone."

"Right. Is that before or after Dave-O got you melty, *Lonnie*?" Nate sighed. "I gotta go. Surgeon's coming."

Then that phone line went dead.

God *damn* it.

Surgeon. Lonnie. Slap and tickle.

Dillon stared at the phone, then looked at David, feeling like he might just keel over. "Call Ace. Please? I need to go with you to the airport, but I need to know where Coke is."

"I'll go with you, man. Let me make some phone calls. You... You sit there and worry."

"Okay." He could do that. David couldn't come with him; that would just make things worse. Besides, the man had a wife to go home to, and Dillon had a sneaking suspicion she was pregnant.

Still, if anyone could find out what he needed to know in the damned closed-mouth cowboy community, it was David. They'd figure it out.

There really wasn't any other option.

Chapter Twenty Six

Hurt.

Every bit of him hurt so bad he couldn't barely stand it.

Coke tried to open his eyes, tried to move his...

His head.

Something in the back of his neck screamed like a whore and he went stiff, that pain deep and desperate and sickeningly familiar.

Oh, sweet Jesus, please.

No more.

No more.

His belly jerked as his eyes rolled. Coke couldn't fucking breathe, couldn't...

He remembered the bull coming at that little rider, the scream of the kid's momma and he remembered knowing -- knowing without a shadow of a doubt that there wasn't a bit of good coming out of this. That was steel chute behind him, steel gate beside him, a scared sixteen year old kid from Wyoming scrambling under his feet, and that piss-yellow bull bearing down on him like the rapture.

He didn't remember nothing else.

Nothing.

"Coke? Man, can you hear me?" Nate's voice slid over his nerves like a balm, one hand landing on the center of his chest, bracing him. "Relax, Hoss. Relax. I got you. You're in the hospital, buddy. You got fucked up."

He tried to ask how bad, but his throat felt like a bunch of horror movie leprechauns had been at him with sandpaper. He'd never liked those creepy little green guys.

Never.

There was something unnatural about the idea of gold-hoarding, green-wearing midgets with weird accents and stupid hats.

"It's bad. They had to fuse C3 and C4 and wire your damn collarbone again. I told them to get you a fake one, but they wouldn't listen. They fixed your hand, too. Surged on them little bones." Nate's face appeared above him, eyes a little like an unbroke horse, mouth just moving and moving. "You scared the fuck out of me, Hoss."

"Yeah." He almost asked over Dillon, then he remembered that he might not have the right to, no more. He didn't know for sure and it looked like maybe it'd be a couple three days before he could manage to find out.

"You'll be out a few weeks, but you'll be back working for the finals, so it'll be okay." He got a quick, shit-eating grin. "You and Coop, man, always trying to make my life difficult."

He tried to nod, then he went stiff with a wave of pain that had his legs slamming on the mattress, just pounding, and Nate groaned. "No. No, Hoss. Don't. Nurse! Nurse, motherfuck! You get in here!"

God, yes. Get in here, because he was tired of this shit already.

Chapter Twenty Seven

"I'm sorry, Sir. The fastest itinerary to Great Falls will take at least fifteen hours from DFW."

Dillon sat back on the damned bed in the hotel room that was starting to seem like a prison. Oh, he'd tried to get up and go Tuesday night, but David had called Ace, all right, and Ace had mounted up from his ranch just south of Fort Worth and come riding up to give him what for.

He was under contract, Ace said. He needed to rest and heal, Ace said. He had to work again in just about a week and a half, and no one could do what he had to do without letting a dislocated shoulder heal.

There were even veiled threats about getting his ass fired, if he didn't calm down and do what was best for the league and all...

Dillon had looked Ace right in the eye and told the man where to fucking go. He needed to go to Coke.

Of course, by the time the fight was over, it was nearly three in the morning, and he couldn't really walk anymore because Jonesy had snuck in with David and poked his ass with a needle.

Jonesy was so not his friend anymore.

Well, he was, but Dillon had a few choice words for him. Lurking around down on the next floor, waiting to see what Dillon would do instead of going home like a sane med tech would.

"There's no way you can get me there sooner?" He chewed his thumbnail, wincing as his bad arm protested. Doc had said something about all the tension from him fretting, fretting of all things, was aggravating the strain.

"I can put you on stand-by, but you really ought to be at the airport before I do."

"Okay. I'll take the itinerary, and I'll come sit at the airport. Here's my card number." It was Thursday. Fifteen hours meant he wouldn't make it until Friday. That was five days. Five days since Coke had left, five days his bullfighter had been thinking Dillon was cheating on him, if Coke was thinking about him at all.

No one was answering Coke's phone, Nate wouldn't take his calls, and Jason wouldn't talk to him. If it hadn't been for Ace, asshole that he was, Dillon wouldn't even know that Coke had broken his neck.

Broken his fucking neck. He'd been off his game; Nate had told Ace.

Oh, God, it still made him want to hurl.

He got his shit together and grabbed his bag, calling down to the desk to get him a cab. He'd go to the airport and wait for whatever flight they could get him on.

Dillon just had to pray that he could get there before Coke up and disappeared on him.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing? Pardon my French, sir." Bonner stood at the door of the hospital room, eyes wide. "Mr. Coke, man. You're gonna get me killed."

"I saved your butt." He winked over, trying his dead-level best not to puke on the kid's so-carefully polished boots. "Son, did you bring me a truck?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it gonna get me to Texas?"

"Yes, sir. Daddy said she was good to go." Had he ever been so young? Coke didn't think so.

Not at all.

"Then don't you worry on me."

He'd been in this goddamn place for two nights post-surgery, which was one night too many. Goddamn nurses bothering him and poking him and waking his ass up. A man with a broke neck needed his sleep.

He needed his house.

There was only so much any one man could take. He'd lost a lover, broken his hand and his neck, had a zillion fucking stitches and had tubes in his cock, his nose, and his throat -- all in a three-day period.

He had had enough.

Besides, the relief fund needed all the help it could get. That money could be spent on someone else hanging in the hospital.

Another week his ass.

Nate was at the arena, working with Fred. Ace was somewhere doing something stupid. Jason was freaking out at AJ's, Brenda and Jack had called him enough that he'd just turned his phone off, and he had finally guilted the little boy whose ass he'd saved into calling Daddy and getting him transportation.

Sixteen hundred and fifty miles to home.

He could do this.

"Hand me that there gauze, son. I gotta get this IV out before you help me get my boots on."

"Whut? Mr. Coke, I..."

"Son, this ain't my first broke neck. I got my jeans on, didn't I?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I did it one-handed with the brace." Hell, the shirt was gonna be a hell of a lot harder, not that he was going to tell the kid that.

Good boy. "Then come on, I've got a lot of road ahead of me and that harridan of a Yankee nurse might actually make rounds this evening."

Lord help him. He just needed to get his happy ass home.

"I'm sorry, sir, he's gone."

"Gone." The word came out flat and unsurprised. Goddamn it, he should have known. The fifteen hour trip had taken twenty six, and by midday Saturday, Dillon was feeling a day late and more than a few dollars short.

"Yes." The little nurse clutched a chart in her hands and looked anywhere but at his face. "We didn't know until late Thursday night. The doctor had told us to let him sleep, and only wake him for his medication."

"I see. Well. Thank you. If I see him, I'll call."

He wouldn't. Dillon knew he wouldn't even remember the name of the hospital. He could call all the hotels. He could call the rental car places. It wouldn't do any good, though. Coke would somehow, some way, be on his way home.

When he got back to his rental car, Dillon sat in the driver's seat and leaned his head back against the rest, closing his eyes. Now he had to go to Texas. Fuck, he was tired.

Maybe he should just... Maybe he ought to call Coke first. The man still wasn't answering his cell, but Dillon could leave a voice mail at Coke's house, explain what he and Nate heard. Soften Coke up a little first. Maybe that would...

His cell phone rang, and Dillon dug it out of his pocket, slamming it open. "Coke?"

"Better than, honey."

"Adam?" The last person he'd expected to call him right now was Adam Taggart. "You okay?"

"I am. I'm okay as anything. I'm heading to Coke's."

Dillon sat up fast, banging his head on the roof of the car. "Ow! Coke? Is he all right?"

"He's in a bad way, Dillon. Banged up and was driving himself home. He got himself a little stuck. I sent the boys to get him. How soon can you be here?"

"If it's anything like getting here, it will be late tomorrow."

"Well, come on, then. I'm going to clean up, make sure he has some food. I'll leave the key taped to the top of the inside of the mailbox."

"I... What if he doesn't want to see me, Adam?" That was the worst thing he could think, that Coke would send him away.

Adam kinda yelled at him after that, and Dillon laughed, even as tears welled up in his eyes.

"Okay, okay. I get the picture. I'm on my way."

Hanging up with Adam was tough, because that was one friendly voice, and that was something he'd had too little of lately. Sighing, Dillon turned the key in the ignition and headed back to the airport.

Coke was too important not to try.

Chapter Twenty Eight

Okay.

Coke had survived the drive from Great Falls.

Through the mountains.

Through fucking Denver.

He'd survived a fourteen mile grasshopper swarm that turned the plastic bag he'd wrapped his hand in to goo. If he'd had any sense, he'd have broken the right one, then he could have spread the hand out over the passenger seat.

He'd survived trying to pee in rest stops where he couldn't see his own cock for the brace.

He'd survived a thousand cups of coffee.

What broke him?

Pulling into a fucking Woody's in Amarillo, too close to the ditch. He couldn't pull forward and he couldn't turn to look back and he couldn't fucking figure out what to do, he was hurting so bad.

So he did what they all did when the shit hit the fan. He called the Taggart boys.

And, just like he knew they would, the triplets said they'd come.

They had to come up from Floydada, which would take an hour and some, so he tried to settle, drink his next horrible coffee. Maybe he could grab a nap.

"Lord, Coke, you look like shit." One of the boys leaned against a display of corn nuts just beside the little café booth, the other grinned over his brother's shoulder.

"Saw the truck. You steal it or buy it?" the second one asked.

"It's one of Bonner's, you asshole. His daddy runs a used car lot in Great Falls. I did the boy a favor once."

"Oh, well. You want to keep it, or try to sell it to a local?" The Taggarts would have brought their big dualie, so it wasn't like he had to have it.

"I don't want it. Y'all can have it, iffn you want. Which one of you is which?"

The one in front grinned. "I'm Bryan. That's Chris. Adam headed to your place, to get it ready for you. Says he knows where the key is."

"Thanks, boys." He looked Chris in the eyes, then Bryan. "Take me home, y'all? I'm so tired."

"You bet. You need to hit the head?" They looked so much alike, and so much like their oldest triplet, Adam, who had helped Coke out more than once.

"No. I just want to get on my pony and ride."

He just wanted to be home.

"We can sure do that, Coke. Come on." Bryan stayed to help him up, and Chris got the doors, and God it felt good to sit in the big back of the king cab and not have to be all stiff and hold his arm out.

They'd brought him pillows so he could rest, lean back and breathe. "Thank you, boys."

"No worries, Coke."

"You just relax, and we'll get you home."

"You're good to me." Hell, Adam and Bryan'd been... more than just good to him a couple three times.

"Anything for you, Coke." 'Course, he'd helped the Taggart boys out a lot, too. There'd been a time, after their daddy died, that the ranch was about to go down, and Coke had loaned out his nest egg...

He closed his eyes, sighing softly. He was going to sleep it off. He had eight hours to do nothing but rest.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Dillon wiped his hands on his jeans, afraid to look at the inside of the mailbox. Adam Taggart had told him the key would be there, taped to the roof of the big metal can, but he was terrified it wouldn't be. Oh, he could hop the fence, leave his rental right there by the road, but that was stupid, even in central Texas.

It would be so much better if he could just... look. "Look, stupid," he said out loud, startling himself a little.

Sheepish, Dillon finally opened the box, got Coke's mail, and the key. Just like Adam had said.

Adam had also screamed at him, saying, "I know it's a stupid mistake, honey. Get your ass down there and sort it out with him. He needs you."

Thank God for Adam.

He closed the gate behind him and hopped into the little Subaru, driving down to park beside the house, beside Coke's big diesel.

Gripping the steering wheel, he sat there for a long moment, breathing through his nose. At least his shoulder had stopped throbbing every time he moved. That would help when he had to hold Coke down and make him listen.

When he finally did get out of the car, his knees shook. This was the most important thing he'd ever had to do. So he'd better make it good. Dillon went around to the back of the house, through the barbecue patio, past the pool. Fuck, he loved that pool.

He was pretty glad Coke didn't have dogs. Yet. Coke needed hounds. Maybe wee ones, like bassets or beagles...

He let himself in the sliding glass door, his boots hitting the tile floor with little thuds.

"Coke?"

He heard a thud, a crash. "I... Somebody there?"

"Coke!" Dillon went careening through the house, heading for the bedroom, trying hard not to panic. If Coke fell...

Coke was in the hallway, a glass broken at his feet. Oh, Jesus. He stopped, stared a second. Coke was in a neck brace, eyes both black, left hand all wrapped up in bandages.

Coke's mouth opened and closed and opened again. "Dillon? Hey, ho... son. How's that shoulder doing?"

"I. Oh, Christ, Coke. You need to sit down. Come on, babe. The front room or the bedroom?" Coke called the living room the front room; that always made him smile, but right now it wasn't helping.

"Front room, I guess. You go on. I gotta get the broom. You want a beer?"

"No. You sit. I'll get the broom. I know," he said, holding up a hand. "You're not helpless. I'm just less hurt than you."

"Why'd you come, Dillon? Did... did things not work out for you with... I mean, I didn't know, son. You coulda told me. I know what it's like. I'd've had your back."

"Could have told you what?" That broken glass was going to slice something off, and neither of them could afford to lose a foot. Dillon needed his for stomping Coke's, just for the hell of it. "There was nothing to tell. David and I were over when he got married, and I may be a clown, but I'm not stupid enough to think there was anything real there for him."

Coke looked at him, blinked. "Whut?"

"He never loved me, Coke. Not like you do. What kind of fool would give you up for that?" His hands were clenching and unclenching, his shoulder screaming with the tension. "I've never thrown myself in front of a two thousand pound bull for David."

"You ever throw yourself in front of another one and I will blister your ass."

"I think the urge has passed. From now on, I'll throw my clothes at them. Or my barrel. Maybe Nate. He deserves it." He was still a little mad at Nate.

"I. Lord." Coke looked flummoxed. "You want that beer?"

"I do. Come and sit, and I'll get the broom, okay?" They had to sit, talk like rational people. Hell, if Coke was on the same kind of drugs he'd been on, the man would be really confused.

"Okay." Coke shuffled forward, staring at him a little. "I was worried about you, your shoulder. I came to the hotel to tell you I was sorry."

"When, Coke? Nate said you heard me and David, but I was just trying to get clean. That's all." He didn't know if he should touch, if he could. Coke looked so damned pale.

"Y'all were in the shower. I just... I didn't know what to think and then I thought I'd better go and then..." Coke led him into the front room, right hand on his elbow, solid and sure. "Then Nate told me, and I... Well, I know what it's like to love somebody you can't have..."

"I was drugged out of my gourd, babe. Jonesy gave me a shot. All I could do was flop around like a dying fish." They got settled on one of Coke's big, soft couches, and Dillon forgot the beer in favor of grabbing Coke's good hand.

"It don't matter. I ain't accusing you of nothing. I just..." Coke sighed, legs moving idly, like the man didn't know they were moving.

Maybe he didn't. Back injuries were odd. "Coke. Look at me, okay? I'm going to repeat this a lot over the next few days, because I think you're loopy with meds. I love you, okay? You. Even if you're still pining for some lost love you never had."

"Pining?" Coke chuckled, then those chuckles turned to harsh, hysterical laughter. "Oh, shit. I swear to you, if Daniel Scott had ever thought my ass was pining, he'd've beaten me. I thought I loved his skinny ass, then I got old and learned better."

"Daniel. Jason's dad?" Dude. That was. Wow. "Well, then, we've both gotten smarter."

"Uh-huh. Either that or my old white ass fell in love with this cowboy clown from the Great White North for real. Pick one."

"I'll go with that." The smile bloomed on his mouth, all but splitting his face. "I'm sorry I wasn't there. At the hospital. I tried."

"I left as soon as they took the catheter out. If Doc or Jonesy or Ace calls, don't answer. I'm still 'sposed to be in."

"I know. Ace knows. He's the one who threatened to fire me if I didn't take time to recover before I went to see you."

Coke squeezed his fingers. "Now, cowboy, you know I ain't worth losing all them pennies over."

Dillon sniffed. "I'm not going to get fired, Coke. I did, however, tell Ace to stuff it up his ass." Man, that had been *fun*.

"And I missed it? Tell me that Mitch was there with the camera." Coke chuckled a little, then tugged his hand. "Do me a favor?"

"What, babe?" Anything. He'd do anything for this man.

"C'mere so I can see you? I cain't turn my head. They fused two of my neck bones."

"Oh." Scooting over, he got where Coke didn't have to turn to see him, holding on to that good hand so tight that he worried it might break, too.

"There you are." His bullfighter stared at him. His. "Your shoulder. It's better?"

"Mostly, yeah. It's just sore now." If he didn't get to kiss Coke soon he would explode.

"Good. I shoulda listened to you better. They had to fix my hand." Coke kept staring at him, like he was the most amazing thing the man had ever seen.

"Well, it was all black." Dillon couldn't take it anymore. He leaned up and gently pressed his mouth to Coke's, trying not to move that poor neck.

"Cowboy." Coke moaned for him, soft and low. "I missed you so."

"I missed you, too. Scared me, Coke. Please don't do that to me again." Not that he hadn't been on the scare and guilt thing, too.

"Okay." He got a smile, then a long, heavy-lidded look. "I don't suppose you want a nap?"

"I could so go for a nap." He was exhausted, and relief was making him a little giddy. "You got a set up for your back in the bedroom?"

Coke tried to nod, stopped. "Adam got me a whole pully deal set up to help me."

"Oh, wow." Adam was a great guy. Mr. Rebound. Lord. "Come on. I'll get that glass when we get up."

"kay." Coke scooted forward, ass sliding a little so he could lever himself up.

Dillon got them down the hall, sans glass and got Coke settled before stripping off. "It's hot here."

"It's July." The ceiling fan was whirring, the little set of ropes and pulleys a little fascinating.

"Yeah, but I needed to bring more shorts." He watched Coke maneuver into bed, waiting to crawl in, worried he'd hurt something. He didn't want to hurt Coke any more.

"We'll get you more. C'mere." That poor hurt hand was stretched out, arm offered to him.

Dillon slid into bed next to Coke, letting the cool sheets and the warm skin of Coke's arm soothe him. He just needed to rest his bruises. So did Coke.

"Rest, now, huh? I've got you. Oh, and Coke?"

"What, honey?" Coke's eyes were already closed, brace cradling the man's head.

"Promise me you'll never call me son again."

Chapter Thirty

It took him about an hour to get from bedroom to bathroom to kitchen. It took another twenty minutes to sweep the glass into a pile.

Then Coke stood in the hallway, looking at the little splintery, shattery mess.

He hadn't the foggiest fucking idea how he was going to get it up off the floor.

He leaned against the wall and slid down until his butt hit the ceramic tile. Then he propped his knee against the dustpan handle and used his good hand sweep the glass in. Go him.

Except now he was down here.

With the glass.

On the floor.

Dillon was going to have a cat.

The thought of Dillon, sleeping in his bed where the man belonged made him smile, eased hurts that went way deeper than something a surgeon could dig at.

"Coke?" Sleepy and rough, Dillon's voice floated out from the bedroom, as if on cue. "Where are you, babe?"

"Uh... In the hallway."

Took maybe two seconds for a very naked Dillon to come running, everything bouncing everywhichways. "Coke! Did you fall?"

"No. I was trying to be smart and... Well, you can see how that worked for me."

God, Dillon was fine.

Just fucking beautiful.

Coke found himself grinning up, tickled pink.

"What are you grinning at?" Dillon was smiling back, though, bending to get the tray with the glass in it.

"You. You look good." He reached out with his good hand, touched one thigh.

"Yeah?" Those muscles stuttered under his fingers, Dillon gasping and jerking. "You feel good. I missed you, babe."

"Good." He let his hand slide in a little, let himself touch.

"Coke. Babe. Let me dump this glass, huh? Before I tip it over on you." Dillon smiled, the look as fond as could be. "Then I'll help you up and you can touch as much as you want."

"Works for me." He chuckled. There was no way he could touch as much as he needed to, not like this.

The sound of glass hitting the bottom of his empty trash can sounded, and then Dillon was trotting back to him, sizing up his position. "We're going to have to get you a trapeze or something for the hall."

"Oh, now. That would be fun. You could use it to amuse me." He could just stay down, actually. It was cool, quiet. Glass-free.

"You think I could join the circus?" Dillon did an impromptu cartwheel, which tickled the shit out of him, since it showcased all that naked...

Coke hooted, slapping his hand on his thigh in applause.

"Ta da! Okay, babe. Let's get you up. Now, if I remember right from when Sam broke his neck, I have to get you here." Dillon had been there for all of that, and caught him under the arm and at the hip, levering him up. It was hard, painful work, and by the time he was upright, he was sweating but good, little lights flashing in his eyes.

"I got you. Come on, babe. Let's go back to bed and I can make us some food and we can both rest." Dillon sounded out of breath, too.

"Sorry. This one's a little harder than the last one." He was five years older.

"I would imagine this is never easy. Stop apologizing, eh?" Dillon got him to his pulleys, got him set right and tight. "What kind of food do you want?"

"Adam said there was enchiladas and King Ranch in the fridge from Granny Taggart. Blackberry pie, too. I'd love some casserole."

Granny Taggart was a queen among mortal woman. Sorta like Missy Gardner.

"I can do that. Gimme five minutes." Dropping a kiss on his mouth before bouncing off, Dillon whistled all the way down the hall, normal as anything. Just like before, when he'd come to stay.

They'd said a bunch earlier and Coke figured he'd told Dillon stuff he'd never told no one else. Nate and Bax'd call him a fool, but he believed Dillon. He had to. He had for a long time.

Dillon came back with two plates, two bowls, and two drinks, all balanced on the ridiculous little tray that had been his granny's, all painted with flowers. It worked, though, with its little fold out legs.

"Smells good." He rolled his shoulders carefully, wincing at the grind in his collarbone. "Glad you're here."

He knew Dillon couldn't stay terrible long, but it was Cowboy Christmas.

"Me too." Those too pretty to be real eyes met his. "We're good, right?"

"Yes, cowboy. I got you. You got me. We'll beat Nattie a little." Although he knew Nate. Once he explained, that boy would be more embarrassed than anything.

"Okay. I just... I wanted to make sure. I couldn't stand it if I fucked this up, Coke."

"Come where I can see you." He wanted to do this face-to-face even if they had to move the food.

"Okay." Crawling across the bed, Dillon knelt in front of him, sort of hovering, moving the tray out of the way.

He reached up, wrapped his arms around the man, bandages creaking as he looked into Dillon's eyes. "You ain't got to worry. I'm lots of shit -- grumpy and temperamental, beat up and not the smartest man you'll ever know, but I ain't fickle. Not one single inch of me. You're mine now, so you'd best just get used to it. I'm too old to change my mind."

Dillon stared right back, blue eyes serious as a heart attack. Then the man grinned for him, huge and bright and happy. "Good. You always said I was your people."

"You are, cowboy." And he was going to have a little prayer meeting with David Donaldson, too, about how a married man ought to keep pet names for his woman.

No more Lonnie for him and Dillon. Lonnie. Jesus.

Dillon kissed him again, lips soft and easy on his. "It goes both ways."

"Good." He chuckled, fingers sliding down to love on Dillon's backside. "Anyone ever tell you that you got the prettiest ass in bull riding?"

"I think someone might have. This bullfighter I know, and he actually gets to feel me up." Dillon moved back and forth, getting more of his touch.

"Lucky bastard." He relaxed into the pillows, petting happily.

"Yep." Dillon moved a tiny bit closer, but not enough to lean. "Don't wear yourself out."

He just tugged, got all of Dillon's weight on him, on the right side.

"Mmm. Oh, Coke. Good." Snuggling in, Dillon stroked his ribs. "I needed this. To feel you all over."

"Yeah." The touch wasn't sexual, not really, but it felt like heaven, just to have the contact, the heat, the pressure against him. Especially on his stupid legs that didn't want to stay still.

"Shh. I got you." One of Dillon's legs slid over top of his, settling them right down. It was like they'd just needed to be told what to do.

"Oh, thank you." He moaned as his lower back relaxed. "Sweet Jesus. I needed that."

"Looked like it. Like all your synapses are misfiring, huh?" Smiling, Dillon kissed his chest, his shoulder, not pressing down, just loving on him.

"Yeah. Things are having to reroute some. Last time? I sprung a happy for nine weeks."

"Oh, man. I missed that?" Glancing up, Dillon gave him waggly brows. "I thought if you had one that lasted more than four hours, you had to see a doctor."

"I spent hours packing it in ice. It was fucking ridiculous."

"Coke. That sounds horrible." One hand came up to pet his belly, stroking in little circles, just hard enough not to tickle.

"Nate and Coop didn't think so. They kept buying me scarves for it. I got a whole drawer full of them." He grinned, chuckled a little. They'd had fun with that.

"Lord. Those two." Dillon was laughing, though, almost enough to rock the boat, but it didn't hurt.

"Yep." He tried to nod again, stopped. "Man, I got to stop that."

"You do. No hurting. Just learn to say, 'Ayep'."

"That's awful Yankee sounding. I haven't felt this good since... I can't remember the number of the bull. It was piss-yellow and mean, though."

"I'm sorry, Coke. I should have been there. If I hadn't been so stupid..." Dillon trailed off, sighing, still petting him.

"Shh. Folks gotta have the shitty parts." He waited for Dillon to look at him. "You know, so we can have make up nookie."

"I've never had make up nookie." Dillon cackled. "I like the sound of it."

"You'll probably have to give me a day or three, but I'll get on it."

"I can give you all the time you need, babe. If I get desperate, I know what drawer you keep your stash in."

Oh. Oh, good Lord and butter.

"Dillon!" He was going to set on fire. "I shoulda moved that picture... I... You. I mean."

Damn.

"Why? I like that you have that. There. Here. Whatever." Now it was Dillon's turn to go pink and stutter.

"Yeah. I..." He took a deep breath, grinned. They were idiots. "You know how I look on you. I have from the start. Let's have our lunch and we can find a movie."

"Sounds like a plan, babe." Easing away, Dillon got the tray set up again, right where it was easy for him to reach, the look in those eyes purely happy.

They were figuring it. Now if he could only get unbroke enough to get back to the make-up nookie...

Epilogue

Dillon sang, shaking his ass, so glad to be back at Coke's after the last two weeks of events that he could possibly explode with joy. Boom. Little sparkly bits of Dillon Walsh. Everywhere.

Which, really, if he exploded would probably break his contract and God knew, Sandy and his lawyers would be all over that shit. Hell, they'd been extremely clear about how Dillon needed to get his ass back to work the second Cowboy Christmas was over, work out the rest of the summer, even if Coke had to stay in Texas and recover.

Good thing they had more and more breaks through August and September.

He grinned at himself. He was becoming a homebody -- even if that home was Coke's.

He was making iced tea. Iced tea. Him. Mr. I Like Pop. Damn. Coke was a heck of an influence on him.

Coke had gotten his neck brace off, even if he couldn't go back to work, and Dillon had been really patient. Really, really patient. He hadn't even screamed when he found out that AJ and Bax were the ones who took the stitches out and removed the brace, not the doctor.

Of course, it had been close. Especially when Nate shrugged, still sporting a black eye from where Dillon had popped the bastard, and grinned. "At least he didn't tell Jase do it, Dillweed."

Dillweed.

Great.

Of course, that hard punch he'd thrown at Nate seemed to go a long way toward them being buds. Nate had been a lot more open and teasing with him, since then.

"I like that song." Coke came ambling in, looking around. Doc had sent Dillon with instructions to get Coke fattened up and into physical therapy in Austin or Dallas.

"Yeah? I'm thinking of doing a few songs at the after party next time." He loved to be on stage.

"Excellent. I'll come with." Coke stopped, head tilting. "You hear that?"

"Hear what..." Oh. Oh, shit. He'd gotten in late the night before, sneaking in while Coke was asleep, and he'd brought a present, which he'd forgotten he'd left in the garage.

A live present or two that had probably made a terrible mess.

"Fuck! Be right back."

"Uh. Okay."

He could hear Coke, moving slower behind him.

Dillon burst into the garage, hoping the presents hadn't destroyed anything important. Of course, it was impossible to have puppies and nice things, right?

Two floppy-eared basset babies came bounding out, barking, white-tipped tails held high. The yarping was... wow.

"Oh, my sweet lord," Coke murmured behind him.

Dillon whirled around, hands down to stroke ears. "Doc Madding said you needed to do physical therapy. I knew you wouldn't do anything they said but the swimming, and I thought, hey, dogs."

"Oh, look at y'all babies..." Coke knelt down, moving careful, but better than last time. The little girl -- tri-colored and husky and loud as hell -- leapt for Coke, ears wild, trusting in those strong arms like every animal, baby and remarkably talented entertainer of the year rodeo clown he knew.

Dillon held the little boy puppy back, his nose wrinkling a bit. Someone had rolled in an accident, if he knew dogs. He actually did, too, having grown up with Huskies. "Let me clean this one up while you figure out what to name that one."

"Pansy. I like that name." Well, okay then. That was... definite. Coke scooped her up, following along. "Where did you find these babies? And what are you naming yours?"

"Mine? Why is this one mine? Because he pooped all over himself?" Dillon glanced back, making sure Coke wasn't straining. The babies were pretty small. No more than the ten pounds Coke was allowed to lift. "Poop! I should call him Nate!"

"Oh, man..." Coke laughed hard, Pansy's ears flopping. "Call him Jerome. That's Nattie's middle name."

"Jerome is a superlative name for a basset hound." Dillon grinned when little Jerome wiggled like he understood he had a name now.

"It's a good name." Coke hummed, laughing as Pansy licked his face. "Lord, look at y'all. We'll have to go get beds and bowls and biscuits and seatbelts for the truck."

"I got bowls, but we'll have to upgrade as they grow. I, uh, I hope you're not allergic to dogs." God, what if Coke was? "They needed a home. Their breeder was going to put them down if no one picked them up and promised to get them fixed."

"Allergic? Me? Nah. I've had lots of dogs. Millie used to come on tour with me. Drove Ace crazy, when the kid was riding. Millie was a sheepdog - all hair and... uh... hair."

"Oh, wow. Well, this is cool, then? I mean, we'll probably have to put them on a leash or something when we're out at the pool." He got Jerome to the utility sink and started scrubbing.

"We'll make them a little dog run. Somewhere safe." Dillon felt a hand cup his ass, squeeze a little. "Thank you. They're dollbabies."

"You like?" He looked over his shoulder to smile at Coke, but all he got was a face full of water for his trouble. Jerome shook like crazy the moment he was distracted.

"Lord have mercy. There's a pen around here somewhere... Can I leave her with you while I go hunt it?"

"You bet. Holler if it gets heavy." See him. See him let Coke do for himself. Dillon would clean the floor, too.

That was going along well until he heard a clang and an oof and then a, "Dillon? Help?"

He ran over to find his stubborn bullfighter on a ladder, holding himself up with one hand, a huge metal pen unfolded and dangling from the other.

"Shit!" Plopping Jerome on the floor with his sissy, Dillon grabbed the sagging pen, letting it clang and crumple on down. Then he went after Coke.

"Don't holler, now. I found it."

"I'm not hollering." Easing Coke back down the ladder, he hugged that silly man, kissing the back of that beat up neck. "You just need to tell me when shit is in the attic or on a high shelf, okay?"

"Mmm." Coke hummed a little. "Do that again."

"This?" Dillon squeezed a little. "Or this?" Then he kissed Coke's skin one more time.

"That." Coke shivered a little, moaned.

"Mmmhmm." Oh, he loved how Coke's skin tasted, and all those new scars just proved that the man had survived, and would be fine. Dillon could live with that. He pressed his lips under Coke's ear.

"Love you, babe."

He loved how that nickname made Coke shiver, moan. "You know, we could get the babies set up and talk about... reconnecting, some."

"We so could. They're ready for a nap, anyway." Jerome was sprawled on his back, idly chewing the toe of Dillon's boot, and Pansy was sound asleep against Coke's foot.

"There's a nice soft bit of grass under the bedroom window. We'll set the pen there." Coke bent down, scooped Pansy up.

"That's a good idea. I'll bring this one, come back for the pen." He left Coke outside with the pups and went to get the pen. He had to laugh when he got back, seeing his Coke with two very droopy hounds, tickling their feet.

"Look at the size of these paws, cowboy. We're gonna have so much fun with them."

"You know it. They're going to come on the road with us. We'll take them to my place for Thanksgiving..." The pen almost defeated him, but Coke helped, and they got the babies walled up, safe while they napped in the shade. They were adorable, all ears and tails and white fur, curled up like a yin and yang symbol in seconds.

"Oh, Thanksgiving sounds like a hoot. I got Andy and Jase to watch the place for six weeks come the holidays." He got a shy smile. "Thought we could have a white Christmas, too."

Dillon blinked a little, then whooped and grabbed Coke's arms, kissing the man silly. When he pulled back, he had a little moment of panic. "Did I hurt you?"

"Only if by hurt, you mean make me all flutter-pated."

"Oh. So, what was this about getting reacquainted?" Checking one last time on he bassets, he grabbed Coke's hand and started pulling the man inside. That adjustable bed waited for them.

"I was thinking that my brace is off and my hand is good as new. We never did get that whole make up sex, you know?"

"This is true. There are still the pulleys and ropes." Look at Coke blush when he said it, too.

The man recovered well, though, giving him an impish grin. "Well, yeah, but I ain't had time to install the trapeze, yet."

end