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Ménage Amour

Saving Stakes



Tonya Ramagos



SAVING STAKES

Tasty Treats

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MENAGE AMOUR



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Tonya Ramagos

DEDICATION

To Korlin, because being who you are is never a curse.

SAVING STAKES

Tasty Treats

TONYA RAMAGOS

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Chapter One

Jay Masters stepped to the window between the two sets of bunk beds and stared at the view beneath the darkening sky. He saw the wide open expanse of rolling land, the horse barn to the right, the corral to the left, the fence in the distance that surrounded it all, and the main house with its imposing presence smack dab in the middle.

He'd own a third of it one day. He'd made sure of that.

By putting yourself at the whims and mercy of a man who would rather gamble you away than give a hill of beans about you, he thought in disgust. Yeah, he'd certainly done that all right. Signed away a decade of his life, no questions asked, to the services of the man who sired him, Guy Masters.

"You should run." Rusty Eubanks' quietly spoken suggestion twisted in Jay's gut.

"Is that what you'd do?" Jay didn't turn to face the other man. He bowed his head, resting his eyebrows on the cool glass of the window, and looked up beneath his lashes at the house. A light flicked on through an upstairs window, Bo's window.

It took awhile for Rusty to respond, but when he did, his answer came as no surprise. "No, it's not what I'd do."

Of course he wouldn't run. A cowboy didn't haul ass at the first sign trouble. He stuck it out, found a way to make it work to his advantage.

"I won't, either." He'd bear it. Whatever they did to him tomorrow night, he'd take it like a man. Fear snaked through him at the ideas that flittered through his mind, the possibilities of what could be in store for him. At twenty-two, he'd seen a lot more than many men his age, and the things he'd done... He still recoiled when he thought of some of things he'd endured to survive. Tomorrow night would be no different.

"Why does it have to be you this time? Bo and Jesse get off on that shit. Guy's got to know you don't."

"Exactly." Silhouettes appeared in the window of the main house, both large bodies and decidedly male. Bo and Jesse, no doubt. Jay pulled away and turned to find Rusty sitting on the edge of his bed with his forearms resting on his thighs, his hands dangling between his knees. The twenty-seven years Rusty put into life had been easier years than Jay's twenty-two, but only marginally. He understood abandonment, pain, a man's bone-deep need to prove himself and take hold of what belonged to him. He understood wanting with every ounce of his soul the one thing not meant for him, the one man not meant for either of them.

The urge to step between Rusty's legs, to feel his wide hands splay on Jay's flesh, hit Jay with an almost unbearable force. It wasn't an alien feeling to Jay, this wanting to be in Rusty's embrace. He'd lived with the secret nearly as long as he'd known the man. Each day, it grew until it became an ache in his chest, a fire in his loins. Only one other cowboy ignited the desires in him the way Rusty Eubanks did and damned if Jay hadn't been denied his affection, too. He never figured out if it had something to do with him or his friendship with Rusty.

"So he's what, testing you, trying to turn you into your brothers, or just being an ass?" Even bent at the waist, Rusty had to be careful not

to hit his head on the frame of the top bunk. Jay's bunk. Jay could've taken a room in the main house. By all rights, the third room down from his brothers' bedrooms belonged to him. He wouldn't have been able to sleep a wink in that room. He'd known that the moment he'd looked into both his brother's eyes. Bo and Jesse Masters might possess the same deep river blue eyes that Jay saw when he looked into the mirror, but their river flowed over a pit of pure molten evil. He cringed every time he thought about looking into their eyes.

"Ass would be my guess. Guy knows going with Longhorn tomorrow night is the last thing I want." Not that what he wanted tended to matter. Or so it seemed. He barely got a wink of sleep most nights because of things he wanted, desires he couldn't fill. Sleeping above Rusty rather than *with* Rusty topped his list of unsatisfied needs, right beneath finding a way to get out of the events sure to unfold tomorrow night. "It's just another of his ways to make me pay for something that doesn't even belong to me yet."

"Your share in this ranch belonged to you at birth," Rusty argued. "That's not something you should have to pay for. Not with money, blood or body. That damned contract is bullshit, Jay. No way is that fucking thing binding in any court."

"Probably not," Jay admitted. "But a man's honor isn't binding in a court of law, either. I lost the bet, Rusty. I signed the contract."

"Without full disclosure," Rusty pointed out.

"When did you become a lawyer?" Jay kept his lower body facing the wall, not wanting Rusty to see the hard-on developing behind Jay's zipper. Not that his dick hadn't gotten hard for Rusty before. The man had to know the effect he had on Jay, how easily Jay became aroused by the simple sound of Rusty's voice, his touch, the mere thought of sharing more with the man. Still, Rusty never made a move to touch him.

"Hell, I don't know." Rusty stood, paced toward the closed door of the matchbox sized room and turned to pace back. The vehemence in his expression meant more to Jay than he could say. Jay knew how

quickly Rusty always jumped to his defense, whether Jay needed it or not. He saw Rusty's fury over the coming events and it filled Jay's heart with a hope and love he didn't need to feel.

Rusty crossed his arms as he paced. How many times, Jay wondered, had he fantasized about feeling Rusty's arms corded around his waist? Jay knew he'd find the comfort he longed to feel in those arms if only he could find the courage to make the first move. Instead, he shrugged.

"I didn't read the fine print." Rusty shot him a withering look that almost made Jay chuckle. "I'm not being flip about this, Rusty. I'm being honest. I have no one to blame for the shit I'm in but myself. I'm the dumbass who went along with the bet. I put my name on the dotted line. No, it's not a legally binding contract, but the morality of it, the fact that I gave my word, is binding enough for me. I won't walk away. Not because of the ranch or my share tied in it, though yeah, I do want what's mine, but because a man's only as good as his word. For most of my life my word's all I've had, and I've always made good on it. I won't stop now. Therefore, whatever happens is my fault."

"And that bastard father of yours and a mother who wouldn't fight for her own rights, much less her son's," Rusty added. "I hear what you're saying, babe, but they made sure you didn't have many options in life."

Jay winced. He didn't like to think ill of his mother or father. All accounts put Guy Masters as a fair, decent, and hard working cowboy who loved his sons. Jay learned all of that to be true. He also learned it applied to everyone but the bastard son he'd sent away.

"I'm sorry." Rusty raked his long fingers through his ebony hair. Jay's own fingers burned to do the same. How many times did he fantasize about feeling that simplest part of Rusty Eubank? How many nights had he lain in the bunk above Rusty dreaming of lying beside the man instead, his hand idly gliding through Rusty's long hair as they talked about anything and nothing? "No matter what I believe,

casting blame isn't going to get you out of this. There's got to be some other way, something that will save face and your hide."

"I'm open for suggestions." Jay turned fully around, lifting a booted foot to prop on the frame of Rusty's bed, his forearm resting on the frame of the top bunk. "In less than twenty-four hours, Guy is going to settle down with Longhorn and a handful of others at the main house and I'll be fucked. No pun intended."

"Only if he wins." Rusty started pacing again, though there wasn't much space for movement in the tiny room. He walked to the door, pivoted right, crossed the width of the room at the foot of both sets of bunk beds, and then pivoted again to pace between them.

Despite the severity of the situation, Jay's attention got caught up in watching the other man move. Each step pulled the pant legs of Rusty's jeans tighter around his strong thighs and a truly delectable ass. Each breath caused the white cotton t-shirt he wore to cling to his tense muscles and broad shoulders.

Jay dipped his head, clamping his thumb and forefinger over the bridge of his nose, and closed his eyes. He needed to focus on tomorrow night, on how to save his own ass, figuratively and literally, instead of letting his brain fall to his cock and its soul focus of wanting to fill Rusty's tight ass.

"Of course he's going to win." Jay dropped his hand and opened his eyes. "The bastard always wins. There isn't a soul in this county that can beat Brody Longhorn. And still they come from miles around for the opportunity to try."

Rusty stopped pacing and turned slowly to face Jay. His expression, so devoid of emotion, took Jay by surprise. Until Rusty spoke. "There's one man that can beat him. All I have to do is convince him to play."

Jay clinched his teeth to keep his jaw from dropping as he stared at Rusty. Surely he didn't mean what Jay thought he did. But, as Jay continued to gaze into Rusty's chocolate eyes, Jay knew that was precisely what Rusty meant.

"Don't." Jay said the word so quietly he doubted Rusty heard him. "I can take care of this myself. I don't need a man coming to my rescue." He certainly didn't need one who'd hurt Rusty as badly as Cole Duvall. Especially not one that Jay wanted as badly as he did Cole, despite his attempts to hate the man.

Would he be forever haunted by the one night he spent with the man, by a few close dances and a shared bottle of liquor? It sure as hell seemed that way. He might lay awake at night wishing he could be in the lower bunk next to Rusty, but when he closed his eyes Rusty wasn't the only man to fill he dreams. He saw Cole, too. The image usually came to Jay in the most erotic of forms. Cole, his broad chest covered by a muscle-hugging t-shirt, his lower body clad in tight jeans and cowboy boots, his blond hair mussed with a crease around the skull where his cowboy hat always sat. The masculine curve of his jaw would slide with the widening of the come-hither smile that had drawn Jay onto the dance floor, and he'd be lost for as long as the dream realm held him captive.

"He'll do it." Rusty's voice rang with conviction. "If he knows it's for you."

"He doesn't want me any more than he wanted you." Rusty flinched and Jay wished he could take the words back, but the damage had already been done.

Rusty grabbed his cowboy hat off the hook by the door and slapped it on his head as he reached for the knob. "You're wrong about that. I'm not sure what happened that night at the bar, but I've seen the way he looks at you. You're wrong. He wants you, and I'm going now to see that tomorrow night he proves it."

* * * *

Rusty didn't know what he'd expected. Finding Cole's bedroom empty at well past eleven at night surely wasn't it. At least he hadn't

found Cole in bed with another man. The idea of that twisted a knife in Rusty's heart.

Get used to it, champ, he thought as he eased the window closed, careful not to make a sound. He heard a quiet bark followed by a series of louder ones as Mare-woof, an unknown mixed breed belonging to Cole's sister Denise, came barreling around the side of the house. *Some watch dog. Stupid mutt's always been slow as molasses.*

Rusty stood in the shadows of the darkened bedroom and watched the dog turn circles on the ground below. If anyone saw Mare-woof, they'd likely believe he'd merely found amusement by chasing his own tail. After a peace-disturbing minute or two, Mare-woof gave up the racket and pranced off.

Rusty shoved his fingers in his pockets and rocked back on the heel of his boots. He wondered how long he'd have to wait here in the silence of Cole's bedroom before Cole came in, being tortured with the dick-teasing scent of the man's spicy cologne and—Rusty sniffed. *That can't be rose scented soap.*

He supposed he could've used the front door, rang the doorbell like any normal visitor. He hadn't wanted to answer the mountain of questions Denise likely would've thrown at him if she'd been the one to come to the door. Instead, he'd climbed the tree outside Cole's bedroom, shimmied over the closest branch, and worked his way inside through the partially open window. Better to confront the man here in the privacy of his bedroom.

Rusty glanced over his shoulder, not needing much light to remember how the bedroom looked. It hadn't changed much in the year since he'd last been in here, the only time he'd ever stepped foot through the door before tonight. Like that time, his breath caught in his throat and his groin stiffened to the point of pain at the mere sight of the extra-large unmade bed in the center of the room. That bed had made him stop short the day he'd followed Cole into this room, steaming mad and looking to pounce.

Yeah, he'd wanted to pounce all right. He'd wanted to toss the man on that bed, rip off his clothes, ram his cock in Cole's amazingly sexy ass and show Cole how great they could be together. Instead, Rusty told the man he quit. He gave up on more than his job at the Double D that day. He gave up his pursuit of Cole Duvall. He finally admitted to himself that Cole would never be his no matter how badly Rusty wanted him. Rusty went to work at Masters High and met Jay.

Rusty closed his eyes as Jay's boyishly handsome face swam into his memory. The way Jay looked tonight with his river blue eyes so full of the fear he refused to admit, needs he refused to voice, desires Rusty wanted so desperately to ease. Rusty noted the way Jay's shoulders had slumped when he stared out the window of the room they shared with two other ranch hands, the way the other man's sandy blond curls flirted with the collar of the denim work shirt he wore. He'd wanted so much to walk behind Jay, to pull the man against his body and whisper to him that everything would be okay.

But it won't be okay. Not for you.

That didn't matter. It only mattered that he made everything okay for Jay.

It'll be Jay in that bed with Cole, Cole in that bed with Jay. Where will that leave you?

Happy. He would be happy because the two men he cared for, the men who cared for each other would be together. But for how long? Cole Duvall had the "fuck 'em and leave 'em" reputation. Would he be that way with Jay, too? Did that explain why he steered clear of Jay since the night they met? Or did Cole's distance have something to do with Rusty, with the fact that he, no doubt, thought Rusty had already hooked up with Jay?

Rusty heard the unmistakable sound of cowboy boots striking a hardwood floor and turned back to the window, his back to the door. He'd need a moment when Cole got in the room, a chance to steady himself in the power of the other man's presence. Only then would he be able to face Cole, to tell him why he'd come here tonight.

* * * *

Cole Duvall stopped outside the closed door of his bedroom, turning a keen ear to listen for any sounds coming from inside. He heard nary a one. Adrenaline pumped through his veins even as his mind computed it wasn't right. He'd seen the way Mare-wolf carried on below the large oak tree. The dog's ruckus drew his attention up just in time to spot the booted foot disappearing through his bedroom window.

Someone had broken into his room. That someone remained inside. Quietly waiting in the shadows to what, jump him? He let an amused smile quirk his lips even as he pulled his handgun from the holster at his side. If that were the case, the bastard was in for a helluva surprise. Cole hadn't taken off his gun belt after his late night ride on his horse. He'd just walked inside and gotten his shirt unbuttoned when Mare-wolf kicked up her racket out front.

His grip secure on the handle of his revolver, he turned the knob on the bedroom door and eased it open. Darkness bathed the room, broken only by the silvery sparkle of the moon outside. A silhouetted figure stood at the window.

Cole didn't waste a second. Four long strides brought him standing behind the figure, the gun in his hand cocked and pointed at the intruder's temple. The fact that the figure stayed put though he must've heard Cole enter didn't register in Cole's rapidly firing brain. The fact that the figure seemed to slump back against Cole as if in relief rather than stiffen in fear at the gun pointed to his head didn't snap as odd, either. But the feel of that hard body against Cole's bare chest, the warmth of the rigid muscles and the musky scent of cologne hit him like a freight train.

Cole closed his eyes and lowered the gun. His heart pounded so loudly he heard it in his ears. Rusty Eubanks shifted his weight, the

movement grinding his back to Cole's front, and Cole involuntarily grabbed the man's hip to hold him still.

"I could've shot you." The words rumbled from Cole's constricting throat, a low growl of pure desperation he rarely let escape. The combination from the crash of adrenaline and the apex of desire had him bowing his head to rest on the back of the taller man's shoulder. "Christ on a crutch, Rusty, what the fuck are you doing sneaking into my bedroom?"

Rusty's shoulders rose and fell in a heavy breath, and Cole heard the man gulp before he answered. "I needed to see you."

You left me.

The accusation sprang to the tip of Cole's tongue so fast he nearly spit it out before he caught himself. He never heard a more unfair accusation. Rusty only left because he'd pushed the man away. Rather than take him for a night or gamble the man's heart on a game of chance for more, Cole sent him packing.

It was his choice, his cowardice, but that didn't stop the burn, didn't ease the ache. He never felt a more wicked pain, intensified now by the feel of Rusty against him, the firmness of the man's body in his hand. Cole stepped back before he spontaneously combusted. He needed the distance to concentrate, to keep himself from giving into the desperate desire to be with this man.

"You ever heard of a front door?" Cole flipped the safety mechanism on his gun and shoved it back in the holster. He moved to the bedside table and flicked on the lamp. Fluorescent lighting flooded the room. His fingers were still curled around the switch when Rusty turned to face him. Cole nearly turned the lamp off again.

He made a point to avoid seeing Rusty since he left the Double D. That hadn't prevented the man from invading Cole's dreams. He couldn't count the times he'd awakened with his throbbing cock in his hand, viciously stroking himself to ejaculation even as he fought to push his memories of Rusty to the back of his mind. Time had done

little to change the other man. It had done even less to calm Cole's intense craving to have him.

"I didn't want to wake Denise." Rusty's gaze slid over Cole in a leisurely fall that made Cole feel drunk and tingly all over.

Cole felt paralyzed beneath Rusty's stare, unable to move, barely able to breathe. He'd felt the same way when Rusty came clean about all he felt and wanted just before he'd quit the ranch.

I'm crazy about you, Cole. I want to be with you, to touch you, to be inside you. I can't stand working on this ranch day after day, being this close to you and not having you.

Then go.

Cole had wanted to say more, to explain he wasn't the man Rusty thought him to be. He wasn't the staying kind. Instead, he said nothing. He'd watched the pain move through Rusty's eyes, followed quickly by defeat. Rusty gave up then, turned and walked away, and Cole had let him leave, his own pain and grief rendering his limbs and brain momentarily useless.

Cole felt it when Rusty's attention focused on his crotch. His dick pulsed in response, hardening to the point of pain. His agony only intensified as Rusty's gaze slid up, gliding like a physical caress over his exposed stomach, his abdomen, his chest. Cole's flesh heated, his breath quickening, his heart damned near pounding out of his chest.

Cole stopped himself from reaching for the sides of his shirt to pull it closed, not wanting Rusty to know the way his looks still affected him. He'd managed to hide the depth of his attraction to Rusty for too long to screw up now. Instead, he stood stone still but for the shallow breaths he finally managed and waited for Rusty's gaze to reach his face. The heat burning his skin raged in Rusty's eyes.

Rusty blinked, gulped and then asked in a surprising coolness, "She still lives with you, doesn't she?"

"Yeah, it's her house, too." Cole sniffed the air. "You can't tell? Smells like a damned strawberry orchard in here. Women can't ever

use a soap that gets you clean. They've gotta have all that fruit and herb shit, too."

The corners of Rusty's alluring lips kicked into a grin so sexually ripe Cole felt the effects close around the head of his cock. "I thought you'd decided to try the feminine side of life for a while."

"As if." Cole scoffed. "Shower in her room is being replaced. She's using mine for the time being. Should've taken off from the ranch work to do the job myself. Would've been faster."

"I'm surprised you didn't." Rusty didn't move from his stance to the right of the window. Cole didn't want him to. The choices of where he could go in the room seemed limited. A chair sat in one corner laden with the smelly shirt and grimy jeans Cole wore yesterday. He didn't blame the man for not sitting there. A tall chest of drawers and the bed took up much of the remaining space in the room. He supposed Rusty could lean against the chest, but he definitely didn't want Rusty sitting on the bed.

No, he wanted Rusty on all fours on the bed, naked and poised to take Cole's cock deep inside his...

"You said you needed to see me," Cole blurted as he straightened. He indicated his body with a gesture of his hand. Bad idea, he realized too late. The move drew Rusty's attention down for another of those slow slides that had Cole taking a deep breath even as embers of lust rained inside him clean to his toes. "Well, you're seeing me. What do you need, Rusty? It's late and I'm tired."

He was being a bastard and he knew it, but damnit he needed to get this man out of his bedroom. He clinched his teeth over the apology that wanted to follow. Rusty possessed a body made for lovin' and a personality designed for falling. Cole knew of no other way to resist a man like him then by being a sonuvabitch. Rusty Eubanks was the staying kind, and Cole couldn't stick around.

Rusty nodded and got straight to the point. "It's about Jay."

Cole blinked, the only visible reaction he let himself make, but everything inside him exploded in a multitude of emotions at the name.

"Guy's got a poker game set for tomorrow night," Rusty went on when Cole said nothing.

Cole forced himself to shrug as he took off his gun belt. He turned his back on Rusty and walked to the hook by the bedroom door. "It's been a few months since I've heard of one. Guess it's about time."

Poker games at Masters High were legendary in the county. Guy Masters catered to the highest betters around usually three or four times a year. Before Cole's old man died, he'd been one of those highest betters. After his death, the people around expected Cole to take his place, seeing as the old man taught Cole everything he knew about the game. Cole got so good he could even beat his old man, earning him the title of the best poker player in these parts and the coveted invitation to Masters High on poker night. Cole never went. He knew how the games went down, especially since his old man died, knew the outcome, and wanted no part of it.

"What's that got to do with Jay?"

Jay was Guy Masters' youngest son. He'd been born out of wedlock to a barroom whore, by all accounts, who Guy sent away with a heavy purse and closed lips. She died several years back. At least that's the story Cole knew. Left alone, Jay eventually found his way to Masters High, presumably to claim a portion of what belonged to him.

"You weren't invited this time?"

Cole's brows knitted as the oddity of that struck. He hadn't been invited. Not that he would've gone. His principles to stay out of the twisted poker game rivaled his need to stay away from Jay Masters these days, giving him all the more reason to steer clear. Funny what a half a bottle of Jack and a night on the dance floor could do to a man. Cole suspected Jay's relation to the Masters clan the night he met the man at the local bar. The eyes gave it away. Jay's, however, gleamed

of a kindness and compassion Cole had never witnessed in any other Masters' eyes before. He'd felt himself drowning in that river of blue desire and been too intoxicated to stop himself from going under. The Duvall curse fluttered through his thoughts, serving as the life raft he'd needed to pull himself to shore.

"No," Cole answered curtly.

"Word is Brody Longhorn'll be there."

Cole scowled and shot Rusty a look. "Brody Longhorn is always there." Which stood as reason number three for Cole's continued absence. He'd just as soon stay as far away from the sick bi-sexual fuck as possible. "He never misses a chance to stomp a mud hole in the asses of every pocket bulging gambler around."

"He plans to take Jay in exchange for his winnings this time."

The news hit Cole like a punch in the gut. He heard himself make an "ooof" sound as if he'd been physically hit, even felt the burn through his midsection. He turned slowly, his breaths coming heavy as the weight of Rusty's words set in.

"Jay won't go for that."

"Jay doesn't have much choice."

"He's not like his brothers."

Rusty shook his head, his brown eyes revealing a bone deep fear Cole immediately felt reverberating in his soul.

"No, he's not."

"They'll break him." Cole couldn't stop his voice from rising any more than he could swallow the panic welling for the younger man. "Brody and that bitch he's married to, they'll shatter Jay to bits."

Rusty nodded this time, his gaze never wavering from Cole's. "Yeah, they will."

"Fuck!" Cole swore vehemently, his hands balling into tight fists of their own accord. Jay's soft face with his strong square chin and straight nose, his gleaming white teeth and sensually ripe smile flashed through his mind. "I'll fucking kill 'em."

"I thought so." Rusty's whispered words somehow broke through Cole's fury.

"Thought so what?" Cole took an involuntary step toward the other man.

"You care about Jay. You're in love with him." Cole shook his head, but before he could deny any of it, Rusty went on. "What I haven't been able to figure is why you haven't gone near him since that night at the bar. Have you been staying away from Jay because of me?"

"I've stayed away from Jay because of *me*." Cole turned the statement around, poking a finger at his own chest. But the words only revealed half the truth. He bowed his head and said the rest. "And you."

Rusty walked to Cole, slow and even steps that closed the distance between them. Cole couldn't be that close to him, especially not now when they talked about the only other man who could make him lose it. Cole turned his back again.

"We aren't together," Rusty said softly.

"You should be. You'd be good for him."

"Jay and I are just friends. I haven't touched him. God knows I've wanted to. He's amazing, Cole. He's gorgeous, sexy, passionate, tough. I've never met another man like him. Not even you."

Cole flinched at the light touch of Rusty's hand on his shoulder blade. "Why?"

"Because I knew you wanted him, and I want you to be happy. I wasn't the man for you, but that doesn't mean I don't want you to find the one who is."

"There isn't a man for me." Cole muttered.

"Bullshit! How can you say that? I've felt the arousal coming off Jay in waves when he talks about how badly he wants you. I've heard how much he cares for you in his tone. I feel the same coming from you now, hear the same in your voice."

Cole closed his eyes as Rusty closed the last remaining space between their bodies, his arm cording around Cole's waist.

He rested his chin on Cole's shoulder, his breath a breeze of fire against the side of Cole's neck.

"That's why I've stayed away from Jay. You don't want me, but I know you want him."

He'd done it, Cole realized with no sense of satisfaction. He'd made Rusty believe he didn't want him.

"I figured if I touched him you wouldn't go after him."

"I wouldn't have gone after him anyway." It wasn't a lie. He never would've stepped foot in Jay's path again. Damned if staying away hadn't proven to be the second hardest thing Cole ever did. Not going after Rusty immediately after he'd told the man to go proved the first hardest thing.

What if he were wrong? What if the Duvall history was wrong? What if the Duvall curse, as the family had come to think of it, turned out to be pure horseshit?

"But you'll help him tomorrow night?" The hope in Rusty's voice wound around Cole's heart.

Cole nodded, stopping abruptly when the movement had Rusty's lips grazing lightly against his neck.

"Thank you." Rusty let out a breath of relief, his arms around Cole's waist tightening in a fierce hug. "You're the only one who can beat Longhorn."

Christ, what if he didn't? He couldn't fathom the thought of the Longhorns getting their extreme sexual sadists' hands on Jay. They didn't stop at a little master-submissive play. They went all out with sexual strangulation and torture to the point of beatings that left their partners sporting bruises and even shallow gashes for weeks.

Cole needed to think, and he couldn't do it pressed so closely against Rusty's body. He stepped forward out of the man's embrace and turned.

"Why Jay this time? Why not Bo or Jesse? Won't they be pissed if they aren't chosen?" The idea of any man getting off on that shit made Cole sick to his stomach. He always thought of Jay's brothers as less than human because they enjoyed it. Evil swam in the depths of their eyes, eyes as spectacularly blue as Jay's, but with a darkness that left them looking hollow and ugly.

"I'm sure they will be." Rusty shoved his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his heels. "It's probably another reason Guy is allowing it to happen. One or both of them has likely done something to piss him off."

"So he's using the opportunity to keep them away from the Longhorns as punishment." Cole barked a humorless laugh. "That's one fucked up family."

"And yet everyone for counties around won't hear an ill word spoken of the Masters' clan. To hear talk, Guy is the greatest cowboy since John Wayne. Even took in a son he never knew he had and willed him a third of his life's work."

"John Wayne was a helluva an actor, just like Masters. And all that you just said is hogwash. He knew about Jay. The bastard paid Jay's mother off, forced her to leave the state."

"I know that. You know it, and probably a handful of others know it. But Guy pays his men well, treats 'em fair, and works 'em hard. That's what matters most to folks. What he has or hasn't done with his own boys ain't seen as no one's business but his own."

"And mine now," Cole vowed.

"Yeah, I'd hoped you'd say that. Guy's got a noose around Jay's neck, Cole, and he's finding any way he can to tighten the rope."

"I know about the contract Jay signed, the bet he lost to Guy." He'd found out shortly after meeting Jay. Tangled in the shit that went on at Masters High remained the last place he wanted to be and the one place he'd find himself tomorrow night.

"He lost more than a bet. He lost a good decade of his life. Guy planned that from the start. Jay might as well have signed that

contract in blood, because that's what Guy's been taking for months, one little dribble at a time."

"He fooled Jay just like he's fooled most everyone in these parts."

Rusty nodded. "But if Jay runs, he'll lose more than his share of the Masters' spread. I think they'll go after him, Cole. Bo and Jesse, they're looking for an excuse to pound on Jay. I'm not saying Jay wouldn't get in a few good swings. He's tough, but against those two, they're pure evil. They'll kill Jay if given the chance."

"They'll have to get through me first." Cole knew how absurd he sounded, but the determination pumping through his veins made every word feel logical.

"You know how these games are played, right? How the stakes are divvied up in the end?"

"Longhorn wins, turns the money over to Masters in exchange for a night with Bo or Jesse. It's male prostitution. Guy Masters is nothing more than a fucking pimp for his sons."

"They agree to it. Hell, Cole, they love it. And who would argue with Masters? The sheriff sure won't. He'll be right there at that damned poker table with you tomorrow night."

"And he'll watch Longhorn lose. Tomorrow night, Jay'll be hanging his hat inside my door, not theirs." Cole turned away at the flash of hurt that moved through Rusty's eyes. Rusty had come to him for help. He expected Cole to charge in on his white horse like some gay fairytale knight and save Jay from certain humiliation and pain. Where did he expect Cole to bring Jay but back here after the game?

Everything inside Cole screamed that would be a mistake. For the first time in too many years to count, he felt himself tuning out those voices, centering his attention on the sexy slide of Rusty's husky tone instead.

"He'll certainly enjoy your bed more than the Longhorn's," Rusty said quietly.

"I said I'd help him. I never said I'd bring him to my bed." Even though in his bed was exactly where he wanted Jay. What made him

think he couldn't take Jay or Rusty the same way he took every other man he ran around with when he left the Double D spread? A set of blue eyes and an expression of deep longing, and he all but went scurrying for the hills. Hell, he'd seen that in any number of the men he'd bedded.

Cole gave his head a mental shake to rid himself of that copout answer. He wished he could find solace in his rapidly settling decision to push all reservations aside and take the two men he truly wanted. Damned the consequences and fuck the Duvall curse.

"It must get pretty lonely there night after night."

Cole glanced at Rusty.

Rusty shot a pointed look at Cole's bed. "You never bring a man in here, do you? I know you don't go without. Why are you always so careful to keep your escapades a secret?"

"My escapades?" Cole felt his lips twitch. "Now you're making me sound like a prostitute."

"I'd pay any amount of money for an hour with you, babe. You've got to know that."

Would you pay with your heart? Cole didn't ask the question. He didn't have to. He could see the answer in the swirl of hope and desire in Rusty's eyes.

"If I win tomorrow night..."

"When you win," Rusty leapt to correct him. "You have to win, Cole."

Cole nodded and forced a quick smile. "Talk about putting pressure on a man. Okay, Rusty, *when* I win tomorrow night, I want you to come back here with me and Jay."

Rusty's brows shot up. He licked his lips, a slow glide of his tongue between perfectly bow-shaped flesh that made Cole stifle a whimper. Then he pursed those lips and angled his head.

"Would that be to chaperone or join in the fun? Because in case you're wondering which one I'd prefer, I've never been much of a designated watcher."

"Too bad, because that's the role you've got now. Jay can see what's coming at him, but he'll need someone to watch his back." Cole leveled a look at Rusty. "That someone is you, and leaving him alone at Masters High with all the shit that's about to go down ain't smart."

Rusty nodded and stood. "Then I guess we'll see you tomorrow night. Know how you're gonna weasel your way into this game seeing as you weren't invited this time?"

"I'll get in." Cole didn't doubt that. He figured he only needed to show up at game time at Masters High. Guy Masters would let him in the main house with a crooked smile on his pudgy face. "You just worry about sticking by Jay's side."

"You think Bo and Jesse are gonna go after him."

"I don't want him left alone," Cole answered and knew tomorrow night wouldn't be the end of this shit storm. Guy Masters would still have his claws in Jay even if Cole beat Longhorn.

Cole could think of only one way to stop the event from repeating itself as often as Guy wished it. Everything had to be put on the table in the highest staked poker game the county had ever seen and Cole had to win.

Cole shuddered at what would happen if he didn't.

Chapter Two

Jay rested a booted foot on the bottom of the corral fence and brought the beer bottle in his hand to his lips for a deep pull. He felt Rusty's presence at his side. The man hadn't gone far since returning from Cole's place the night before. Jay kept his attention fixed on the main house of Masters High.

"I should be in there." The poker game that would seal his fate kicked off hours ago. From the angle of corral in position to the main house, he could see the trucks parked out front belonging to the men who would be gathered around the poker table inside. The beat up Chevy with its rusted, lime green paint job and 70's factory rims stood out among the line of king cab trucks so gleaming they looked brand spanking new. Cole's Chevy. A part of Jay remained surprised the man came. The other half wanted to hang his head in shame because Cole had to come to his rescue.

"No one should be in there," Rusty commented quietly. "Shit like this stopped being morally acceptable in the days of brothels and twelve-year-old brides."

Jay felt his lips quirk. "Masters Brothel and Poker Hall. I bet ole' pop wouldn't mind the ring of that. Can't say as I'd fit the part of the twelve-year-old bride, though."

"Oh, I don't know. We could get you one of those fancy dresses they wore back then with the hoop skirt and the corset, do up your curls real nice with a couple of bows and all. I think you'd look rather smashing."

Jay laughed, tipped his beer back for another swig, and looked at Rusty. The sensually wicked smile tilting the other man's lips made Jay's cock dance in his jeans. Christ, that was all he needed right now. His nerves were strung so tight they'd have made a helluva bow for the arrow of fear piercing his belly. His heart landed somewhere in the main house when he'd seen the Chevy pull into the drive. Now his cock looked to leap into the excitement, flexing almost painfully in its need to have this man. With the rodeo of emotions bucking inside him tonight, he wondered that he didn't explode clean out of his cowboy boots.

"What'd you say to him?"

Rusty averted his gaze. Jay followed it easily, straight across the spread of Masters High to the Chevy pickup truck. Jay had wanted to ask last night. He'd known when Rusty got back. Surprise and relief mixed a strong concoction in his veins when he'd heard the other man slip into their room a little after one in the morning. Jay couldn't say what he'd expected to happen. Part of him expected Rusty to stay with Cole last night. The larger half of him hoped Jay's need for rescue would prove to be the rope that lassoed the other two men together.

Jay hadn't slept a wink. The niggling fear he didn't want to feel, wished to God he could ignore, kept his heart hammering. The low burn just beneath the surface of his flesh to feel Rusty's body against his, to be in Cole's arms again, kept him in a constant state of arousal till dawn. He'd likely put in the longest day in ranch hand history working the cattle today. A quick shower followed by a small bite to eat and a beer, and he found himself here, hanging on the fence surrounding the corral, waiting for the end of the poker game, waiting for the darkness to fall.

Rusty shrugged. "Didn't have to say much of anything. I said you needed him, and he started saddling up his white horse to charge into battle."

Jay gave a light chuckle. "I doubt it was that easy." Simply going face to face with Cole, head to head with the sexiest man in four

counties wasn't that easy. Being alone with the man, as Rusty had no doubt been, would've sent Jay's world careening off the Smokey Mountains.

Rusty sighed. "You'd be right. As was I. He's crazy about you." He let out a dry sound that might've been a laugh. "Stupid thing is, I think I figured out the dumbass's problem last night. I don't know why it never hit me till then."

"What problem?" As far as Jay ever saw, Cole Duvall didn't have a single problem. The cowboy screamed sex appeal, bedded almost anyone he wanted without restraint, ran the Double D the way he liked, and shared the joys only with his sister, Denise.

"Ever heard of the Duvall curse?"

Jay shook his head. "What? Is the Double D haunted or something?"

"Naw, nothing paranormal like that. Word has it there ain't a Duvall male who's been able to hold onto a wo—partner for longer than a couple of years."

"And that makes the men cursed? Hell, if that's the case, half this friggin' planet is cursed."

"Sex," Rusty said bluntly. "Duvall men can't stay satisfied for long. They go looking for someone else."

Jay turned back to look at Cole's truck. He'd never made it there with Cole that night, never made it out of the barroom. It shouldn't have been so easy to picture himself bent over in the passenger seat, sucking Cole off behind the wheel. Jay closed his hand tighter around the beer bottle, his palm feeling the warmth of Cole's stiff cock rather than the chilled glass of the bottle. His mouth watered, but he didn't drink from the beer, knowing the brew wasn't the liquid his senses wanted to taste.

"I bet we could satisfy him." It wasn't until Jay felt Rusty nudge his shoulder that he realized he'd spoken aloud.

"Now we're barking up the same track, babe. See, I did a lot of thinking about this last night. I figure we both got it right. Cole wants me. That's not why he never touched me."

"He's afraid of hurting you, afraid he can't make it last."

This time, Rusty reached over to clank his bottle against Jay's in a toast. "That about sums it up. He knows I'm not into the whole one ride deal. As for you..." He eased back, sliding a gaze down Jay's body that had Jay fighting the need to writhe even as erotic sparks fizzled beneath his flesh from the roots of his hair to his toes. "Anyone can look at you and see you're the stayin' kind."

"What's your excuse? If you're looking for more than a ride, and you know I want more, why is it you've never thrown your rope my way?" Jay held his breath as he waited for Rusty to answer. He'd never dared ask such a forward question of the man before.

Their gazes met and held for several suffocating heartbeats. Even if Jay'd been able to breathe, he likely wouldn't have found enough oxygen in the air because the look that passed between them sucked the living force right out of the atmosphere.

"I didn't think you'd want me when you could have Cole." The honesty in Rusty's eyes, in his voice, twisted around Jay's heart. Jay turned slightly, reaching to cup the side of Rusty's face in his hand. He leaned in, daring to brush his lips to Rusty's in a kiss so light he barely felt the contact. He experienced the effect, though. It shot through him like an electric bolt of erotic lightning straight to his balls.

"You were wrong," Jay whispered.

Rusty put a hand on Jay's hip, sliding his arm around Jay's waist like a hook and reeled him closer.

"Was I?" He bent his head, nipped Jay's bottom lip.

Jay sighed and, for the first time since Cole had held him this way at the watering hole, felt his world settle to rights on its axis.

"Yeah."

Rusty's lips tilted in a smile so freaking sexy it made Jay moan. "'Bout time you told me." And then those lips met Jay's, capturing

Jay's mouth in a fevered kiss that nearly knocked him out of his boots. Rusty's tongue swept inside Jay's mouth, tangling with Jay's in a dance as old as man and as primal as the animals that roamed the lands.

Rusty tasted of beer and sweat, of hunger and a ball smacking need that Jay embraced as fiercely as he held onto the man now in his arms. Their bodies fit, hard muscle for rigid line. Their stance coupled with the difference in height made Rusty's cock a decidedly firm bulge against Jay's stomach, Jay's aching shaft stretching long up Rusty's thigh.

By the time they broke apart, they were both breathless, lips swollen, chins stinging from the abrasions of stubbled flesh, and eyes alight with promises and possibilities.

Jay's hands wound around Rusty's neck during the kiss, and he brought one down now, slowly swiped the pad of his thumb over Rusty's top lip. It came away moist from their combined saliva. "I'd like to do more than tell you."

Rusty stilled, his gaze assessing Jay's face. "Now?"

Jay nodded. "Now." No matter what happened tonight, he wanted to have the memory of these few moments with Rusty to hang onto.

Rusty glanced around. "Come on." He took Jay's hand and led him between two walls of haystacks to the right of the stables. The space between the stacks concealed by the height of the hay bales hid them well enough while leaving the arousing possibility of being caught open to chance. He pulled Jay's arm, bringing Jay to stand in front of him, and yanked him against his hard body.

"This good enough for you?"

Jay answered by rising to the balls of his feet and capturing Rusty's mouth in another kiss. "I wanted our first time to last," he said against Rusty's lips, lowering himself to stand flatfooted as he licked his way over Rusty's jaw and down his neck. "But I don't know how much time I have."

"It's okay, love. There'll be other times."

Jay eased back. "I want you inside me." He reached between their bodies and palmed Rusty's bulging package. Rusty's head fell back on a low throated groan as Jay gently massaged Rusty's cock through his jeans. "God, I can't wait another second to feel this in me."

Rusty lifted his head. "You don't have to." He grabbed Jay's waist and spun him around, his back to Rusty's front. He wasted no time dropping those hands to Jay's pants, freeing the button and zipper of Jay's jeans in record speed and shucking them and his briefs to his knees.

Jay felt his sanity leak out his ears as one of Rusty's hands closed around Jay's pulsating cock, the other moving between their bodies to work his own pants free. And then, "God, yes." Rusty's other hand parted Jay's ass cheeks, two fingers sliding over his nether hole to trace and tease the outer rim.

"I don't have anything to lube up with," Rusty said tightly. His hand fisting Jay's cock moved in slow strokes that made agony and pleasure clash in a bronco ride of ecstasy.

"I don't care." Jay's vision swam with desire. Circuits fried in his brain, rendering him unable to think about anything beyond having that rock hard, enormous cock he felt nudging his backside thrusting into his aching body. "Fuck me, Rusty. Please."

"God, love, this is going to hurt." Rusty's hand on Jay's back eased Jay to bend forward, and then the head of Rusty's cock parted Jay's back entrance. "But only for a second. Take a deep breath."

Jay inhaled deeply and the breath rushed from his lungs as a cry that sounded more animal than human as Rusty thrust balls deep inside his tight anus. Pain ripped through him, bringing tears to his eyes, but it lasted only a second as Rusty had promised before it began to dull, morphing into amazing, burning pleasure.

"Are you okay?" Rusty's tone thickened with concern. He held himself still inside Jay's body, his cock buried to the hilt. Jay felt the man's body quivering in its desire to push even as Rusty fought to hold steady.

"Great," Jay growled. "Oh, fucking more than great!" He felt fantastic, empowered, stupendous, possessed. Rusty's hand continued its slow caresses of Jay's cock bringing the release closer and closer to the surface. Jay felt overwhelmed, finally being skin to skin, anus to cock, hand to shaft with one of the men he loved. They could've had all night, and he knew in that moment he wouldn't have been able to make it last any longer than he could right now. "Fuck me, Rusty," he said again. "Hard and fast. Tear me up, babe. I want us to come together."

"Then you better be ready to come in a few strokes, because if I move that's about how long I'll last," Rusty warned. "Being inside you is, damn, love, I can't tell you how wonderful it is."

"I already know. I can feel it." Jay closed his eyes, reveling in the feeling they spoke of, hogtying it in his mind so he could release the memory when he'd need it most. Rusty eased back, his thick girth stretching the inner walls of Jay's anus with such delicious splendor Jay groaned like a horny mule. Then he thrust, a single rapid plunge followed immediately by a drawing back, only to drive in again. Jay nearly lost consciousness, it felt so frigging good.

Jay sucked in a breath as Rusty's hand on his cock fisted tighter, squeezing until the pressure hit just this side of pain. All the while, Rusty continued his vicious ramming of his cock into Jay's backside.

"It's coming, love. I'm coming. Oh, God, Jay, come with me."

Jay didn't have to be told twice. The combination of having his cock jerked as Rusty filled his ass with such a long and thick dick sent him screaming over the edge. His control rode off into the sunset, leaving his body to tremble in the glowing aftermath of the approaching moonlight.

Jay straightened, the movement dislodging Rusty's softening cock from his ass, and leaned breathlessly against the other man. He tipped his head back to look up at Rusty. Rusty met his gaze with a look so full of love and happiness it made Jay's heart sing.

"Told you I wanted you."

Rusty smiled, his arms winding around Jay's waist to hold him close. "We'll be okay, love. Cole's in there seeing to that right now."

"And then we'll see to him?" Jay lifted a brow in question.

Rusty slowly nodded. "You still want him."

"As I know you do, too." Jay countered. "Think we'll have any problems sharing?"

"Not a one."

"Good, because I figure between the two of us, we can satisfy our man and make him stay around."

"Jesus, I've unleashed a monster," Rusty whispered.

Jay bit his lips and lifted a brow. "You think?" He pretended to consider the statement and then shrugged. "I suppose I can be a monster if the situation calls for it."

"Oh, baby, it will tonight."

Jay's body turned to stone at Bo's harshly teasing tone. All warmth leaked out his ears as his blood smashed through his veins so loudly it momentarily drowned out all sound. Rusty turned in front of him, an obvious attempt to shield Jay's body from his brother's view. The move offered Jay more comfort in that moment than the other man would ever know.

"Longhorn and his wife'll drag it out of you," Jesse chimed in. "They'll do it real good, too, make you like it. Get ready for it, bro, 'cause your boy in there, Mr. Cole Duvall in all his sexy ride-to-the-rescue glory, just lost it all."

Jay closed his eyes as the truth of his brother's evil words hit home.

* * * *

Cole rubbed the back of his neck, his fingers kneading at the tense muscles, the action showing a sign of weakness he never divulged. He'd lost, bluffed a hand of deuces and kings until all the other players folded the last hand except him and Longhorn. Longhorn,

always the confident gambler, called Cole's bluff and, in a last wager that gained him the substantial pot, revealed a hand of four smiling ladies.

The game was over.

"It would be my pleasure to help you with that, cowboy." The feminine voice drifted through the air in a room of three males like velvet, yet each word held an undertone sharper than a buck knife. "I've been told I give the best massages in these here parts."

Cole shot Isabella Longhorn a look. She'd struck a pose at the old saloon style piano in the corner of the parlor that reminded him of the showgirls in the Wild West movies. A delicate elbow rested on the piano top, the fingers barely touching the ebony hairs near her face. Her other hand splayed on one cocked hip, the leg bent enticingly to part the slit of her straight skirt clean up her thigh. He knew she tried to come off as sexy in the siren red silk with the black lace and silk corset and six inch stiletto heels. The look she achieved reminded Cole more of a devil's queen whore ready to score.

"No, thanks. I'll pass." Cole dropped his hand to his side.

"Are you sure?" Isabella slithered like a cobra into a straighter position. "I promise the minute my hands touch your skin you'll forget all about those sore muscles."

"Isabella." Brody Longhorn snapped a warning that made Isabella's sinfully painted lips take a decided curve south. He turned his attention on Cole and lifted a bottle of whisky in offer. "Can I interest you in a drink, Mr. Duvall?"

Cole nodded. "Don't mind if I do."

Longhorn poured the whisky, passing Cole a glass and then took a slow sip of his own, eyeing Cole over the rim of his glass. Like Guy Masters, very little about Brody Longhorn's appearance gave away the evil beneath the surface. The hefty cowboy stood a good six-foot-three with graying auburn hair, a slim angular face, and an average physique for a wealthy rancher. His expression revealed nothing,

either. The man could put on the best poker face in the South, never letting any emotion show in his beady black eyes or thin lips.

"I appreciate you sticking around. The others are usually out the door after the last hand so fast you'd think the hounds of hell bit at their heels."

Smart men. Cole kept the comment to himself, knowing he stared down the king hound even as he sipped his single malt whisky. He shrugged. "Not much else going on tonight. Besides, I've never made it to one of your poker games before tonight. I wasn't quite ready for it to end."

"We play a set number of hands each time. Same as we did when your father played. Keeps the game from stretching on all night for those who have women at home waiting up for them." Longhorn clicked his tongue and narrowed his eyes. "Gotta admit, you showing up tonight surprised me mighty good. First time Guy here doesn't issue the invite, and you show up anyway. Makes a man wonder why."

"A man gets an invite to the highest stake poker game in four counties for several years running and suddenly hears of one going down without his bidding makes a man curious why he's suddenly left out," Cole countered, his tone as level and conversational as Longhorn's.

Longhorn nodded, his expression remaining blank, unreadable. "I gotta figure you know the answer as well as I."

"Yeah, gotta figure you're right. Question that springs to my mind is whether it was a lure or a trap."

"Why, Cole, sweetheart, tonight was just a friendly poker game among prominent men," Isabella purred. She sashayed to him, trailing one long red nail down his cheek. Cole didn't flinch, though bile rose to burn his throat. "Mighty nice of you to come to your man's rescue. Heroics always make me so *hot*." She smacked her lips. Her hand slid to his chest and kept falling lower down his front.

Cole caught her wrist in a sure grip before she reached his cock. "Jay isn't my man." The truth of that left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"But you'd like him to be," Guy Masters spoke for the first time since they'd moved to the parlor after the poker game. He sat quietly in an overstuffed recliner until now, his booted feet crossed at the ankles, his hands laced over his expansive belly. It'd been a while since Cole had seen the man without his cowboy hat, and he'd been surprised to see the older man was damned near bald. Hard lines and deep wrinkles creased his aged face, his jowls more pronounced with the passage of time. Not much remained of the handsomeness the Masters brothers shared in the eldest Masters anymore.

Cole said nothing to Guy's declaration. He couldn't allow himself time to contemplate the emotions twisting his gut in knots over Jay right now. The poker game might have ended some half hour before, but the night's festivities just began. He needed all his wits and none of the sappy stuff taking root in his chest to get through the rest of this encounter.

"How about a little proposition, Duvall?" Longhorn asked. He set his glass on a nearby table and rubbed his hands together. "Seems the itchy palms I get when I need a good poker game ain't quite cured for the night yet."

"Maybe you should try Calamine lotion instead," Cole commented. "I hear it's great for persistent itches."

Longhorn flashed him a tight, quick leer. "Not exactly what I had in mind. I reckon we go for another hand of Texas Hold'em, just you and me."

Cole pretended to consider the suggestion as he brought his glass to his lips for another swig. His heart kicked and adrenaline pumped through his blood. Longhorn was playing right into his hand. Now, if only Cole could keep the man thinking it was all his idea, keep Longhorn thinking he had one up on Cole. "What kind of stakes you got in mind?"

Longhorn shrugged. "Nothing too big. A grand, perhaps."

Cole lifted a brow. "Money?" Not what he'd expected. Cowbells clanked, sounding an alarm in his head.

Longhorn slanted Cole a look. "You figured I'd put something else on the line?"

"I figured you'd want something more out of it. It's no secret you never walk off this land with the money you win. You give it to Masters in exchange for..." Cole stopped, nodding slowly as it clicked. "You're looking to make a purchase with that grand."

"Your boy will be a lot of fun tonight. I've no doubt about that. But, seeing as it's his first time, another night could be useful, give us more of a chance to show him the true pleasures we've given his brothers over the years."

If Cole didn't know better, he'd have sworn he saw Guy Masters flinch. No way would he look away from Longhorn long enough to prove himself right. He couldn't say he hadn't seen it coming. Still, his expecting it didn't stop the anger from boiling. The need to pound Longhorn into the concrete foundation of Masters High Manor surged so strong within him he had to tense his muscles to keep himself from acting on the urge.

Cole shook his head and played his trump card. "I don't know, Longhorn. Stakes just don't seem to be even this time."

"Oh, you got something else in mind?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. Jay for a thousand dollars and me." Cole didn't have to know better or be looking dead at Guy Masters to know the man sat up straighter this time. Isabella gasped, but the sound was more of an excited inhale than one of horror.

"You'll want to make that wager clear, boy," Guy Masters told Cole, his tone one of warning.

Cole spoke to him rather than Longhorn. "We play one hand of Texas Hold'em just like before. Longhorn wins, you get the grand and he gets me for the night. I win, Longhorn loses his night with Jay and you cut Jay loose. You tear up that contract you conned Jay into

signing, he still gets his third of this ranch, and you lose any control over him for good."

"Why would we agree to something like that?" Isabella asked, laughter shaking her voice. "You call that fair stakes?"

"Come now, Isabella," Cole closed the distance she'd put between them. "You aren't suddenly worried your man'll lose, are you?"

Isabella's chin went up. "Of course not."

Cole traced the heart-shaped line of her bodice with his fingertip. "Am I not worth the gamble? Think about it, my lady, a night with me at your mercy. Don't you think it's worth a little bet?"

"You know what you're offering, Duvall." Masters said it as more statement than question but Cole turned and nodded. Their gazes locked and for the briefest of moments, Cole thought he saw relief, even gratitude flicker through the old man's eyes.

Cole blinked and wondered if Longhorn managed to slip something in his whisky, something that made him see things that weren't there. Though he doubted it, he set his still half-full glass aside.

"I know exactly what I'm offering. Now, do we have a bet, gentlemen?"

Longhorn and Masters exchanged looks and the Longhorn nodded. "We have a bet."

"Then let's get started." Cole followed the two men back to the game room, flinching only slightly when Isabella hung back and hooked an arm around his shoulders.

"I'm going to make you feel so good," she purred. "You'll scream and beg and cry until you're writhing on the bed for more. Brody won't be easy on you either. He'll—"

Cole stopped listening, his thoughts going to Jay. He pictured Jay's river blue eyes as they peered back at him, felt the firmness of Jay's body against his. He saw Rusty, too, the hope and promise that swirled in the chocolate depths of his eyes, felt the electric jolt that sizzled through him each time their bodies brushed.

He might be playing this game for Jay tonight, but come morning they'd both be his. No games, no pretenses, no fear. Cole learned to play poker from one of the best gamblers in Texas. Daniel Duvall never spent a faithful day in his life to his wife, but he'd been faithful to the game and taught Cole everything. Cole hadn't lost nearly every hand in tonight's game without rhyme or reason. He'd endured the humiliation at the smirk quirkling Longhorn's lips each time he'd folded because he'd known it would pay off in the end. It brought them right here to the last hand of the night and the highest stakes yet.

This time Cole couldn't lose.

Chapter Three

Rusty saw Cole enter the stables, watched him stop a foot inside the doorway. He wore his cowboy hat low, the brim shielding his eyes. Rusty could be grateful for that. He didn't want to see the apology, or worse, the pain he expected the other man felt when his gaze landed on Jay.

A muscle in Cole's strong jaw jumped. He hooked his thumbs in the pockets of his jeans. It would've been a casual stance, sexy as hell at any other time given the man's drool-worthy body clad in well-worn denim and a western style shirt of blues and browns with blue fringe. It would've made him look relaxed and ready for anything if not for the squared set to his shoulders, the stiffness of his elbows, and the grim set to his lips.

"Planning on running?" Cole spoke just loud enough for his question to carry to the open stall where Jay stood brushing his horse's mane with such a gentle hand it made Rusty's loins ache even as his heart wept.

Jay's hands didn't shake. He didn't show any sign of the fear that had to be snaking a river through him right about now. Any minute, the Longhorns would come out of the main house in search of him, ready to claim their prize for the night, ready to take Jay away to do with him as they pleased until the sun rose on a new day. A new day that would find Jay Masters a changed man and likely not for the better.

Rusty couldn't suppress a shudder.

"Naw, I've never been the running kind." Jay didn't turn. He continued to brush the horse, slow and tender strokes that spoke of the

gentleness inside the man. Despite the rapid viciousness of the love making they'd shared, Rusty felt that gentleness as he'd held Jay, as he'd felt Jay struggle not to crumble against him when the news came of Cole's loss. God, he didn't want to see that tender nature shattered by the evil delivered from the Longhorns. "Can't seem to find the honor in that."

"Things in there didn't happen the way you thought they would."

"I know. I heard. Bo and Jesse seemed all too ready to rub my nose in the news. It should've been me in there tonight. Can't seem to find much honor in sending you in there to fight my battles for me."

"You didn't send me in there," Cole countered.

Rusty stared at them, wanting to open his mouth, not having a clue in hell what he'd say if he did.

"Rusty asked for my help." Cole lifted a shoulder and glanced Rusty's way, though Rusty still couldn't see Cole's eyes beneath the cowboy hat. "I gave it. There's honor in being man enough to accept help when it's offered, even more to ask for help when it's needed."

Jay nodded slowly. "I suppose you're right about that."

"You couldn't have taken them, Jay, couldn't have beaten them. I'm not saying that just because I lost."

"No, you're saying it because I wouldn't be where I am now if I hadn't gambled myself into a corner to start. The Longhorns came up with the bright idea of the wager that night." Jay finally turned to look at Cole, one hand staying on the horse to idly brush its back. "Did you know that? Guy, my father, went along with it, of course, used it to his advantage every chance he got, but he didn't set the stakes of that game. They did."

"I can't say I'm surprised to hear that."

Cole may not be, but Rusty sure as hell was. He stood straighter, taking an involuntary step forward. The move brought him a little more out of the shadows of the stable. He'd been standing there since he reluctantly let Jay out of his arms between the haystacks. He

wanted to watch over Jay, but, at the same time, tried to give him a little space.

"You never told me that." Rusty couldn't help the accusatory tone that laced the statement.

Jay's gaze flicked to Rusty. "It didn't seem to make much difference. The Longhorns and Guy are like a happy little threesome when it comes to swapping money for a piece of Masters ass. Hell, as far as I know, the Longhorns could be shoving it up Guy's ass, too."

Rusty wouldn't have thought so. Despite the decidedly grotesque things Guy Masters allowed the Longhorns to do to Bo and Jesse, Rusty had never seen the evil glint in Guy's eyes that shown in his two sons. He'd believed Guy's association with the Longhorns to be one of strict financial means and a pimpish dealing of bartering his sons for the gain.

"It makes no difference," Jay said again. "What's done is done. Tonight won't be so bad. I'll get through it. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do, right?"

Cole nodded. "He does, which is why you need to put up that brush, grab your hat, and come with me."

Jay stared at Cole, emotions so twisted and torn in his handsome face it made Rusty's throat ache. "I'm not running, Cole. Not even with you."

"I didn't say I planned to run anywhere. I figured we'd take my truck."

"Cole—" Jay began, but Cole held up a hand, stopping him.

"I told you things in there didn't happen the way you thought they would. I lost damned near every hand I played against that sonuvabitch tonight."

"You shouldn't—" Jay started again, but Cole's next words had him stopping once more, this time his jaw falling open.

"On purpose."

Rusty felt his eyes grow wide, and his own jaw nearly hit the dirt covered floor of the stable.

Jay blinked, put down the brush, and jammed a hand through his already tousled hair. "You lost on purpose."

"I did some gambling myself tonight. Lucky for me, lucky for *us*, Longhorn played right into my hand."

"What are you saying, Cole?" Jay's voice shook with emotions Rusty didn't want to attempt to define, but hope rang paramount.

"Longhorn and I played one last hand after the others left."

Jay gulped visibly and asked the question Rusty wanted to ask himself. "What was the wager?"

"Me for you."

"You sonuvabitch." Jay sounded livid. "How could you put yourself on the line like that? Of course the Longhorns would take that bet. They'd do damned near anything to get their paws on a man as gorgeous as you."

Cole's thin-lined lips tilted ever so slightly at that, as did his head in an almost imperceptible nod. "Thank you. Glad to know this attraction doesn't flow one way."

"I thought I proved that the night we met," Jay sighed. "Damnit, Cole, I won't let you do it. I won't let you take my place tonight."

"I don't intend to. I won that last hand, Jay. I knew they would take the bait if I made it sweet enough. I only had one ace up my sleeve to get you free of this shit. I didn't want you safe for tonight. I wanted to be sure you wouldn't ever have to face this kind of shit again."

Rusty blinked, afraid to believe what Cole said. He looked from Cole to Jay, saw the same twist of disbelief in the other man's handsome face, then looked back at Cole.

"You won?" Jay asked in a barely audible whisper.

Cole finally lifted the brim of his cowboy hat, the look in his eyes as he gazed at Jay indescribable. Rusty's eyes filled, happiness warring with a heavy dose of jealousy in his chest. He'd wanted Cole Duvall to look at him that way for so many years. Yet, he couldn't

help but be elated then as he saw the emotions pass between Cole and Jay.

"I won," Cole said softly. "Guy's agreed to tear up that stupid contract, to let you be, and tonight you're going home with me. Now get your hat and let's go."

Rusty kept quiet as he watched Jay secure the door to the horse's stall. The cowboy snatched his hat off the nail and shoved it on his head, a wide smile plastered to his handsome face.

What could Rusty say? "Hey man, I'm happy for you both." Though true, the words got stuck somewhere in the mix of relief and hurt tightening his throat. He didn't move as Cole turned and took two steps toward the door of the stables. Jay walked more slowly behind him.

When Cole stopped short in the doorway, Rusty's heart slammed into his breastbone. Cole turned to look at Rusty over his shoulder, and lifted one sexy brow. "You coming, or what?"

Rusty blinked. "I didn't know if..." If Cole wanted him to come along, too. He didn't finish the sentence aloud. He and Jay decided they wanted Cole. They made a vow to do what it took to make him happy, to make him theirs. But this night dealt so many surprises Rusty suddenly found he had trouble keeping up.

"I told you I wanted you at my place with Jay tonight, didn't I?" Cole cut him off.

"Well, yeah." Jay stopped to look at Rusty, too, a keen edge of "here's our chance to have him" glistening in his amazing eyes.

"Then get your damned hat and come on."

"Bossy cowboy," Rusty muttered, but smiled as he snatched his hat off the bench along the wall and did a quick two-step to catch up with the other men.

* * * *

Jay couldn't believe the turn of events the night had taken. He sat between Cole and Rusty in the cab of Cole's Chevy. Excitement and wonder pumped through his veins, threatening to spread his lips in a smile even a double barreled buck shot couldn't have wiped off his face. He bit back the smile, letting his heart do the grinning instead. His mind shifted from the scheming his way out of the mess he'd gotten himself into to devising a plan to make his and Rusty's night with Cole last forever.

His shoulder brushed Cole's as the man reached for the A/C control, flipping it up a notch. *Getting a bit warm, cowboy?* Jay let his gaze drop to Cole's crotch and, oh yeah, the man definitely appeared to be getting warm. The long, stiff rod appearing beneath the zipper of Cole's jeans made Jay's hand burn to feel, his mouth watering for a taste. Jay wasn't the only one affected by this closeness. What would Cole do, Jay wondered, if he reached over and covered Cole's erection with his hand, if he began to stroke it through the denim?

Beside him, Rusty shifted in the bench seat and Jay glanced at him, saw the amusement tilting his lips and the heat burning in his eyes. If Jay ventured a guess, he bet they thought the same thing right about now. How could they turn their belief that they could stake their claim on Cole Duvall into the reality of the evening?

Jay licked his lips, watched with great satisfaction as Rusty's attention dropped to follow the progress of Jay's tongue. Rusty's gaze flicked to Cole, to the other man's bulging cock, and Jay faked a cough to cover a chuckle. Yeah, Rusty obviously got the idea. When they ganged up on their man, Jay wanted to be the one going down for the stiff, cream-filled dessert.

Cole shot them both a questioning look as he pulled the Chevy onto the dirt road leading to the Double D ranch.

"Do you, um, have any plans tonight once we get to the ranch?" Jay asked, going for innocent but figuring he failed by the quiet snicker he heard Rusty make.

"I need to make my nightly rounds, since I didn't see to that before going to the poker game," Cole answered, his attention back on the road. "I'll show you to your room first. I'd let Rusty show you, but I'm not convinced he could find his way without climbing through my bedroom window to get there."

Rusty's lips spread into a wide grin that showed off perfect white teeth. "My way's more fun."

"Can't argue with that one."

Jay glanced at Rusty, lifting a brow. Hmm, so Cole admitted having Rusty in his bedroom could lead to fun, but what about Jay? "Any reason I can't ride along with you?" Any reason I won't be sleeping in your room tonight? Uncertainty settled like a lead weight in Jay's gut. Maybe Cole only thought Rusty might be fun between the sheets. "I've never been on the Duvall property. I wouldn't mind seeing your spread."

"I'd show him myself," Rusty told him, "but there aren't any windows in the open land to climb through."

Cole's lips twitched. "Ain't that a shame? Fine, you want to, you can both ride along. We'll go straight to the barn, saddle up the horses and head out."

Jay nodded, wanting to smile but unable to around the ambiguity tying him in knots. He knew of only one way to loosen the rope. He put voice to the second question.

"Any reason I won't be sleeping in your room tonight?"

Cole didn't answer. He pulled the truck to a stop between the main house and the stables, put it in gear and cut the engine. Neither of them made a move to get out. He stared out the windshield for a long time before he finally exhaled a hard breath through pursed lips.

"There're a lot of reasons you shouldn't be sleeping in my room tonight. The first of which is that I didn't do what I did tonight just to get you into my bed."

"If you think I believe that then you don't know me very well." Jay dared to put his hand on Cole's thigh and nearly moaned at the

warm firmness beneath his palm. "You don't have to win a poker game to get me in your bed or anywhere else for that matter. All you have to do is say you want me there."

Cole turned his head toward Jay, but the dark cab of the truck made his expression impossible to read without the dash lights illuminating his features. "It's not that easy. There are things you don't know about, Jay, things you don't realize about me."

"Like the Duvall curse?" Despite the darkness, Jay saw the flicker of surprise move through Cole's face. "You don't really believe that shit, do you?" He did. Jay didn't have to see the answer in the other man's chiseled features, didn't have to hear it in the other man's voice to know Cole believed in it fully. Jay felt it in the vibrations coming off Cole's body, in the heated energies that enveloped the air in the cab of the truck.

Cole's gaze flicked to Rusty, and he swallowed before meeting Jay's stare once more. "I've never had a reason to believe otherwise."

"Well, you have two of them now." Jay put a tone to his statement that left no room for argument. He saw Cole's attention shift to Rusty again, felt the vibrations in the air kick into a higher, more scalding rhythm that screamed of contained desire, and then Cole slowly nodded.

"Seems I might. Are we still going for that ride?"

Rusty made a sound that might have been a soft snicker, and Jay looked at him, caught the wide smile that unfolded on his kissable lips. Jay grinned too, knowing exactly where Rusty had taken that question.

"For starters." Jay nudged Cole's thigh with his, even as his hand inched to brush lightly over the man's impressive bulge. "As soon as you decide to get out of the truck, babe. I'm penned in the middle here. Not that I mind. I can't think of a single place I'd rather be, except for on my knees in front of you, but the cab of this truck is a bit too small for three men our size."

Cole let his head fall back to rest of the headrest and closed his eyes. "What the fuck am I doing?"

His words were a barely audible breath, but Jay sat close enough to hear him anyway. Jay lightly caressed Cole's thick length through the denim and then pulled his hand away. "You're doing exactly what you want. I hope."

Cole didn't say anything. He raised his head, opened his eyes, and got out of the truck. Jay slid out after him, and Rusty got out on the other side. Cole didn't wait to be sure Jay and Rusty followed. He walked straight to the horse's stables and disappeared inside. Rusty met up with Jay at the front of the truck.

Rusty hooked an arm around Jay's waist, and Jay couldn't stop himself from leaning into the embrace. God, how long had he hoped Rusty would hold him this way? How long had he pined for Cole to put his arms around him again? He'd gotten one man he wanted tonight. Shortly, he'd have the other.

"We can do this," Rusty leaned in to whisper in Jay's ear. "We just have to take it slow, give him time. He's struggling with what he wants as opposed to what he's thought for way too long. God, how could I have not realized that before tonight?"

Jay shrugged. "Maybe you weren't meant to." He'd never been a religious man, but he always figured things worked out the way they were supposed to. He snaked an arm around Rusty's waist and pulled him closer as they walked to the stables.

Cole stepped out of one of the stalls, leading a horse into the open when he spotted them. His gaze dropped to their waists where they held each other close. It wasn't jealousy Jay saw in Cole's eyes, but a deep longing to be included. If he harbored any doubt he and Rusty planned to do the right thing by pursuing Cole together tonight, that desire in Cole's features swept it all away.

"Betsy's still in her stall if you want to take her," Cole told Rusty. "She could use a ride tonight."

Rusty stepped out of Jay's embrace, his hand gliding over Rusty's ass before it dropped away. Cole stood between Rusty and Betsy's stall, but left ample room for Rusty to get past the other man. He didn't take the space. Jay bit back a grin when Rusty turned sideways, grazing his front to Cole's back, one hand on Cole's hip as he slid by him. Jay heard Rusty's huskily spoken words, too, when the man dipped his head to boldly nip Cole's ear lobe.

"So could you."

Cole covered Rusty's hand on his hip with his own, turned his head and brushed his lips to Rusty's. Rusty sucked in a surprised breath, but before he could react further, Cole dropped his hand and returned to his task of saddling his horse.

"Jay, this is Windjammer," Cole told him as he started walking the horse toward Jay. "He's fast but gentle. I think you'll get along fine." He handed over the reins, his hand lingering in Jay's longer than necessary, his gaze moving searchingly over Jay's face. Looking for what, Jay didn't know. He did realize in that moment exactly how right Rusty had been. Cole battled an inner struggle neither Jay nor Rusty could fully understand. Cole allowed himself to take one minute particle at a time with the light brushes and tender contact.

Cole cleared his throat and turned. "I'll get my horse ready, and we'll ride out."

Chapter Four

Cole didn't really have to make a round over the Double D tonight. He'd left the ranch in the very capable hands of his ranch foreman when he'd gone to Masters High. Still, he'd needed the quiet, wanted the fresh air and the abandonment of worry and responsibility that seemed to come with being on horseback late at night.

He led Jay and Rusty in a slow trot over the open fields of the ranch, down the narrow trail through the wood. Rusty would know where Cole intended to take them. The other man knew the Duvall land as well as Cole.

The horses' hooves crunched on the fallen twigs and branches as they meandered along the trail. Cole found he liked hearing the sounds of the men behind him, their faint breaths, low whistles, and contented sighs that occasionally reached his ears. The sounds gave him a comfort he hadn't realized he sought even as it kicked up an arousal inside him different than any he'd ever felt.

He bit the inside of his lips, clamping them together. They still tingled from their slight brush over Rusty's mouth. He'd never dared kiss the other man like that. Always wanted to so desperately he'd ached from it, but never gave into the urge until tonight. They knew about the Duvall curse, but did they understand the full extent of the possibilities? Cole doubted it.

He closed his eyes, knowing his horse could follow the trail without his guidance, but when he attempted to pull up the visions of the pain he'd watched so many Duvalls inflict on their lovers in the past, he found he couldn't do it. He heard the stories of the heartache his grandfather dished out to the women and men in his life. He

remembered his mother crying over his father's infidelity. He heard the echoes of his father's voice telling him how a Duvall man never found satisfaction for long, how they always went looking for more, and hurt the ones who loved them in the end. It all clambered in his head and yet Cole couldn't latch onto them now. He couldn't grasp the fear he always felt of being the next Duvall to dish out such anguish to the one who dared love him.

The horse stopped on its own accord, and Cole opened his eyes to find they'd reached the cliff edge. The view, always breathtaking in the day, looked even more glorious at night. The nearly full moon offered enough light to glisten off the rock face, to dance like diamonds on the natural spring flowing below.

"It's gorgeous." Jay brought his horse to a stop on Cole's left and stared over the side as Cole did.

"I used to come here a lot when I worked for you," Rusty commented from his place on horseback on the other side of Jay.

"I know. Sometimes I followed you, watched you from the woods." Cole swallowed hard at the admission and slowly turned his head to meet Rusty's gaze. He saw surprise move over Rusty's handsome face and then an amusement that tilted Rusty's lips in a gorgeous smile. It was so fucking sexy that Cole's cock flexed in his jeans.

"Did you, now?" Rusty clucked his tongue. "Sure would've been nice if you'd decided to join me."

Cole knew the other man referred to all the times Cole watched him jerk-off out here beneath the flickering stars. Cole had wanted to join Rusty. He sat on his horse with his cock flaming for the treatment Rusty showed his own dick. His hands screamed to be the ones wrapped around Rusty's thick shaft rather than Rusty's own hands.

Cole swallowed again and said the words that might seal a fate of heartbreak for the three of them, but would likely deliver satisfaction at least for tonight. "I'm here now." Relief washed away the surprise in Rusty's expression. It was so potent, so heartfelt, Cole had to look

away. What was he doing? *Could* he do this? He began this night looking to save Jay from the evil, disgusting grips of the Longhorns. He'd done it. Jay was safe. So why did Cole suddenly feel like the one who needed saving?

He got off his horse, slapping it lightly on the rear to get it moving. He had no worries it would wander far, but the instant it trotted away, he wondered again what the hell he was thinking. He sent his escape trotting off into the woods.

Cole heard Rusty and Jay's boots hit the ground as they dismounted their horses and sent them off to join Cole's. He stood several feet back from the edge of the cliff, his fingers hooked in the pockets of his jeans, his head tipped back to gaze at the stars beneath the brim of his cowboy hat. The stars disappeared moments later when his eyes closed as Rusty's corded arm snaked around his waist. It had to be Rusty, since the man stood the tallest of the three. He felt Rusty's arousal against the small of his back and couldn't stop his body from pushing back against it.

A low growl rumbled from Rusty's throat, and his head dropped to rest on Cole's shoulder. "Yes, you are. Finally, you're here."

Rusty's words sounded thick with so much emotion Cole felt his eyes burn. He'd kept his distance from this man, denied himself all the pleasures of Rusty's body to keep from causing Rusty pain. Could it be possible he hurt Rusty in his attempt to protect the man?

"But you're still thinking too much," Jay said as he stepped into Cole's line of sight. Both of Jay's hands came up to touch Cole's temples. Jay's wide, calloused fingers felt so incredibly gentle. "I can almost see the wheels turning in your gorgeous head. Stop them, Cole. Let those wheels rest for tonight."

"Just for tonight?" Cole heard himself ask. Was it too much to hope they wanted nothing more from him beyond tonight? Was it too much to fear he'd only get them for one night?

"For starters." Jay's gaze held his. Cole saw the amusement flowing in the other man's incredible river eyes, but he saw the

promises causing the waves, too, the conviction betraying Jay's obvious belief that tonight would only be the start.

Cole all but heard the wheels grind to a stop as he shut off his mind, cutting off all thoughts except those that allowed him to feel the intense bliss of finally being between the two men he wanted most.

* * * *

Jay framed Cole's face with his hands and closed the distance between their mouths. He didn't break eye contact even as their lips met and, because of this, he saw when Cole surrendered.

Cole surprised Jay, laying one on him nothing like the tender brush of lips he stole from Rusty back in the horse stables. He captured Jay's mouth in a kiss that controlled, devoured, and claimed in its ferocity and delicious pressure. His tongue drove between Jay's lips, sweeping over Jay's tongue and licking the roof of Jay's mouth in a way that drew low purring sounds from Jay's throat. His hand closed on Jay's nape, fingers delving into Jay's curls and knocking Jay's cowboy hat to the ground in the process.

Jay hardly noticed the absence of the hat as he angled his head, allowing Cole to take the kiss deeper still. Cole tasted of heat and arousal, a heady mix that had Jay's toes curling in his boots. Even when Cole kissed him at the bar, the one and only time Jay'd ever gotten this close to the man, it hadn't been this consuming, this fantastic.

Jay's hands fell from Cole's face. He grazed his palms over the stubble of Cole's cheeks, his wide neck, his strong shoulders. Cole's hand remained like a vise to Jay's nape, his other arm winding around Jay's waist to clamp their bodies together, front to front. If Cole could've pulled Jay inside his skin, Jay believed in that moment the man would've done it, and Jay wouldn't have had any complaints.

Cole's body made a rigid wall of muscle and heat against Jay. At nearly the same height, their bodies molded in perfect alignment,

chest to chest, stomach to stomach, cock to cock. Jesus, the man had a helluva cock! Jay writhed against it, grinding his own pulsing erection to Cole's fierce length. Only then did Cole break eye contact, wrenching his mouth from Jay's in an animalistic growl.

"Damnit, Jay, are you trying to kill me?"

Jay let a small smile tilt his tingling lips. "No, just pleasure you." He splayed his hands flat on Cole's shoulders and brought them down, absorbing the feel of each hard angle and rigid muscle beneath his palms. He didn't stop until he encountered Rusty's arm still encircling Cole's waist. Lost in his kiss with Cole, Jay had forgotten about Rusty. He met Rusty's gaze now, though, over Cole's shoulder and saw approval and encouragement in his chocolate depths.

Jay felt Rusty slide his free hand between Jay's and Cole's bodies, between their groins. Rusty cupped Cole's cock and Jay watched as Cole's eyes rolled with pleasure. His head fell back to rest once more on Rusty's chest and another quietly whispered, "Damnit," escaped his lips.

Rusty dipped his head, catching Cole's lobe between his teeth. "Do you want me to leave you two alone?"

Jay's heart skipped. No, he couldn't. They meant to take Cole together, to show Cole they could give him the satisfaction he required to keep him sated and happy. Not that Jay didn't believe he could do that alone. He knew he could please Cole two ways from Sunday for the rest of their lives. But he didn't want to do it alone. He wanted Rusty there with them always.

Cole released his hold on Jay's waist, but not his grip on Jay's nape. He lifted his head, locking his gaze with Jay's. Jay felt Cole's arm shift and knew he'd reached behind himself to grab onto Rusty. "You've walked away from me once." He tipped his head back, this time meeting Rusty's gaze. "Don't do it again tonight."

Flames leapt in Rusty's eyes, mirroring the ones licking the inner walls of Jay's cock. "We won't do it tonight or any other night."

Cole visibly gulped at the love and conviction that rang in Rusty's tone. The man's use of the word *we* obviously didn't get lost on Cole. Cole's head came up again, his fingers twisting in Jay's curls as their gazes met. He opened his mouth to say something, but Jay stopped him with a vow of his own.

"And we'll make sure you don't walk away from us." Jay knew Cole understood the implications of his words. Still, he felt the need to make himself perfectly clear. "The Duvall curse ends here with us. You saved me tonight. Now it's our job to take care of you."

Even as he spoke, Jay began unfastening the buttons of Cole's shirt. With each inch of tanned flesh he exposed, his mouth watered more and more. He leaned in, tracing Cole's collarbone and throat with his tongue. He pushed Cole's shirt off his shoulders and bent his knees, finding Cole's nipple and closing his lips around the hardened bud.

* * * *

Rusty hadn't prepared himself for Cole to turn to liquid in his embrace. Who would've thought the man would surrender so completely to a lover?

He should've thought it, Rusty realized as understanding took hold. Cole believed for so long he had only two choices. He could fight to keep every emotion and desire locked inside, and indulge only in simple, wad-shooting sex. Or he could give himself over and take the chance on the Duvall curse ruining it all. He'd taken the first option and held true to it in every interaction he had with another man until tonight. Tonight, he finally let himself abandon the fight. He allowed himself to submit to the desires of his body, his mind, and, hopefully, his heart. Such a total surrender turned him to putty in Rusty's and Jay's hands.

That's when it clicked. Rusty might have slapped himself upside the head if his arms hadn't been locked around Cole, holding him

tight. Cole spent a lifetime being in control. He'd been taught from an early age to guard every emotion, to be in charge of every action. So much so that he'd feared what might happen if he let go. So much so, Rusty bet now, that he craved the freedom to surrender.

"Relax against me," Rusty whispered against Cole's neck. "We're going to make you feel good, baby. Give yourself to us, Cole. Will you do that?"

Cole's eyes closed on a heavy sigh. When he opened them again fear and heady desire glinted in their depths. "I already have."

Jay straightened before Cole only to lean in and nip Cole's bottom lip. "Put your arms around Rusty's neck."

Rusty met Jay's gaze, putting an unspoken question in his eyes that Jay answered with a smile and an infinitesimal nod. He'd realized it, too, the root of the Duvall curse and the key to Cole's immense satisfaction.

Cole didn't move. He continued to grip Jay's nape with one hand while the other remained latched to the back of Rusty's thigh just below his ass. While it felt fabulous to have Cole's hand so close to the one part of his body that ached as intensely as his cock, it wasn't where he needed Cole's hands at that moment.

"Did you like what Jay did to your nipples?"

Cole's eyes narrowed at the firmness Rusty put in his tone. He didn't answer, still didn't move.

"Did you?" Rusty prompted, lifting one brow.

"I did."

"Then put your arms around Rusty's neck, and I'll do a lot more of it," Jay told him.

Cole's gaze flicked to Jay, and Rusty felt the man's body quiver even as he hesitantly brought his hands up to stretch behind Rusty's neck. Given the height difference, the position equaled that of shackling Cole to a wall.

Rusty looked down the length of Cole's front, loving the way the position made the muscles in his pecs bulge, the way it pulled his already rigid abs and flat stomach even tighter.

"Damn, you're gorgeous," Jay said on a quiet exhale as his gaze traveled the same path as Rusty's. His hands took the trip next, gliding over Cole's chest, his abs and stomach as Jay sank to his knees before the man. His fingers already started working at the button on Cole's jeans. Rusty felt Cole suck in a quick breath, holding it as Jay shucked Cole's pants and briefs down his legs.

"Breathe," Rusty instructed, unable to hide the amusement in his voice. "You pass out on us and you'll miss all the wonderful things we plan to do to you."

"I'm going to do them whether he's awake or not." Jay smiled up at them. "I figure when the pleasure reaches a certain point he'll have to regain consciousness." He took Cole's stiff cock in his hand and Cole let out the breath he'd been holding as a growl.

"He's vicious," he told Rusty.

Rusty chuckled, his gaze transfixed on the beautiful sight of Jay's hand fisted around Cole's cock. "We're discovering that together, but I've gotta say I'm loving it."

"Me, too." His laced fingers behind Rusty's neck tightened, drawing Rusty's gaze to him. "Both of you."

Rusty swallowed, the emotions swelling in his chest at those words too potent to put to definition. Cole's eyes started to close, and Rusty glanced down and saw Jay's lips closing around the head of Cole's cock. "Keep your eyes open," he told Cole. "Keep them on me. I want to watch your expressions as he sucks you off."

Cole shook his head. "I don't think I can. God, Rusty, his mouth feels so good!"

"I bet it does. Lucky bastard." Rusty's own cock did a painful two step in his jeans, throbbing for the same attention. "But if you close your eyes, I'll tell him to stop. Do you want him to stop?"

"Fuck, no. Ah, God!"

Rusty glanced down again to see that Jay had swallowed Cole's cock. The sight of Cole's length buried in the other man's mouth pulled a whimper from Rusty's throat. "Jesus, that's beautiful. Tell me how it feels, Cole."

"Fucking amazing!"

"That's not good enough. Do you want him to stop?"

"I already told you no."

"Then tell me how it feels to have your cock in his mouth." Rusty looked back at Cole to find Cole's eyes blazing with arousal and torment. The threat of making Jay stop drove Cole nuts, heightening his desire.

"Damn you," Cole cursed. "His mouth is wet, warm. His lips are, oh, shit, they're so tight around my rod. Jesus, his teeth are...Jay, please!"

"What's he doing, Cole? I can't look because I'm so busy watching the pleasure on your face. Tell me what he's doing."

"He's got my nuts in his hand." Each word came on a labored breath as Cole obviously struggled to speak and hold Rusty's gaze. "He's rolling them in his palm while he fucks my cock with his mouth. Shit! I'm not going to last long, Rusty."

"Do you want to come in his mouth, Cole?" Rusty's own mouth had gone as dry as the desert. His cock throbbed, his balls stinging as if a whip smacked at their tender flesh. His questions and demands tortured himself as much as Cole. Cole's description and the intoxicating bliss in his eyes gave him foreplay of a different dimension.

"Yes, ah, God, I'm about to come."

"You have to ask first." Watching Cole's struggle against his need to obey, his desire to beg, and the pleasure that racked his body proved nearly as fabulous as fucking him. Okay, not even close, because fucking Cole would be sheer ecstasy, a slice of paradise Rusty couldn't wait to experience. He would wait, though, because

right now was all about Cole, his pleasure, his release, his acceptance of Rusty and Jay as they made him theirs.

"What?" Cole's eyes widened, understanding obviously lost somewhere in the sensations Jay's mouth sent through Cole's groin.

"You have to ask for permission to come."

"Are you fucking nuts?"

"Do you want him to stop before you blow your wad, leave your balls aching, and dick full but no release? He'll do it. Won't you Jay?"

Jay's answer came in an "Mmm-hmm" sound with Cole's cock still lodged in his mouth.

"Fuck, you two *are* trying to kill me."

"Nope, just show you pleasure," Rusty assured him again. He felt Cole's hips start to rock into Jay's mouth, and he gripped them hard, held them still. "He's in control. You stay still and ask for what you want."

"I want to come. God, damnit, let me co-*me*." The word became two syllables as it left his lips, his face contorting and his eyes slamming shut. He growled, loud and long, like a beast of the woods surrounding them as he shot his seed into Jay's hungry mouth.

Chapter Five

Cole's body jerked with the force of his ejaculation. The release left him in a gush of erotic relief, taking with it his ability to move any muscle, to ponder any thought beyond the sheer bliss of the moment. As his limp cock fell from Jay's wickedly amazing lips, Cole felt something he'd never felt before: contentment.

He drew in a ragged breath and let it out on a quiver that shook him to his toes. It made Rusty chuckle, the sound low and heated. His amusement twisted with a still-to-be-sated arousal in the air. Cole loved that he brought that sound from Rusty, loved the way Jay's hands slowly cruised up Cole's front as Jay stood. The two men he wanted more than any he ever met sandwiched him between their hugely aroused bodies. They obviously needed a release of their own and yet his pleasure held their focus. As unfair as it seemed, he couldn't find the strength to dispute their decision.

"Feeling better now?" Jay's question held the same amusement Cole heard in Rusty's laugh.

Cole looked at the other man. "Never better." He closed his eyes despite Rusty's order to keep them open and let his head rest on Rusty's shoulder as his breathing slowly returned to normal. He had a sneaky suspicion no other part of him would ever be normal again.

"Good, because we aren't done." Rusty's breath against the side of Cole's neck sent icy shards of desire spiking through him. "Jay still has on all his clothes."

"So do you." Cole ground his back against Rusty's cock. He felt it stretching long and thick through the man's jeans. If only he were a

little shorter, Cole could feel that length pushing at the crevice of his bare ass. His anus puckered, need causing it to spasm.

Rusty's hands latched onto Cole's hips, stopping his movement. "We'll worry about me in a minute. Undress Jay."

Cole didn't hesitate. He made quick work of Jay's shirt, freeing the buttons and pushing the material aside and then, *yes*, he touched his bare flesh. He splayed his hands on Jay's chest, eased them down in a pressured caress to absorb every firm angle and gorgeous line.

"I've dreamt of touching you this way," he whispered, too far gone to care how much of himself he revealed anymore. "At first, it was always Rusty." He felt Rusty still behind him, the man's hands on Cole's hips gripping tighter until fingers bit into flesh. He even thought he felt the other man's heart pound against his back. He sure as hell wondered how neither man heard his own heart the way it pounded so viciously in his chest. "Then I met you. I tried to forget you, forget Rusty. I couldn't. Both of you haunted me. Night or day, I couldn't stop the want, couldn't quench the need."

His perusal of Jay's chest and stomach led him to the man's waist where Cole's fingers actually shook in his haste to unfasten the button, pull down the zipper. He couldn't wait to touch, couldn't wait to curl his fingers around Jay's cock. He abandoned his act of removing Jay's pants and drove his hand inside.

Both men groaned as Cole's hand closed around Jay's shaft, the thick meat pulsing in his palm. The riot of sensations at the touch sent Cole spiraling through a tornado of ecstasy.

"Jesus," Jay gasped even as Cole felt a hand close around the wrist that held Jay's cock. The hand turned to a vise on Cole's wrist.

"I said undress him, not jerk him off." Rusty's tone sounded as firm as his hold felt. He pulled Cole's hand back, his fingers applying a pressure that forced Cole to release Jay's cock or risk hurting the man.

Frustration spiked and Cole wrenched his hand from Rusty's grasp. "What? I don't get to touch? Who put you in charge?"

"We're in charge," Jay corrected, the words tight with arousal. He enjoyed having Cole's hand on his cock, but again he obviously put his own pleasure on hold for Cole. Only Cole wasn't getting his needs met this time. "As for who put us in charge, you did when you gave yourself over to us tonight."

"You'll do as we say and ask for permission to do anything else."

Bullshit! The expletive sprang to the tip of his tongue, but Cole couldn't seem to speak it. He opened his mouth, closed it again, swallowed, and found himself nodding rather than giving into the desire to argue. It wasn't the desire to protest that gripped him the strongest, but this alien need to obey. What the hell?

"Finish undressing him," Rusty commanded.

Cole gripped the sides of Jay's jeans, catching the man's briefs in the process and yanking both down his toned thighs. Rusty's hold on his waist kept him from sinking to his knees, so he bent at the waist instead, noting when Jay took a half step back to give Cole room. Jay's cock grazed Cole's cheek as Cole bent far enough to push Jay's pants to his ankles around his cowboy boots. Cole swallowed the urge to take Jay's dick in his mouth.

He started to straighten, but a firm pressure to the small of his back held him in place. Rusty's hand cruised over Cole's ass, the man's calloused palm circling first one cheek and then the other. The hard slap of palm connecting with tender flesh a half a second later had Cole crying out in both surprise and pain.

"Fuck! Rusty, you sonuvabitch." He ground the words even as Rusty's hand came down on his other cheek. The sting rocketed through him, hardening his cock and tightening his balls. It hurt, but the pain felt erotic, arousing him even as it spiked his anger. There should've been embarrassment, too. He was a cowboy, a friggin' grown man! Yet this man spanked him like an unruly child.

"That's for touching Jay when you weren't given permission to do so." Rusty's words flittered through the haze of confusion wreaking havoc in Cole's mind and body. Rusty's finger slipped between Cole's

stinging cheeks, instantly finding home. It moved over the outer rim of Cole's back entrance, and Cole's muscles tensed. A hand delved into his hair, and then Jay's face came into view as Jay knelt before him.

"It's okay to like it," Jay told him softly. "You don't have to be embarrassed. Don't fight it and it will be much easier."

"What are you doing to me?" Cole couldn't sort out the emotions traveling through him. His mind rebelled against everything he knew even as his body hummed for more. Rusty's finger dipped inside Cole's anus, a slow intrusion that stretched the tenderly taut muscles and started the burn.

"We're breaking the Duvall curse." Rusty wiggled his finger, eliciting the need for Cole to move with it, but Rusty's hand on the small of his back held him in place.

"We're showing you how a man, or in this case, two, can satisfy your needs so completely you will never feel the urge to stray from us, never need to fear hurting us because you'll never want for anything." Jay's hand toyed with Cole's hair. It felt so good, so sweet and gentle Cole's eyes started to close. Then Rusty's finger plunged all the way inside his anus, and he gasped from the deep burn. "We will give it all to you."

"By controlling me?" Cole managed to ask. "I'm not some fairy dog who'll ask how high every time you say jump."

"No, you're a gorgeous man whom we both love that will obey our orders in bed." Jay glanced around, a smirk tilting his lips. "Or wherever we decide to fuck you, because you crave submission. You need a break from being in charge, Cole. You need time to let yourself go in the hands of men who you can trust, who love you the way Rusty and I do."

Cole listened to every word, a part of him balking at the idea of what Jay said even as the largest part of him recognized it for the truth. Rusty's finger withdrew from his ass, and he groaned. Cole's eyes grew wide from a fear Rusty would stop. Then two fingers

plunged inside his tight hole, and he cried out again, his eyes opening wider this time from the force of the pressure and the sensation of being filled so completely.

"We'll give you one chance to stop this, one chance to walk away." Rusty pulled his fingers free again, this time gripping Cole's waist and urging him to stand straight.

Cole breathed fast. His heart hammered. His mind reeled. His ass ached, not with the pain of Rusty's fingers as they'd stretched his entrance, but with the absence of the attention. His cock throbbed, fully erect once more and jutting out from his body as pleading for Jay's mouth again.

Rusty reached around him, cupped the side of his face and turned Cole to face him. "Tell us now, and you can put your clothes back on and ride away." He gulped and Cole saw the glint of tears in the man's chocolate eyes. "But know before you say anything that I love you, *we* love you. Sex with Jay and me won't always be this game of dominance and submission, but we feel you need the release sometimes. We believe it might be the thing the men in your family have looked for all these years, but couldn't find it because they didn't know."

"And what if I want it to always be this way?" Cole asked, unable to stop himself now that he stared Rusty's love straight on and felt the echo of that emotion coming from Jay before him. They were right. He could feel it, understood it, and knew now why he suddenly felt so content with these men. They gave him what he needed, what no other man ever gave him, feeding a desire so deep he hadn't known it to be there before tonight.

Rusty's lips curved into a devilishly sexy smile. "Then you'll have it, my love." Rusty kissed him, his tongue making love to Cole's mouth in sensuous strokes that broke through any last resistance or doubt Cole might have harbored. He pulled away slowly, leaving his moisture on Cole's lips for Cole to taste. "Drop to your hands and knees."

Cole fell to his hands and knees on the ground between Rusty and Jay. He looked back over his shoulder and watched as Rusty unfastened his jeans and pushed them to his ankles. He didn't wear briefs. A small bottle of lube seemed to materialize out of nowhere in his hand, and he squirted it on three fingers. Cole's gaze took in Rusty's cock, stupendously long and gloriously thick, and he swallowed the urge to start begging.

Rusty dropped to his knees, one hand spreading Cole's ass cheeks apart while the other drove three lubed fingers into Cole's ass. Cole clinched his teeth together over the burn that flamed the inner walls of his anus.

"Breathe, babe," Jay said softly. "He's big. Trust me, you'll want him to prepare you."

Cole turned his head and tipped it back to find Jay standing before him, gazing down at him with pure love and primal desire in his river blue eyes. Cole breathed, slow and even, as Rusty worked his ass, stretching him to accept Rusty's cock. Then Rusty pulled his fingers free and, without warning or hesitation, drove his dick all the way inside.

"Sonuvabitch!" Cole screamed, nearly bucking off the ground as Rusty's mount sent him soaring. Pain quickly diverted to insurmountable pleasure and lights exploded in his vision. Rusty stopped, buried inside his anus to the hilt. The impossible girth and length of Rusty's cock filled Cole more than he'd ever dreamed he could take.

"Relax, love," Rusty's words sounded tight from his obvious need to hold himself still. "It won't hurt as much if you relax. Jay took me tonight back at Masters High without any lube or prep."

"You fucked during the poker game?" Cole fixed his gaze on Jay.

The younger man winced. "Are you mad?"

"Hell no. I'm glad. It should've happened long before tonight."

"So should this. Now relax, love," Rusty said again. Cole forced his muscles to ease. He wanted to clamp onto Rusty's cock, wanted to

rock back, to drive the man deeper inside him. His cock dangled toward the ground, pulsing in a fierce need to be stroked, to fuck. "That's it. Now suck Jay's cock while I fuck you."

Cole shook his head. He wanted to fuck Jay, not suck him off. His cock screamed, the pressure too intense for words. His balls tightened to the point of intense pain. But when Jay stepped into his line of sight, his hand fisting in Cole's hair, the head of his cock nudging at Cole's lips, Cole opened his mouth and sucked Jay's dick inside.

Cole opened his throat, swallowing Jay's complete length just as Rusty pulled free of his ass only to ram viciously inside again. The force of Rusty's fucking pushed Cole forward, driving Jay's cock further into Cole's mouth, controlling every suck, every thrust. Rusty left his mark, pounding into Cole's body until Cole thought he couldn't take anymore. He'd be sore come morning. He didn't doubt that. But it would be a delicious kind of sore, one he hoped he'd feel for the rest of his life.

His concentration on Jay's cock in his mouth distracted him from his own release. It fused an electric current in his cock, but just as the juice rose to the head, Rusty would buck harder, thrust deeper and Cole would lose all sense of sanity.

"Rusty, I can't hold on. Cole, I'm about to come in your mouth, babe. Get ready to drink." The words barely left Jay's mouth before Cole felt the hot bursts of semen shooting down his throat. He swallowed it greedily, his lips closing tighter around Jay's shaft to milk more from his pulsing dick.

"Cole, have you come yet?" Rusty asked, still thrashing into Cole's body with a reckless abandon.

Cole couldn't answer with Jay's dick in his mouth so he shook his head.

"Good, you don't have our permission. I'm going to come now, but you can't. If you do, we'll have to punish you."

Christ, Cole didn't know what punishment meant beyond the spanking he'd gotten earlier, but he feared he might find out. Now that

Jay stopped fucking his mouth all his attention reverted to his ass, to the vicious pounding Rusty gave him, to the rapidly growing release collecting in his own dick.

Rusty growled as his come filled Cole's ass. He fell over Cole, his breath ragged, his lips trailing tender kisses over Cole's shoulders and back. "Did I hurt you?" Concern filled Rusty's shaking voice.

"Not in any way that I didn't enjoy immensely," Cole answered through clenched teeth. He fought with all he had not to come. "I need to come, Rusty. Please, jerk me off, suck my cock, something. I can't hold back much longer."

"How about if you put it in me?" Jay suggested, and Cole looked to find the other man getting into position in front of him.

"Ah, there is a God," Cole whispered, making the other two men laugh as he found a strength he didn't know he still had to crawl to Jay. "Later, I want to take more time with you," he told Jay as he mounted him. "Right now, I can't make it last. I hope that's okay."

"More than ok, babe." Jay shot him a look over his shoulder that echoed his tender words. "We have the rest of our lives for you to take time with me."

Cole snatched the lube Rusty passed him, rubbed it on his cock, biting back a moan at how close he nearly came to blowing it in his own hand at the touch, and then pushed inside Jay's tight ass. Later, he might be embarrassed at how quickly he lost control. He barely thrust a handful of times before all restraint left him and he gave into the release.

"You're mine," Jay whispered moments later as Cole lay folded over him attempting to catch his breath.

"And mine," Rusty chimed in, coming to kneel beside them, his hand lightly caressing Cole's back.

"I want that," Cole admitted. "I've loved you both for so long."

Jay wiggled from beneath him, turning to sit on the ground and pulling Cole into his arms. "You saved me tonight. Now it's our turn."

"The stakes are high." Rusty sat down on his other side, joining in the embrace. "Love and commitment, forever. Do you think you're up for the game?"

"I've been told I'm the best poker player in these parts." Cole grinned. "Let's prove 'em right. This is a hand I don't intend to lose." He wound his arms around both men, drawing them close and basking in the contentment he'd finally found in their love.

THE END

<http://www.tonyaramagos.com>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tonya Ramagos is a bestselling author of contemporary, fantasy, paranormal and cowboy novels. She spends most of her time in a fictional world dreaming up hot hunks and head-strong heroines. When she's not writing she's reading. Anything from legal and military non-fiction to any genre of romance can be found on her bookshelves and flash drives. Her music tastes are just as varied with artists ranging from country to rock to heavy metal loading her MP3 player. Her idea of relaxing is curled on the sofa or on her back deck with a book and a cup of coffee, glass of wine, or an MGD 64. A wife and mother of 2 fantastic boys, she enjoys playing games, dancing, and walking the nature trails around her home in Harrison, TN.

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