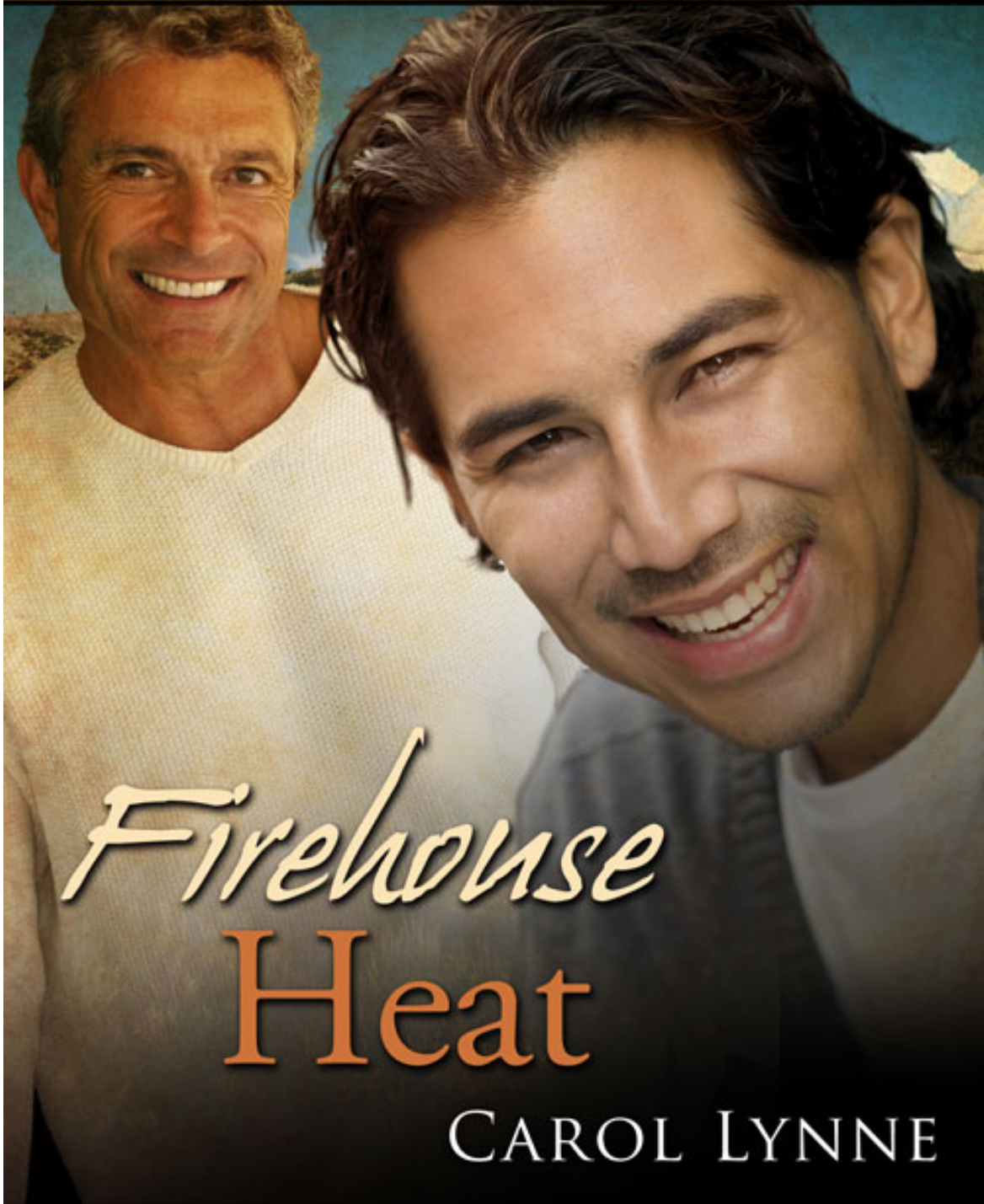




CATTLE  
VALLEY



*Firehouse*  
**Heat**

CAROL LYNNE

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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Firehouse Heat

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

**Cattle Valley**

# **FIREHOUSE HEAT**

**Carol Lynne**

## *Dedication*

In early April of 2007, shortly after my second book was released at Ellora's Cave, I decided I wasn't cut out to be a writer. I stopped writing for over a month, miserable and quickly sinking into a depression of epic proportions.

One day I received an email from Claire Siemaszkiewicz about a new epubliishing company she was planning to launch. There was something about Claire that drew me in. For the first time in weeks I was able to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

I quickly agreed to write a short story for Total-E-Bound. To be honest, I wasn't sure at that point I could even pull a short story off. I wrote Coach, book one in the Campus Cravings series, and Claire released it on Total-E-Bound's opening day. It truly was the start of a new type of writing for me. To work with an owner/editor who seemed excited by my stories was like a breath of fresh air.

Firehouse Heat is my 50<sup>th</sup> book with Total-E-Bound, and I'm as happy working for Claire now as I was that first release back on July 2, 2007. I can't explain what it is like to work for a publisher that truly seems to care about their authors and the stories they put out. A publishing house that doles out respect along with on-time payments and a cheerful attitude is not easy to find, and for me, Total-e-bound is one of the best.

Thank you, Claire. Without you, my life would not be what it is today. Here's hoping for another 50!

## *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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Dr Pepper:	Dr Pepper/Seven Up, Inc
Twister:	Milton Bradley
Twilight:	Summit Entertainment, LLC

## Chapter One

Leo Burkowski lifted the barbell from its stand and began to do his normal set of fifty. He was getting into his zone when Sammy Lee popped into the room.

"Pirate's Cove is about to start," Sammy informed him.

"That's okay. I've got other things on my mind today. You go ahead," Leo replied. Hopefully Sammy would leave it at that.

"Want me to record it?"

"Naw, don't worry about it." Leo continued his workout without looking at Sammy.

"Well, okay then. I guess I can fill you in at supper."

Leo heard the hurt tone in the other man's voice, but didn't acknowledge it. "Sure."

Sammy left the small weight room, and Leo resettled the weights on the stand. He reached beside him and grabbed a towel to wipe his face and neck.

In the beginning, he'd enjoyed spending time with Sammy. The younger man liked to flirt and it was a nice feeling to know the handsome man was attracted to him. Over the winter things started to get out of control. Sammy became more obvious, and Leo became more tempted.

Leo sat up and braced his forearms on his knees as he looked out the window. The most recent deluge of snow was quickly melting under the unseasonably warm March temperatures. According to George, Cattle Valley didn't normally dig out until well into April. Leo hoped they'd seen the last of the snow for a while, but he knew enough not to hold his breath.

Having been born and raised in Milwaukee, Leo was used to the snow, but that didn't mean he had to like it. He'd much rather be outside, walking around town or swimming. Jogging used to be his passion, but with his busted-up knee, that particular activity was no longer an option.

Leo absently rubbed the small scars on his knee. If it hadn't been for the injury he'd sustained on a call, he wouldn't have been off work so long. If he hadn't been off work, his partner, Randy, wouldn't have had the chance to hook up with that young EMT at the station.

Leo grunted at his thoughts and stood. Thinking about Randy always put him in a funk. He walked to the treadmill and started a slow pace to warm up. Randy's infidelity was the reason he refused to act on any attraction he may feel for Sammy. He'd seen first-hand what fucking a younger man looked like. Leo doubted he'd have ever noticed how old he and Randy were getting if it hadn't been for walking in on Randy fucking the twenty-three year old. The contrast in their bodies alone was enough to make Randy look like a creepy old leech.

His cell phone started to ring, drawing Leo's attention away from his workout and his libido. He shut down the treadmill and crossed the room to his phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi," Neil greeted.

Leo grinned. He'd been working with Neil Peters as a grief counsellor since he'd arrived in town. Neil refused to talk to a psychologist regarding his feelings about the death of his boyfriend Gavin, and since Leo had a fair amount of training, he'd offered to befriend the younger man to help him out. There were a lot of people in Cattle Valley still trying to cope with the horrific grandstand collapse earlier in the year. Leo didn't do anything special with Neil. They usually just rode around the EZ Does It ranch and talked. Leo thought more than anything, Neil just needed a friend.

"I was wondering if you'd like to go for a ride this evening?" Neil said.

"Can't tonight. I'm on shift, but I can come out tomorrow night."

"Okay, that sounds good. I'll pick up a six-pack."

Leo's smile grew. Since Neil's twenty-first birthday, the guy rarely missed out on an opportunity to drink beer. "None of that light crap."

Neil laughed. "I remember."

"See ya then," Leo said before hanging up.

He picked up his towel and headed towards the showers. Maybe he should get Sammy interested in Neil. At barely thirty-years old, Sammy was closer to Neil's age than Leo's forty-eight.

Leo shook his head and rolled his eyes. He needed to stop worrying about Sammy. If he tried to push the younger man onto someone else, it would only cause trouble around the station. Living and working together would be hell if he pissed the guy off.

\* \* \* \*

"Dinner's on," Leo called.

Sammy walked into the dining room and took a seat. "Smells good."

Leo glanced to the door. "Where's Zac?"

"Terry's here. He brought Zac some tacos from O'Brien's."

Leo looked at the big pot of spaghetti. "Guess we'll have leftovers to take home tomorrow."

Leo set the garlic and cheese bread on the table before sitting across from Sammy. He didn't begrudge Zac spending his supper break with Terry, but it meant he'd be alone with Sammy, which was never a good idea. Maybe if he could get Sammy talking he could eat his meal without holding an actual conversation. "So what happened on Pirate's Cove?"

Sammy's face lit up as he swallowed his bite of pasta. "Oh, you missed a good one today. Allison came on to Jesse again, only this time he told her flat out he wasn't interested."

Sammy winked at Leo. "Of course he didn't tell her why he wasn't interested. Needless to say, Allison didn't take the news so well. She raced out of Jesse's restaurant and immediately went to see Colt, but of course, Colt wasn't alone."

Leo's brows lifted in surprise. "You mean?"

Sammy laughed. "Yep. Dex was there."

"Did she see them?" Leo asked with a forkful of spaghetti poised at his mouth.

"No." Sammy shook his head. "But Colt tried to get rid of her, and I think she suspects something's going on."

Leo whistled. "Guess I should've watched after all."

Sammy tore apart a piece of garlic bread and popped a bite into his mouth. "Told ya."

Leo chuckled. Despite not wanting an intimate relationship with Sammy, he really did enjoy the man's company. No matter what, Sammy seemed to be in a good mood. Leo found himself smiling more when he was in the same room with the younger man.

"Next time I'll have you record it," Leo mused.

Sammy shrugged and finished his piece of bread. "Or you could just take the time to sit and watch it with me."

Leo stared at his plate. "Yeah, guess I could."

\* \* \* \*

Leo rode up the bluff to Neil's favourite spot. "I never get tired of this view."

Neil dismounted and tied his horse, Footloose, to a nearby tree. Leo sat atop Buddy for a few more moments before climbing down. His legs usually felt rubbery after a ride. He wasn't used to being on the back of a horse like Neil. Of course it could also have something to do with his age.

"You okay?" Neil asked, untying a soft-sided cooler from behind his saddle.

"Yeah. Just feeling old lately," Leo answered. He settled Buddy next to Footloose before joining Neil on the 'thinking rock' as Neil called it.

Neil grinned. "You're only as old as you feel."

Leo couldn't help but laugh. It was the kind of thing someone only twenty-one would say. "Then I must be ready for retirement."

Neil handed Leo a can of beer. "So why're you feeling so old?"

"I don't know. Hey, aren't we supposed to be talking about you?" Leo asked, trying to draw attention away from himself.

"We always talk about me."

"That's because I'm boring," Leo joked. He didn't like to talk about himself. What was there to say? He'd spent eighteen years with the same man, only to find out Randy never considered himself in a monogamous relationship.

Neil sighed and laid back on the smooth boulder. "You know it's pretty hard to keep opening up to a man I realise I barely know."

Leo took a sip of his beer. "Okay. I'm forty-eight, born in Milwaukee. I've got two younger brothers and a big sister. My mom died of cancer six years ago, but my dad's still alive and well. Oh, and I had a dog named Pork Chop growing up."

Neil shielded his eyes from the late afternoon sun. "That's great, but you still haven't told me why you feel old."

"Yeah I did. I'm forty-eight. Isn't that reason enough?"

"Nope. Besides that fucked up knee of yours, you're in better shape than most men half your age, so I figure it must be something else."

Leo playfully reached over and punched Neil on the arm. Neil shot straight up and scurried off the rock before Leo could even pull his hand back. *Shit.* "I'm sorry. I forgot."



Red-faced, Neil climbed back onto the boulder. "Not your fault. I hate that I do that."

"From what you've told me about your childhood, I reckon it's just a natural reflex." Neil hadn't gone into a lot of detail, but he'd made it pretty clear he'd grown up in an abusive household with no father and a string of 'uncles' as his mom liked to call them.

"Maybe, but I haven't had to live like that for going on five years. You'd think I'd get over it." Neil emptied his can and reached for another.

Leo leaned his head back and closed his eyes. The warmth of the sun on his face felt good. If he concentrated hard enough, he might almost believe it was spring. "I think there are some things you never fully get over."

"Yeah? Are you speaking from personal experience?"

Leo sighed. He hated to open his soul for inspection, but Neil was right. He really couldn't continue to ask the man to pour out his darkest secrets without getting a little in return. "Just over a year ago, I found out my partner of eighteen years was fucking around on me."

"Shit. I'm sorry."

"Thanks, but it gets worse. Evidently Randy had a thing for the young ones and always had. Come to find out he'd been fucking twinkles on the side for the majority of our relationship. I'm just the asshole who didn't have a clue."

Neil looked over at Leo. "So did you beat the shit out of him when you found out?"

"Nope. I quit my job, moved in with my baby brother and moped around for about seven months before I took the job here in Cattle Valley." Leo crushed the can in his hand and blindly reached for a replacement.

"That sucks," Neil commented.

"Yep," Leo agreed.

"So is that why you're feeling old?"

What would Neil think of him if he knew about Leo's unwanted attraction to a man eighteen years his junior? But Sammy wasn't just any man. He was the most gorgeous man Leo had ever laid eyes on, with eyes so dark brown they looked black and lashes that would make any woman envious. Aaah, and Leo wouldn't even get into the deep dimples that tore his insides up every time Sammy granted him with a smile. "Partly, I guess."

"Partly?" Neil prodded.

Leo rolled to his side. The hard surface of the rock dug into his ribs, but he figured that's what he got for lounging on a fucking boulder. "Sammy's been coming on to me pretty strong lately."

Neil grinned. "So? Do you like him?"

Leo shook his head. "Whether I do or don't isn't the issue. He's too young for me."

Neil's face went red. In the blink of an eye the normally quiet, sad man in front of him was pissed. "What the hell is it with older men? Do you think anyone younger is just stupid or something?"

Leo sat up and held up his hands in surrender. "I didn't say that..." he started, but Neil cut him off.

"I mean, if you're both adults, and you both want it, what's the problem? How come what I want doesn't matter? Why do you have to protect me just because you're older? I know what I want, dammit!"

Leo blinked several times. He'd never, in all the months they'd hung around together, seen Neil go off the deep-end. It was obvious Neil had become so angry he'd transferred Leo's situation with his own. Maybe it was the first real bit of information he'd gotten out of the younger man.

"I know you're not talking about me, so what? Is there someone you want who's older?" Leo asked.

Neil tipped his beer can up and guzzled the remainder. "Doesn't matter. It was a long time ago, before I got to Cattle Valley. I'm just trying to make you understand that if you think you're protecting Sammy, you're not. I can only assume the guy can take care of himself."

Leo slid off the rock and stood at the edge of the bluff, looking out over the EZ Does It. "Maybe I'm protecting myself. Regardless, getting involved with Sammy isn't in the cards. Besides, we work together."

Leo glanced over his shoulder. "Didn't mean to upset you."

Neil waved away the apology. "Sensitive subject. Don't worry about it."

After another look at the landscape below, dotted with patches of melting snow, Leo turned back and rested against the boulder. He hated to push Neil, but a few things had become painfully obvious.

"You're still in love with this older man from your past," Leo stated. "Do you think it would help to talk about it?"

"No."

Leo hated to push further. It was obvious that although Neil had come to terms with his feelings, or lack thereof, for Gavin, he still hadn't dealt with his past. Leo glanced at Neil. The younger man had shut himself off from further discussion.

With a sigh, Leo climbed back up on the rock. Delving into Neil's past would have to wait for another day. "Pass me another one of those beers."

\* \* \* \*

"I need you to take the City Council meeting for me on Wednesday," George informed Leo at shift change.

"Why?" Leo asked.

George grinned. "I'm going to Vegas. Trick's up for a couple of awards. With Carol only a month away from her due date, we really don't want her to fly. I'll only be gone overnight, so other than leaving the station to attend the meeting, nothing else should change as far as your schedule."

Leo rolled his eyes and nodded. "Sure. Have fun in Vegas while I try to stay awake through a long, dull meeting."

George chuckled. "You haven't been to one of Nate's meetings. They're rarely boring. Especially when it's a topic that involves the Sheriff's Department. There's nothing hotter than watching Nate and Ryan go at it. I think it must be some sort of foreplay because the meetings usually break up shortly after."

"Good to know." Leo pounded George on the back. "Wish Trick luck for me."

"Will do." George picked up his thermal coffee cup and left the small office.

Leo sat at the desk long enough to check the previous twenty-four hours of logged calls before heading into the main living room. As usual, Sammy was sprawled on the couch. Leo tried not to notice the sparkle in the handsome man's eyes when he spotted him. Unlike the usual weekday shifts, the station had a full-time EMT crew on the weekends.

Leo sat in one of the recliners and nodded to Zac and the newest EMT, Jakob Cox. "Anything good on?"

"Nope," Jakob answered. "I brought the new Ryan Reynolds action movie if anyone's interested."

All eyes in the room lit up at the mention of the sexy wet dream. There was something about Ryan Reynolds that made Leo, and apparently every other man in the room, go half-hard just thinking about him.

"I'll pop the corn," Sammy said, jumping up from the couch.

"I'm going to run and call Terry real quick before we start," Zac said, also leaving the room.

With Jakob getting the DVD ready, it left Leo to fix the drinks. He got up and strode to the kitchen. Sammy was bent over with his hands braced on the counter, staring through the window of the microwave. Leo couldn't help but notice the muscled ass encased in a pair of tight uniform pants. "You think tea is okay with everyone?"

Sammy glanced up in time to catch Leo staring. He grinned and winked. "Sounds good to me."

Leo tore his gaze away and opened the cupboard, removing a box of tea bags. He started a pot of water to boil and had no choice but to watch it. Allowing his eyes to stray to the younger man wasn't wise, it would only encourage Sammy.

The microwave beeped, and Sammy took out the popcorn and replaced it with another bag.

Pressing himself as close as possible to Leo's side, Sammy held up the bowl of warm popcorn. "Would you like a piece? It's hot."

Leo gritted his teeth as he tried not to notice the way Sammy's body felt against him. He shook his head and kept his eyes on the water. "No thanks. I'll wait until the movie starts."

Sammy sighed and set the bowl on the counter. "Why do you do that?"

Leo glanced at Sammy before quickly turning away. "What?"

"Deny to yourself that you want me as badly as I want you."

"I don't." Leo took a deep breath and turned, once again, to look at Sammy. Until he laid his cards on the table, he knew the younger man wouldn't let it go. "We work together, and you're too young for me."

Sammy's hand landed on the centre of Leo's chest. Through the thin cotton of the tight, dark blue T-shirt, Leo could feel the warmth of the man's touch. Staring into Leo's eyes, Sammy moved his hand to brush across one of Leo's nipples.

"Even if you fucked me right here against the counter, it wouldn't affect the way I do my job. So that excuse doesn't fly. There're no rules about getting involved with a co-worker. I checked." Sammy's fingers pinched lightly at the pebbled nub poking against the front of Leo's T-shirt.

Leo closed his eyes. He should knock Sammy's hand away, but he couldn't bring himself to do it, not yet. For a man who had become accustomed to the touch of another, the last year had been rough. Part of him, his dick part, wanted to cave in to his body's demands, but his mind wouldn't let him do it.

Opening his eyes, Leo reached out and removed Sammy's hand. "I can't."

Sammy took a step back and smiled. "You will eventually."

"Don't hold your breath," Leo argued.

\* \* \* \*

With a bowl of popcorn resting on his stomach, Sammy watched the movie and Leo at the same time. He wondered if the obvious erection trapped behind Leo's pants was due to their interlude in the kitchen, or Ryan Reynolds.

Sammy tossed another kernel into his mouth. Although he'd like to think it was because of him, he realised it didn't much matter. Just seeing the object of his fantasies in all its hard glory was enough for the moment.

Leo may protest the attraction between the two of them, but it was definitely there, in spades. Sammy tried to reach down and adjust his own erection when he heard a cough. He glanced up and spotted Leo's gaze on him as he shovelled a handful of popcorn into his mouth.

Sammy grinned and did it again, taking the time to rub the throbbing shaft. Leo coughed again, only it sounded more like he was choking. When Leo's face went a deep red, Sammy jumped up, spilling his bowl of popcorn all over the floor and rushed to Leo's side. He gave Leo's wide, muscled back a few thumps.

"You okay?" Sammy asked.

Leo held up his hand before reaching for his glass of tea. "I'm good. Just went down the wrong pipe."

Sammy glanced over to see Jakob and Zac had already returned their attention to the movie. Sammy leaned one hand on the arm of Leo's chair and reached for the glass Leo was using to help shield his still half-hard cock.

Sammy intentionally grazed the hard ridge with the back of his hand as he lifted the glass and set it back on the table. Leo inhaled a sharp breath and stared at Sammy.

"You should be more careful. It wouldn't do for you to need a rescue in your own firehouse." Knowing he'd done enough for one day, Sammy returned to the mess on the floor beside the couch. He glanced down and shook his head before strolling towards the kitchen to get a broom and dustpan.

He might have made a mess of the floor, but he hoped his actions would be on Leo's mind the rest of the shift.

## Chapter Two

The slamming of the bay door caught Sammy's attention. He glanced up from his position at the front of the fire engine and spotted Leo's expression. Sammy stood stalk still, polish rag in hand, and hoped Leo wouldn't see him. He wasn't sure what had put the sour look on Leo's face, but the last thing he wanted was to have it directed towards him.

"Sammy!" Leo yelled.

*Fuck.* Sammy took a deep breath and stepped out of his hiding place. "Yeah?"

"I've got a problem, and I need your help."

Sammy perked up immediately. He tossed the polish rag onto a wooden chair and walked towards Leo. "Sure. What can I do to help?"

Leo sighed and ran his fingers through his thick, salt and pepper head of hair. "I made the mistake of volunteering to organise a chilli supper. Problem is, I really have no fucking clue how to do it."

"What's it for?" Sammy asked.

"A youth centre. Asa's agreed to buy the building, but he thinks the town will be more invested in it if they have to pitch in for the furnishings and upkeep."

"Sounds like a worthwhile venture. What do you need help with?"

"Everything. I mean, I know how to make chilli, but how much, where to have it and how to get the word out, I have no ideas on."

Sammy grinned. He loved that Leo was asking for his help. Whether the other man knew it or not, it was a step in the right direction. "Well, I think we should have it here and it should be a chilli cook-off. That way there are no costs for food."

Leo nodded. "That takes care of the chilli, but Nate told me there also had to be cinnamon rolls involved. What the hell is up with that? Whoever heard of eating cinnamon rolls with chilli?"

Although Sammy had only been in Cattle Valley a couple of months longer than Leo, even he knew the answer to that. "Reverend Sharp introduced the combination. I've tried it, believe me, it's addictive, especially if they're Kyle's rolls. You should probably talk to him, see if he'd either give you a cut rate or donate them."

Leo's scowl turned into a slow and easy smile. "Thanks, I will."

Sammy panicked. It sounded as if Leo was going to continue the project on his own. "Of course I'd be more than willing to talk to Kyle for you. I can also help with everything else if you'd like."

Leo's head cocked to the side. He seemed to study Sammy for several moments before nodding his head. "That would be a big help. Thanks."

Leo turned to walk towards the door leading to the main living area. Sammy started to follow, but held himself back. The last thing he wanted was to spook the object of his attraction.

"When are you planning to have it, by the way?" Sammy asked.

With his hand on the doorknob, Leo glanced over his shoulder. "Do you think we can get everything ready in a month?"

"Sure. That shouldn't be a problem. Not much else going on this time of year."

"Great." Leo glanced at his watch. "Feel like a movie?"

Shocked, Sammy brushed his hands on his pants. "Uh...sure. I'd like that. Let me clean this stuff up, and I'll be in."

Without another word, Leo left the bay. Sammy stood where he was for several moments before turning to clean up the chrome polishing supplies he'd been using on the bumpers.

After what happened the last time they'd watched a movie in the same room, Sammy was surprised Leo was willing to do it again so soon. He put the bucket with supplies into one of the cabinets and washed his hands in the bay sink before going inside.

Leo was in one of the recliners with a clipboard and pencil.

"What're you working on?" Sammy tried to sound casual as he started flipping through the DVDs on the shelf under the TV.

Leo held up the clipboard. "Just making lists of everything that needs getting done."

Sammy pulled out a DVD. "Have you seen Twilight lately?"

Leo shook his head. "I'm not sure if I've ever seen that one all the way through. I'll put it in if you want to make the popcorn."

Sammy's cock immediately started to fill at the comment. Dare he tell Leo he'd love for him to put it in? Naw. Best to keep his mouth shut. No sense winding the guy up before the movie even started.



"Sure," he finally answered. "You need something to drink?"

"Yeah. Whatever's in the pitcher will do." Leo stood and took the movie.

Sammy almost sighed when their fingers brushed in the transfer. With it only being the two of them on shift, it was going to be hell to keep his mind on the movie and out of Leo's pants.

\* \* \* \*

Leo had suggested the movie, thinking it was a better idea than talking to Sammy all evening, but now he wasn't so sure. He'd heard the hype surrounding *Twilight*, which was one of the reasons he'd refused to actually sit down and watch it. Now that Edward was on the screen, Leo found himself incredibly attracted to the boy.

"How old is that guy?" he asked.

"Edward or Robert Pattinson?" Sammy asked.

"The guy. The actor," Leo clarified.

"Not sure. Early to mid-twenties I'd say. Younger than that when this was filmed. Why?"

"No reason. Just wondered." No way was he going to admit he was attracted to the kid.

Sammy chuckled. "So I take it you're more of a team Edward fan than a team Jacob?"

Leo turned to stare at Sammy. "What?"

Sammy laughed and set the bowl of popcorn on the coffee table before sitting up. "There are two types of fans. The team Edward or the team Jacob."

Leo shook his head and grunted. "That's just weird."

Sammy shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe so, but people get pretty protective on both sides."

Leo grinned. "So which one are you?"

"In *Twilight*, I'm an Edward guy, but in *New Moon* it was Jacob all the way. Damn, that man-boy filled out nicely."

Leo found himself chuckling at the enthusiasm in Sammy's expression and voice. There was something so incredibly sexy about the man at times. Maybe it was the innocent look to him. Of course Leo knew Sammy was anything but innocent, it was a stark contrast to the dimples and Mario Lopez good looks.

"Leo?"

He hadn't realised he was staring until Sammy interrupted his thoughts. "Huh?"

Sammy stood and walked towards him. "I'm gonna get another Dr. Pepper. You want something?"

Leo reached for his empty glass of iced tea. "Sure. Thanks."

Taking the glass, Sammy surprised Leo by bending over and planting a kiss on his mouth. Leo opened his mouth to protest when he felt the slide of Sammy's soft, warm tongue against his own.

Leo couldn't help but suck the man's tongue into his mouth. He was about to pull Sammy into his lap when it dawned on him what he was doing. He pulled out of the kiss and stared at Sammy.

"Forget it. I'll get my own drink." Leo jumped up and stalked to the kitchen. *What the hell?*

He dumped the melting ice in the sink before opening the freezer. He should probably just stick his head inside. Better yet, he should stick his dick inside the cold interior. He heard Sammy come into the room, and snapped out of his lustful daze long enough to refill his glass with ice.

Sammy pressed himself to Leo's side. "Be honest. Is it me, my age or the fact we work together?"

Leo couldn't bring himself to meet Sammy's gaze. "Two of the three is enough to remind me to keep my distance. It just wouldn't work. I've told you that. Besides, I'm your boss. It wouldn't be right."

Sammy squirmed his way between the fridge and Leo. Had he always been so short? Leo started to step back, but decided to hold his ground.

Sammy's hands landed on Leo's chest. "Don't you get lonely? I'm not asking for forever. I'm more of a live-in-the-moment kind of guy."

God, Leo wanted to give in to his body's needs. Sammy had hit the nail on the head. He had absolutely no illusions of an affair with Sammy going beyond a few rounds of hot sex. Leo was honest enough with himself about the longevity of an affair with Sammy. Sooner or later, probably sooner, the younger man would realise distinguished wasn't nearly the same as sexy.

Was that the reason he didn't stop him when Sammy began kissing his neck? Leo braced his hands on the top of the refrigerator and closed his eyes. It would be so incredibly easy to give in.

The words were on the tip of his tongue when the emergency buzzer went off, breaking the two men apart immediately. Leo tilted his ear towards the corner of the room.

"Be advised. A black Ford Mustang, off the road at Sayer's Curve. EMT is being notified," the sheriff's department dispatch said over the wall-mounted speaker.

Leo stepped back, breaking the contact with Sammy's leanly muscled body. "You drive."

\* \* \* \*

By the time they got the engine backed into the firehouse bay, it was after midnight and Sammy was worn out. The victim's injuries hadn't been life-threatening, but he had to be cut out of the demolished Mustang. Thank Heaven the man had enough sense to be wearing a seatbelt.

"They need to put up a bigger sign at the curve," Leo grumbled, climbing down.

"Yeah. I mean, most people in town know to slow way down for it, but visitors who aren't used to such a tight curve always seem to have difficulty," Sammy agreed. The man was lucky all he'd sustained was a broken arm and cuts and bruises.

"I'll mention it to Ryan or Nate." Leo led the way into the living quarters.

Sammy yawned and stretched his arms over his head. "I'm done. You gonna stay up?"

Leo nodded. "For a few minutes. I need to log the accident."

Sammy nodded and made his way towards the back of the building. "I'm going to jump into the shower before hitting the sack."

"I'll turn off the lights when I'm done," Leo mumbled, walking towards the office.

Sammy stripped out of his clothes on the way to the shower. He hated to wash the smell of Leo's cologne from his cheeks and hands, but the reminder of the way the man had shut down once they climbed into the fire engine was weighing on him.

Sammy turned on the water. He was so lost in thought, he didn't give the spray a chance to warm up before he stepped under it.

A shout filled the air as the cold water hit his cock and balls. "Shit!"

"What happened?" Leo came running into the room.

Sammy turned sheepish eyes on the gorgeous man. "Sorry. The cold water surprised me. I didn't mean to worry you."

Leo's gaze moved slowly up Sammy's nude body. Although Sammy was only five-eight, it seemed to take Leo's eyes forever to complete the perusal.

Despite the warming water, Sammy's cock went rock hard in no time. He licked his lips and held his breath, wondering if Leo would ever act on their mutual attraction.

Leo spun around and started to walk from the communal bathroom. When he reached the doorway, he braced both hands on either side of the doorjamb and bowed his head. "You're killing me."

"No. *You're* killing you. I've been honest all along. I want you. I want your tongue in my mouth, your hands on my skin and your cock in my ass." Sammy wondered if he'd gone too far when Leo dropped his hands. Just when Sammy thought the man was going to leave, he turned around and charged towards him.

Leo's six-foot-four-inch frame slammed Sammy against the tiled shower wall. Before Sammy could say a word, Leo's mouth closed over his. Sammy opened immediately to Leo's questing tongue as he tugged against the wet uniform shirt.

"Skin," he gasped during a break in their kiss.

Either Leo didn't hear him or he didn't want to stop long enough to get undressed. Instead he slumped to the shower floor, pulling Sammy down with him.

"Skin?" Sammy asked again, wrapping his legs around Leo's hips. The wet fabric rubbing against his cock was exquisite, but Sammy wanted to feel Leo's dick.

Leo continued to eat at Sammy's mouth like a man completely out of his mind. The rough bristles of Leo's cheeks and chin continued to scrape the flesh surrounding Sammy's mouth. *Bring it on.* He could take anything the man above him wanted to dish out.

Leo grunted again as he increased the pressure, grinding his cock against Sammy's.

"Fuck!" Sammy cried out, shooting his cum between them.

Leo nipped Sammy's chin moments before his body jerked several times. Sammy wished the water wasn't splashing him in the eyes. He would've loved to study the lines and expression on Leo's face more clearly as the man came in his pants.

Sammy buried his face against Leo's neck. He took the opportunity to pepper kisses to the wet skin while shielding himself from the overhead spray. He wasn't sure how long they

both lay there, but soon the water started to cool. Sammy squeezed his eyes shut, knowing all too soon the cold water would signal an end to their brief interlude.

Leo finally roused when Sammy's body began to shiver. "Sorry." Leo rolled to the side and stood, holding a hand out.

Sammy took the offered gesture and stood. He couldn't bring himself to look Leo in the eyes. The last thing he wanted to see was regret. Even though it hadn't been a tender moment, it taught him a lot about how Leo would react as a lover.

Sammy swiped his hand over his stomach quickly before shutting down the water. He didn't bother with a towel right away, instead waiting to see how Leo would react after losing control.

Leo once again surprised him by retrieving the towel Sammy had hung on one of the hooks. He swiped Sammy's hair and chest before wrapping it around his waist and tucking it in.

"Better get dressed or you're going to get sick," Leo mumbled before leaving the room.

Sammy took a deep breath. He ran a hand over his face, feeling the chafed skin and smiled. If he let Leo try to put distance between them, he'd never regain the ground.

He waited for several minutes before walking out of the bathroom to the bunkroom. With only a handful of people on staff, the single room only contained five twin beds. Looking towards Leo's bed, Sammy wondered how the man had managed to strip and dry off so quickly.

Dropping his towel, Sammy pulled back the covers and climbed between the sheets. He lay there for several seconds before rolling to his side to face Leo. He should probably keep his mouth shut, but he had to know.

"Do you regret it?" he asked.

It took a few moments for Leo to answer. "I don't know yet."

*Now or never.* Sammy slid from his bed and walked over to Leo's. Even in the dark, he could feel Leo's gaze tracking his every move. Sammy stood beside Leo's bed and waited.

Eventually, Leo held up his covers in invitation. Sammy smiled and accepted. He pressed his nude body against Leo's and sighed. "I'll just lay here for a few minutes. I know there isn't enough room to sleep."

Leo grunted in reply, but his hand rubbed up and down Sammy's back before settling on the cheek of Sammy's ass.

Sammy would have been content with simply being held, but Leo's lips found their way to Sammy's forehead. Soft, gentle kisses landed on his face as Leo fit his leg between Sammy's.

When those fantastic lips finally captured Sammy's mouth, he was once again lost. Their tongues duelled as they took turns tasting each other. Leo's mouth tasted so good, Sammy wondered what the rest of him would taste like.

He started to kiss his way down Leo's neck towards his chest, but Leo pulled him tighter against his chest.

"I'm not a young man. You'd probably just be wasting your time," Leo whispered.

Sammy tilted his chin up. Pushing at that point wouldn't have been a good idea. Eventually, he'd show Leo how much enjoyment could come from playing and sucking a flaccid cock. Instead he kissed Leo again and settled against him. *Yes. Hopefully there would be time.*

\* \* \* \*

Leo woke the next morning, surprised to find Sammy still in his arms. The last thing he'd remembered was listening to the younger man's breathing even out as he'd drifted to sleep. Leo was sure the bed would become too small at some point during the night, and Sammy would go back to his own bed.

He leant back enough to stare at the sleeping man's face. The black lashes fanned over Sammy's high cheekbones begged to be kissed, but waking Sammy wasn't what he wanted. He had a lot of thinking to do.

Leo carefully slid his arm out from under Sammy and rolled out of bed. He gazed down at the gorgeous man as he slipped on his clothes for the day. An affair with Sammy would definitely be easy to do. The question he kept asking himself was if it would be enough.

With one last look, he left the bunkroom and headed to the kitchen to make a pot of coffee. The next shift wasn't due in until three, which gave him another eight hours to be with Sammy.

After the coffee maker was turned on, he walked out front to retrieve the Sheridan paper from the drive. He heard a loud muffler and glanced up to find Mario's truck pull to the side of the road.

Mario rolled down his window and grinned. "How's it going?"

"Good," Leo said, walking towards his neighbour.

"Asa told me you got roped in to do the fundraiser."

Leo nodded. "Yeah, but Sammy's agreed to help, so it shouldn't be too bad. I figure it'll give me a chance to get to know more people."

"That it will," Mario agreed.

"Sammy suggested a cook-off. That way we'd save money on supplies. Do you think there'll be enough interest?"

"Are you shittin' me? I know very few men who don't think their chilli is the best you've ever tasted. It'll be cut-throat. Just you watch. You're going to have to line-up some judges though."

Leo nodded. "Any suggestions?"

Mario scratched his jaw. "You could ask Erico, Jay and then there's always Deb from the diner. I don't think it would be fair for them to enter anyway."

"Okay. Three enough?"

"Well, if you can find two more who love chilli but aren't interested in competing that would probably be good."

Leo had no idea how to do that, but he figured Sammy probably did.

Mario rubbed his hands together. "I'm gonna have to do some perfecting on my recipe. This should be fun."

Mario glanced at his watch. "Better get going. There are far too many people who enjoy working out before putting in long hours at their day job. Fools. If it was up to me, I'd still be snuggled under the covers with Asa."

Chuckling, Leo slapped the side of Mario's truck. "Have a good one."

"You, too." Mario drove off in a puff of black smoke.

Leo coughed and shook his head. Why Mario refused to buy a new truck was beyond Leo.

Tucking the paper under his arm, he headed back into the station. As he walked into the kitchen, he was greeted by the sight of Sammy's naked torso. Although the man had pulled on jeans, his chest was bare as well as his feet.

*Shit.* He wasn't quite ready to face the events of the previous night. He was weighing his options, when Sammy stepped forward and offered a quick kiss.

"Morning." Sammy handed Leo a cup of coffee before setting his own cup on the table. "Cereal okay?"

Leo nodded. The situation was starting to freak him out. It was just too...domestic. He sat down and took a sip of his coffee. "About last night..."

Sammy turned around and held his hand up, cutting Leo off. "You don't even have to say it. I know you aren't interested in anything too heavy. I know you're going to be all funky about the age difference. Yada, yada, yada. I can deal as long as you don't shut me out completely."

Sammy turned back around and pulled the cereal and bowls out of the cupboard. He set them on the table before retrieving the milk and a couple of spoons.

Leo waited until Sammy sat down and stopped moving. "I haven't done this sort of thing in over twenty years."

"Fucked?" Sammy asked.

Leo nearly spewed the sip of coffee he'd just taken across the table. "No. Casual."

Sammy's face turned crimson. "Sorry. Guess you can tell where my mind's at."

Leo grinned. The thought of fucking Sammy was quite appealing. He just needed to lay a few ground rules. "No messing around when others are at the station, and I'd prefer to keep things in the bedroom." *Preferably with the lights off.*

The thought of Sammy seeing firsthand what the years had done to parts of his body didn't appeal to Leo in the least. He may be in good shape for a guy of forty-eight, but there were certain things gravity had a way of destroying. Just looking at Sammy's firm ball sac the previous evening told him that, although he assumed genetics had a lot to do with it.

Sammy narrowed his eyes. "What about when we're not on shift?"

*Shit.* Leo hadn't thought that far ahead. "Uhhh, bedroom rule still applies, but I suppose we could go out occasionally if that's what you're asking."

Sammy smiled. "Yeah, that's pretty much what I was asking. I was trying to figure out if you wanted to keep things a secret."

Leo had had his fill of keeping affairs secret with Randy and his boy toys. "No. I'm not really into public displays of affection. Well, I don't mind holding hands or the occasional kiss, but that's about my limit."

Sammy poured cereal into his bowl. "Why do I get the feeling I'm going through some kind of job interview?"



“Sorry. I’m not trying to sound like an ass.” Leo rubbed his hands over his face. “Dammit. I told you I’m new to this. I just want you to know upfront what you’re getting into.”

Sammy stood and came around the corner of the table to give Leo a quick kiss. “You’re right. I’m glad you laid everything out. I officially accept your terms. Although I may have to sneak a few kisses here and there outside the bedroom.”

Leo pulled Sammy down into his lap. “I said sex in the bedroom. As long as we’re here alone. You can kiss me anywhere you want.”

“Well, in that case...” Sammy ended the sentence with a deep kiss.

Leo groaned and pulled the man even closer. He knew it was either the best thing he’d ever done, or the worst. Only time would tell.

## Chapter Three

Sammy didn't see Leo again until Friday afternoon at the beginning of his shift. They had planned to get together on Thursday after their shift ended, but George had decided to stay in Vegas an extra day, so Leo had to fill in for him.

Walking into work, Sammy knew it was going to be torture. With the full-staffed weekend shift, he wouldn't be allowed to touch Leo for at least forty-eight hours. It was even worse because he had to work a full forty-eight, but Leo was off on Saturday night.

Sammy waved to Jakob before continuing on to the bunkroom. He spotted his old high school friend, Zac hanging up three days worth of clothes in his locker.

"Hey," Sammy greeted.

Zac glanced over his shoulder. "Where were you last night? We needed you."

"Shit. I completely forgot." Sammy hadn't really forgotten their weekly dart league at O'Brien's, but he hadn't felt like being around his friends.

"Right. What's his name?" Zac asked with a chuckle in his voice.

"What? I was home alone. I watched some TV and fell asleep on the couch."

Zac grinned. "Whatever."

"So'd we at least win?" Sammy asked.

"Yeah. We had to find a substitute player. The only one in the bar who knew how to play but wasn't already on a team was that new nurse from the clinic, Adam Sackston."

"Is that the guy with the reddish brown hair?"

"That's the one."

"How'd he do?" Sammy wasn't sure he liked the idea of being replaced, but he knew it was his own damn fault.

"Good. We asked him if we could call him next time we needed another player. He fits in nicely."

Sammy finished putting his stuff in his locker. "See ya."

He walked out of the room and into the main living area, spotting Leo's broad back leaning against the doorjamb to the office. "Mind if I turn the TV on?"

Jakob glanced up from the newspaper and shrugged. "Suit yourself."

Sammy settled on the couch and turned on Pirate's Cove. He wondered if Leo had been able to catch the previous day's episode. Things were really starting to heat up between Colt and Dex, but of course no one in the town of Pirate's Cove knew it.

"Thank God for cable," he muttered.

"Huh?" Jakob asked, looking up from his paper once more.

Sammy gestured to the television and repeated what he'd said. "I never got interested in soap operas until this one. It's nice to see naked man butts on TV. There's something about the way they film this show that really gets me going. I mean, it's like you see and know what they're doing, but they don't really show it. You know?"

Jakob narrowed his eyes like he didn't have a clue what Sammy was talking about. "What kind of soap are you watching?"

Sammy's jaw dropped. "Please don't tell me you've never watched Pirate's Cove. It's only the best gay soap opera ever. Okay, so it's the only real gay soap opera, but you know what I mean."

Jakob's attention went to the TV. "Are you shittin' me?"

"Watch and learn, my new friend," Sammy said with confidence as he set the remote on the coffee table and stretched out.

\* \* \* \*

Leo walked into the living room to a heated discussion between Jakob and Sammy. He grinned at the vehemence in Sammy's voice as he tried to argue the merits of having a bisexual character on the show.

"Are you fucking nuts? It shows diversity. Not all men are as smart as we are. Some of them actually enjoy girly parts."

"But I thought you said this was a gay soap. So what's the point?" Jakob asked.

"Trying to get the new guy addicted to Pirate's Cove?" Leo asked. He surprised himself by automatically going over to the couch.

"You mind?" He nodded in the direction of Sammy's socked feet.

Sammy's eyes rounded as he bent his knees, moving his legs enough for Leo to sit down. "Jakob's already addicted. Make no mistake. You can't watch fifteen minutes of this show and not be. He's just trying to be an ass by questioning what shouldn't be questioned."

Leo chuckled. He could see both sides of the argument, but he decided to add his two cents into the mix. "Although it's a gay show, Pirate's Cove is supposed to be a normal town which just happens to have an overabundance of hot, sexy gay men."

"Like Cattle Valley," Jakob added.

"Yeah. Like Cattle Valley."

Jakob nodded, and turned back to the show.

Leo settled back against the couch and watched as Allison once again tried to flaunt her big tits to Jesse. Bravo to the restaurant owner for not slapping the woman. Leo's hand wandered to Sammy's leg. He lifted the bottom of his uniform pants and rubbed small circles against the skin of Sammy's calf.

Sammy pressed his foot against Leo's thigh, getting his attention. When Leo glanced at Sammy, the younger man subtly gestured towards his cock. Leo grinned at the obvious erection trapped behind Sammy's zipper. Leo smiled apologetically and removed his hand just as the show ended.

"Hmph," Jakob grunted and tossed the folded newspaper onto the table. "Other than the scenery, I'm not quite sure what the two of you see in that show."

"Give it a chance. You'll be able to pick up on the storylines soon enough," Leo explained.

Shaking his head, Jakob headed for the kitchen. "I'll start dinner."

As soon as they were alone, Sammy sat up and gave Leo a deep kiss. Even though he knew he shouldn't, Leo opened his mouth and accepted Sammy's tongue.

They broke apart and Leo shook his head. "You're going to get us in trouble."

Sammy laughed. "If I wanted to do that, I'd be straddling your lap right now."

Leo decided it might be better to remove himself from temptation. He gave Sammy another quick peck before standing. "I'm going to start calling around for chilli judges."

"You want me to run over and talk to Kyle? I could pick us up something for dessert?" Sammy taunted Leo.

Leo rolled his eyes. Sammy knew Leo didn't often indulge in sweets, but the sound of one of Kyle's pies sounded nice. "Pecan praline?"

"If he's got one," Sammy agreed.

"Don't forget to take a radio with you," Leo reminded.

"Sure thing." Sammy checked to make sure he had his keys before walking into the office to get a handheld radio.

Once Sammy was out the door, Leo wandered into the kitchen. "What's for dinner?"

Jakob added diced carrots to the pot on the stove. "Vegetable soup sound okay? I usually make mine really thick, almost like a stew."

"Sounds great. Sammy went to pick up dessert." Leo opened the fridge and pulled out the big pitcher. "Dammit. I hate when someone takes the last of the tea and doesn't make more."

Jakob snickered. "I think you need to yell at George for that one. I saw him with a big glass earlier."

"Just my luck. Seeing as how I can't really yell at the boss." Leo grinned and set the pitcher on the counter. "Can I use this back burner?"

"Yeah."

Leo filled a pan with water and a couple of tea bags. He was leaning around Jakob, setting the pan on the stove, when Zac walked into the room.

"Oh, sorry," Zac said.

Leo pulled back and turned to the doorway, but Zac had already left. "What was that about?"

"Beats me," Jakob answered.

"Will you watch that for me while I go make a few phone calls?"

"Sure."

Leo headed towards the office. He had high hopes that he could get Asa, Erico and Jay to judge, but he wasn't so sure about Deb. Why the hell did he open his big mouth and volunteer in the first place? It wasn't like he had nothing else on his mind. Damn, Sammy. Since their scene in the shower, Leo hadn't been able to concentrate on anything but the taste and feel of the younger man's skin.

He'd surprised himself earlier by giving in to the overwhelming need to touch that soft flesh again. What would he have done if they'd been caught? He needed to cool it before someone did just that.

\* \* \* \*

While in town, Sammy decided to stop in at the drug store. Since he'd arrived in Cattle Valley, he hadn't dated and he needed supplies. "Afternoon, Maggie."

The friendly pharmacist smiled. "How're things at the station?"

"Slow, but I guess that's better than busy, huh?" He wandered down the aisles looking for the condoms.

"Can I help you find something?" Maggie asked.

"Condoms?"

Maggie laughed and pointed towards the door. "Front of the store. This is Cattle Valley. Rubbers are one of our top sellers."

Sammy laughed. He'd never get over how open the residents of the small town were with their sexuality. "Of course. What the hell was I thinking?"

"Got some new lube in, too. It's supposed to warm your willy while you fuck."

Sammy laughed harder. "Guess I'll need to try it."

"Get it quick. I have a feeling once word gets out about it, there'll be quite a run on the stuff." Maggie ended the statement with a wink.

Maggie was the only person Sammy had ever met who could talk openly about sex, but still not bring herself to say dick, cock or prick.

Sammy walked towards the front of the store and sure enough, there was a huge display with every brand, size and type of condom known to man. He settled on a fun box of cherry red condoms as well as a super-sized box of ribbed. Tossing them into his basket, he walked to the lube display.

"Is it this stuff with the picture of the erupting volcano on the label?" he hollered towards the back of the store.

"That's it. Don't blame me if your willy melts. I just sell the stuff, I don't make it."

An image of lava erupting from his cock came to mind. Sammy made a face and decided to go with a small bottle, along with a bigger bottle of the stuff he was used to using. He chuckled to himself as he walked towards the counter. He decided there wasn't a better place for Leo's cock to catch fire than the station.

"That it?" Maggie asked.

"Yep. I reckon that'll hold me for a few days."

Maggie laughed as she lifted her brows at the super-sized box of condoms. "I'm going to have to call you Mr. Stud Muffin from now on."

Sammy didn't correct her. She didn't need to know he was more of a bottom player. That would be a little too much information to share with the friendly pharmacist. He paid his bill and turned right as he left. Several shops down, he entered Brynn's Bakery. This late in the day, there wasn't much going on. The morning's doughnuts had been removed from the display case to be replaced by a whole host of desserts.

"Be with you in a second," Kyle called from the back.

"No rush. I'm on city time," Sammy said with a chuckle.

He enjoyed knowing the people in town. In San Antonio he only knew the people in his own neighbourhood, but here it was different. He already felt like a member of the community.

"Hey, Kyle? I don't see any pecan praline out here. I don't suppose you have any in the back, do you?"

Kyle came through the swinging door still drying his hands. "Sorry. I didn't make any today. I've got a nice Dixie pie though."

"That's the one with pecans and chocolate, right?"

"That's the one. Gill's number one favourite lately."

"Okay, I'll take one of those and a loaf of your homemade white bread." While Kyle boxed his pie, Sammy tried to figure out how to broach the cinnamon roll question. In the end, he decided to just spit it out and take his chances.

"Leo's been asked to head up a fundraiser for the new youth centre the city wants to open."

"That's nice of him," Kyle said, setting the pie on the counter.

"Yeah. He's nervous, but don't tell him I told you that. Anyway, he's planning a big chilli cook-off. I told him we needed to have cinnamon rolls, and I was wondering if we could get a discounted price on them."

Kyle slipped the loaf of bread into a bag and started ringing up Sammy's purchase. "I could sell them to you for the cost of supplies. Shouldn't be much. I would normally just donate them, but the winter's been pretty hard for business."

"I'm sorry to hear that, but I completely understand. I just appreciate anything you can do for us. I don't know how many we'll need, but maybe once it gets closer to the day we'll have a better idea."

"Don't worry about it. I've supplied cinnamon rolls for enough events in town that I have a good idea of how many. When's the cook-off?"

"I believe Leo said the second Saturday of April. If that changes, I'll be sure and give you a call."

"Sounds fine."

Sammy paid for his pie and bread and stuffed his wallet back into his hip pocket. "Thanks, Kyle."

"No problem."

Sammy walked back down to his car and put his purchases in the back seat before getting behind the wheel. He hoped Leo would be pleased with the deal he'd worked out with Kyle. He hated to hear the baker's business had been off, though.

After checking his rear view mirror, Sammy backed out of his parking space and headed back to the station. He doubted he'd get a chance to steal more kisses from Leo, but he was sure going to try.

\* \* \* \*

Leo set a bowl filled with ice and bottles of beer on the coffee table and glanced at the clock once again. Had he ever felt so anxious about waiting for someone? He heard a car pull up in the drive and went to the door to study a weary-looking Sammy as he made his way up the porch steps.

"You look worn out," Leo remarked, stepping back far enough for Sammy to enter the house.

"I am. We were up most of the night on a domestic call over on Spruce, and I can't sleep for shit during the day." Sammy smiled up at Leo. "But it's good to see you."

Leo helped Sammy off with his coat before pulling him into his arms. "It's good to see you, too."

There was something about Sammy that felt so right in his arms, which was odd given that Randy had been over six-foot. Leo didn't push. He simply enjoyed holding the man for several moments before placing a kiss on Sammy's forehead.

"Make yourself comfortable. I'll get the popcorn." Leo stepped back and turned towards the kitchen.



"I picked up a couple of movies. They're on the coffee table." With everything done ahead of time, all Leo had to do was press the start button on the microwave. He made his way back to the doorway and watched Sammy as he sat on the couch. Every move the man made seemed graceful.

The microwave beeped, and Leo was pulled away from the view. He opened the popcorn bag and dumped the hot, buttery contents into a bowl. After grabbing a couple of napkins, Leo carried the snack into the living room.

"Find anything that interests you?" he asked, setting the popcorn on the table.

"I've been wanting to see this one," Sammy said, holding up a comedy.

Leo took the movie from Sammy and put it in the player before settling on the sofa beside the other man. With a slight chill still in the air, he pulled Sammy against his side and covered them with a blanket from the back of the couch.

Sammy snuggled against Leo's chest. He reached for the bowl of popcorn and two beers, handing one to Leo. "I can't tell you how many times I've wished I could watch a movie like this with you."

Leo brushed a kiss over the top of Sammy's head and opened both of their bottles. He didn't want to say too much. Putting himself on the line was something he knew he wasn't ready for.

"It's nice," he finally said.

\* \* \* \*

As the movie ended, Leo carefully set his empty bottle on the coffee table before removing the popcorn bowl from its precarious position on Sammy's stomach. Although it was only six, Sammy was in a deep sleep. Leo hated the thought of waking him, but, several times during the movie, he'd heard the younger man's stomach growl.

Leo eased himself out from under the sleeping man. He went into the bedroom and retrieved a pillow from his bed to place under Sammy's head. It was while he was readjusting the blanket that Sammy's eyes opened.

"Did I fall asleep?" Sammy mumbled.

Leo leant down and kissed the lips he'd been dying to taste for two hours. "That's okay. I'm going to make us something for dinner. Why don't you continue your nap."

Sammy started to pull the blanket off his body. "I can help with dinner."

Leo stayed Sammy's hand and dropped to his knees to lean against the edge of the sofa. His lips hovered over Sammy's as he stared into the sleepy eyes of the gorgeous man. "I'd much rather you caught up on your sleep. The last thing I want is to wear you out before I even get you into my bed."

Sammy's eyes snapped open fully at the comment.

It was out of character for Leo to be so bold, but he'd shied away from the inevitable long enough. He closed the distance between their mouths and rimmed Sammy's lips with the tip of his tongue.

With a moan, Sammy captured Leo's tongue with his lips and sucked. What started as a playful teasing quickly became an erotic dance of teeth and tongues. Leo's cock hardened as he pressed it against the side of the couch. He wanted Sammy more than he could remember wanting someone in a long time, if ever.

Leo quickly calculated the hours left in the day. He may not be Superman, but it was early enough he could enjoy himself and still recover in time to bury his cock in Sammy's ass before the end of the evening.

As his tongue continued to dual with Sammy's, Leo reached between the other man's legs and ran his hand over the hidden erection. When Sammy's hips lifted off the couch to push against the palm of his hand, Leo knew what he wanted.

"I need to taste you," he said, breaking the kiss.

Sammy nodded. "Naked first."

Leo's lack of self-confidence kicked into high gear. The room was still lit by the setting sun, too light to bare his aging body to the younger man. Leo sat back on his heels, pondering. If he told Sammy the reason he didn't want to get naked in the light, he had no doubt the other man would try to reassure him that his age didn't matter.

The truth was it did matter. An image of a fifty-year old Randy fucking the young twink immediately came to mind. Randy was in great shape for a man of his age, but there was no way his body could compete with the firm, unblemished skin of a man in his twenties. Randy had looked like a complete fool in Leo's eyes.

"Let's wait until later when we can fully enjoy each other." Leo reached for the zipper on Sammy's pants and slowly lowered it. "For now, I just want to wrap my lips around you."

"But I want to taste you, too," Sammy replied.

Damn. Leo wanted that. Reaching a decision, Leo unzipped his jeans enough to fish his cock out. He left the button fastened, giving a sort of peak-a-boo affect. With his hands wrapped around Sammy's hips, he pulled him further down on the couch, before standing and straddling the other man's body in the typical sixty-nine position.

"Okay?" he asked, swiping the head of Sammy's cock with his tongue.

"I...uh...yeah. Wow. I guess I never realised how big you are."

"Just don't pull my balls out or they'll smother you." Even though he said it in a light manner, Leo knew the truth behind his words. He'd always had a large, heavy sac. In his youth it was something he was incredibly proud of, but over the years he'd noticed the subtle changes in his body. Randy had even made remarks.

*Aarghh.* Leo attempted to shut Randy's parting shots out of his mind. He'd tried time and again to tell himself Randy's cruel words were nothing but justifications for his own infidelity. The last thing Leo needed to hear from Randy was the reasons why he preferred fucking younger men as opposed to his aging partner.

Leo forced his attention back to Sammy. He began licking and sucking the head of the other man's cock, well pleased with the attention his own cock was receiving. When Sammy sucked Leo's cock to the back of his throat, Leo was shocked.

Without taking his mouth off Sammy's shaft, Leo tried to look between their bodies. Sammy tugged on Leo's hips, silently asking for more. Leo gave Sammy's crown a playful scrape of his bottom teeth as he pulled off.

He rested his forehead against Sammy's groin as he started to pump his hips, slowly fucking the younger man's mouth. "Let me know if it's too much."

Sammy grunted around the cock in his mouth and tilted his head to take even more of Leo's length down his throat.

Comfortable with the rhythm of his thrusts, Leo returned his attention to Sammy's cock, bathing the bulbous dark crown with his tongue. He used one of his hands to jack Sammy's length as he sucked, trying his best to master doing three things at once and doing them well.

*Damn, I'm out of practice.* He felt soft fingers brush against his balls and closed his eyes. Despite his obvious embarrassment over them, his sac was extremely sensitive to touch. He felt the hair on the back of his neck prickle as gooseflesh covered his skin.

Leo had no choice but to release the cockhead in his mouth. "I'm going to explode if you keep that up."

Sammy laughed, vibrating Leo's length.

"Awe, fuck!" Leo barely had time to shout before pumping his seed down the other man's throat. He did that all-over body shiver that always accompanied a really intense climax as he continued to empty his balls.

With his hand still wrapped around Sammy's length, Leo tried to clear his mind enough to give his new lover the same powerful orgasm he'd just enjoyed. Although he'd never been the best at tamping down his gag reflex, Leo took as much of Sammy's shaft into his mouth as possible.

Sammy bent his knees to rest his feet against the cushion and thrust up, driving himself in deeper. Leo gagged, but recovered quickly. It was a good thing he did, because in the next moment, he felt the first spurt of cum hit the back of his throat. He pulled off enough to keep from choking and let the warm, thick seed coat his tongue, bathing his taste buds in the slightly bitter flavour of Sammy's essence.

Leo rolled to the floor and rested his cheek on Sammy's thigh before carefully tucking himself back into his underwear and zipping his jeans.

Sammy ruffled Leo's hair with his fingers as he let out a big yawn. "That was nice."

Leo chuckled. "So nice you can't keep your eyes open?"

"Can't help it. You've sucked the life out of me."

"Don't say that. I'm hoping to get my second wind around bedtime." Leo had thought of little else but lying naked with Sammy. The previous night was the first time since he'd arrived in town that he'd wished he'd been on duty instead of having an entire day of free time.

Sammy's stomach growled, bringing Leo out of his thoughts. He reached out and rubbed the flat muscled skin. "Guess I'd better get dinner on."

Leo stood and gazed down at a content but sleepy-looking man. "Rest. I'll wake you when I have everything on the table."

"I think I'll take you up on that," Sammy said around another yawn.

Leo smiled and turned towards the kitchen. He rubbed his chest at the ache beginning to form. It had been a long time since he'd had someone to cook for. Although part of him

could easily get used to Sammy in his life, Leo knew better than to let himself dream of happily ever-afters. There were no such things, and he'd do best to remember that.

## Chapter Four

Sammy closed his eyes on a moan. "Oh, my God, this is the best chicken fried steak I've ever eaten."

"Glad you like it," Leo said before taking another bite.

Sammy couldn't believe Leo had gone to so much trouble while he slept on the couch. It made him feel...special. In the past, he was lucky if a lover grilled him a hamburger. This was way beyond a freaking hamburger.

Their age difference seemed to be a big deal to Leo, but Sammy was quickly finding out he'd been dating the wrong men for years. Leo took every step of their budding relationship seriously. It was a refreshing change from the on again off again dating scene he was used to.

"So, tell me about the call on Spruce," Leo began. "Was it a fight?"

Sammy shook his head. "Fred Banks wandered off. Gene called and asked us to help him find him."

"Fred Banks? I don't think I know him."

After swallowing his mashed potatoes, Sammy took a drink of his water before answering. "He's old, doesn't leave the house without his partner, Gene." Sammy shook his head slowly from side to side. "Alzheimer's. Guess it's progressing at an alarming rate."

"I take it you found him though."

"Yeah. He was wandering downtown, trying to get into the bakery. Dispatch got a call from Ethan that someone was trying to break in downstairs." Sammy set down his fork. "The whole situation is depressing. Gene was so upset that we were afraid he'd have a heart attack, so we called Zac in to stay with him while we helped the deputies look for Fred."

Leo nodded. "It's a frightening chance some people are willing to take to love someone for a lifetime. The older you get, the more likely something's going to happen to one of you."

"I know." Sammy wasn't sure how to explain his feelings. "Other than my parents, I don't know that I've ever seen someone so in love with someone else. I guess they've been together for, like, fifty-seven years. Can you imagine how hard it was for them in the beginning? They somehow managed to stay devoted to each other despite the crap society no

doubt threw at them, and then this? Gene refuses to put Fred into a nursing home. He said he'd look after Fred until the day one of them died."

Sammy couldn't believe his eyes were filling with tears. He didn't really know either man, but they'd definitely had an impact on him. He wiped away an escaping tear. "Sorry to get all emotional on you."

Leo reached over and cupped Sammy's face, drying another tear with the pad of his thumb. "Don't be sorry. You have the job you do because you care. There will always be certain calls that affect you more than others. It's natural."

Sammy nuzzled Leo's hand before placing a kiss on his palm. "Thanks."

Leo eventually pulled his hand away and they resumed their dinner. Sammy ate bites of food between glances at the gorgeous man across from him. He wasn't sure why Leo was so hung up on the age difference. From the first day Leo had walked into the station, Sammy had wanted him.

In the beginning, it had, of course, been a physical attraction, but over the months it had changed. He still thought Leo was hot, no two ways about it, but he was also a genuine person. Games didn't appear to be his thing, and Sammy appreciated that. It was refreshing to spend time with someone who really seemed to listen to what he had to say. In the past, his dates had been all about who could get into who's pants first. The men he'd been with had taught him a lot of things, but not one of them had been mature enough to share themselves beyond a physical relationship.

Sammy wanted more. He wanted a lover who was also a friend, and he had a strong suspicion he'd find both in Leo.

"You okay?"

Sammy blinked and looked up from his plate. He suddenly realised he'd been staring at his food, and not eating it. "Sorry. I was just thinking about going to bed with you."

Leo laughed. "And the idea is so unappealing you've lost your appetite?"

"Very funny. Actually, I'm beginning to wonder if I should just strip off my clothes and offer myself up for dessert."

Leo glanced out the window before returning his attention to Sammy. "It just so happens I didn't make a dessert, so your suggestion is a good one."

Sammy grinned and stood. "Are you going to make me clean my plate before dessert?"

Leo pushed back his chair, got to his feet and held out his hand. "I wouldn't dream of it."

\* \* \* \*

Other than a small candle burning on the bedside table, the room was dark, something Leo had insisted on. The reasoning behind the request was obvious, but Sammy had dreamt about Leo's naked body for months. He wondered if he'd ever actually get to see it.

With Leo safely tucked under the covers, Sammy finished undressing. He didn't worry about Leo seeing him naked, even if it was in heavy shadows. Leo had watched him take a shower earlier in the week, this was nothing compared to the unforgiving florescent lights of the station house.

"You're breathtaking," Leo murmured.

Sammy lifted the blankets and slid between the sheets. Pressing himself against Leo's side, he immediately went in for a kiss. As he played Twister with Leo's tongue, he let his hands roam down the man's body.

When he felt Leo tense, Sammy broke the kiss. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"That's bullshit, and we both know it. Why'd you tense up when I started touching you?" Sammy asked. If there were skeletons in Leo's closet, he needed to know. The last thing he wanted was to make Leo uncomfortable.

Leo covered Sammy's hand with his own and ran it over his chest. "Can you feel the difference between my skin and yours?"

Sammy nodded. "Sure. You've got all this manly hair on your chest. I barely have any, must be the Asian in me."

"I'm not talking about hair. My skin isn't the same. When I touch you, you feel like silk under my hands..."

"Gee, thanks," Sammy replied, cutting Leo off. "I'm sure every guy likes to hear they have girly skin."

Leo grunted in frustration and covered his face. "It isn't that, and you know it. I'm old, remember?"



Sammy sat up and gazed down at Leo. What should have been a romantic evening was quickly evolving into their first argument. "How could I possibly forget? You throw it between us every chance you get."

Leo tossed back the covers and jumped out of bed.

"Where the hell are you going?" Sammy asked.

Leo stopped beside the door and flipped on the overhead light. Sammy blinked several times at the bright intrusion.

"This is what a forty-eight-year old body looks like," Leo said in a huff, his hands going to rest on his hips.

Sammy sat in stunned silence for several moments. The salt and pepper hair on Leo's chest and groin did absolutely nothing to detract from the sexy man in front of him. Sammy licked his lips as he stared at the set of low-hanging balls. They had to be the biggest he'd ever seen. "Fuck."

Leo's chin dropped as he stared down at his own body. "Do you understand now why I don't want to make love to you with the lights on?"

Still sitting on his heels, Sammy removed his hands from his lap and turned to fully face Leo. He gestured to his throbbing erection. "Because you're afraid I'll come just from the sight of you?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Look at your body compared to mine. Can you see the differences in us?"

Sammy rubbed the back of his neck. He wanted to state the obvious, but figured Leo wasn't talking about how much bigger he was south of the border than Sammy. It was all going back to the same crappy age thing. Sammy groaned and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

"I can't do a damn thing about you being older. Just like I have no control over the fact my skin is darker than yours. This is who I am, take me or leave me. That's who you are." Sammy gestured to Leo's body. "Now that I've finally seen you, I can honestly tell you, you make me fucking hard, you sexy sonofabitch. If that's not enough for you, or if you don't believe me, that's your problem, not mine."

Sammy crossed his arms and waited for Leo to make up his mind. He wouldn't allow himself to fall for Leo without resolving the issue.

Leo sighed and turned the light out, once again plunging the room into darkness, save for the candle still burning. He sat beside Sammy on the edge of the bed and reached for his hand.

"My body disgusted Randy. He said that's why he fucked around with all those young guys."

"He was an ass. Get over him."

"He may have been an ass, but I've realised how much truth there was in his hateful parting shots."

"You're wrong." Sammy turned to straddle Leo's lap. He wrapped his arms around Leo's neck and rested their foreheads together.

"Randy was trying to justify his own infidelity by blaming you. It would be different if our interests weren't similar, because of our ages, but they are. The only real difference between us is this." Sammy tapped Leo's temple.

Leo stared at Sammy for several moments before leaning in for a kiss.

Sammy opened himself to the kiss and tried to believe everything had been worked out. There would be hiccups along the way, he had no doubt of that, but hopefully he'd be able to help Leo regain his self-confidence.

He began to move his ass against the hardening cock under him, hoping to get their evening back on the right track. Leo's hands landed on Sammy's ass as the kiss continued to heat up.

Sammy pushed his butt out, hoping Leo would continue. The first brush of Leo's finger against the puckered hole of his ass had Sammy groaning. "More."

Leo wrapped one arm around Sammy's waist and leant to the side to open the bedside drawer. As soon as Sammy spotted the bottle of lube, he started to laugh.

"Oh my God, you've been talking to Maggie at the pharmacy, haven't you?" Sammy asked, pointing at the bottle of volcanic lube.

"Huh? No. George clued me in on this stuff. Why? What does Maddie have to do with it?"

Sammy couldn't imagine the discussion between Leo and George. "Never mind Maddie, why the hell were you talking lube with George? Did you tell him about us?"

"No. George doesn't have a clue, which is kind of the way I'd like to keep it. He just mentioned that he'd taken a bottle of the stuff to Vegas and how it really worked."

Sammy took the lava-maker out of Leo's hand and opened it before they got into another argument. The last thing he wanted at the moment was a discussion as to why Leo didn't want George to know they were seeing each other.

He coated Leo's fingers with a liberal amount before tossing the bottle back onto the bed. "Fire me up."

Leo spread his legs further apart, giving him better access to Sammy's hole. Sammy held his breath, not sure what to expect. The pads of three of Leo's fingers began massaging the sensitive skin surrounding his hole, before one slowly pushed its way inside.

The only burn Sammy felt was the stretch as his body tried to accommodate the large digit. He began to move, as his body began to welcome the invader. "More."

As another finger eased its way inside, Sammy's eyes rolled to the back of his head. His body wasn't quite ready to accept Leo's length, but he wanted to pounce as soon as it was. With Leo still stretching him, Sammy leaned over to the bedside drawer.

"Rubbers?"

"New box," Leo answered, sawing his fingers in and out of Sammy's hole.

Sammy fumbled blindly until he closed his hand around a box. He pulled it out and grinned. "I knew you'd be an extra large."

The faster Leo's fingers moved, the more the lube warmed the inner walls of Sammy's ass. "Oh, shit, I can feel it heating up."

Leo's hand paused. "Too much?"

Sammy shook his head. "No, but you need to experience this."

He grabbed the lube from the bed and poured some into the palm of his hand. Reaching between them, he wrapped his fingers around Leo's cock and began stroking. "Tell me when it starts working."

Leo groaned. "If you keep that up I'll shoot before I even get inside. Save it for some other time when we aren't in the position to fuck."

Sammy tore open the condom with the aid of his teeth and slowly rolled it down Leo's length. "Please tell me I can ride you now?"

Leo nodded and removed the three fingers from Sammy's hole. "Like this, or would you rather lie down?"

Sammy didn't even answer the question. Bracing his knees against the mattress, Sammy lifted himself from Leo's lap. He reached behind his back and manoeuvred Leo's cock into

position as his soon-to-be lover held himself steady. The wide, flared head took a few moments to pass through the outer ring of muscles, but Sammy's body was hungry for the invasion.

He groaned as he lowered himself down the full length of Leo's cock. Staring into Leo's eyes, Sammy bit his bottom lip. "You're even bigger than I'd imagined."

Leo chuckled. "You're a little guy."

Sammy leant forward enough to press his erection against Leo's stomach. "Not that little."

Laughing, Leo shook his head and squeezed Sammy's butt cheeks. "I wasn't talking about the size of your cock, and you know it."

After several deep breaths, Sammy's body relaxed enough to move. With one hand buried in Leo's thick head of hair and the other wrapped around his dick, Sammy leaned in for a kiss.

The ride was slow and sensual as the two of them adjusted to each other's bodies. Sammy wasn't positive, but he was pretty sure he'd already become addicted to Leo's cock. "You should come with a warning label. Something like, 'The ride of a lifetime. Once you experience it, you'll never settle for less.'"

"You think so?"

Sammy noticed the more he complimented Leo, the more relaxed he became. After his last statement, Leo's thrusts increased in speed and intensity. Sammy was surprised someone with as much experience as Leo had would need the encouragement, but he had a feeling Randy had really done a number on Leo's self-confidence.

"God, you feel good. Oh, shit, yeah. Right there, peg me again." Sammy knew he was blathering on like an idiot, but with every word he said, Leo became more and more like the sex-machine Sammy knew was inside of him.

In a surprise move, Leo stood with Sammy still impaled on his cock and turned them around. He slammed Sammy's back onto the mattress and wrapped his hands around Sammy's ankles, spreading him so wide he thought he might split.

"Damn, Leo, you might as well make a wish," he teased at his precarious position.

"No need. My cock's buried balls deep in my wish."

Sammy closed his eyes as Leo began using his cock like a battering ram, trying to jar his teeth loose. It was heaven and hell at the same time. He wanted, no, needed to come, but he knew once he did, it wouldn't be long before Leo followed him.

His hands scrambled to gain purchase on something. One hand closed around the bedspread while the other began digging into the hair on Leo's chest. "You're killing me."

With the increased tempo of Leo's thrusts, Sammy felt the slapping of the man's heavy sac against his ass for the first time. It was more delicious than he could have imagined.

"Yeah, slap my ass," he cried as the first burst of cum shot from his cock.

Whether it was the words he spoke or the sight of his cock erupting, Sammy didn't know, but within seconds a loud howl from Leo signalled his own release. Sammy pulled the twitching man down into his arms as Leo rode out his climax.

His first thoughts while lying under Leo were of the station. How in the hell would he be able to control his lust for Leo while at work? At least during the week, he knew he'd be able to sample some of what the gorgeous man had to offer, but the full-staffed weekends were going to be pure torture.

\* \* \* \*

After a round of morning sex, Leo was in the kitchen making breakfast while Sammy showered. He couldn't seem to wipe the smile from his face. How many years had it been since he'd performed with as much vigour as he did last night and earlier?

Maybe there was something to sex with a younger man. Could that be the reason Randy indulged as much as he did? As soon as the thought popped into his head, he tried to push it away. Although he hated to admit it, he knew the fantastic sex had nothing to do with Sammy's age and everything to do with Sammy. *Fuck.*

The last thing he needed was to get emotionally involved. Just like the little twink Randy had cheated on him with, Leo knew the novelty of fucking someone older wouldn't last for Sammy. He might be lucky enough to get a couple of months of fantastic sex, but that would be it. *Best to remember that, you old fart.*

The sound of shuffling feet signalled Sammy's arrival moments before he felt a warm body press against his back. With both of them clad only in underwear, Leo could still feel the stray drops of water Sammy had missed with the towel.

"I'm making biscuits and sausage gravy." Leo reached back with one hand and squeezed Sammy's ass.

Sammy began kissing and licking Leo's back and shoulders. "Sounds good to me."

When Sammy's hands started to wander to the waistband of Leo's underwear, he released Sammy's ass and stilled his lover's hand. "I'm spent for a while, babe."

"I know that, so am I. I just wanted to play with you while you finish cooking," Sammy replied, knocking Leo's hand away.

Leo wasn't sure if Sammy didn't believe he really wouldn't be able to get it up so soon after coming, or if he really did just want to touch him. His thoughts were cut short by the feel of a hand on his flaccid cock and one on his balls.

Whether he got hard or not, the attention felt damn good. Leo tried his best to concentrate as he poured the gravy into a mixing bowl, careful to not spill or splash the hot liquid.

"Breakfast is done. I just need to get the biscuits out of the oven."

With a disappointed sounding sigh, Sammy removed his hands and stepped back. "I'll set the table."

The two of them worked side-by-side for the next few minutes serving up the food.

Leo sat down first, while Sammy poured them both a glass of orange juice to go with their morning coffee. "Thanks," Leo said, as Sammy set the juice in front of him.

Instead of taking his seat, Sammy dropped to his knees and crawled under the table.

"What're you doing?" Leo asked.

Sammy's hands reappeared at the waistband of Leo's briefs. "Do you have any idea how many times I've sat across the table from you, and wished I was under it sucking your cock?"

Leo felt his face heat as he lifted his ass enough for Sammy to pull his underwear down and off. "Do you know how many times I've thought of you doing the same thing? Only in my fantasies, I'm hard and coming down your throat."

The cold surface of the oak chair pressed against his balls, making Leo shiver until the wood warmed. Sammy sucked the cock all the way into his mouth before pulling off.

"I happen to love a flaccid dick in my mouth and a hard cock up my ass. Why waste opportunities?" Sammy said between licks to Leo's cock.

Leo's head fell backward. "I've found my dream man."

As soon as the words were out of Leo's mouth, he wished he could take them back. *Shit.*  
"I mean...uhh..."

Sammy laughed before assuring Leo. "I know what you mean."

Leo moaned as Sammy's mouth travelled down to bathe his balls. He was becoming totally enraptured in the moment when Sammy started to giggle. It wasn't the normal laugh of the man Leo had come to know. He started to reach under the table to cover his forty-eight-year old sac, when Sammy wrapped a hand around Leo's erection. *Erection?*

"Guess you're not as old as you seem to think you are."

## Chapter Five

Sammy was damn near skipping by the time he arrived at work the following Friday. He'd spent every night except Wednesday with Leo, and things couldn't be better. Throwing open the stationhouse door, Sammy heard laughter coming from the TV room and headed that way.

Spending the weekend trying to keep his hands off Leo would be hell, but at least he'd be in the man's company. Not only was Leo's touch electrifying, but he was a lot of fun to be around. Sammy never had someone to share the little things in life with. Pirate's Cove had been a passion of his since he'd come out to his family six years earlier, and now he'd found someone who enjoyed it as much as he did.

Entering the main living area, Sammy waved to the four men. "Hey, Collin, haven't seen you for a while."

Collin Zeffer grinned. "I've been hibernating up on the mountain with my man. How'd the winter treat you, Texas?"

"Froze my nuts off, what do you think?" he joked. "So where's Zac?"

"Sick," Collin answered. "He called me yesterday and asked if I could cover for him."

*Weird.* Zac had been one of his best friends since they were in elementary school. If he was really sick it wasn't like him not to call for some San Antonio babying. Sammy suspected he was taking time off to be with Terry, so he didn't say anything that could get his friend in trouble.

He turned his attention to the television. "Mind if I watch my show?"

Jakob shrugged and tossed him the remote. Sammy turned Pirate's Cove on and settled into the corner of the sofa.

"Damn, I haven't seen this show in months," Collin mentioned.

"Sacrilege!" Sammy barked.

"Sorry," Collin chuckled. "It's not like we have cable up on the mountain. And Abe thinks buying a satellite dish would be a waste as well." Collin grinned. "He has other ideas on how to spend the evening hours."



Sammy didn't need to ask what they did all the time without TV. He hadn't known Collin long, but it was obvious how in love he was with his partner, Abe. Hmmm, Sammy wondered if he'd be willing to give up Pirate's Cove for Leo. Sweat started to pop out on his forehead. Hopefully, he'd never be put in the position, since he didn't plan to move to the side of a mountain anytime soon.

\* \* \* \*

"So'd you talk to Nate about the expansion plan?" Leo asked.

George leant back in his chair and nodded. "Yeah. I tried to talk him out of it, but he's pretty determined to get it passed through the council."

Nate's plan to release a large section of land on the edge of town for new homes was sure to be a hot topic around Cattle Valley in the weeks to come.

"I mean, I know he's been inundated with emails from people asking what is available in the way of housing, but do we really need it?" George shook his head. "I'm just not sure."

"Sammy said something about Kyle's business being way down. In this economy, I think folks are rethinking every purchase they make. I agree with Nate. If we want the town to survive, we need to do everything we can to help the local merchants." Leo didn't usually get involved in political issues, but he was finally feeling at home in Cattle Valley. It was too promising of a town to just let it go down the tubes.

"Maybe. At least he's been talking to Hal Kuckleman about being the contractor. Hal won't let a bunch of cookie-cutter houses go up."

Leo nodded his agreement. "With that many new houses, he'll have to hire new employees. Where're they going to stay?"

"Right now the plan is to turn the top floor of City Hall into a dorm-like setup," George explained.

Leo's nose wrinkled. "And have construction workers tromping up and down the stairs all hours of the day and night? Surely there has to be a better solution than that."

George chuckled. "Well, you get right on that. Other than the lodge or the B&B, we're out of options."

"How many people are you figuring to house?" Leo asked.

"Around forty, including labourers, plumbers, electricians and general construction workers."

"I'll think on it." Leo stood. "By the way, I haven't received an entry form from you or Trick for the chilli cook-off."

George laughed and waved his hands. "No way are we getting involved in that. Carol's due any day. We've got our hands full trying to keep that woman happy."

"That's why I prefer to fuck men. No unexpected surprises."

"Shut up, asshole. We're excited about the baby," George said defensively.

"Good for you."

"Speaking of fucking, I found a condom in the trashcan in the bunkroom. Any idea how it got there?" George asked, an evil grin on his face.

"What the hell are you doing going through the trash?"

"Emptying it. You fucking Sammy?"

Leo felt like a deer caught in the headlights. "Is that a problem?"

George shook his head. "Nope. You know my stance on dating someone you work with. Just make sure it doesn't interfere with your duties."

"It won't."

"Great. In that case, I'm happy for you. Sammy's a great guy."

"You're not going to say anything about him being too young for me?" Leo asked.

"Why would I? It's not like he's too young to know what he's getting into. He's thirty for Christ's sake."

Leo shrugged and walked towards the door. "Maybe I'm the only one who thinks eighteen years is too wide a spread."

"Get over it. Enjoy the man, not the age."

Leo left the office and looked around. The shift change had occurred and Sammy and Collin were the only ones in the TV room. "Where's Jakob?"

Sammy met Leo's gaze and smiled. Leo refused to acknowledge the spark that gorgeous dimpled face had on him.

"He said he had to make a phone call," Collin answered, taking his eyes from the television screen.

"I need a volunteer to go grocery shopping with me," Leo announced.

Before Collin could even answer, Sammy was off the couch and walking towards him. "I'll go."

"What about your show?" Leo asked. He couldn't keep the grin from his face.

"Collin can catch me up. Won't you, Collin?"

"Sure, but I'm still trying to make sense as to why Jesse won't just tell his Maître d' he wants him."

"Jesse thinks his business will suffer if people know he's gay," Sammy explained, getting into his coat.

"So he'd rather just be miserable? That's fucked up," Collin observed.

"Yep," Sammy agreed.

Leo stopped by the office and grabbed a radio on his way to the parking lot. Instead of taking his own vehicle, he unlocked the Emergency Rescue SUV and got behind the wheel. Before Sammy buckled his seatbelt, Leo pulled him in for a quick, but deep, kiss.

"Mmmm." He removed his tongue from Sammy's willing mouth and sighed. "I needed that."

Sammy reached down and squeezed the front of Leo's uniform pants. "I need this, but I guess I'll have to just dream about it for the next few days."

Leo chuckled and started the SUV. "You and me both. By the way, George knows. He found a rubber in the trash."

"Was he pissed?" Sammy asked.

"No. He doesn't care as long as we still do our jobs." Leo wanted to reach across the seat and put Sammy's hand back on his cock. Of course he wanted to do a lot of things to Sammy, but he'd have to hold his libido in check for the next two days.

"Cool."

\* \* \* \*

Sammy casually rubbed his foot across the front of Leo's pants as they sat on the couch watching yet another movie. Leo could pretend all he wanted, but the longer Sammy rubbed, the harder his lover's cock became.

Eventually, Leo reached down and grabbed Sammy's foot, pressing it harder against his erection before moving it off his lap. "Be good," Leo mouthed.

Sammy grinned and spread his legs enough for Leo to see what the sly foreplay had done to his own cock. He stood, and started to ask Leo if he'd join him in the kitchen when Leo's phone began to ring.

As soon as Leo started to talk, Sammy could tell it wasn't good news. He ended the call and jumped to his feet.

"Domestic disturbance at six-five-four Grand Avenue. The caller suggested rescue personnel."

"Why didn't they announce it over the intercom?" Jakob asked.

Sammy felt like someone had knocked the wind out of him. "That's Zac's place."

"Fuck!" Jakob screamed and took off running towards the bay.

Sammy felt a comforting hand on the small of his back and looked up into Leo's eyes. "I should've known something was wrong."

"Don't." Leo bent and brushed a kiss across Sammy's mouth. "Deputy Nash is the one who made the call. He didn't want it broadcast in case there were others listening in on the emergency frequency, but he knew you'd want to be there."

"Damn right."

\* \* \* \*

Instead of taking the fire engine, they opted for the ambulance and the SUV. The ride over was torture for Sammy. "Zac's the biggest baby when it comes to being sick, so I knew he wasn't. I should've called and checked on him."

"He's a grown man."

Sammy nodded. "He's also my best friend."

Leo's hand landed on his thigh. "I'm not sure what's happened, so we may be jumping the gun."

Leo pulled up to the kerb across the street from Zac and Terry's house. There were two cruisers out front, both with their lights off. "Try to stay calm."

"Sure thing," Sammy said, rolling his eyes. He jumped out of the SUV and ran towards the front door. As he passed one of the cruisers, he noticed Terry sitting in the backseat with his head bowed.

Sammy slammed the side of his fist against the window. "What the fuck did you do?"

When Terry refused to answer, Sammy pounded again.

"You'll need a stretcher," Roy yelled across the yard to Jakob.

The request drew Sammy's attention back to the house. He turned away from Terry and ran towards the porch.

Roy Jenkins held up his hands to stop Sammy from entering while he opened the door for Jakob and Collin. "Let them take care of Zac's injuries. They aren't life threatening, but he's lost too much blood to be steady on his feet. Zac's refusing to press charges. We thought you might be able to talk some sense into him."

Leo came to stand next to Sammy on the porch. "What happened?"

Roy adjusted the hat on his head before pointing towards the house next door. "Neighbour said she'd heard yelling coming from the house for several days. Tonight when it started up, she said it seemed more heated than usual. When she heard the breaking glass, she called us."

Sammy tried to push by Roy. "I need to see him."

"I'm sure Collin and the new guy will be out any minute with him. Do you think you can talk some sense into him?" Roy asked.

"I won't know until you let me in." Despite his smaller size, Sammy squared his shoulders and pushed against Roy's arm blocking access to the door.

"Let him in," Leo said.

Roy reached behind his back and opened the door.

Sammy couldn't quite figure the situation out. Roy had always been one of the nicest deputies in town, why suddenly was he being a prick? Sammy entered the living room and stopped in his tracks. The first thing he spotted was blood, lots of it, along with a shattered glass coffee table.

Jakob's broad back obscured Sammy's view of Zac. With a deep breath, Sammy moved forward. He couldn't tell the extent of Zac's injuries, but Collin was looking a little green around the gills, holding a thick stack of gauze pads against the side of Zac's face as Jakob worked to get an IV in.

"Call Isaac," Collin ordered. "Have him meet us at the clinic."

"I don't think that's something Isaac can fix. Take him to Sheridan," Sammy suggested, kneeling beside Zac.

"Isaac needs to stop the bleeding first," Jakob barked.

Sammy's jaw dropped. He'd never heard Jakob yell. He was so stunned he stared at the man for several seconds.

"I got it," Leo said from behind Sammy.

Sammy glanced over his shoulder in time to see Leo walk away with his cell phone to his ear. Returning his attention to Zac, Sammy reached out and laid a hand on his friend's thigh. "It'll be okay. Do you want me to call your dad?"

"No!" Although muffled by the thick gauze pads Collin kept swapping out, Zac's wish was definitely made clear.

Despite what Roy wanted, Sammy knew it wasn't the time to talk Zac into pressing charges against Terry.

"Get the other end while Collin applies pressure to the wounds," Jakob ordered, indicating the gurney.

Sammy stood and helped Jakob set the legs into place before wheeling it towards the front door. As they passed Roy, Sammy gestured to the cruiser with his chin. "You'll have to keep him locked up until Zac's in a position to think straight."

Roy nodded. With Leo's help, they carried the gurney down the steps and to the waiting ambulance amidst a growing crowd of concerned neighbours.

"I need to go with them," Sammy told Leo.

Leo nodded. "I know. I've already called George. He said to send you with the ambulance. I'll go back to the station, and he and I'll handle things there."

Sammy squeezed Leo's hand before getting in the front passenger seat of the ambulance. He rubbed his eyes, unable to get the image of Zac's blood out of his mind. As soon as Collin got behind the wheel, Sammy started questioning him.

"How bad is it, really?"

Collin shook his head. He turned on the lights and siren and pulled away from the kerb. "I don't know for sure. He's going to need a lot of plastic surgery though."

"Do you know what happened? I mean, I saw the coffee table. Was he pushed or did he fall?" Sammy prodded.

"He won't say. But he's lucky. Another inch and the glass would've slit an artery."

Sammy's hands started to shake. He wondered just how close he'd come to losing the best friend a man could hope for.

\* \* \* \*

It was four in the morning when Leo heard the return of the ambulance. He got out of bed and reached for his pants and T-shirt just as George started to stir. "They're back."

George yawned and sat up. "Toss me my clothes, would ya?"

"If you weren't such a neat freak and dropped them on the floor beside the bed, like the rest of us, you'd be dressed by now." Leo opened George's locker and pulled out the folded clothes he'd had on earlier.

"Hey, don't bust my balls this early in the morning." George caught the clothes Leo threw at him. "Go on. I'll be there in a second."

Leo made his way to the bay. Other than two brief phone calls from Sammy, he hadn't heard much.

"Where's Sammy?" he asked Jakob.

"He wouldn't leave the hospital. Zac's refusing to talk to anyone, but Sammy wanted to be there in case he changes his mind."

"What's the verdict on Zac's condition?" Leo asked, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

Jakob shook his head and disappeared into the main living area. Leo turned his attention to Collin. "What's up with him?"

"He's taking this whole thing really hard, nearly had a meltdown when Zac refused to see him." Collin opened the back of the ambulance and began restocking the supplies. "Zac's got a cheek full of stitches, but I have a feeling the injuries go a hell of a lot deeper than that. He seems to have shut down. I don't know what went on between him and Terry, but he told Ryan he wasn't going to press charges as long as Terry got the fuck out of his house."

"How long have the two of them been together?" Leo asked.

"Close to a year, I reckon. They met shortly after Terry moved here."

George strolled into the bay. "Why don't you go on home, Collin. I called in two of my newest volunteers to come in and help me out."

Collin shook his head. "As long as I can grab a couple hours of sleep in the bunkroom, I should be fine. I think you might offer the same deal to Jakob though. With the mood he's in, he's not gonna be much good around here anyway."

George turned to Leo. "Where's Sammy?"

"Hospital," Leo answered. He was starting to worry about his lover. "I thought I might call and see how he's doing?"

George nodded and walked back into the station.

Leo pulled his cell out and punched in Sammy's number. Sammy picked up on the first ring.

"Hey," Sammy answered.

"How're you holding up?" Leo walked outside to get some privacy.

"Okay. Zac'll probably kill me, but I called his dad, so he's on his way. I wouldn't wanna be Terry when Mr. Alben gets here. I've known Butch all my life and he still scares the shit out of me."

"I thought I'd take a couple of hours off later and drive up to get you if that's okay?" Leo asked.

"Yeah. I don't want to leave until Butch gets here though. Can I call you?"

"Sure. I'm going to talk to George about the two of us taking the night off. He said he had two volunteers coming in, so it shouldn't be a big deal." Leo scraped the toe of his boot over a lingering patch of ice near the road. He wanted to tell Sammy he missed him, but didn't want to put himself out there just yet.

"Did you manage to get any sleep?" he asked Sammy instead.

"No. I tried, but the chairs suck. Thanks for the offer to come and get me," Sammy said.

"My pleasure. I know you're there for your friend, but take care of yourself, too."

"I will."

"Bye, babe," Leo hung up the phone and stuck it in his pocket. He went back inside and found George in the kitchen making a pot of coffee. "Mind if I take some time off this afternoon and evening? I need to pick Sammy up from the hospital. I can come back tonight, though. I wouldn't want Carol and Trick to get too comfy without you."

George slapped Leo on the shoulder. "Don't worry about me. I'll be fine here for the night. Trick had to go out of town and Carol's so late into her pregnancy, she'd rather not even look at a man."

Leo grinned. Carol was one feisty woman even when she wasn't suffering from swollen ankles and, from what he'd heard, hourly trips to the bathroom. He couldn't imagine what she was like at nine months pregnant. "Thanks."



\* \* \* \*

After asking for Zac's room number at the front desk, Leo stepped into the elevator. He hadn't heard from Sammy since their phone conversation earlier, so he hoped he wasn't pushing the boundaries of their relationship by arriving early.

When the elevator opened, Leo glanced around the small waiting room. Not spotting Sammy, he wound his way to room three-sixteen. The door was open and he peeked inside. Sammy sat in a corner chair, looking rather lost while the biggest man Leo had ever seen stood beside Zac's bed. Leo shook his head. Butch Alben could be Ezra's bigger brother.

Sammy looked up and smiled. He stood, said something to Butch and Zac and walked towards Leo. "Hey."

Leo opened his arms and brought Sammy against his chest. "How's he doing?"

"Okay. They'll let him go tomorrow morning if he shows no signs of infection." Sammy glanced over his shoulder towards Zac. "He won't discuss what happened. I had to agree not to bring it up before he'd allow me in the room."

Leo kissed Sammy's forehead. The action caught Butch's attention, and the big man strolled over.

"This the guy you've been talking about?" Butch asked.

Sammy nodded and stepped back. "Butch, this is Leo."

Butch's eyes narrowed as he looked Leo up and down. "How old're you?"

"Please don't do this, Butch," Sammy pleaded.

Leo met the man's gaze and answered the question. "Forty-eight."

Butch turned his attention to Sammy. "Do your folks know about this?"

"Unless my lover had a vagina, my folks don't care to hear about it," Sammy stated in a matter-of-fact tone.

Butch gestured to the hall. "Why don't Leo and I get us some sandwiches from the cafeteria?"

"Butch." Sammy put a hand on Butch's arm.

Leo couldn't get over how small Sammy looked standing next to the man. He knew Sammy was trying to protect him, just like he knew Butch was trying to protect Sammy.

"We can do that," Leo finally said, accepting Butch's challenge.

Butch ruffled Sammy's hair. "Stay with Zac. We won't be long."

Sammy wrapped his arms around Leo's neck and pulled his head down for a quick kiss before whispering in his ear. "Don't let him scare you. He's been like a father to me for years."

For someone who'd admitted, only hours earlier, to being frightened of Butch Alben, Sammy talked a good game. Leo smiled and followed Butch to the elevator. At almost six-four, it felt odd to have to look up to meet a man's eyes. Besides the intimidating height, Butch was built like a brick shithouse. Yep. Ezra's big brother.

They didn't say anything on the ride down to the cafeteria.

"Why don't we have a cup of coffee?" Butch suggested.

Leo ordered a sandwich for himself and one for Sammy, along with a cup of black coffee. He paid for his purchases and found a table in a small nook cut into the cafeteria.

While he waited for Butch to settle his bill, he tried to brace himself. It was obvious Butch had a problem with the age difference between him and Sammy. *Hell, I have a problem with the same thing.*

Butch set his wrapped sandwich on the table and took a seat. Leo was surprised the hospital chairs were strong enough to hold Butch's abnormally-sized frame.

"I love Sammy like a son," Butch began.

Leo nodded. "I can understand that you're concerned about our age difference, but you need to know Sammy and I have had this exact conversation. It was our first argument, as a matter-of-fact."

Butch took a sip of his coffee before leaning his forearms on the table. "How much do you know about Sammy's past?"

Leo shrugged. "Not much, I guess. We've only been seeing each other for a couple of weeks."

"So you don't know that he was engaged for two years with a woman his parents set him up with."

It wasn't a question, so Leo merely shook his head. What it had to do with Leo, he wasn't sure. He decided to let Butch get to the point before questioning him.

"Sammy's always been gay. Zac knew it, I knew it and his parents knew it. That didn't stop them from applying so much pressure to the boy that he allowed himself to get roped into an engagement. Two weeks before the wedding, Sammy finally stood up to his parents

and Danielle. They've barely spoken to him since. He was so hurt by their actions that he called Zac and ran to Cattle Valley."

Butch sat back in his chair and took another drink of his coffee. When it didn't appear he was going to offer more, Leo finally spoke.

"It sucks that parents do that to their children, but what does it have to do with me?"

"You're around the same age as Lee Han. It makes me wonder whether he's trying to get back at his dad or if he's trying to replace him." Butch narrowed his eyes. "The two of them were very close before the blow-up."

"Couldn't have been that close if he was willing to wash his hands of his son so easily. Sammy's reasons for being with me are his own. I'm not hiding anything from him. He knows exactly how old I am and has known since before we even kissed for the first time." Leo had gotten used to arguing with himself over the age difference, but he'd be damned if he'd let Butch stick his nose into it.

"All I'm saying..." Butch started.

Leo held his hand up. "Sammy's been happier in the last two weeks than all the months I've known him. I never thought I could have that affect on a man, but for some reason I have. I'm not about to let you or anyone else tell me to walk away because I'm older."

Butch stared at Leo for several moments before the corner of his mouth tilted up. "Mr. Lee is a wealthy and powerful man in San Antonio. I needed to hear you speak of your relationship with Sammy with conviction in your voice."

"I take it you're not too fond of Sammy's father," Leo observed.

"Of course I'm not fond of that bigoted prick. It's one thing to cling to your ancestral ways. It's something else entirely to turn your back on your son because he chooses a different lifestyle. I knew early on Sammy was like my Zac. It's why I accepted Sammy into my home so many years ago. The boy needed a place where he could be comfortable with who he was, even though he didn't know what it was yet."

Leo finished off his coffee, and rose to toss his cup into the trash. "If we've worked out our issues, I'd like to see if I can get Sammy home. He's taken this pretty hard. He blames himself for not seeing it before last night."

Butch stood and followed Leo's lead. "I don't think anyone saw it coming, not even Zac. It's probably the reason he's refusing to talk about it."

Leo and Butch went back upstairs to Zac's room. Sammy was in the corner, chewing his fingernails, a habit Leo hadn't noticed before. He walked over and stood by Sammy's chair, passing him the sandwich. He unwrapped his own and took a bite, listening as Butch teased Zac about them both having to eat hospital food.

Leo bent down and whispered in Sammy's ear. "Does Butch need a place to stay?"

Sammy turned his head and brushed a kiss across Leo's cheek. "No. I'll tell you about it later."

After finishing his sandwich, Sammy stood and walked to Zac's bedside. "We're going to take off. Are you sure you don't need anything?"

With one side of his face covered in a loose-fitting gauze wrap, Zac shook his head. He reached out and took Sammy's hand. "I'll be okay. I know I yelled at you earlier for calling Dad, but I'm glad you did."

Sammy grinned. "Yeah. I kinda figured."

After giving Zac's hand a squeeze, Sammy left his bedside and walked back to Leo. "I'm ready."

Leo nodded and stepped towards Zac. He reached across the bed and shook Butch's hand. "Nice meeting you." He reached down and touched Zac's thigh. "Get better and listen to your dad."

Zac gave Leo a lopsided grin. "You old farts always stick together."

Leo smiled, but it was one more punch in the gut. "Sure we do. We've managed to learn a few things the hard way."

Turning away, Leo reached for Sammy's hand and left the room. He was still smarting from the comment and Sammy must have known it because his lover's arm wrapped around his waist.

"Do you have to go back to work?" Sammy asked as they got into the elevator.

"No. I'm all yours."

Sammy snorted. "As if."

## Chapter Six

As soon as Sammy buckled himself in, he immediately dropped off to sleep. Leo alternated between watching the road in front of him and the gorgeous man to his side. He wondered what it would be like to have the kind of friendship Zac and Sammy had. It wasn't that Leo had never had friends or didn't now, they'd just never lasted.

He gripped the steering wheel. Leo wasn't sure if that said more about the friends he'd chosen in the past or his ability to even be a long-term friend.

His thoughts strayed to the conversation with Butch. At some point during their talk, Leo realised he didn't want to dwell on the differences between him and Sammy. There were plenty of things that could break them up. Age was only one of them.

Sammy had already proven, in many ways, how much he enjoyed Leo's body, something Leo still found hard to believe. He glanced over at his sleeping lover. Even admitting to himself their new relationship had the possibility of going further was a big step for him. But the more he thought about it, the more he wanted it.

Instead of taking Sammy back to his apartment, Leo drove to the small rental house he'd grown to love. He pulled into the driveway and turned off the engine. Rolling his head to the side, he stared at Sammy once again.

With a brush of his hand over Sammy's cheek, Leo tried to wake the sleeping beauty. "We're here," he said in a soft voice.

Sammy stirred and opened his eyes. "That was fast."

Leo chuckled. "Can you make it inside?"

Sammy glanced out the windshield before turning to Leo. "I should probably get a change of clothes from my place first."

Leo leant over and kissed Sammy. "I didn't really plan on you being dressed at all, but we can always go over later."

"But if we go now, we won't have to get dressed later to do it," Sammy countered with a grin.

Leo nodded and started the engine. "You're right."

He pulled back out of the driveway and headed towards the small apartment building Sammy called home.

"So, how hard was Butch on you?" Sammy asked, reaching over to put a hand on Leo's thigh.

"Not too bad. He was concerned about my intentions, I think."

"Which are?" Sammy asked, a wide grin on his face.

"Honourable," Leo answered.

He decided to lay his cards on the table. He hadn't given Sammy much in the way of hope for a future, and he realised it was time he did so. "I enjoy being with you, in bed and out. I'd like to see where it leads."

Sammy's grin morphed into a full-fledged smile with dimples so deep you could insert a fingertip into them. "I'd like that."

Leo released the breath he hadn't realised he was holding. "Good."

\* \* \* \*

Sammy opened his eyes to find Leo on the floor beside him, pouring over entry forms for the cook-off. "Sorry."

Leo's head snapped up and around. "For what?"

"Falling asleep on you again." Sammy stretched his arms over his head and yawned.

"Technically, it was under me, but don't apologise for it. You had a rough night." Leo set down his pen and ran his hand under the blanket he'd covered Sammy with after he'd fallen asleep.

Sammy moaned as Leo began a slow hand job. For someone who claimed to need hours and hours between erections, Leo was doing an awfully good imitation of a sex-starved teenager.

He threw one leg over the back of the couch, giving Leo room to play. He gestured to the stack of papers on the coffee table. "How many entries do you have?"

"Seventy-three. At fifty dollars a pop for the entry fee and a prize of only a fifty dollar trophy for the winner, I'd say we're in good shape."

"It's not about the trophy. It's bragging rights for an entire year." Sammy reached out and ruffled his fingers through Leo's hair. "Will we have room at the station?"

"I'm starting to wonder. I had no idea we'd have this many entries, and there're still three days left to register." Leo's hand slipped from Sammy's hard cock down to fondle his sac.

Sammy gasped as Leo's finger entered his recently fucked hole. "Park."

"Excuse me?" Leo grinned, inserting another finger.

"Maybe we should have it at the park," Sammy managed to say as he began to ride Leo's talented digits.

"What if the weather doesn't cooperate?"

"People will understand if it's a little cold. Besides, it'll give them a better excuse to sample all the hot chilli being served. Just ask Nate. I'm sure he'll give the okay." Sammy released Leo's hair and rubbed his way to his lover's cock. Although not fully hard, Leo's cock was far from flaccid.

"Fuck me," he pleaded, gazing into Leo's eyes.

Leo leant in and kissed him. Sammy opened for the tongue battle he knew was coming. Leo didn't disappoint, as the kiss went carnal in a matter of seconds. Sammy giggled when he felt a strand of saliva run from his mouth down the side of his face.

Leo pulled back and wiped it away with his free hand. "Sorry."

"Don't be. I'm kinda fond of your spit. Now...about the fucking?"

Leo nipped at Sammy's lower lip. "I'm rather enjoying myself."

Leo fumbled beside the sofa and came up with the volcanic bottle of lube. He removed his fingers long enough to coat them with the stuff before resuming his puppet-play. "I've been sitting here thinking about us while you slept. I even had to cover you so I could concentrate on this paperwork."

Knowing he wasn't going to get Leo's cock, Sammy decided to fully enjoy his lover's touch. "What were you thinking about?"

Leo broke eye contact and rested his head against Sammy's chest. "I need you to promise that if someone else catches your eye, you'll be upfront with me about it."

It was obvious how Randy's actions had damaged Leo's confidence, but the last thing he wanted was to be painted with the same brush. Sammy cupped Leo's chin and tilted it until they were once again eye to eye. "I've been here for nine months, and the absolute only one who's caught my attention is you."

"Thanks. It sounds like we're going to get another lot of newcomers once this building plan goes through. I just want you to always be honest with me."

Sammy rolled his eyes and playfully slapped the back of Leo's head. "Why do you think it's impossible for me to love you and only you? Seriously, Leo, you need to pull your head out of your ass and see what I see. You're incredibly sexy, you fuck like a dream, you care about everyone around you and you make me laugh on an hourly basis. Why the hell would I go looking elsewhere when I have you in my life? Randy was a fucktard. Forget him."

Leo got to his knees and wrapped his free hand around Sammy's cock before leaning down to capture his mouth in a deep kiss. Sammy's senses were overloading quickly. Between the fingers thrusting in and out of his ass, the tight grip on his cock and the gentle tongue sweeping the interior of his mouth, he didn't stand a chance.

He cried Leo's name while their tongues continued to dual as he shot his load. A series of tremors shook his body with each spurt of his seed. When he'd been drained, he opened his eyes and pulled out of the kiss. "No man could ever ask for more than a lover like you."

\* \* \* \*

Sammy's eyes rounded when Jakob walked into the stationhouse a week later. "What the hell happened?"

Jakob shrugged and touched the tender skin of his bruised and swollen eye. "Got in a fight."

The small cuts and swelling on Jakob's right hand attested to that fact. "With who?"

"Doesn't matter. It's done now."

It was obvious Jakob wasn't in the mood to discuss it, so Sammy let it drop. "Do you mind going with me to the park later to set up tables and chairs for tomorrow's chilli cook-off?"

"I don't mind, but if you set them up today, they'll all have to be dried off tomorrow. Why not just wait until morning?" Jakob asked, taking his usual spot on one of the recliners.

"Because I have a million other things to do in the morning to get ready for this thing. I just thought I'd be able to get one of my tasks done beforehand," Sammy explained.



Jakob shook his head. "Don't worry about it. I'll deal with the tables and chairs in the morning. That'll free you up for other things."

"Thanks," Sammy said as Leo walked into the room. He was surprised when Leo sat beside him and leant over for a kiss.

"I take it there's something going on between the two of you," Jakob remarked.

Sammy broke their kiss and glanced at Jakob. "Yeah. Hope it doesn't make you uncomfortable."

Jakob shook his head and chuckled. "If it did, I wouldn't have come to this town."

Once Jakob went back to watching television, Sammy questioned Leo with a look. Leo shrugged and pulled Sammy to his side, wrapping his arm around him.

Leo leant down and whispered in Sammy's ear. "Been doing some thinking. I talked to George again, and he doesn't seem to have a problem with the two of us being out as a couple at work."

"Cool," Sammy said, brushing his lips over Leo's. He settled against the man he was seriously falling for and pretended to watch television. His thoughts were all over the place, wondering why the sudden change in Leo's attitude.

Leo had spent quite a bit of time over the last week with either Neil or Butch while Sammy tried to keep Zac's spirits up. He wondered which of Leo's new friends he had to thank for his lover's about face.

He rested his hand on Leo's thigh, perfectly content with his life at the moment. "Oh, the printer is bringing by the banners they agreed to donate. They're supposed to be here any time, so we can get them up. I thought we'd put one at the park entrance, one at the actual location and one in front of city hall since most people drive by it."

Leo kissed the top of Sammy's head. "Sounds good, babe. Thanks for getting them to do that."

Sammy gazed up into Leo's eyes. "I've enjoyed helping on this. I've met a lot of new people since I started working on it. And I think we're going to make enough money to get a lot of the things the new centre needs."

He pulled Leo's head down for another deep kiss. "You should be proud of yourself."

The deep blush on Leo's face was new. "I couldn't have done it without help, but thanks."

Jakob broke into their lovefest with a clearing of his throat. "Sorry to interrupt, but has Zac said when he'll be ready to return to work?"

"Next week," Leo answered.

"You should go by and see him. I think he's going stir-crazy with just his dad to keep him company. He's still too embarrassed to go out of the house, but I'm going to try to get him to come to the cook-off tomorrow," Sammy said.

He hated to lay Zac's appearance out on the table, but Jakob needed to be prepared for what he'd see. "It'll be hard, but try not to stare when you see him. Unfortunately, he'll probably have to endure several plastic surgeries before the right side of his face resembles the Zac we've all come to know."

Jakob narrowed his eyes and jumped out of the chair. He headed for the bunkroom and threw his response over his shoulder. "I'm not the kind of person to stare at someone's misfortune."

Sammy bit his bottom lip as Jakob retreated. "Shit. I didn't handle that very well."

Leo pulled Sammy into his lap. "I don't think it was what you said. There's something else going on with Jakob. He and Zac were getting to be really good friends. Has Zac said why Jakob hasn't been by to see him?"

Sammy shook his head. "He said he called once, but hadn't been by, which is why I said something."

Leo swatted Sammy on the ass. "Well, I guess we'll just stay out of it from now on. Let's go get dinner started."

Sammy climbed off Leo's lap and held his hand out to help his lover to his feet. "What're you making me?"

"There are only three of us, so I stopped and bought some steaks. The weather's nice enough to grill, so I figured why not."

Stepping into the kitchen, Sammy opened the cabinet and pulled out the bag of potatoes. "Boiled, baked, fried or mashed?"

"Boiled is fine with me," Leo answered.

Turning on the faucet, Sammy started peeling potatoes. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure." Leo continued to mix up a marinade to pour over the meat.

"What happened in the last week to make you change your mind about us?"

Leo poured the mixture over the steaks and set them in the fridge. He walked over and washed his hands before pulling Sammy into his arms.

Sammy quickly dropped the knife he was holding in the sink and reciprocated Leo's embrace. He gazed up at Leo and waited.

"I realised how lucky I was to have you in my life. And I decided young or not, you're the man I want to spend my time with. If something happens to change that, I'll be upset, sad and probably pissed, but I know I can't push you away because of what might happen."

"So do I have Butch to thank for this new outlook?" Sammy asked, a wide grin on his face.

"Nope." Leo bent down for a quick kiss. "You have you to thank."

\* \* \* \*

Still laughing, Leo called out, "Uhh, Sammy? Can you come out here?"

Walking out of the bay door, Sammy smiled. "Oh! They came!"

Leo held one of the opened banners above his head out of Sammy's reach. He managed to stop laughing long enough to ask a question. "Did you come up with this slogan?"

Sammy's enthusiasm sobered. "Yeah. Don't you like it? I thought it would get people's attention."

"Hot Tongues and Sticky Buns? Yeah, I'll agree it'll get their attention, especially in this town."

When Sammy's expression remained unsure, Leo kissed him. "It's great. I love it."

Sammy broke out into an exuberant smile. "Thanks. I'm glad you do."

"Want to help me put them up?" Leo asked. "I brought some steel tee fence posts with me."

Leo handed the opened banner to Sammy before walking to his truck. "What's the plan for tomorrow morning?"

"Well, check-in starts at ten, so I thought barring any unforeseen emergencies, I'd get there around eight to start setting up. Jakob volunteered to put up the tables and chairs, but it's more than a one person job, especially getting the plastic table cloths on them."

Leo nodded and fastened his seatbelt for the short drive to city hall. "I got the party supply store in Sheridan to donate a good-sized tent just in case the weather turns bad. The

last thing I want is the judges to sit out in the cold rain. So, I'll need to be at the park around the same time to help them with set-up."

When they arrived at city hall, Leo carried the fence posts to the front lawn. He held out his hand and Sammy gave him the hammer he'd brought as well. After securing the banner to the posts, Leo and Sammy stepped back.

Leo shook his head and wrapped an arm around Sammy's shoulders. "It looks fantastic. Hopefully it'll draw enough townspeople to the park to make a big dent in the money needed for the centre."

"I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a great day."

Leo hoped Sammy was right. Although it was his first big project in Cattle Valley, he'd actually enjoyed himself. Sure there was a lot of stress involved with getting such a charity event off the ground, but he'd had a lover by his side that'd done wonders to help alleviate the workload.

The two of them worked well together. Leo hoped it was a good sign for things to come.

## Chapter Seven

With their emergency radios strapped to their belts, Sammy and Leo pulled out of the station lot and headed towards the park. Sammy couldn't wipe the smile off his face if he tried.

For whatever reason, Jakob had decided to leave at the crack of dawn to start setting up. Sammy hadn't questioned his new friend on the reason. He had a pretty good idea that Jakob was carrying a certain amount of guilt about Zac's injuries. Zac was like a brother, and Sammy knew he wouldn't have cheated on Terry for any reason, but he figured something must have gone on that involved Jakob. It was the only explanation Sammy could come up with as to why Zac and Jakob both refused to talk about what had happened.

Leo's hand on Sammy's inner thigh began moving back and forth, slowly inching its way to Sammy's cock. He spread his legs and chuckled. They'd already given each other blowjobs in the shower after Jakob had left, but Leo seemed to be in the mood for more play.

Normally, Sammy would jump at the chance, but they were only a couple of blocks from the park. "You're gonna make me hard again, you know?"

Leo grinned. "Is that a bad thing?"

"Not at all, but it might be a tad uncomfortable to be sporting a woody in front of the other volunteers."

Chuckling, Leo ran his hand over the hard length in Sammy's pants before turning into the parking lot. "Fair enough. I'll try to keep my hands to myself today."

Sammy got out of the Emergency Response SUV and made sure his radio was on before pulling his box of supplies out of the backseat. He joined Leo on the sidewalk, who was carrying an even bigger box. "I didn't say you had to keep your hands to yourself all day, just while I'm walking around trying to look official."

Leo bumped the side of his body against Sammy. "I'll remember that, but unless Jakob goes to bed early tonight, you may have to wait until we get off shift tomorrow."

"Then three blessed days to lie around in bed and touch you whenever I want to." Sammy gave a dramatic sigh. "I hope I can last until then."

"I've faith in you," Leo said with a chuckle in his voice.

"Nice sign," Neil said, walking across the dewy grass to meet them.

"Thanks," Sammy answered. "You're here early."

Neil shrugged and fell into step beside them. "I got up early to get my chores done. I volunteered to help Leo set up the booths."

"That's nice of you," Sammy told the younger man.

Neil rubbed his stomach. "I have an ulterior motive. Leo said if I helped set up, I could be an alternate judge."

Sammy glanced up at Leo. "Alternate? So like if one of the judges keels over from the chilli, you're going to send Neil in to risk his life?"

Leo laughed and smacked Sammy's ass. "We've got four judges. I think we need a fifth in case of a tie."

Sammy looked at Neil and poked Leo in the ribs with his elbow. "That's why I keep him around. He's the smart one."

They were all still laughing when they arrived at the big gazebo in the centre of the park. Sammy set his box on the step. "I thought I'd set the check-in up there so it'll be easily visible."

"Good thinking. I'm not the only smart one of the family."

Although he said it in a joking manner, the sentiment nearly stopped Sammy's heart. He felt the sting of tears and quickly blinked his eyes. Giving away his suddenly emotional state wasn't an option. He was sure Leo hadn't meant the statement like it sounded, so he tried not to read too much into it.

Sammy gestured to the area already coming together. "I'm gonna go make sure Jakob doesn't need my help."

Before he had a chance to get away, Leo set down his box and pulled Sammy into his arms for a kiss. When they broke apart, Leo stared down at Sammy. "You okay?"

Sammy nodded. "Yeah. I'll catch up with you later."

Leo watched Sammy walk away. He'd realised he'd made a slip-of-the-tongue, but it wasn't the time for personal revelations. He had a job to do, one that was important to do right. He clapped his hands together and turned to Neil. "Okay, let's get the booth areas marked out."

Leo pulled a can of bright orange spray paint out of the box along with a folded sheet of paper. As they walked over to the area he'd determined would be the best space for the booths, Leo unclipped the tape measure from his belt. "Okay, each one needs to be nine by nine. That'll give them enough room for their eight-foot table."

Neil nodded and took one end of the tape measure, stretching it out.

Leo couldn't seem to get his mind off the expression on Sammy's face when he'd made the slip about them being family. *Why did I say that?*

"Leo?"

Leo gave his head a slight shake and glanced up. "Sorry. I let my thoughts get away from me." He glanced at the tape measure. "That's nine."

He marked the grass with a line of orange paint before moving over to measure the next section.

"Leo?" Neil prompted once again.

"Shit. I'm sorry." Leo made another mark.

"What's going on?" Neil asked.

Leo shook his head, hoping Neil would drop it. "Nothing."

Neil let go of his end of the tape and walked towards him. "I know that's not true. What's going on between you and Sammy?"

Leo rubbed the back of his neck. "I've been figuring a few things out lately, and I guess it's starting to consume my thoughts."

"You like him. What's to figure out?"

It was strange confiding his deepest fears in someone so young, but Neil had become a good friend despite the vast age difference between them. "I more than like him and it scares the shit out of me."

"Because he's young." It wasn't a question. Neil shook his head, getting the same disgusted look on his face that he'd had on the bluff weeks ago.

"No. That's just it. I think I used that excuse to keep him away, but I've realised the age difference is only an issue if I make it one. Sammy doesn't seem to have a problem with me being older. If one of us should be complaining about the age thing, it's him."

"So what're you scared of?" Neil asked.

Leo bit the inside of his cheek, trying to put his finger on the real issue. "I guess Sammy finding out I'm not good enough. I gave eighteen years of my life to a man and came to find out I was never good enough for him. Why should Sammy be any different?"

"Because Sammy's a different person than this ass you stayed with for eighteen years." Neil's head tilted to the side. Leo could see the younger man was uncomfortable with the topic. Maybe it hit too close to home for him? He'd hinted several times that he'd once been in love with an older man.

"We don't always get to choose who we fall in love with. If we could, I'd probably have a girl on my arm right now. I sure as hell wouldn't be living in Cattle Valley. But love happens. And maybe it's so rare that we should grab it when we have the chance."

Seeing the tears swim in Neil's eyes, Leo stepped forward and pulled the man into his arms. Leo was caught between being a friend and a grief counsellor. It was the first real breakdown Neil had had in months. "Who'd you love that pushed you away?"

Neil buried his face in Leo's neck, holding on for dear life. "My guardian, Ben Waters."

The revelation shocked Leo. "Your guardian? As in a father-like guardian?"

Neil nodded. "Yeah. Ben had about the same reaction, as you, when I told him I loved him."

Talk about being on the edge of a double-edged sword. Leo could tell the pain was still deep for Neil, but he understood Ben's position, too. "Common blood or not, society doesn't think too kindly of father-son relationships."

Neil tore himself out of Leo's grasp. "It wasn't like that between us. He lived next door. Whenever things at home..." Neil wiped at his eyes. "Ben was my safety net growing up. I wasn't quite seventeen when my mom was killed. Ben took me in rather than see me go into foster care. I thought it was the perfect situation because I'd been in love with him since I was around fifteen."

Neil turned and took several steps, staring out towards the lake in the distance. "Ben was one of those ex-military, everything-by-the-book kind-of-guys. I knew he wouldn't accept my love while I was still underage, so I waited to tell him until I turned eighteen."

Neil scrubbed his hands over his face. "Biggest mistake of my life was being honest with him. He couldn't get rid of me fast enough. Shoved me out of his house the day after graduation with a wad of cash."



He glanced over his shoulder at Leo. "And I ran straight to Cattle Valley. I haven't spoken to him since because I hate him." Neil shrugged. "Well, I love him and hate him at the same time. Is that how you feel about Randy?"

Leo shook his head and took several steps to rest a hand on Neil's shoulder. "That's how I felt right after we broke up, but I don't love him anymore. The fact that you still love Ben says something."

"It might say something, but I've learned it doesn't mean shit. I'll never forgive him for pushing me away like that. He was the only person who ever showed me an ounce of love and he threw it away."

"Is Ben gay?" Leo asked. The answer would say a lot about Ben's motivations behind his actions.

"Yeah. He was pretty open about it, so it wasn't like it was a secret. He said he'd had his fill of hiding his nature in the military."

Leo couldn't help but grin.

"You think it's funny?" Neil asked, disgust written all over his expression.

"No, but I think I understand Ben's motivations a little more now."

"Well then explain them to me."

"It's not my truth to tell. You should call him," Leo said.

"Like hell. And even if I wanted to, I doubt he's still living in Rapid City. He always seemed to hate it there."

"South Dakota? That's less than three hours from here."

Neil retrieved the tape measure from the grass and held it out. "Three or three hundred, it doesn't make much difference. I'll probably never see him again. We gonna finish this? I still need to go into town and fill up my beer cooler before this thing starts."

It was obvious Neil didn't want to talk about his past any more. Leo stretched out the metal tape and handed the end to Neil. "You know you shouldn't drink while you're judging."

Neil snorted. "Yeah? You can't enjoy chilli without an ice cold beer! Everyone knows that."

Leo rolled his eyes and consulted his booth diagram once more. "Just promise me you won't get drunk."

Neil chuckled and squatted to hold the tape against the grass. "I promise not to get drunk while I'm judging."

\* \* \* \*

"Great day," Ryan commented.

"Yep. It's a fantastic day." Sammy finished putting his check-in supplies in the box and glanced around the area. The sun had come out and the weather had warmed to a balmy fifty-eight degrees.

"Seems like everyone's enjoying themselves," Sammy remarked, scanning the crowd for Leo.

"He's over at the judges' tent," Ryan said with a chuckle.

"Speaking of, where's your crew?"

Ryan gestured towards the picnic tables. "Nate's over there with Carol. She told him if he didn't stop hovering, she was going to cram a cinnamon roll up his ass. Evidently Nate's willing to take that chance. He thinks she's going to go into labour early and have the kid in the middle of the park."

"And Rio?"

"Dishing up chilli for the masses." Ryan leant towards Sammy. "Don't tell him I said this, but he doesn't have a chance at winning. Rio's chilli is mediocre at best, but Nate and I always go on and on about it, so he thinks it's the best thing out there."

Sammy smiled. He loved the relationship the three men had. Speaking of men. "I'm gonna go find Leo."

He started down the gazebo steps and stopped dead in his tracks. Coming towards him was Butch and Zac. As far as Sammy knew, it was the first time since being released from the hospital that Zac had been out of his house.

"That's a surprise," Ryan commented from behind Sammy.

"Yeah, it is." Sammy continued down the steps.

Although Zac had stopped to talk to George, Butch continued towards Sammy. It was obvious by the man's expression he wasn't happy.

"What's going on?" Sammy asked.

"He insisted. Said he wanted to get the stares over with and out of the way. Zac figured you'd have quite the crowd and he was right," Butch explained.

"Is he up to it though? I mean, I don't think people will say anything cruel to him, but it's human nature to stare at something that's different."

"I know. I told him that very thing, but we both know Zac's got a head harder than a coconut." Butch ran his hand over his closely-cropped greying hair. "He won't admit it, but I think he's looking for ways to punish himself."

"What? Why would he do that?"

"Probably has something to do with what went on between him and Terry, but he still won't talk about it."

Sammy wondered if he should mention Jakob. Zac wasn't the only one punishing himself. Jakob was doing a damn good job of that, too, lately.

"I'm going to go say hi." Sammy gestured to the rows of booths. "Chilli's over there. I'd suggest having a drink handy. Some of them are pretty damn spicy."

"Watch your mouth. You're not too old for a bar of soap." Butch grinned.

Sammy rolled his eyes. "Yeah I am."

"No you're not, never will be in my eyes." Butch headed for the beer garden O'Brien's had set up, and Sammy made his way over to Zac. He'd seen Zac almost daily since he'd been released from the hospital and his friend's face was still hard for him to look at. It was still early in Zac's recovery, but the jagged torn flesh would never be completely fixed, not even with plastic surgery. From the side, Zac didn't even look like the man Sammy had known all his life.

"Hey." Sammy gave Zac a quick hug, interrupting the conversation with George.

"I decided I couldn't hide anymore. Besides, Dad was driving me nuts. He just stalks the house like he expects Terry to show up at any moment."

George touched Zac's arm. "I'll see you tomorrow then?"

Zac nodded. "I'll be there."

They both watched George walk away before turning back to their conversation. It was the first time Zac had really mentioned Terry since the night of the attack, or fight, or whatever it had been.

"Is he still in town?" Sammy asked.

"I don't think so, but who knows. Last I heard, Ryan stood watch while he gathered his shit from the house and saw him to his truck."

"I don't suppose you're ready to talk about it."

"Nope. What's done is done. Just wish I hadn't ended up looking like Frankenstein because of it."

Sammy started to correct Zac, but they knew each other too well to lie. "They'll fade some, even more if you follow your doctor's advice and get the plastic surgery done."

Zac shook his head and started to walk towards the beer garden. "I earned 'em. Best to just get used to no longer being the prettiest one of the two of us."

Sammy wondered what Zac meant by the comment. What had his friend done to earn what had been done to him? "Don't kid yourself. I was always the prettiest."

\* \* \* \*

Leo had just finished tallying up the results, when Sammy stepped into the tent. Other than a few glimpses, it was the first time in hours since he'd been close enough to kiss. Leo set down his clipboard.

"I'll be right over there," he told Elliott Simms.

Leo walked towards his lover and pulled him to the corner of the tent before wrapping him in his arms. "I've missed you today."

Sammy wrapped his arms around Leo's neck. "You have? How much?"

Leo tightened his hold around Sammy's waist and lifted him up for a deep kiss. He no longer worried about what might happen to end his relationship with the gorgeous man, instead he decided to relish it, roll around in it and soak in every ounce of love Sammy was willing to give.

Breaking the kiss, he stared into Sammy's bright eyes. "I love you."

Sammy's eyes rounded before filling with moisture. "Really?"

Leo nodded his head and kissed his lover again, putting every ounce of himself into each swipe of his tongue.

Sammy was the first to pull back. "I love you, too."

"I know this wasn't really the time or place to tell you that, but I couldn't hold it in any longer," Leo tried to explain.

"That's okay. You can tell me again later when you've got me all naked and pliable."

Leo laughed and kissed Sammy again. "Deal."

He set Sammy back on his feet. "Just finished adding up the scores. Would you like to accompany me to the gazebo so I can announce the winner?"

"Sure, but I already know who won. I tasted most of them earlier."

"I think the winner will surprise you," Leo said.

"No it won't." Sammy grinned.

Leo picked up the clipboard and the big gaudy crown he'd purchased before heading out of the tent with Sammy at his side. He climbed the gazebo steps and picked up the portable microphone brought in for their use.

"If everyone could gather around, we have the first ever Cattle Valley Chilli King or Queen to crown."

While he waited for the contestants and townspeople to make their way to the gazebo, Leo turned off the microphone and leant down to whisper in Sammy's ear. "Zac's here."

Sammy nodded. "I know. I talked to him earlier."

"Is he okay?"

"No, but he hasn't figured that out yet."

Leo brushed a kiss to Sammy's forehead. "Just be there for him when he does."

"No worries there. I'll always have Zac's back."

Sammy's loyalty was one of the things Leo had fallen in love with. It was a trait he was counting on to get them through the next thirty years or so.

"Okay. If everyone's ready, I'll get right to it before the chilli starts kicking in and the area is declared an environmental hazard."

The growing crowd laughed. Leo held the rhinestone embellished crown up over his head. "As you know, we decided to have only one official winner. So with that in mind, Cattle Valley's first ever Chilli King is...Reverend Casey Sharp!"

Leo glanced down at Sammy who had a smug expression on his face. "How'd you know?"

"Helloooo? Did you taste Casey's chilli? It was obvious," Sammy answered as Casey made his way towards the steps.

Leo handed the microphone to Sammy and shook Casey's hand, passing him the small cheque. "Congratulations."

Casey took the crown and set it on his head. Sammy handed the reverend the microphone.

"I'll have to buy a new crown for next year because this feels too good to just give up. I'd like to donate the prize money to the cause. Believe me. I'm going to get good mileage out of this crown." Casey chuckled and sought Hal out in the crowd. "See this? I'm the King."

"Does that make me the Queen?" Hal asked amongst laughter from the crowd.

Casey laughed into the microphone. "Oh, that's too easy."

After handing the mic and the cheque back to Leo, Casey made his way down the stairs and into the arms of his partner.

Leo addressed the crowd once more. "I hope you all enjoyed yourselves here today. I haven't received a final tally on the money raised towards the youth centre, but I've got a good feeling we've surpassed our original goal."

As the townspeople cheered the accomplishment, Leo looked out over the people he'd grown to care about. "On a more personal note, I just want to take the opportunity to thank you for welcoming me with such open arms. Although it's not perfect, Cattle Valley is the closest damn thing I've ever found. We should all be proud to live in and support this community. God bless you all and thanks for coming today."

Nate rushed up the steps before Leo could turn the microphone off. He held out his hand and Leo gave it to him.

"I'd like you all to put your hands together and show Leo, Sammy and the rest of the volunteers how much we appreciate everything they've done."

Leo was touched by the overwhelming applause generated by the residents.

Nate glanced at Leo and gave him a devilish grin. "I hope this entices you to head up the cook-off next year."

Leo chuckled. "I should've known you had an ulterior motive."

"Me? Why, I'm completely innocent," Nate said, giving the crowd his best schoolboy expression.

Raucous laughter replaced the applause. Despite Nate's silliness, Leo knew Cattle Valley couldn't ask for a better man to lead them. After all the heartache the town had suffered, Nate's wit and dedication continued to act like a balm to the still-healing residents.

Nate left the gazebo and Leo turned to Sammy. "Let's get this mess cleaned up before I drop where I stand."

\* \* \* \*

With an arm around Leo's waist, Sammy did his best to shoulder some of the man's weight. It was obvious Leo was completely worn out, but Sammy knew better than to say anything. It would be just his luck for his lover to take it as a slam against his age. Sammy knew that wasn't the case. Leo had worked his ass off, running between the judges' tent and the booths, not to mention the set-up and take-down. That much activity was enough to wear anybody out.

When they entered the TV room, they found Jakob asleep on the sofa. Leo broke away and walked over to put a hand on Jakob's arm. "Why don't you go on to bed?"

Jakob opened his eyes and shook his head. "I'm fine here for the night if you could grab me a pillow and blanket."

Sammy had a feeling Jakob was trying to give him and Leo some privacy. "You don't have to do that."

Jakob glanced at Sammy. "Yeah I do. I haven't been sleeping well. No sense in waking you guys up all night long. I'll be fine here."

"Okay, but if you change your mind, just holler." Leo left Sammy's side. "I'm going to grab a bottle of water, want one?"

"Sure."

After Leo left the room, Sammy sat in the chair beside the sofa. "Did you get a chance to talk to Zac today?"

Jakob rolled to his side to face away from Sammy. "I saw him. Didn't look like he cared to talk though, so I left him alone."

Sammy took a deep breath and went to the bunkroom. He pulled the blanket off Jakob's bed and grabbed the pillow. After covering Jakob and settling his head on the pillow, Sammy stood back and looked down at the man. Jakob wasn't asleep, but he hadn't acknowledged Sammy's presence since he'd been back in the room.

"Goodnight," Sammy whispered.

"Night," Jakob eventually replied.

Sammy walked away with a heavy heart. He wondered how long it would be before Zac and Jakob talked about whatever was making them both miserable.

Sammy followed the sound of running water back to the communal shower, stripping as he went. Before joining Leo, he watched as the water ran down his lover's body. How in heaven's name could Leo have ever been self-conscious of such a gorgeous frame?

"You joining me?" Leo asked.

"That depends. You bring the proper shower supplies with you?"

Leo pointed towards the small shelf fastened to the wall. "If those are the supplies you're talking about, then yes."

Sammy noticed the bottle of lube and the shiny corner of a condom wrapper. "Excellent."

After pulling Leo's head down for a quick kiss, Sammy dropped to his knees. He buried his face against the wet nest of hair above Leo's cock and wrapped his arms around Leo's upper thighs. He wondered if it was too early to bring up his hopes for the future.

As he began licking at the flared head of Leo's hardening cock, he thought about making love to Leo without anything between them. He sucked the crown of Leo's erection into his mouth and suckled for several moments until he heard a loud groan from the man in his arms.

Sammy pulled back and stared up at Leo. "Would it be too forward if I asked if we could get tests done?"

Several heartbeats later, Leo turned off the shower and grabbed two towels without saying a word. He passed one to Sammy before swiping at his own body.

"You're mad, aren't you?" Sammy finally had to ask.

Leo shook his head. "Not at all. It suddenly dawned on me that I don't want to do this or have this conversation in here."

Confused, Sammy finished drying himself. Naked, he picked up the clothes and shoes that littered the hall leading to the shower and followed Leo into the bunkroom. While he put his stuff away, Leo pushed their twin beds together.

"I talked to George today about bringing in a bigger bed for the two of us," Leo casually announced.

Shocked, Sammy's jaw dropped. "And what'd he say?"

"That he didn't care as long as we bought it and no one else objected. Of course he reminded me that fucking in a room full of co-workers wasn't a good idea." Leo finished the explanation off with a wide grin. "As if."



Sammy pulled down the covers on his bed and climbed in. "So you're really thinking beyond the next month or so of this thing between us?"

Leo turned off the overhead light and switched on the lamp beside the bed before joining Sammy on his mattress. "Of course I am. Why would you even ask a question like that? I thought we were on the same page with this relationship."

Sammy shrugged, suddenly feeling stupid. "We haven't really talked about it, so I guess I'm just not sure what page that is."

It was Leo's turn to look uncomfortable. "I thought we'd start building towards something permanent. Maybe eventually think about moving in together."

Sammy gave a silent sigh of relief. He straddled Leo's lap and buried his tongue in his lover's mouth as he ground his cock against Leo's erection. Breaking the kiss he braced himself against Leo's chest and grinned. "Just tell me the day, and I'll have my stuff packed and ready to go."

Leo's hands roamed down Sammy's back to his ass as he thrust his hips upward. "I want it to be good and solid, and that requires a little more foundation work first."

Sammy was jumping the gun and he knew it. He nodded his acceptance and reached for the bottle of lube. "As long as I know that's the eventual plan, I'm fine with that."

"Good." Leo held out his hand and Sammy squirted a good-sized amount of lube onto his lover's fingers.

As the pads of Leo's fingers began massaging the puckered skin around Sammy's hole he licked his lips. "Now, about the other thing you brought up."

"Getting tested," Sammy guessed.

"Right. I happen to know everyone in the department was tested in January for insurance reasons," Leo said, pushing a finger inside Sammy.

Sammy nodded. "I'm clean."

"I know that. Otherwise George would have had trouble getting our policy renewed. So am I, by the way."

"So why've we been using condoms all this time?" Sammy asked.

"Because going bareback is a cementing thing for me. I couldn't do it until I knew for sure things would work out between us." Leo added another finger to Sammy's ass.

"But you are now, right?" Sammy began moving his hips back and forth, riding Leo's hand.

"I am."

"Will you do me one favour?" Sammy asked.

"Anything," Leo answered.

"Make love to me. No one's ever truly made love to me."

Leo rolled them over onto his bed as he settled on top of Sammy. "You're wrong about that. I've made love to you for the last two weeks, maybe even three if I were being totally honest with myself."

"You've been in love with me for three weeks?" Sammy asked. He reached between them and began lubing Leo's cock.

"It took me a while to realise it, but yeah." Leo braced himself on one hand as he held his shaft by the root and slowly pushed inside.

Once he was past the initial bite of pain, Sammy opened his eyes. "I started falling for you the day you told me you'd become addicted to Pirate's Cove."

Leo chuckled. "So I have a gay soap opera to thank?"

"Guess so." Sammy spread his legs further apart, allowing Leo to enter him fully. He welcomed the thick cock with a moan while maintaining eye contact with the man he loved. "So big."

His hands smoothed down through the thick curls on Leo's chest. He cupped the beautifully sculpted pecs and squeezed. "I want a body like yours. Will you help me workout?"

Leo looked down at Sammy like he was crazy. "Your body's perfect the way it is."

Finished talking for the time being, Leo began a slow, grinding rhythm as he took Sammy's mouth in a kiss. All Sammy could think about was the thick cock sliding in and out of his ass. Leo's body had a way of doing that to Sammy. One touch from Leo and he was a goner.

Sammy's hand travelled down to the point at which he was joined with Leo. Each time Leo pulled out, Sammy slid his fingers along the bare shaft. The way his body stretched to accommodate Leo's cock amazed him. "Does it feel different to you without a condom?"

"Hell yeah. It's fantastic, but there's a downside. I'm not going to last as long without one." Leo gave Sammy a deep kiss. "You feel too damn good."

In his heart, Sammy knew he'd found the one and only man he would ever love. Leo broke their kiss and rested his cheek against Sammy's as he continued to thrust in and out.

"I love you," Leo whispered as his cock pounded into Sammy. "I just hope I have enough time left on this earth to make you understand how much."

The sentiment pushed Sammy over the edge. The warmth of his seed spread between his body and Leo's as he cried, "I'll love you forever."

Leo's lips covered Sammy's mouth, no doubt in an attempt to quiet him. Sammy didn't care. He opened to Leo's questing tongue and accepted everything Leo offered.

After several moments, Leo's body jerked as he pushed deep inside and came. Bareback wasn't something Sammy had ever experienced and he was surprised at the feeling of being filled with his lover's cum.

With Leo's larger body lying heavily on top of him, Sammy started to chuckle as he felt the seed begin to leak from his ass as Leo's cock began to soften. "Tickles."

Leo opened his eyes and regarded Sammy. "Huh?"

"My cup runneth over and it tickles," Sammy tried to explain.

Leo laughed and gave Sammy a quick kiss before climbing off the bed. "We should probably take another shower. That's the only downside to going Free Willy."

Sammy started laughing. "Oh, my God, I've never heard anyone say that."

Leo handed Sammy a towel. "There are all kinds of things to teach you then."

## Chapter Eight

With lights flashing and sirens blaring, Leo drove as fast as he could to the EZ Does It. Only five minutes earlier, he'd been sound asleep wrapped around Sammy's warm body, and now they were on their way to help a victim who had suffered a TBI—traumatic brain injury. Because of the severity of the accident, a helicopter had already been dispatched from Sheridan.

Sitting beside him, Sammy hung up his cell phone and rubbed his eyes.

"Get anything?" Leo asked.

Sammy nodded but didn't answer for several seconds. "Some of Ezra's cattle broke out of their fence and onto the road. He sent the cowboys out to round them up."

Sammy's voice faltered and Leo squeezed the steering wheel in a white-knuckled grip. There was a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach at Sammy's hesitation. The only thing he hated about working rescue in a small town was knowing the people involved.

"Neil?" Leo asked, swallowing the bile that started to rise in his throat. He tried to concentrate on the speeding ambulance in front of them.

"Yeah," Sammy finally said. "He was on his horse trying to get the cattle back across the road when a truck, with its radio blasting, rounded the corner. Neil's horse spooked and bucked him off."

Sammy reached across the seat to put a hand on Leo's thigh. "He hit his head on one of the stone fence posts on the way down. He hasn't regained consciousness."

Leo fought to remain professional. If the helicopter wasn't on scene when they arrived, he knew Jakob would need all the help he could get. "Neil's too young for this shit!"

Leo pounded his fist against the steering wheel. "He has his whole life in front of him, dammit!"

"Ezra said he doesn't have an emergency contact for him. Has he ever said anything to you about family?"

Leo shook his head. "He doesn't have any family, but there is someone I need to try and find as soon as Neil's taken care of."

They pulled up behind Ryan's Sheriff's SUV and killed the sirens, leaving the lights on. Hopefully, between the three sets of flashing lights, they'd be easy for the helicopter to spot. Leo jumped out of the rescue vehicle and ran towards the gathered crowd, stopping to help Jakob.

He heard the chopper coming and pointed upward. "Leave the gurney. They'll want to use their own."

Leo jumped the ditch and pushed his way through the cowboys. Neil's body was lying at an odd angle. "No one moved him, right?"

"Right," Jax answered, pushing the cowboys away from Neil's unconscious body.

Leo turned to yell over his shoulder as soon as he realised the helicopter was setting down in the field. "Sammy, grab the bolt cutters and get a section of that fence down so they can get the stretcher through."

Leo watched as Jakob efficiently cut the sleeve of Neil's western-style shirt and started an IV. Within seconds of touch down, the Sheridan paramedics came running with a backboard.

Because he wasn't properly trained, Leo stepped back and gave the team of professionals room to work. He found Sammy in the crowd and pulled him to the side. "I'm going to the SUV to make a few phone calls, see if I can find Neil's guardian."

Sammy nodded and gave Leo's hand a supportive squeeze.

Leo returned to his vehicle and pulled out a sheet of paper and pen before calling information. When the automated operator came on, he tried to speak as clearly as his nerves would allow. "Rapid City, South Dakota."

He was then switched to a live operator. I need the phone number for Ben Waters."

"I have a Benjamin Waters," the operator said.

"Yes. I'll try that."

"Please hold."

He was once again switched to an automated voice that gave him the phone number. It was another fifty cents on his bill to have them dial it for him, but the way he felt, he'd screw it up anyway.

Leo held his breath as the phone began to ring.

"Hello?" A deep voice answered, obviously startled to be roused from sleep at three in the morning.

"Ben Waters?" Leo asked.

"Yes."

Leo licked his lips as he stepped out of the SUV. "Do you know a Neil Peters?"

There was a momentary hesitation on the other end of the call. "Yes. Has something happened to him?"

"Yes, sir. This is Leo Burkowski, Assistant Fire Chief of the Cattle Valley, Wyoming Fire Department. I'm afraid there's been an accident, Mr. Waters. Neil hit his head on a stone fence post. We're getting ready to airlift him to Sheridan Memorial Hospital."

"Airlift? Is he..."

Leo could hear the fear in Ben's voice. "He's alive, but I think it's bad."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

The line went dead, and Leo could imagine the man jumping out of bed and frantically getting dressed, just as Leo had done only less than thirty minutes earlier. He sent up a silent prayer that he'd done the right thing by calling. If his suspicions were right, Ben Waters cared a hell of a lot more for Neil than his young friend thought.

\* \* \* \*

Sammy handed Leo a cup of coffee before sitting beside him. "Anything?"

"Nothing new," Leo mumbled.

Sammy rested his cheek against Leo's shoulder. They'd both spent too damn much time in this hospital in the last month. Although as bad as Zac's injuries were, at least they knew once they got him to the hospital he'd live. The doctors still couldn't assure them Neil would regain consciousness.

The elevator doors opened and a harried-looking older man rushed into the waiting room. Sammy noticed the man's swollen dark grey eyes and knew he must be the man Leo had been expecting.

Leo immediately stood. "Ben?"

The man stopped and nodded. "Are you the one who called me?"

"Yes, I'm Leo." Leo held out his hand. "I'm a good friend of Neil's."

"How is he?" Ben asked.

Leo gestured towards a chair. "Have a seat."

"I'd rather see Neil if you don't mind."

"I don't mind at all, but they won't let you in for another," Leo glanced at his watch, "ten minutes or so."

Sammy tried to give Ben a reassuring smile. "He hasn't regained consciousness. Dr. Flatts, Neil's surgeon, performed a decompressive craniectomy. They're hoping that removing a small section of the skull will alleviate some of the pressure on the brain caused by swelling."

Ben braced his elbows on his knees and buried his face in his hands. "Did they give you a prognosis?"

"No. They won't know much until he regains consciousness," Leo added.

"And no idea when that might be?" Ben asked.

Leo shook his head.

"How'd it happen?"

As Leo told Ben how Neil fell, Sammy couldn't help but study the man. Attractive didn't do the man justice. There was something incredibly sensual and...dangerous, about the older man, despite his apparent distress over Neil's condition. Sammy would have to ask Leo what he knew about the man.

When Leo finished, Ben stood and began pacing the waiting room. "He shouldn't have been out there in the first place."

"The cattle broke free of the fence. It was part of his job. A job that he loves, by the way," Leo said, defending Neil.

Ben stopped pacing and turned to face Leo. "I mean he shouldn't be here, in Wyoming."

"From what I hear, he didn't have much choice after you stuffed some money in his hand and shoved him out the door!" Leo yelled.

Sammy's eyes rounded. It was the first time he'd ever heard Leo raise his voice to the level it was. He watched as the vein in Leo's neck began to bulge as his anger rose.

Ben opened his mouth to say something but snapped it shut again. "It had to be done."

Leo's expression softened. "He's still in love with you."

Ben shook his head. "He told me he hated my guts the last time I saw him."

"And part of him still does. It's up to you what you choose to do about it." Leo glanced at his watch again. "They'll probably let you in to see him now."

Ben stopped in front of Leo and held out his hand. "I appreciate your call. I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever see him again. I had no idea he was living so close."

Sammy spotted Dr. Flatts standing at the nurses' station. "That man there is Neil's doctor, you should talk to him before you see Neil."

Ben nodded and jogged towards the surgeon, leaving Sammy and Leo alone once again.

Leo sat in the chair beside Sammy and wrapped an arm around him. "I can't decide if I like that guy or not."

"What's not to like? He's obviously as upset over Neil's accident as you are. That has to tell you something."

Leo returned to his feet and stretched his arms over his head. "As soon as Ben's five minutes are up, I think we should head home, grab a couple hours of sleep and a change of clothes. I have a feeling I might be camped out here for a few days."

Sammy stood and gave Leo a hug. "We might be camped out here."

"You don't have to do that. I know you're not as close to Neil as I am."

"Doesn't matter. If he's important to you, he's important to me. We're in this together from now on."

Leo rubbed circles against Sammy's back as the two of them held each other. Leo's arms around him became tighter and tighter. Sammy closed his eyes and tried to pass his strength to the man he loved.

"I need to tell you something about Randy and then I promise to never mention his name again," Leo whispered.

"Okay," Sammy replied. He wasn't sure what Leo was about to say, but he could tell by the way his lover's breathing had changed it was important.

"My dad died of a heart attack when I was in my early twenties."

"I'm sorry," Sammy said, burying his face against Leo's throat.

"That's okay, babe, it was a long time ago." Leo took several deep breaths before continuing. "Eight years ago my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had always been the strongest woman I'd ever known and she lasted almost five months after the doctors told her they'd done everything they could do for her."

Leo stopped to clear his throat. "For the last two weeks of her life, I sat at her bedside watching her waste away, and you know where Randy was?"

Sammy shook his head, too choked up to answer.



"I don't know either. Not once did he come by my mom's house to check on me, to see if I needed anything, bring me something to make sure I ate. Hell, I'd have given anything just to have him hold me during that time, but he was always busy. He told me he had to work, that he was trying to take up the slack left from the family leave I'd taken. After I found out about his infidelity, I had a good idea what he'd been doing for the two weeks I'd needed him. I think that, more than anything, killed my faith in love."

Sammy tried to dry his tears without giving away the fact that he was crying like a big ole baby. "He didn't deserve you."

Leo set Sammy far enough away to stare into his eyes. "Your willingness to sit with me until I know Neil's outcome is...huge. It tells me more about you than words ever could. I love you, Sammy. And I can't thank you enough for giving this old man another chance at life."

Sammy pulled Leo's head down for a deep kiss. "Every moment of every day, from here on out, will be my pleasure. I may have a few more years left than you do, but without your love they wouldn't mean nearly as much to me. I love you, too."

A throat cleared behind them, and Sammy broke away from Leo.

Ben stood with a broad smile on his face. "He woke up. It was only for a few moments, and he didn't seem to recognise me, but he was awake. Dr. Flatts said it was a really good sign."

Seeing the hopeful, but still scared, expression on Ben's face pulled at Sammy's heart strings. He gripped Leo's hand and gazed up into his lover's eyes. "Let's go give Ben some of our strength."

Leo bent down and kissed Sammy. "And that's another reason why I love you."

"Regardless of the reasons, I'm just happy you do."

## About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles between being a full-time mother and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find Carol either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favourite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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