



A

Loving Hart

LEILAND DALE

HEART OF THE MOUNTAIN BOOK 2

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Heart of the Mountain, Book 2

By Leiland Dale

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my cover artist Reese. Without your support for my writing, I truly don't know how long I would have kept it up. Thank you for always being there.

To Carol Lynne and Stormy Glenn. You are two very awesome people and I feel blessed to have you in my life. Thank you for your guidance, for listening to my ranting and for being there when I just want to "run something by you". You're friendship is invaluable to me.

Last but not least, to my sister. We've been through tough times together and you've always supported me and looked out for me. Especially now, you support me and want to see me succeed. Love you lots sis!

I know someday you'll find your own cowboy to sweep you off your feet.

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CHAPTER 1

Seth Hart sat behind his desk, going over the ranch's books. He hated paperwork, but knew it had to be done. Simply a necessary trade off to owning the Montana cattle ranch he loved so much. It was the one place where he felt at peace. He knew the prior owner who accepted him without questions or assumptions played a large role in the love for his home. He wanted others to feel the same peace, the same level of acceptance of 'family' regardless of their life choice or situation.

Once he inherited the ranch, he immediately converted it into a gay-friendly haven for others like him. Although each of their circumstances may differ, they all shared the same peace offered at the Mountain Hart Ranch. And he was damn proud to be a part of that.

A knock at the front door startled him. "Come in. I'm in the office."

He wondered who it could be at this time of night. Knowing their usual schedules, he knew the ranch hands were busy, either in the stables or pen.

He saw Greg, his foreman and best friend, walk towards him with a young man following close behind.

“This is my brother, Jasper. He just arrived in town.” Greg nudged the young man, who moved up to stand next to him.

Seth’s eyes widened when he finally saw Jasper. It was obvious he was the younger brother. Although he shared the same golden skin color, green eyes and dark hair as his brother, Jasper’s hair was short and spiky, his frame slightly leaner and just a tad bit smaller than Greg’s muscular six-foot size. To Seth, the subtle differences were striking. He was just breathtaking.

Seth quickly tried to pull himself together.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t mind if he stayed in one of the rooms in the bunkhouse with the ranch hands.” Greg looked at him curiously, with a glint in his eye.

Busted. “Umm...no, not at all.” Seth stood and extended his hand in greeting. His breath caught when their hands touched. “It’s nice to meet you. I’m Seth Hart, as your brother here seems to have forgotten to introduce me.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too.” Jasper smiled, a row of perfectly white teeth making an appearance.

“Oh, damn. I forgot my manners there for a minute.”

Seth was mesmerized by Jasper’s green eyes and the warmth of his hand. Nothing else existed. When Greg cleared his throat, Seth pulled back his hand as a warm flush crept up his neck and flooded his cheeks. *Double-busted.*

“I take it you’ll be staying around for awhile, then?” Seth asked the younger brother as he sat back down, trying to ignore Greg.

“Yeah, I’d like to be close to my brother,” Jasper wistfully replied as he glanced over at Greg. There was a shimmer in Greg’s eyes for a moment before he rapidly blinked it away.

Seth knew the story behind Greg’s arrival to the ranch. He knew Greg’s father went totally ballistic the day he found out Greg was gay and threw him out of the family ranch at gunpoint forcing him to leave without a word of goodbye or any belonging other than the clothes on his back and his pickup truck. He knew Greg left everything behind, including his brother. Seth wasn’t sure if having Jasper at the ranch was a good idea, but he desperately hoped his best friend’s brother would stick around for a while. He didn’t

know the details behind Jasper's arrival, but he sure as hell wanted to take the time to find out.

"Do you have a place to work yet? Your brother told me years ago he grew up on a ranch." Seth was so nervous his hands became clammy.

"No, actually. Greg was hoping there'd be some work here for me."

Seth heard the hope and uncertainty in Jasper's voice which called to his protective nature.

Greg interrupted before Jasper could continue talking. "We do need another hand around. Things have been picking up around here." Greg slapped his brother on the back. "There's plenty of work for him here."

"Yeah, that's perfect. Go get settled in and show your brother around. We can sort out the rest later." Seth pulled himself together and tried to act indifferent as he dismissed the brothers with a wave goodbye and resumed his struggle with the paperwork.

Seth waited until he heard the front door close behind them before he walked to the kitchen and looked out from the edge of the window. He watched them as they walked over to the bunkhouse, his gaze focused on Jasper's firm butt

in his well-fitted jeans. Seth tried to fight the instant attraction he felt. He knew it would end badly if he allowed himself to get involved with Jasper. It could create all kinds of complications and that was something he didn't want to deal with. He had entirely too many secrets to keep and was scared to take a chance. *Been there, done that.*

He watched them until they entered the bunkhouse, then turned away from the window and walked back into his office. Sitting behind his desk, Seth resolutely turned his attention back to the paperwork, trying to dispel the thoughts of the sexy new ranch hand from his mind.

As they walked to the bunkhouse, Jasper felt he was being watched. He could feel someone's gaze burning into his back. Just as he entered, Jasper turned and looked back to the main house. He could have sworn he saw Seth watching them from the kitchen window. While Greg led the way to a room at the far end of the passage, Jasper's mind went back to his encounter with the sexy ranch owner.

When he had approached Seth's desk, he was startled by the blue-green piercing eyes that had locked onto his, almost as if they could see inside him. The image made his

body shiver. When Seth stood up from behind the desk, the man had towered over him. At 5 foot 11, he figured Seth was well over 6 feet tall. Seth's muscular build and thick arms had his heart banging hard against his chest. He remembered the electric shock that had gone straight to his groin when their hands touched.

Jasper was pulled out of his daydreaming when they stopped at an open door and Greg touched his arm. "This is your room. Just put your stuff down for now. I'll show you around the ranch and introduce you to some of the other hands."

"Thanks." Jasper walked into the sparsely furnished room and put his bag on the bed. It had a single bed that stood against one wall with a dresser against the other and a built-in closet in one corner.

"Come on, let me show you around." Greg pulled him out of the room and threw his arm around Jasper's shoulders, giving him a quick hug before pulling away.

Greg led him around the ranch, taking him to the stables and then to the pastures where a few horses were grazing. Jasper loved the fresh smell of the air mixed with the scent of the horses. During the tour, Greg explained

what his work entailed and what was expected of him. Just knowing he would help train the horses made Jasper feel comfortable in this new place.

They leaned against the railing and watched the horses gallop around the field. He remembered when he and his brother used to do this same thing at the family ranch many years ago. Jasper turned to look at Greg. He looked peaceful. Happy. He knew his brother's partner, Devon, played a big part in that. After all, he was now at the Mountain Hart Ranch because Devon sought him out to tell him the truth behind Greg's departure from the family ranch. Jasper couldn't understand how his own father could disown Greg simply because he was gay. He couldn't believe it at first. He just couldn't imagine his father forcing Greg to leave at gunpoint. That is, until Devon told him the truth. Jasper learned firsthand the truth about his father when he too revealed he was gay. He loved his father and tried to hate his brother for leaving – and all of it was based on lies.

Now looking over at Greg, he was grateful his brother had someone who loved him so much. He deserved it. He had always been a great brother and he should have trusted

his heart rather than the lies his father told him for the last seven years. Thanks to Devon, he not only stood up to his father, but was reunited with Greg who never stopped loving him. He knew that *now*, thanks to Devon. He still couldn't believe it. He now he had his brother back in his life.

When Greg looked over at him, Jasper couldn't swallow past the knot in his throat. Jasper hugged Greg again. "I'm happy I have you back."

Greg cleared his throat, "I'm glad you're here. I missed you."

They pulled away from each other just as two guys rode up to the fence and dismounted. "Hey, guys. This here is my brother, Jasper. He'll be working with you guys." Greg turned to him and pointed at each of the men. "This is Jeremy and Miles. Don't listen to everything they tell you. They love talking shit half of the time," Greg said with a mischievous smile.

"Watch it, old man!" Miles playfully punched Greg on the arm before shaking Jasper's hand. The sprinkling of grey hair made Miles look a few years older than Greg. "Welcome to the Mountain Hart Ranch." Miles smiled. "I'm

sure you'll love it here. Just don't forget to bring the horses out to graze again at midnight."

Jasper wasn't sure if Miles was joking or if he was serious but when he looked over at Greg and saw his expression, they all burst out laughing.

Jeremy, who was both young and very good-looking, came over and shook his hand. "Welcome. It sure is going to be a lot of fun around here now," he said, grinning as he visually surveyed him from head to toe.

Greg snuck up behind Jeremy and tipped his hat forward. Jeremy quickly turned around to try and grab Greg but he wasn't quick enough. He watched as Greg jumped the fence and Jeremy took off running, his laughter ringing through the air.

Jasper watched as they playfully wrestled on the ground. "Those two are like teenagers at times," Miles said as he crossed his arms and chuckled.

"I remember when Greg and I..." Jasper's voice trailed off as an acute sadness came over him, like a stabbing pain to the heart. He watched as Greg got up from the ground, dusted off his jeans and walked towards them. They'd lost

so much time together these last few years. At least they were part of each other's lives again.

Greg jumped back over the fence and grabbed Jasper around the neck. "Come on. Let's get you settled in. You gotta get up early in the morning and tomorrow's your first day."

"See you in the morning, guys." Jasper mock saluted them before turning around and following Greg back to the bunkhouse. "They seem like nice guys."

Greg chuckled, a smile played on his lips. "Yeah, they're great guys. Once you get to know them, they'll do anything for you. We look after each other here. It's the one place you're always safe and where you don't have to pretend to be someone you're not."

Jasper stopped. *Pretend?* Jasper glanced over at the kitchen door as they passed the main house. "Is Seth also...gay?" When Greg stopped and looked at him, Jasper diverted his eyes and looked down at the ground before looking back up at Greg.

"Yes, he is." Greg frowned and looked over at the main house. "All the guys on the ranch are gay."

Hesitantly, Jasper asked, "Is he...is he with someone?"

"No." Greg looked at Jasper with a wicked smile. "Come on."

Jasper followed Greg to the bunkhouse. "Well, I guess I'll see you first thing in the morning?"

"Yeah, you know it." They hugged and held on tight to each other for a while.

"It's really great to have you here. I'm very happy you're back in my life again, Jasper." Greg's voice was rough with emotion. Jasper pulled away and looked at Greg smiling at him.

"It's great to be here," he said, giving his brother another hug before turning around and going into the bunkhouse. "See you in the morning."

Jasper walked into his new room and started unpacking the few things he had been able to pack in hurry before leaving his father's ranch. After talking to Devon by the lake at the ranch and learning the truth, he knew he couldn't stay there. Luckily, he thought about packing a few things in his duffel bag before confronting his father. When he faced him, his dad spewed profanities of *gay's going to hell*

and *his brother must have turned him into a fag*. Those words cut Jasper deeply and further cemented everything Devon had told him about his father and Greg.

He shook himself out of the memory and looked around. The bedroom was sparsely furnished but he didn't care. It was a roof over his head and a place to work and sleep. Nothing else mattered, now that he had his brother back in his life.

He grabbed his toiletries and some clothes and went to the communal bathrooms the ranch hands shared. There were fresh towels hanging over the towel rails, three hand basins and three closed-in showers. The bathroom was immaculately clean for a bunch of ranch hands—even the inside of the showers sparkled. It looked like a bathroom cleaner commercial. Jasper remembered Greg telling him that they had a woman come in every day to clean up the bunkhouse and cook.

Jasper reached into one of the showers and turned the water on to the right temperature. He jumped in the shower and let the hot water wash away the tension from his shoulders. He heard the other ranch hands walk into the bunkhouse as he dried himself off. Quickly slipping into his

boxers and t-shirt, Jasper walked out of the bathroom. On the way to his room, he ran into Jeremy.

"I'll see you in the morning," Jeremy said with a wicked smile as they crossed.

Jasper looked over his shoulder and noticed Jeremy blatantly checking him out.

Jasper smiled as he closed his bedroom door and slipped into bed.

Seth sat in the darkness at the kitchen table with a glass of juice in his hand. The earlier conversation he had overheard between Greg and Jasper replayed in his mind. He could still hear Jasper's breathy voice echoing in his mind. *"Is he...is he with someone?"*

Closing his eyes, Seth took a deep breath as he tried to will Jasper's voice from his mind. He was sexually attracted to Jasper but Seth knew that nothing could happen between them, regardless of how much he wanted it. He couldn't take the chance of his secret being exposed or of the consequences that came with it. He just couldn't relive the same situation from his past. It was just too painful. And

now, he had too much to lose with the ranch and too many people counting on him.

Seth finished his juice and left the kitchen. He walked past his office to the end of the hall where the back door opened up to the wooded area behind the main house. Seth discarded his clothes and walked out into the woods. As the moonlight cast a faint glow in the darkness, his naked body disappeared amongst the trees into the night.

CHAPTER 2

Jasper woke just before the break of dawn. He got out of bed and stretched his tired, achy muscles. He wasn't sure if his restless night was a result of leaving his house, reuniting with his brother after so many years, unfamiliar surroundings, or whatever else was mixed into this fucked up situation, but he was just plain exhausted. At that specific moment, he decided to leave all the bullshit and lies behind and finally move forward. For the last seven years, he was forced to hide his sexual preference. For the last seven years, he was told his brother didn't love him and had abandoned him and his father...all lies. He was leaving all that crap behind and moving on to start his new life here. In all honesty, it was the only place where he felt welcomed.

With renewed energy, he grabbed some clothes from the closet and headed to the bathroom. As he passed the mirror hanging on the wall, he noticed his stubble. Wanting to make a good impression, he grabbed his shaving kit on the dresser.

Most of the guys were still asleep when Jasper entered the bathroom. Jeremy was the only other ranch hand up and about at that time and was getting ready to shower.

“Morning.”

“Morning,” Jasper replied as he hung his clothes and towel over one of the empty rails against the wall and started to undress. From the corner of his eye, Jasper noticed Jeremy watching him as he stepped into the shower. A moment later Jasper heard the neighboring shower turn on.

Jasper turned his back to the shower nozzle and let the water cascade down his back and shoulders. He tilted his head back as the warm water washed over his head and down his face. With lazy ease, Jasper soaped up his wash cloth, and ran it over his neck and shoulders then down his body. Jasper rinsed his body off and stepped out of the shower.

As he reached for his towel hanging on the wall, the shower door behind him opened. Jeremy stepped out in all his naked beauty still glistening from the shower. Jasper was mesmerized by Jeremy’s magnificent body. He teasingly turned and gave him a better view of his ass. Jasper’s cock immediately reacted.

“Like what you see?” Jeremy asked with his back still turned.

Jasper diverted his eyes and dried himself off. Jeremy turned around and walked towards him, his cock half erect. Jasper quickly straightened before he could tempt himself to touch Jeremy.

“Can you hand me a towel?” Jeremy asked with a smirk on his face.

Jasper pulled the extra towel from the rail. “Here you —” When Jasper held the towel out, Jeremy grabbed his wrist and pulled him against his body. Before Jasper could protest, Jeremy’s mouth came down on his. With a groan, Jasper grabbed the back of Jeremy’s head, tilted his head slightly and slipped his tongue into Jeremy’s mouth.

Jeremy’s hands touched him everywhere. The towel around Jasper’s waist fell to the ground as Jeremy wrapped his fingers around Jasper’s hard shaft. Jasper trailed his hands down Jeremy’s back and squeezed his wet, muscled cheeks. It felt good. It had been a long time, too long, since someone touched him intimately. He needed this relief. Normally, he found himself alone at night with his own hand wrapped around his aching shaft.

Jasper didn't think he could last much longer. He could feel his balls already drawing up close to his body.

Slipping his hand between them, Jasper wrapped his fingers around Jeremy's hard cock and started stroking him. Jeremy pulled his lips away, breathing hard and trying to catch his breath. "I'm not going to last long. God, you feel good."

"Me either," Jasper panted. "Just don't stop. I'm so close."

Their labored breathing echoed through the empty bathroom. Jeremy stroked Jasper's chest then tweaked his nipples. Jasper shuddered then latched his mouth onto Jeremy's as he spilled his seed between them. He felt Jeremy's warm release splash against his torso as Jeremy groaned against his mouth.

They stood there for a few minutes just holding onto each other as they tried to catch their breath. Jeremy was the first to pull away. He smiled at Jasper as he walked back to the shower stall and grabbed the washcloth. "That was just...wow."

Jasper stood there while Jeremy cleaned him up. He couldn't believe he'd just lost it like that with someone he

was supposed to be working with. "I'm sorry. This shouldn't have happened." Jasper felt embarrassed, but he had no regrets. He'd been alone for so long, it was bound to happen sooner or later.

Jeremy held Jasper's face in his hands. "Hey, no worries. It's only a little fun." Jeremy leaned forward and gave Jasper a chaste kiss on the lips as he released him. "You know where I am if you wanna hook up again."

Jasper could feel the heat rise up his neck into his face. He turned away and quickly got dressed. "I don't normally do this kind of thing."

"Me either. I just couldn't keep my hands off you. You're so fucking tempting." Now fully dressed, Jeremy slapped Jasper's ass and walked out of the bathroom, shouting over his shoulder. "See you down in the barn."

"Wow." Jasper stood there fully dressed, stunned. He still couldn't wrap his mind around what had just happened. One moment he was drying off, and the next he was devouring Jeremy's mouth and getting off. He decided not to worry about it. It was all for fun, and besides, it felt good.

Jasper threw the wet towel in the laundry basket and grabbed his shaving kit. After getting dressed and finishing up, he went out to the barn to start his work day.

Seth needed to get some fresh air and clear his head so he decided to take a break and walk out to the stables. He could hear laughter coming from the stalls. When he approached, he saw Jeremy's arm slung over Jasper's shoulder as they laughed. Seth hated seeing Jeremy so friendly with Jasper.

"Jeremy, don't you have to be helping Miles?" Seth snapped, barely keeping his temper in check.

"Yes, boss." Jeremy looked over his shoulder at Jasper and said, "see you at lunch," with a wink and a smile before scurrying out of the stall.

Seth watched Jeremy disappear around the corner then turned to Jasper.

"We were cleaning out the stalls and we were just chatting while we worked."

"Greg is looking for you. He's waiting in the main house." Seth knew he was attracted to Jasper but he needed to accept that Jasper was entitled to do and sleep with

whoever he wanted. If he wasn't going to do anything about the attraction he felt, he had no right to be annoyed or jealous. At least that's what he kept telling himself.

He turned away and started walking back to the house. The crunching of the gravel behind him let him know Jasper was following closely behind. Seth opened the door leading into the kitchen where Greg waited. Seth leaned against the doorway to the living room and watched the brothers.

He knew the attraction he felt for Jasper could shatter the safe haven he'd created for himself. If he allowed his attraction for Jasper to grow, he knew he ran the risk of having history repeat itself. Seth stood there and watched Jasper as he remembered what happened with his ex.

"Wayne, I have something to show you." Seth lifted his head to look at Wayne. When Wayne looked at him with those love-filled eyes, Seth knew there was nothing he wouldn't do for him. He was willing to take the chance and reveal his other half to Wayne, hoping he would accept Seth regardless of the truth.

"What is it? You have a surprise for me?" Wayne asked, jumping in his seat from excitement.

"Kind of." Seth slowly got up from the chair and took Wayne's hand, leading him outside to a secluded area behind the

house. He let go of Wayne's hand and stood back, slowly removing each piece of clothing.

"What are you doing? We can't do anything out here!"

Wayne frowned at him while a smile played on his lips.

"No, we're not going to do anything." Seth let out a chuckle. "Just watch." A feeling of trepidation washed over Seth before he allowed the changed to take effect. Within moments he revealed himself to Wayne.

A gasp from Wayne drew Seth's attention. The look of horror on Wayne's face had Seth's world turning upside down. Quickly, Seth shifted back to his human form.

Wayne opened and closed his mouth barely able to speak.

"What the fuck was that? How did you...?"

Any explanation Seth could have given would have been hopeless. He could tell by the disgusted expression on Wayne's face. Before Seth had a chance to say anything, Wayne ran off.

Seth let Wayne run away. He began to rationalize and assumed Wayne just needed time to come to terms with it. Seth was certain Wayne would be back in the morning with tons of questions.

Seth visibly shivered thinking about what happened the morning after he revealed himself to Wayne. He remembered a knock at the door. When he looked out the

window, he saw the townsfolk had gathered around the front of his house with shotguns and pitchforks. He was devastated. In that moment, he knew what Wayne thought of him. He was left with no choice but to find a way to escape the town and leave everything behind.

He ran far enough away and found this ranch. When he arrived, the place was almost falling apart. Old man Henderson found him one day hiding in the barn and offered him a home. Without the blessing of having a child before his wife died, Henderson unconditionally accepted Seth as a son. When he passed away several years later, Seth inherited the ranch and converted it into a gay-friendly safe haven, for him and for other gay men without a home.

Seth shook off the sad memories, catching the last of Jasper's sentence. "I'm going to go have lunch with Jeremy."

Immediately Seth's anger rose again. There was no way he was going to let Jeremy get closer to Jasper. "Greg, why don't you take Jasper out to lunch and eat at that diner you guys like so much? Maybe Devon can show Jasper around and introduce him to some people?"

Greg looked up at Seth with a knowing smile. "That sounds like a good idea." Greg looked back at Jasper. "I'm

sure Devon won't mind showing you around town and introducing you to some people."

Jasper looked at Seth with a frown on his face. "Is that okay with you, boss?"

"Yeah, that's fine Jasper. The stables are basically clean. You can finish the last stall when you get back." Seth pushed away from the doorframe as Greg and Jasper got up from the table.

He watched them walk out the kitchen and felt his cock respond to the lustful thoughts playing in his mind as he watched Jasper's ass sashay down the hallway. Just before the door closed, Jasper turned and looked at him. *Shit! Busted.* Seth felt the blush creep up his neck and into his cheeks.

Seth quickly turned away and went to his office. Shutting the door behind him, he leaned against the door and let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding. After only one day, Jasper already had his insides tied in knots. Once again, he had to remind himself that nothing could happen between them. He couldn't take the chance of his secret being exposed and having to start over again.

Seth longed for companionship and someone to love who would love him in return...but at what price?

CHAPTER 3

Jasper sat across from Greg and Devon at the table in the diner. Jasper couldn't forget the lustful look in Seth's eyes when he caught him staring before he left the house. He was attracted to Seth. He wasn't stupid enough to deny it. He sensed it from the first moment when he met him last night. But Seth was the boss and he didn't want to jeopardize his brother's job or his own.

"What's on your mind? You look like you're miles away."

Jasper noticed the look of concern on Greg's face. He was always so protective. *Old habits die hard*. He couldn't help but smile.

Jasper squirmed in his seat. "I was just wondering...about Seth." Heat sufficed Jasper's cheeks when Greg gave him a knowing smile.

"What about him?" Greg teased.

"I don't know what his problem is." Jasper diverted his eyes away from Greg, looking around the almost empty diner. "When he came over to the stables earlier, Seth

practically bit Jeremy's head off. Then when we left the main house earlier, he looked at me...."

"He looked at you...how?" Greg smirked. Obviously his brother hadn't missed the look on Seth's face either.

"You know...like he wanted to...dammit, don't play dumb!" Jasper could feel the heat rising up his neck and into his cheeks.

Greg burst out laughing.

"Baby, stop teasing him." Devon said.

Greg suddenly became serious. "Yeah, I've noticed. Seth has been alone since I've known him. I think he's just lonely and doesn't know how to approach things."

"Like Greg said, he's been alone for so long maybe he's never been in a relationship before and doesn't know what to do. He could just be scared." Devon took Jasper's hand. "Maybe you should make the first move."

"Who says I'm interested?"

They were interrupted by the waiter bringing their lunch. "You new in town?"

"Yeah." Jasper turned his attention to the plate in front of him and started eating.

The waiter smiled. "Well, I hope you like our little town." The waiter pointed to his nametag on his left shirt pocket. "My name's Trevor. I hope to see you around again soon." With a wink Trevor sauntered off to the kitchen.

Jasper looked up and caught Greg looking at him. "What!?"

"Oh nothing." Greg just shook his head and laughed. "You're a real heart breaker. This town doesn't know what it's in for."

"I'm not like that." Jasper sat back in his seat and hung his head before looking over the diner once more. "I want more than just a quick fuck."

"I hear you." Greg wound his arm around Devon and pulled him into an embrace and a quick kiss. "I've found mine. Maybe it'll be you next?"

"We'll see."

Seth was sitting on the front porch staring off into the distance when Greg's pickup pulled up to the main house. He watched Greg stroll over and take a seat next to him.

"Nice evening out." Greg said as he looked up to the sky.

The last rays of the sun shined down on the ground with an ethereal glow. "Yes it is. How was your lunch?"

"It was good but is that really what you want to know?" Greg turned and looked at Seth. "What's going on?" The only sounds breaking through the silence of the night were the neighing of the horses and the chirping of birds.

"Nothing, just enjoying the fresh air." Seth could feel heat creeping up his neck with the obvious lie. He'd been secretly waiting to see Jasper when they arrived, even if it was only from a distance.

"Come on. I'm your best friend. Talk to me." Greg got up and leaned against the porch railing, looking down at him. "I've noticed the looks you and Jasper have been giving each other. Are you worried that I'd be pissed if you're interested in my brother?"

"No." Seth shifted in his seat. "I...I just can't. You know I don't do one night stands and I just don't see no future for us." He didn't know what else to say. No one at the ranch knew his secret, not even his best friend. *What would Greg say if he knew? Would Greg out him to everyone?*

"What do you mean you can't? Of course you can!" Greg looked at Seth. "I really don't mind if you and my

brother...you're obviously attracted to one another." In the last light of the day, Seth could see the slight blush on Greg's cheeks.

His mind was in turmoil and his body visibly started to shake. "Dammit, Greg!" Seth got up from the chair and paced up and down the porch, combing his fingers through his hair in agitation. "I just can't! There are things in my past...there are things about me that people don't know." Seth looked at Greg, his eyes pleaded for understanding.

"I know there are things about you that I don't know but I was hoping that someday you'd trust me enough to tell me. You're both strong men and I'm sure whatever it is, you can work it out." Greg walked over to him and placed his hands on Seth's shoulders. "I don't know your past but I know both you and Jasper have been through a lot and you have survived. I've seen you walking around here almost as if you're lost."

Seth looked at Greg when his voice caught. He was shocked to see tears forming in Greg's eyes. He was always so tough and never let anything get him down.

"You're my friend and it hurts to see you so lonely and lost. You've been alone since the day I met you. I want you to be happy, Seth."

Seth found himself wrapped into a quick hug. His emotions were in turmoil not knowing what to do. For the first time in his life, Seth found himself wanting to take a chance again. If Jasper was anything like Greg, he felt he'd be able to learn to trust him just as much and maybe, someday, tell him the truth.

"Thank you, Greg." Seth stood there gazing at Greg. "Where *is* Jasper by the way? I thought he was supposed to be back already? He still has some chores to do."

Greg smiled at him. "He'll be back in a bit. Devon's showing him around town and I've already had the other stuff taken care of."

Turning away, Seth sat back down on the chair with his elbows on his knees and his head resting in his hands.

"I'm going to be off and check up on things." Seth felt Greg's hand come down on his shoulder. "Whatever it is, don't let the past stop you from being happy."

Greg's hand fell away from his shoulder as Seth sat back in the chair and watched Greg walk to the stables.

He got up from the chair and walked into the house. A shopping bag lay in the middle of the kitchen table. *Why the hell not? You never know.* He grabbed it and headed into the bedroom. He removed the box from the bag and placed it in his dresser drawer.

Seth sighed and longingly stared at the drawer hoping to someday be able to share it.

“Wow. We’ve been out all day. Seth is going to be pissed.”

“Greg already made arrangements to have your chores taken care of.” Devon looked at him with his eyebrows drawn together. “What is it with you and Seth?”

Jasper felt the heat rise up his neck into his cheeks. “I don’t know. Just...when I came here and met him the first day... he just...well...took my breath away.”

“And...*you* don’t think he feels the same way?”

“I wish I knew. He runs hot and cold so I don’t know where I stand with him. He looks at me like he’s checking me out so I think he’s interested, but then earlier today,” Jasper threw his hands up in the air, “he was a totally different person.”

“Maybe Greg’s right. Seth’s been alone for so long maybe he doesn’t know what to do about it. So I guess it’s up to you to make the first move.”

The drive home in silence gave Jasper the time he needed to think. His mind was racing a million miles per hour. He was conflicted. He had finally decided to move on but he thought it was too soon to pursue a relationship. He just got Greg back into his life and started a new job. And, of course, he had to have the hots for his boss. *Seriously, could it get any worse?* At the same time, Jasper felt the way Seth pulled at his heart strings. He knew this could be something much more than mere friendship or a roll in the hay. With Jeremy, there was nothing more than a need for relief from someone who was just too sexy to refuse. But that’s it. Everything felt different with Seth. He had never felt that way and it scared the shit out of him. Trying to label what he felt scared him even more. He loved his father, or so he thought, but he realized it was all based on lies. The only person he truly loved was his brother. And still, he let his father’s lies mislead him and take that away from him for seven years. He still couldn’t get over that. He sucked at this whole love thing.

When they got to the ranch, Jasper climbed out of the pickup.

"Thanks, Devon," he said somberly as he started to walk towards the bunkhouse.

"Hey Jasper?"

"Yeah?"

"Just follow your heart."

Jasper half smiled as he walked away.

Jasper woke sometime in the early morning hours. Lying quietly in bed, he intently listened for any sound which might have woken him. Everything was silent except for horses neighing and an owl calling out in the distance. *Another restless night...great.* He got out of bed and slipped on some jeans and a t-shirt.

He made his way down the corridor and stepped outside. It was still dark, quiet, and absolutely beautiful. Back home, whenever he couldn't sleep, he found comfort with the horses. For him, they were the most uncomplicated relationships in his life. He loved them and they seemed to accept and trust him without question. It just always felt right.

As Jasper approached the stables, his attention was drawn to something in the distance. He stealthily walked over to the pen fence and tried to make out the shapes as his eyes adjusted to the darkness. The clouds moved away and let the moonlight shine through. Jasper's breath caught as a pearly white horse stood atop the furthest ridge, just past the trees. The horse glittered like a thousand diamonds in the moonlight, its mane flowed in the breeze.

He was awestruck. He had never seen such a beautiful creature. The horse looked like it sparkled in the moonlight. The horse reared up onto its hind legs, shaking its muzzle just as a drizzle of rain began to fall and disappeared into the distance. "Magnificent," he whispered to himself.

Jasper wondered if the horse was wild or from a nearby ranch. He was mesmerized as he walked back to the stables. Checking each stall, he made sure the horses were comfortable. He sat down on a pile of hay stacked in one corner and leaned back against the wall. With thoughts of the beautiful white horse, Jasper drifted off as a deep calm settled over him.

Tired from yet another restless night, Seth woke up before the crack of dawn. He stepped out onto the porch and took a deep breath. The fresh smell of hay and horses always seemed to bring him peace. It was more than he could say for his heart...it was never at peace. Although it seemed impossible to him, he still had some hope that one day, he would find someone who would accept him, unconditionally.

In the distance he saw Jeremy by the barn. It always seemed as if Jeremy was the first one up in the morning, sometimes even before him. Reaching the stables, Seth swung open the doors and shoved the wooden blocks underneath to keep them open. As he stepped into the stables, something in the corner caught his eye.

Seth stepped closer to the pile of hay in the corner and his breath caught as he watched Jasper, asleep against the wall. Even in sleep, Jasper was breathtaking. Seth's mouth went dry and his cock took notice, rising and throbbing in the confines of his jeans as he quietly approached. He leaned forward and gently placed his hand on Jasper's shoulder to wake him.

Still in a deep sleep, Jasper's arm snaked out and pulled Seth down next to him. God, how Seth wanted this but he knew this was wrong on so many levels. He couldn't take advantage of Jasper like this but...just for a moment longer. "Jasper," Seth whispered his name.

Jasper whimpered and moved closer as he draped one leg between Seth's. Seth could feel Jasper's hard shaft pressing against him. Before he could call out Jasper's name again, soft lips touched his. Seth groaned out loud when Jasper's tongue slipped between his lips. Jasper tasted like wild berries with a hint of sweetness that made Seth's head spin. He leaned into Seth's leg and thrust in the same rhythm as his tongue pushed into Seth's mouth.

Seth pulled away and shook Jasper hard. "Jasper, wake up!"

Seth watched as Jasper's eyes slowly opened and stared straight into his. A satisfied smile passed over his lips before he realized how he held onto Seth.

Squirming away, Jasper pushed at him. "Oh! Oh! I'm sorry. I don't know..."

"It's okay. I came in and found you asleep." Slowly Seth got up and looked down at Jasper. "Why are you sleeping in here anyway?"

A flush of color tinted Jasper's cheeks. "Sometimes, whenever I can't sleep, I like to come to the barn." Jasper got up from the hay and brushed a hand over his face, turning away from Seth. "It's peaceful and comforting."

He could tell Jasper was embarrassed so he thought it best to not bring up what had happened. He could still taste Jasper on his lips. The kiss felt perfect, it felt right. It scared the hell out of him. *Maybe...just maybe it could be different this time.* "I'm going to check on the horses. You go get ready, lots to do today."

"Yes, boss!"

Seth walked further into the stables towards one of the stalls when Jasper called out to him.

"I wanted to ask you, do you know if a nearby ranch is missing a horse?"

"Missing a horse? What are you talking about?"

"Early this morning when I woke up and came to the barn, I saw a beautiful white horse out on the furthest ridge just past the trees."

Seth sucked in his breath and froze. He tried to swallow passed the lump in his throat and answered Jasper hesitantly as he diverted his gaze. "No, not that I'm aware of. Sometimes we have a wild horse or two coming through here."

"Ah, okay."

Seth watched as Jasper walked back to the bunkhouse. He stood there frozen unable to move for some time.

Jasper walked out of the stables towards the bunkhouse. He didn't know why the color drained from Seth's face when he had mentioned seeing the white horse. He was a little concerned but didn't want to pry. *Had Seth seen the white horse before?* Confused and a little worried, Jasper frowned and continued on to the bunkhouse to shower and dress in fresh clothes.

CHAPTER 4

Over the next two weeks, Seth avoided Jasper like the plague. Whenever Jasper would approach him, Seth would walk away. Jasper had never been more confused by another human being in his life. He didn't know exactly *why* Seth was avoiding him. He thought it may have been because of the kiss they shared. He tried to apologize on more than one occasion but Seth just shrugged it off.

Most nights, Jasper would wake up early and walk out to the edge of the pasture hoping to see the magnificent white horse again. Sometimes, he'd stay out in the barn for hours, eager to catch a glimpse of it. In the last two weeks, he hadn't seen the horse again but he was still hopeful.

Jasper leaned against the railing. The darkness surrounded him and the slight breeze of the wind ruffled his hair. *Yet another restless night out by the barn waiting for the white horse to appear.* He chuckled. He was starting to wonder if the horse was a unicorn or some other fictitious creation of his mind.

He couldn't help but think of Seth. He wished he understood what Seth was thinking and how he felt. Maybe Devon was right. Maybe he did need to make the first move. Well, make the first move while he was awake, then maybe Seth would take it seriously. He chuckled again and shook his head. He pushed away from the railing and turned around. He was about to leave when he spotted something running through the trees. Squinting, Jasper barely made out a streak of white rushing through the trees in the distance. He kept his eyes focused on the white movement. He gasped when the magnificent beast emerged from the trees.

The horse turned and looked directly at him. Jasper didn't move. He didn't think there was any way the horse could have heard him or seen him from that distance. The horse neighed and continued to stare at him. It seemed as if it was trying to decide whether to approach him or not. As if in slow motion, the horse slowly galloped towards him. It jumped high in the air over the railing through the pasture. Jasper stood in awe, barely breathing. Never had he seen such beauty in his life.

Jasper's eyes were riveted on the horse as it approached. He noticed it had a patch of black on its chest

but it was too dark to see with great detail. The horse stopped a few feet away from the fence. Jasper slowly climbed over the railing, trying not to scare the horse away. His movement was slow and cautious as he approached the horse. It stood still, staring at him as it heavily blew air out through its nostrils.

Jasper extended his hand out towards the horse in a show of solidarity. When he was close enough, his hand softly touched the horse's nose. The horse stilled and watched him carefully. Jasper rubbed down its neck and chest. His fingers traced the outline of the black patch on its chest. Jasper continued to run his hand over the horse as he crooned. "Good boy. You're such a beautiful horse."

The horse neighed at him and stepped closer as if it understood his words. Jasper was in awe. He knew horses well enough to know that wild ones would never come close to humans. Yet this one approached him and allowed him to rub him down with his hands. He continued to stroke the horse. What caught his attention the most was the unusual color of its eyes. Those blue-green eyes seemed familiar somehow and glittered with intelligence. He had never seen a horse with that odd eye color. "Wow."

With a shake of its mane, the horse moved away and looked directly at him. Jasper swore he saw sadness in its eyes as it looked at him then turned its head to look over at the ridge.

“You want to run.” Jasper said trying to decipher its thoughts.

Stepping closer, Jasper embraced the horse and gave it a slight tap on its hind quarter. “Go. We’ll see each other again...I hope.”

The horse neighed and rose on its back legs and set off at a full run, jumping the fence. Jasper watched the horse as it disappeared into the night. How could an animal get so quickly into his heart? He knew the answer. He trusted them without question. They never lied.

Jasper turned and climbed over the fence. He realized he still had a few hours before sunrise so he headed back to the bunkhouse. The moment his head hit the pillow he fell asleep with a smile on his face as he remembered the beautiful white horse.

Seth lay in bed looking up at the ceiling as his heart pounded in his chest. He couldn’t believe what he had done

tonight. Allowing Jasper to touch him was the most stupid thing he could have ever done. When Jasper told him how beautiful his horse was, the lust inside overwhelmed him. The need to change and take Jasper at that moment forced him to quickly pull away.

Seth's cock hardened as he remembered the way Jasper touched him. Taking himself in his hand, Seth slowly starting stroking as he thought of the way Jasper's hands ran over his rump. Using the precum oozing from the slit of his cock, Seth lubed up his hard shaft and continued stroking, applying just enough pressure to produce more precum.

Remembering the way Jasper had looked at him had his balls draw up tight to his body as a white hot heat shot down his spine to his balls and up his shaft. The thought of Jasper's arms wrapped around his neck set him off and had him spewing his seed all over his stomach and a few blotches on his neck.

Seth knew he was in trouble. Not only was he falling for Jasper but he actually considered telling him the truth. He got up from the bed and walked into the bathroom. Taking the washcloth hanging over the edge of the bathtub, he soaked it under warm water and cleaned himself up.

He returned to the bedroom and climbed back into bed. It was obvious Jasper trusted animals more than he trusted people. Just maybe, there was chance for something more. Maybe...just maybe, he could take a chance and trust someone again. Seth fell asleep with thoughts of Jasper and what could be.

The next day, Seth walked out to the stables and found Jasper softly crooning to a horse as he rubbed it down. Seth cleared his throat as he approached the stall to avoid startling Jasper. "Good morning."

"Good morning," Jasper smiled as he continued to brush the horse.

"Umm...are you going into town for lunch or staying at the ranch?"

Jasper looked at him with an odd expression. "I was just planning on staying here. Why? Do you need me to do something?"

"I...I..." Seth stuttered. "I was wondering if you'd like to have lunch with me up at the main house?"

Jasper stopped brushing the horse and looked up at him. "That would be...really nice. Thank you, I'd love to."

“Okay.” Seth let out the breath he hadn’t realize he was holding and smiled. Feeling a spark of adventure, he winked at Jasper before turning around and walking out of the stables. “See you at lunch.” He called over his shoulder.

Did he just wink at me? Jasper stood frozen with a smile on his face unable to believe the total change in Seth. *What is up with him?* Jasper turned back to the horse and continued to rub him down. His heart sped up and his hands started to perspire at the thought of having lunch with Seth.

The morning went by in a blur. Jasper was on cloud nine and nothing was going to upset his day. Making his way to the bunkhouse, he got changed and put on a clean shirt and left the first two buttons undone. *Hey, why the hell not?* Grabbing the CK One from his dresser, he sprayed some in the hollow of his throat before walking out of his room and over to the main house.

The men had all left to have lunch in town for their daily afternoon ritual. They’d go into town for lunch and hope for a little piece of ass on the side. Jasper didn’t believe in sleeping with every Tom, Dick and Harry but that didn’t

mean he didn't have needs. Since that first time with Jeremy when he arrived at the ranch, rubbing each other off had become a regular occurrence when either of them needed a little relief. But he wanted something more.

His hands started to get clammy again as he approached the main house. He was nervous as hell. Jasper knocked on the kitchen door, ran his hand through his hair and opened the door when Seth called out to him. Seth sat at the kitchen table with his fingers intertwined as he fidgeted nervously. *So he wasn't the only one*, Jasper thought to himself as he walked over to the table and sat down.

"Thank you for inviting me to lunch."

Jasper stared straight at Seth. He was dressed in pale blue jeans, a checkered blue and green shirt and his hair was disheveled as if he had run his hand through it numerous times. Jasper watched as Seth got up from his chair and walked over to the stove.

"I wouldn't have asked you if I didn't want you to come." Seth removed two plates from the stove and sat down, placing one plate in front of him. "This isn't much but..."

Jasper looked down at his plate expecting something thrown together. He was rather surprised to see it was lasagna. He looked up at Seth. "You cooked this?"

"Yes." A blush crept into Seth's cheeks. "You sound surprised. Thought I couldn't cook?" Seth chuckled lightly.

"Actually, yes." Jasper couldn't believe Seth went through the trouble to make lasagna. No one had ever taken the time to make a home cooked meal for him. "Wow, I'm...surprised, that's all. You don't seem like someone who likes to cook."

Seth threw his head back and laughed. "I didn't say I liked cooking, I just said that I can cook. When you live alone you learn to do everything for yourself."

The throaty sound of Seth's laughter sent trembles through Jasper's body. This was not good...so not good. "I'm sorry if I offended you. I didn't mean to."

"Hey!" Jasper watched as Seth's hand covered his own. "You didn't offend me. I think you'd be surprised at some of the things I can do." Seth looked away from him and pulled his hand back as a blush crept up his neck and into his cheeks.

It was endearing and sweet how a tough guy like Seth could become shy and blush so easily. Jasper's mind began to wander as he thought about some of the things Seth could do...to him, in bed, on the couch.

Dammit! Seth felt like an idiot. Why did he have to go and put his foot in his mouth like that?! He could kick himself for saying that. Seth looked over at Jasper who was smiling at him rather mischievously.

"Oh, I'm sure you can do *everything*," Jasper said and winked at Seth which made his cheeks heat up all over again.

Normally he wasn't a very shy person, but there was just something about Jasper. Sure, it set his blood on fire and his heart racing, but he also felt so nervous it was difficult to focus. When Jasper arrived and stepped into the kitchen, Seth's cock instantly took notice. He had the top buttons of his shirt undone which showed off his well defined pecks. *Man, I'm in trouble.*

Seth moved his chair further under the table and pulled out the bottom of the shirt to try and hide the bulge in his jeans. Sitting this close to Jasper, he could smell his

cologne. The urge to lean over and take a huge whiff was overwhelming. His mouth went dry. "Would you like something to drink?" He asked as Jasper started to eat.

"Some pop if you have it otherwise, water would be fine. Thanks."

Seth grunted as he stood up. *How could he have forgotten the drinks?* He felt all tongue tied and nervous as if it was his first date...*ever!* Hopefully Jasper wouldn't notice the woody he was sporting.

Seth was so lost in thought he didn't hear Jasper approach from behind. He stood up straight and closed the fridge door. He almost dropped the two soda cans when Jasper's chest brushed against his back and his arms snaked around him.

His body went rigid encased in Jasper's arms. Jasper reached around Seth and took a can in each hand then whispered in his ear, "thank you" as he placed a kiss on Seth's cheek.

Seth cleared his throat. "It's my pleasure."

Jasper's arms moved away as he stepped out of the embrace and walked back to his chair and sat down. *How was he going to get through this lunch without jumping the man?*

His cock throbbed in his jeans, struggling to break through the zipper. He was sure a wet spot was starting to form in the front of his jeans. Seth returned to his seat and started eating.

After they finished lunch, Seth picked up the empty plates and walked over to the sink. He heard the chair scrape against the floor as Jasper got up. "I should probably be going. The guys will be back soon."

Seth stopped what he was doing and turned to face Jasper. "Do you have a problem with people seeing us together?"

"No, I just thought..."

"You just thought what?" Seth could feel his anger rising. "That this," he pointed to the table, then to Jasper and then himself, "was just me being nice?"

"No dammit! I just thought that you might not want people to know!"

"Well, I don't give a fuck what people think!" He dropped the plate in the sink and stalked over to Jasper. He grabbed Jasper behind the neck and hauled him in for a rough, deep kiss.

Seth nipped at Jasper's lips and ran his tongue over them asking for entry. Jasper's lips parted, their tongues teasing each other. It was a passionate frenzy neither of them could get enough of...that neither of them wanted to stop. Seth felt Jasper's hard cock press against his and moaned into his mouth. The need to take Jasper on the kitchen table was threatening to overtake him.

Seth pulled away and resting his head against Jasper's. Both breathed hard trying to settle down. "God, you drive me insane."

"The feeling is mutual." Jasper smiled and pulled away. "I need to go. Otherwise the boss won't be happy with me if the work doesn't get done."

Seth leaned back against the sink and laughed. He watched Jasper as he turned around and walked out of the house. He stood there for a few moments before finally deciding to unzip his jeans. He took his hard cock in his hand and started to stroke himself. Within seconds he threw his head back and shouted Jasper's name as he shot his seed all over the kitchen floor. Never had a kiss aroused him this much.

Completely spent, Seth zipped up his jeans and rinsed his hands. He cleaned up the floor then finished the dishes.

As he walked to this office, he thought about the moment his lips touched Jasper's. Seth knew he was a goner. He would never get enough of him.

He leaned back in his office chair, closed his eyes, and smiled as he replayed the kiss over and over again.

CHAPTER 5

The rest of the day flew by rather quick. Jasper finished bringing in the last of the horses and brushed each of them down before securing the door and calling it a night. Numerous times throughout the day, he had caught Seth stealing glances at him while they worked. He'd smile when the rush of red colored Seth's cheeks. He just couldn't get over how cute he looked when he was embarrassed. He was falling for Seth. He knew it and didn't bother denying it any further. When Seth had kissed him in the kitchen earlier that day, it felt as if his world was knocked off its axis and flipped upside down. He just couldn't stop smiling.

As Jasper walked into his room, a glitter from the dresser caught his eye. His breath caught as he looked down at the silver necklace with the diamond encrusted heart. The necklace was neatly laid on a square of black satin in a small box. He hesitantly reached out and picked up the necklace. He held it between his thumb and forefinger and watched the diamonds capture the light as the heart shape dangled in the air.

Who would give him something so beautiful? Jasper smiled when only one person immediately came to mind. *Seth...but why?* Jasper sat on the edge of the bed as he thought of Seth's possible motives. A crinkling noise beneath his feet drew his attention. He looked down and saw a piece of paper lying on the floor. Jasper picked it up and turned it over. Two simple words. Nothing more. But it was enough to ignite Jasper's temper.

Jasper palmed the necklace and the note and stormed out of his room. Never, in all his life, had he felt more like an ass than at that moment.

Seth put his hands on the edge of the desk and pulled himself out of the chair. He still felt flustered just thinking of what he did. He couldn't believe that he had taken the chance and left the necklace for Jasper. As he walked into the kitchen, the door was flung open.

Jasper stood in the doorway, his face red with anger.

"What..." Before he could continue, Jasper walked up to him, enraged.

“What is the meaning of *this*?” Jasper yelled as he held up the note. His jaw pulsated. “*I’m sorry*. Sorry for what? Sorry you kissed me?” Jasper shook with anger.

He held up the necklace in front of Seth’s face. “So you thought you could just buy me a gift and it would all be okay?” Jasper began to pace.

What? Seth was appalled that Jasper could ever think he would try to buy him. Yes, they hadn’t had the chance to get to know each other and it was mostly his fault, but he would never try to buy Jasper’s affection. Seth’s own anger began to rise.

“You think I gave you the necklace because I was sorry we kissed?” Seth stalked towards Jasper. With each forward step Seth took, Jasper took one step back until Jasper bumped against the counter and stared at him, wide-eyed. He leaned in close, gritting his teeth, mere inches from Jasper’s face. “I wrote that note because I was sorry I lost my temper earlier today *not* because I kissed you.”

Seth grabbed the back of Jasper’s head and fused their mouths together in a passionate kiss. His free hand grabbed Jasper’s ass and pulled their bodies together. Jasper’s arms wrapped around Seth’s waist and up his back, one hand still

clutching the necklace. Seth flicked the tip of his tongue over Jasper's lips and plunged deep inside when Jasper gasped.

The sweet taste of Jasper made Seth's body hot all over. Jasper slid his tongue along Seth's. Jasper took Seth's tongue between his teeth and slowly pulled. Seth shuddered at the intimacy of the kiss.

The sound of a throat clearing shocked them and they jumped apart.

Greg stood in the doorway with a huge smile on his face.

"If you guys don't want an audience," he pointed over his shoulder to the front porch where two ranch hands stood staring with huge toothy smiles, "you should at least close the door."

Jasper flushed a deep shade of red.

Seth was embarrassed as hell. *Busted by his staff and Jasper's brother. Fucking lovely.*

Greg smiled and winked at him. "Just wanted to let you know everything is done for the day, boss." Greg tipped his hat back as he turned around and closed the door behind him.

"Fuck! I'm so sorry. I...I wasn't thinking."

“Jasper, it’s okay.” Seth smiled and took Jasper’s hand. “I’m the one who should apologize. I obviously screwed up big time and I lost my tempter...again.”

Jasper took his other hand and stepped right up to Seth. “No. I jumped to conclusions. I shouldn’t have. I just...”

Seth leaned forward and gave Jasper a chaste kiss. “No need to apologize. Let’s just forget it, okay?”

Jasper nodded in agreement and smiled. Opening his hand, Jasper let the necklace hang from his fingers as he held it out to Seth. “Would you, please...”

A knot formed in Seth’s throat when he looked into Jasper’s eyes. *Do I see what I think I’m seeing in those eyes?* Jasper had stolen his heart. It was pointless to deny or even attempt to resist it anymore. If there was a chance anyone could love him for who and what he was, he knew, from what he saw in those eyes, that Jasper could be the one to love him.

His hand shook as he took the necklace from Jasper and unclipped the clasp. Stepping forward, he slipped each end around Jasper’s neck and fastened it. The heart shape nestled between Jasper’s sculptured pecks.

"Thank you...for the gift."

"It was my pleasure." Seth smiled.

Jasper gave him a swift kiss before stepping back and out of his embrace. "See you in the morning?"

"Definitely." Seth smiled as he watched Jasper walk out the door.

CHAPTER 6

Over the next month, Seth and Jasper shared an unexpected old-fashioned courtship. Jasper had no idea there was a hopeless romantic buried beneath that big cowboy others knew as Seth. They'd have candle lit dinners, moonlight walks around the ranch and even picnic lunches. Although some may think Seth was a romance novel cliché, to Jasper, it meant the world. No one had ever taken the time to make him feel so special. Seth actually took the time to get to know him. On every occasion, they would share something about themselves - their pasts, their dreams, and hopes. Jasper didn't know exactly when it happened, but he knew he fell deeply in love with Seth. There was a connection between them that he couldn't describe, but it didn't matter. He felt it every time they were near each other. It was almost as if they were meant to meet and fall in love.

At the end of each day, Seth would leave something for Jasper on his dresser. Most times, it was simply a note letting Jasper know he cared or missed him. Jasper would

anxiously finish his work and run to his room just to see if Seth left him a note that day. Jasper knew it was silly, but he didn't care. He loved the little gestures and especially enjoyed the time he was able to spend with Seth. Each night before going to bed, Jasper would head over to the main house where Seth waited, ready to kiss him goodnight.

Regardless of what people thought, Jasper wasn't a sexually reckless person. He knew people thought he was more carefree, but he didn't care. At his father's ranch, he had casually seen only one or two people. And while at Seth's ranch, he'd only sought relief with Jeremy on those occasions in the shower when they would rub each other off. Nothing more. But after that night when Greg and the other ranch hands busted him and Seth kissing, Jasper didn't want to pretend anymore. He no longer sought out Jeremy or hid how he felt about Seth. Seth was his, and he wanted everyone to know it.

Jasper lay in bed looking up at the ceiling and smiled as he thought about all the ways Seth romanced him. He loved it. He couldn't wait for the night when he and Seth would finally make love. He knew there was something Seth held back, but he didn't have a clue what it could be. Even

on those nights where they had shared things about themselves, Jasper felt Seth held some things close to his heart. He did notice Seth became extremely nervous for some reason whenever he'd mention the white horse – he just didn't know why. He thought Seth was worried about him interacting with a wild horse. He later dispelled that idea because Seth knew Jasper was great with horses. He just couldn't put his finger on it. He let it go and figured Seth would eventually tell him in his own time.

Jasper got up from bed and started getting dressed for his moonlight ritual. This was another thing Jasper looked forward to every night. Whenever Jasper woke up during the morning hours, he would walk out to the grazing pastures and look for the white horse. It was more than the simple beauty of the magnificent stallion that enthralled him. There was something special, something different about this animal. It was as if the horse understood him unlike any other. Each night, the horse would appear from behind the trees, as if it expected him. The light of the moon would shine on the horse and almost glitter. It was magical.

Jasper finished tying his shoes then stopped at the barn to get a few sugar cubes on his way to the pastures. His

steps faltered when he got close and saw the horse waiting for him.

“Hello. Waiting for me already, are you?”

Jasper jumped over the railing and threw his arms around the horse’s neck in an embrace. He placed a kiss on the crown of the horse. The horse immediately began nibbling at his shirt pocket. Jasper laughed. “Oh, you smell that? And here I thought I was going to surprise you.”

Jasper stepped back and slipped his hand into his shirt pocket and withdrew the sugar cubes. “Okay, hold your horses.”

The horse shook its head vigorously and neighed as if offended. He held out his hand to the horse. Lifting its head, Jasper once again noticed the heart shape on the horses’ chest and traced it with his finger. He looked up when it nudged his hand.

“Had enough?”

Jasper smiled when the horse neighed. Confused, he watched as the horse trotted over to the railing. He walked over and looked into its eyes.

“What is it? What are you trying to tell me?”

The horse nudged him with its head towards the railing. Realization finally hit Jasper. *He wants me to ride him.*

“Okay.”

Jasper cautiously climbed up on the rail. As he leaned forward to mount the stallion, Jasper noticed his necklace escaped from beneath his shirt. He sat atop the horse and quickly tucked the necklace back under his shirt. He was nervous as hell. This was the first time the horse had voluntarily allowed Jasper to mount him.

Jasper leaned forward and wrapped his arms around the stallion’s neck. “You’re magnificent,” he whispered close to the horse’s ear.

He held on as the stallion took off. Its mane flapped as the wind rushed passed them. Jasper held onto the horse tightly, pressing his body closer to the stallion’s back. He was scared as hell to fall off racing at such a high speed. His heart was pounding so fast he felt as if his chest would explode. Jasper was scared, but somehow, he knew the horse wouldn’t put him in danger. He moved as one with the stallion as it jumped high up into the air and over the railing on the far side of the pasture. Jasper couldn’t remember the last time he had felt so free. He held on to the stallion’s neck

and braced his legs around the horse's rump as it sped through the trees at a flat out run. It was exhilarating.

Jasper slowly relaxed his body when the horse began to slow down. The horse stopped when they reached the top of the ridge. He sat up straight and looked to his side and saw Seth's ranch from a distant bird's eye view. In the moonlight, the place seemed almost surreal. The trees surrounded the ranch along the sides and back. From this distance, the ranch looked like it came from a fairytale.

"So beautiful." High up on the ridge, the wind was colder. He shivered when the slightest breeze blew past them.

Jasper slipped off the horse and wrapped his arms around the stallion's neck in an embrace. He held onto the horse for a moment before his eyes were drawn to the heart-like patch on the stallion's chest. He released the horse as a sense of familiarity lingered in his mind.

The horse walked over to a nearby pond while Jasper stood admiring the view of the ranch. In the distance he could see the edge of town barely coming into sight. He tried to think why the stallion's patch always gave him an odd feeling.

He jumped when the horse nudged his back.

He chuckled. "Okay, let's go."

Jasper grabbed hold of the stallion's mane and hauled himself up. He leaned forward and held onto the horse's neck as it broke into a full run again. "Be careful with me," he yelled as the wind pounded his face.

The horse neighed as if in response.

When they eventually returned to the ranch, Jasper kissed the horse on the crown then placed his hands on each side of the horse's face. "Thank you," he said softly as he embraced the stallion one last time before leaving.

He walked into his room, got undressed and slipped under the covers.

He drifted off to sleep with a smile on his face as thoughts of both Seth and the white stallion played in his mind.

The stallion trotted through the trees behind the main house and stopped just outside the back door entrance. It stood there as the change began, bones crunched and a searing hot pain shoot down its spine as it shifted into

human form. The cold morning breeze that blew over his naked human form made Seth shiver.

He headed into the house and grabbed his discarded clothes from the floor just inside the back door. Seth couldn't believe he had let Jasper ride him tonight. After he drank water from the pond and nudged Jasper, Seth saw a funny look cross over Jasper's face just before he mounted him again. He noticed the same expression each time Jasper touched the heart shape on the stallion's chest. Seth knew he was taking a chance when he gave Jasper the heart shaped necklace. He secretly hoped Jasper would somehow recognize the similarities.

During the past month, Seth has slowly come to trust Jasper. It was his idea to court Jasper so they could get to know each other. Besides, he was a hopeless romantic and wanted to seduce Jasper the old-fashioned way. With each passing day, Seth would learn more and more about him. And with each date, the love he felt for his cowboy was further cemented. He knew what he felt was pure, unadulterated love unlike anything he had ever felt before. And that's exactly why he wanted to do it the old-fashioned way. He wanted Jasper to get to know *him*, the man, rather

than having everything clouded by the lust they both obviously felt for each other. He was tempted on many occasions when he saw Jasper working in the barn - and it didn't matter what the hell Jasper did, it made him look sexy as hell.

Seth walked to the bathroom and dropped the clothes into the wash basket just inside the door. He stood there in front of the mirror and remembered how tenderly Jasper ran his hands over his horse's rump and told him he was beautiful. His heart raced in his chest.

Seth smiled. *Jasper thought he was beautiful!*

It was time he came clean with Jasper. Tomorrow he'd make a romantic dinner at home and tell Jasper the final truth he had held back. All he could do was hope for the best and pray that the love Jasper felt for him was just as strong as what he felt.

CHAPTER 7

Jasper woke to the sound of screaming and shouting coming from outside. Startled, he looked over at the alarm clock then realized it was Saturday. His mind was hazy but the yelling didn't stop. *What the fuck is going on?*

He got out of the bed and quickly dressed and ran outside. Jasper froze just outside the front door of the bunkhouse when he saw his father standing in front of his pickup. His father was enraged. His face was dark red and his veins were bulging in his neck. He continued to scream and shout at Seth and Greg. *What the hell was he doing here?*

"Where is my goddamn son? Get him. Now!"

Jasper finally regained his focus and walked over to where the trio stood. He didn't hear what Seth told his father, but whatever it was, it seemed to anger his father more. Greg started to say something in response when his father spotted him approaching.

"It's about bloody time! Get your things, we're going home."

Jasper stood a few feet away from his father when he stopped. “*What?*” Jasper shook his head. “No.”

“Get your stuff boy! Don’t make me say it again. You’ve got work to do at home.”

This felt like a dream. More like a nightmare to be exact. Jasper was pissed. He couldn’t believe his father had found him and was now here *demanding* he come home. He had some nerve.

“I’m not going anywhere. *This* is my home now. You threw me off the ranch, remember? You didn’t want another faggot for a son! How the hell did you find me anyhow?”

Seth and Greg stood to the side warily watching the old man. “I have my connections. It’s not hard finding a ranch with gay cowboys in this area. Besides...” His father looked over at Greg and snarled, “you only said you were gay because of him, *that* fucking faggot!”

Seth grabbed hold of Greg, when he stormed forward to charge the old man.

Jasper’s entire body shook with anger. He felt the heat in his body rising and his head pulsating from the anger he was trying to contain inside. He caught movement from the

corner of his eye. Jeremy and another ranch hand came out of the bunkhouse. *God, this was embarrassing.*

Jasper walked over to Seth and took his face between his hands. Leaning forward, Jasper latched his lips onto Seth's and gave him a deep kiss. Jasper pulled away and turned around to face his father.

The old man was shocked, his face crimson red and contorted in disgust.

"I am a *faggot*! So you can just get in your pickup and get the fuck out of here."

His father raised his hand to hit Jasper. Seth swiftly stepped in front of him and caught the old man's hand before he had the chance to deliver the blow.

"I suggest you leave now before things get ugly." Seth snarled between his teeth at Jasper's father.

"Get your hands off me you fucking faggot!" The old man viciously pulled away and stormed back to his truck.

Jeremy shouted "gun" as he charged towards the old man. The old man turned, pointed the gun at them and yelled, "bunch of fucking faggots!"

Two quick shots rang out in the air before Jeremy reached the old man.

Seth's body slumped back against Jasper. He grabbed hold of Seth under his arms and sank to the ground with him trying to break the fall. He cast a quick glance up to see Greg clutching his shoulder as blood seeped through his shirt and over his fingers. Zach, another ranch hand, rushed over to help Greg.

Turning back to Seth, Jasper saw he was losing a lot of blood. Jasper removed his own shirt and used it to push against the bleeding wound on Seth's chest. Tears ran down Jasper's face and a raking sob escaped as he tried to staunch the flow of blood. "I'm so sorry."

Seth gave him a weak smile. "I'll be okay, baby." Jasper watched Seth's eyes begin to close.

"Come on, hold on for me...please." Jasper leaned forward and placed chaste kisses over Seth's face. "Did somebody call an ambulance!?" Jasper shouted as tears ran down his face. He was terrified. He breathing sped up and he began to panic.

"Yes, and the police too." Zach said, looking down at him. "They'll be here soon, just hold on."

Jasper heard the sirens before the emergency vehicles pulled into the ranch. He noticed his father struggling

against Jeremy's hold, shouting profanities. The EMT's rushed over to Greg and Seth, pushing Jasper out of the way. The sheriff and Deputy Stevenson got out of their cruiser and walked over to where Jeremy had his father pushed up against the hood of the pickup.

He stood there looking down at Seth's unmoving form. He couldn't stop crying. Everything he was feeling at that moment was just excruciating. He felt as if he was slipping away. *He hadn't even had the chance to tell Seth how he felt about him.* Instinctively he reached up and took hold of the heart shape pendant hanging from his neck. *God, please let him be okay.* The EMT's lifted Seth onto the gurney, and attached an IV to his arm. Seth didn't move or open his eyes. His face looked peaceful.

Jasper followed the EMT's as they pushed the gurney at a trot to the ambulance. He stopped when he saw the deputy leading his father in handcuffs to the police cruiser, the anger inside him rose again and he stormed towards his father. The moment he was close enough, Jasper lifted his arm and pulled back his fist, planting it squarely on his father's nose.

"I hope you fucking rot in hell you son of a bitch!"

The sheriff came up behind Jasper and pulled him back. "Come on now, son. Don't do this, he isn't worth it. Besides, I'll have to arrest you if you do that again."

Jasper turned around and stormed off towards the ambulance, as he tried to ignore his father yelling, "I hope he dies you fucking perverted faggot!"

Jasper continued to where the EMT's were loading Seth into the ambulance. He stepped into the ambulance briefly to place a soft kiss on Seth's lips, hoping and praying to God that his father's words wouldn't come true. He was so scared. He began to shake again. For the first time in his life, he had fallen in love. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with Seth. The thought of losing him was unbearable.

At that moment, Devon's pickup raced onto the ranch as if the hounds of hell were behind him. His truck screeched to a stop a few feet away from the ambulance. "I'll meet you guys at the hospital," Jasper told one of the EMT's before running over to Devon.

"Oh my God!" Devon rushed over to Greg as the other EMT loaded him into the second ambulance. "What happened?"

“I was shot but I’m okay, baby.” Greg smiled at Devon. “Give Jasper a ride to the hospital. He can tell you what happened, okay?”

Jasper moved closer to Devon and took his arm for much needed support. Jasper was visibly shaking and felt as if he was going to fall to the ground at any moment.

Devon looked over at Jasper.

Jasper pleaded with his eyes.

“Okay. Let’s go.”

Jasper and Devon ran over to the pickup and got in just as the ambulances took off, leaving dust in the air. Jasper leaned out the window and shouted to Jeremy and Zach, “I’ll call from the hospital.”

With a nod from the guys, Devon pulled out of the ranch and followed the ambulances to Memorial Hospital.

On the way to the hospital, Jasper relayed the events to Devon as best he could, sob shaking his body. After he finished, his mind began to ponder the ‘what if’ thoughts. The fear of losing Seth never far from his thoughts.

They arrived at the small hospital nearly frantic and greeted the on duty nurse at the reception desk.

“Hi, Narissa. We’re here to see Greg and Seth. They were brought into the emergency room a little bit ago,” Devon said.

Narissa looked up at them. “Hi, Devon. Greg is getting a couple of stitches but otherwise he’s fine. I’m so sorry to hear about what happened.” A worried look crossed over her face when she looked up Jasper. “Seth’s gone into surgery. His injuries are a bit more extensive,” she said as she got up from her desk. She placed her hand on Devon’s arm, “follow me and I’ll take you to Greg.”

“Is there somewhere I can wait to hear about Seth?” Jasper’s eyes pooled with unshed tears.

“Go down the hall and turn to your right at the end, you’ll see a sign above the doorway.” Narissa gestured towards the hall. “You can wait just outside the OR.”

Devon gave Jasper a quick hug. “He’ll be okay. Don’t worry. He’s a really strong man.” Pulling back, Devon followed Narissa as Jasper headed down the hall to the OR.

It wasn’t long before Jeremy arrived and Deputy Stevenson soon thereafter. Jeremy patted Jasper on the back and took a seat on the opposite wall. He shook the deputy’s hand before sitting down. “Thank you for coming.”

The deputy looked over at Jeremy and sat beside him in the waiting area. "Hi."

Jeremy looked up at the deputy, "Hello, Deputy Stevenson."

"Call me Carlton," the deputy said as he extended his hand to Jeremy.

"I'm Jeremy."

"I know."

A silence fell between them while they waited for news of Seth's surgery.

CHAPTER 8

Seth woke feeling groggy. His chest hurt like a son of a bitch. Grunting, he slowly opened his eyes and blinked a few times against the bright light. He looked around the room. *Fuck, this is a hospital.* The unmistakable hospital smell was nauseating. He moved his arm and grunted again as the IV lead pulled. A hand came down on his, and pushed it back to the bed.

“Are you thirsty?”

That voice. It always sent chills down his body when he heard it. Seth looked up and saw Jasper gazing at him.

Jasper’s fingers ran over his face while he held out the cup with a straw to his lips.

Seth drank some of the best tasting water he’d ever had in his life. Hell, he could probably drink anything right now and think it was Dom Pérignon.

Jasper pulled the straw away from Seth’s mouth. “Don’t drink too much. I’ll give you some more in a little while.” Jasper’s hand shook and silent tears ran down his cheeks.

Seth couldn't take his eyes off him. Jasper quietly put the cup down and dried away the tears. He had never seen anyone cry without making a noise, without a sob. "How long have I been out?"

"For a while." Jasper leaned forward, their lips meeting in a slow kiss.

Seth looked at Jasper with concern. Jasper was too quiet. "Are you okay?"

Jasper chuckled. "Sorry. I'm a wuss. I'm just glad you're awake."

"What have the doctor's said?"

"The surgery went well. They did a bunch of tests. They said your blood work was a little off, but nothing to worry about. Other than that, they said you're as healthy as a horse and you'll be fully recovered in no time."

"Um...good to know."

"What?"

Seth smiled. "When can I get out of here?"

"In a couple of days."

Seth grumbled.

Jasper laughed as the door of the room opened and the deputy and Jeremy stepped inside.

“Hey, boss. How are you feeling?”

“I feel like a thousand bulls ran over me.” Seth tried pushing himself up to sit comfortably on the bed and grunted when a pain shot through his chest.

“Here, let me help.” Jasper leaned forward, braced his arms under Seth’s and carefully lifted him into an almost sitting position.

“Mr. Hart, I need to ask you a couple of question, if you feel up to it?”

“Hmfm...” Seth looked over at Jeremy when he huffed and saw him staring at the deputy. “You’re such an ass. Can’t you see the man just woke up?”

Seth sensed some tension between them in the air. The door opened and the doctor and nurse walked into the room. “Ah, I see our patient has finally woken up. How are you feeling?”

“My chest hurts like a son of a bitch, otherwise I’m feeling good.” Seth gave a wobbly smile as the doctor checked him over and the nurse checked the IV and machines.

“Now you boys let the man get some rest.” The doctor said as he and the nurse walked out of the room.

Jeremy stood, ready to leave. "Well, boss, you don't need to worry about anything at the ranch. Greg has everything under control." Jeremy snickered. "He's just very grouchy."

"Why's he grouchy?"

"His arm's still in a sling so he's a bit pissed," he said as he chuckled.

"Good day, Mr. Hart." The deputy touched his hat as he and Jeremy left.

Jasper pulled a chair up to the bed and held Seth's hand. "Greg's fine. Don't worry about him."

"Thanks." Seth wished Jasper could easily decipher all his thoughts and questions. It would make everything so much easier.

"I'm so sorry for what happened."

Seth looked at Jasper, guilt clearly written all over Jasper's face. Seth lifted his hand and tilted Jasper's chin up so he could look right into his eyes. "Don't. Please. You have nothing to feel guilty about, baby. Come here." Seth tapped the bed next to him and slowly moved over a bit.

"I can't. You're still hurt."

"Just come here."

Jasper slowly slipped onto the bed, lying down next to him. His head rested on Seth's uninjured shoulder with his hand rested on his hip.

"I'm okay. We'll be okay. I...I..." Seth couldn't talk past the lump that formed in his throat. Seth knew, without a doubt, he loved Jasper. But he also knew that he needed to tell Jasper the truth about himself before he could tell him how he felt. He softly pressed and held his lips to Jasper's forehead and closed his eyes.

"Lay here with me for a bit. I need to feel you in my arms."

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be."

With a sigh, Seth drifted off to sleep as he held Jasper tightly in his arms.

CHAPTER 9

Jasper closed his eyes and let the water hit his face then run down his body. He loved taking a long, hot shower after a tough day at work. And the privacy of Seth's shower was just too tempting, just one of many perks of staying with Seth in the main house. Not like he had a choice in the matter. Seth insisted he stay over at the house and share his bed after being discharged from the hospital a week ago. He chuckled as he thought of the creative excuses Seth thought up to get him to stay. *They told me I couldn't lift things, they said I shouldn't walk too much, what if I fall, what if I need a kiss because I can't fall asleep* - that was his favorite excuse, and on and on he went. He smiled. As if Jasper would have said no. *Yeah, right.* Each night, they'd fall asleep in each other's arms. The nights were wonderful but the days, they just seemed to drag on forever.

He stepped out of the shower and dried off, wiped the steam off the mirror and stared at his reflection. His eyes landed on the heart shape necklace hanging from his neck. A

feeling of recognition hit him as he studied the shape. *What is it about this?*

Jasper fingered the heart shape pendant as the image of the white horse appeared in his mind. He allowed the scene to unfold as the stallion looked straight up and lifted its head. The patch of its chest came into focus. Jasper gasped. *This couldn't be. How is this possible?* He felt a chill run through his body. He remembered the odd colored stallion's eyes. He knew those eyes. He stared at his reflection in the mirror as his mind raced. *He must have wanted me to figure this out since he gave me the pendant. But why hadn't he told me the truth?*

"Are you coming to bed anytime soon?" Seth shouted from the bedroom, bringing his attention back to the moment.

"I'll be right out."

A thought went through Jasper's mind. The previous night, he had awakened during the morning hours and was alone in bed. He didn't think much of it at the time. He simply thought Seth might have gone to his office to do the dreaded paperwork. Jasper had simply turned around and

went back to sleep. This new revelation put a different spin on things. *Is this possible?*

Jasper dried his hair and pulled on his boxer shorts. He walked out of the bathroom towards the bed as he kept his face blank of emotion. He didn't have the balls to bring this up right now. It could wait until Seth was stronger.

The pieces started to fall into place. Things started to make sense. Seth's awkward reaction whenever he'd mention the stallion and why he felt Seth always held something back. Then there was the stallion. How it would act as if it understood him. How it would wait for him on those evenings when he couldn't sleep at night. How he felt when he was with the horse. He felt safe, loved. What he didn't understand was why Seth couldn't trust him with something as important as this. That hurt.

"Hey, are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"I'm okay." Jasper smiled at Seth and got into bed. He pulled the covers over both of them.

Seth pulled him closer and Jasper rested his head on Seth's uninjured shoulder. With a whisper of "Good night" and a kiss to Seth's chest, Jasper fell asleep.

Seth stood just outside the door to the kitchen observing Jasper as he made coffee and sandwiches. The moment Jasper walked out of the bathroom the previous night, he knew something wasn't right. Even now, Jasper could barely look at him. Suddenly, Seth began to panic. He felt a shiver travel through his body. His heart pounded and his head began to hurt. He wanted to tell Jasper the truth, hell, he even thought about ten different ways to tell him. Now, the fear of losing him had him second guessing himself. Maybe he shouldn't tell him. *What if he finds out I can shift and decides to leave me?*

Seth had been through this once before and it scared the shit out of him. He didn't think he would be able to handle it a second time around. He watched Jasper walk out to the porch with the sandwiches and coffee. They sat in the porch swing and looked out over the ranch as they ate.

When they were finished, Jasper got up and took their empty plates into the kitchen. "I'm just going to wash this up. We can go checkout the fence today."

"Okay." Seth sighed as he got up from the swing. He wished he knew what was bothering Jasper but he just

didn't have the courage to ask him. He sat there for a moment and thought about the different scenarios. *If he knew, then why is he still here? Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if I told him?*

He finally mustered up the strength and was about to head into the kitchen to speak to Jasper when a vehicle drove up to the main house.

He looked over his shoulder and a shiver passed through him. His body went numb. *This can't be happening.* The feeling of dread came over him. Wayne, his ex, got out from the car and approached him. The man who was responsible for his exile, the man who broke his heart so many years ago, stared him right in the face.

"Hi."

"What are you doing here?" Seth's palms were sweaty and his heart was beating so fast his chest began to hurt.

"I came to apologize." He watched as Wayne moved from foot to foot. "I fucked up big time. Even though it bothered me I shouldn't have done what I did."

Seth's anger rose. "Apologize? After all these years, you decide to come here, out of the blue and apologize? You fucked up my life! I lost everything."

The kitchen door opened. Jasper walked out and looked at Seth with questioning concern.

Seth didn't know what to say or do. He didn't know what Wayne had in mind but he knew it couldn't be good. Not based on what happened before he was forced to leave. He was angry at Wayne for finding him, for showing up on his ranch and possibly ruining everything he had taken years to build. But most of all, he was scared...terrified, actually. He didn't know what Wayne would say and he was scared shitless of Jasper's reaction to Wayne being there, possibly finding out the truth this way. *Oh my God.* He started to tremble. He didn't know if this was because of anger or fear. He felt beads of sweat begin to trickle down his back. His heart pounded against his ribs. He didn't know what to say or do.

Jasper walked up to Seth and slipped an arm around his waist. "Is everything okay?"

Seth closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of Jasper's arm around him. He needed the support, but most

importantly, he just needed Jasper. He rested his forehead on Jasper for a moment while he gathered some strength. He straightened again and looked at Wayne. Seth noticed Wayne's brows raised high in disbelief. Seth looked back at Jasper. "Yes, everything's okay. Jasper, this is Wayne, my ex."

"Pleasure to meet you." Jasper held out his hand to Wayne.

"The pleasure is all mine," Wayne responded as he shook Jasper's hand. Wayne looked back at Seth. "Does he know?"

Seth felt the color drain from his face. He felt his skin begin to get cold. He became lightheaded. *Oh my God, not like this.* He knew he didn't want to lose Jasper. He felt he'd be lost without him now. Seth had thought of so many different ways to tell him, but this wasn't one of them. He simply looked at Jasper, pleading. *Please don't hate me.* He felt tears begin to pool in his eyes.

Before he could answer Wayne's question, Jasper suddenly stood up straighter and looked at Seth. "I think I do," Jasper responded as he lifted the heart shaped necklace from under his shirt and let it drop to his chest.

Seth sucked in a breath and stared at Jasper. His heart skipped a beat as the realization dawned on him. Jasper must have figured it out the night before. *That's why he's been acting so weird all morning and last night. He knows!*

"What do you mean-"

Seth raised his hand to Wayne in a stop gesture. "Not now," he said without looking away from Jasper.

"Boss!" Zach came running up towards them.

"Greg..."

Seth turned and looked at Zach. He and Wayne were staring at each other. Seth saw the heat in Wayne's eyes as he looked at Zach.

"Zach! What is it?"

Zach shook his head as if trying to shake something off then looked at Seth. A red tint colored his face.

"Umm...Greg is looking for you in the stables." He looked at Seth when he spoke, but his eyes kept returning to Wayne. Zach was obviously embarrassed by the situation and walked back to the stable.

Seth and Jasper watched as Zach walked away but glance back at Wayne before entering the stables.

"I...I think I'll go for now."

"I'd like you to leave and not come back."

"That's not gonna happen. I'll be back," Wayne said as he looked over to the stables before looking back at Seth. "We're not done."

"I have nothing more to say to you." With renewed strength, Seth squared his shoulders and looked at Wayne. "You made your decision years ago. Now get the fuck off my ranch and don't come back!"

Wayne was obviously rattled. Whether it was Zach's sudden appearance, Seth's renewed strength or Jasper knowing Seth's secret, who knew. But something was off. Seth knew Wayne well enough to know something else was going on.

Wayne looked at Seth then at Jasper before returning to Seth. "I'll leave now, but you haven't seen the last of me."

They watched as Wayne retreated to his car.

Seth waited until Wayne drove off. He didn't know exactly what to say or how to approach the subject with Jasper. "I..umm...I need to go see what Greg wants." Seth leaned forward and kissed Jasper on the cheek. "But I think we need to talk when I get back."

Jasper nodded. Seth felt so out of his depth. He didn't know what Jasper was thinking. He just hoped things would work out and that his life wouldn't turn to shit again. He walked down the three steps of the porch and headed to the stables afraid to look back at Jasper.

After Seth finished with Greg, he left the barn and went to the main house. Even though he hadn't spent much time with Greg in the stables, he had enough time to run through so many possible scenarios regarding Jasper's reaction, he was sick to his stomach. As he approached the house, he noticed Jasper wasn't in his favorite seat on the porch. He just stood there, unable to move. He began to think of all the negative possibilities. *Fuck. Please let him be inside the house.*

Seth finally gained the strength back in his legs and slowly made his way inside. He walked from room to room looking for any sign of Jasper. Everything was exactly as he had left it earlier, nothing out of place, but Jasper was nowhere to be found. He walked down the stairs and into the kitchen. Seth grabbed a bottle of whiskey and a glass. He knew it wouldn't do much to him but he hoped it would at

least prevent his mind from racing off to the other heartbreaking scenarios.

It was obvious to Seth that Jasper didn't want anything more to do with him. It was like déjà vu. He thought things were different with Jasper. He knew he loved him and thought Jasper felt the same. He had never felt this way for anyone. He thought he had loved Wayne years ago, but it was nothing compared to what he felt for Jasper. Losing Jasper would be just painful. He knew Jasper wasn't the type of person to run into town and reveal his secret...or so he hoped.

He felt hollow inside. He clutched his chest as he felt a sharp pain pass through his body. He began to uncontrollably sob. His entire body began to shake. He just couldn't control himself. He sat at the table and poured himself one drink after the other. After about the sixth or seventh drink he could feel a nice buzz kick in. He knew he couldn't get drunk, but he'd take a buzz if that was all he could get right now. He just needed to feel a little numb from this pain. He felt as if his heart had been ripped out of him. And to him, that's exactly what had happened the moment he walked in the door and didn't find Jasper.

Seth heard the front door open then close. He looked up and saw Greg come into the kitchen. He felt the pain begin to rise again.

Greg looked at the half empty bottle on the table. "What the fuck are you doing?" Greg was scowling at him. He stepped closer and took the bottle away from Seth.

"I'm having a drink. What the fuck does it look like I'm doing?" Seth reached for the bottle but Greg pulled back to get the bottle out of Seth's reach. "Just give it back and leave me alone."

"What's gotten into you? I know you don't drink." Greg put the bottle aside and sat down. "I've never seen you like this. What's wrong, Seth?"

Seth didn't respond.

"We've been friends for years. Talk to me."

Seth just stared blankly as the half empty glass of whiskey in his hand. He ran his finger along the rim of the glass.

"Are you and Jasper fighting?"

Seth chuckled. "If only..."

"What?"

Seth laughed sarcastically. "We're not fighting...he just doesn't want to be with me."

"What!?" Greg shook his head. "I've seen you guys together and there's no way he doesn't want to be with you. He's in love with you."

"Right." Seth lifted his hands and waved it around. "Then where the hell is he?"

"Seth, talk to me, please. This doesn't make sense. I can see there's something you're not telling me." Greg frowned as he looked over at Seth.

Seth looked at Greg and saw genuine concern in his eyes. He was a friend, his best friend, but he just couldn't tell him. He would be completely alone if he alienated him as well. *What would Greg do if he knew the truth?*

"Seth?"

"Nothing...just forget it. I'm going to bed for a while." Seth pushed himself up from the table and started walking towards the stairs. He shouted to Greg over his shoulder. "Just close the door behind you!"

Jasper knew he should have waited for Seth but he just couldn't. He needed to be on his own to think things

through. The revelation that Seth could possibly be the beautiful white stallion had his mind racing over the events of the past few weeks. He wasn't completely sure if this was what Wayne and Seth meant when Wayne asked if 'he knew', but all the signs were there.

He had walked to the top of the ridge and sat in the same spot the stallion had taken him that first time during their ride. Jasper sat there and thought about everything that had happened since arriving at the Mountain Hart Ranch. In a short period of time, his life had completely changed. He was reunited with his brother after many years, and he had finally found a place that truly felt like home where he could be himself. But most importantly, he found love. It was the first time he had truly given his heart to someone. Funny how he had always felt as if something was missing but didn't know what it was until he came to the ranch.

The moment he saw Seth sitting behind the desk, he knew. He was immediately drawn to him since that first night, and each night since then just proved their connection even more. He knew what he felt for Seth. And deep down, he knew how Seth felt even though he had never said the words. Jasper could tell with each look Seth gave him and in

all the things Seth did. He loved Seth. Unmistakably, indisputably, unconditionally. Nothing else mattered to him other than being with the man he loved.

Jasper hadn't realized how long he had been away until the sun began to set. When he walked into the kitchen, he noticed the half empty bottle of whiskey sitting on the counter. He knew something was wrong. He headed for the stairs towards Seth's bedroom.

Jasper opened the bedroom door and looked at the gorgeous man lying fast asleep on the bed. He closed the door behind him and walked further into the room. Just looking at Seth, he knew. What he was, didn't change how he felt. In fact, he loved him even more because of it. The two most precious beings he loved in life, were one.

Jasper carefully slid into bed trying not wake Seth. Leaning down over him, Jasper bent forward and kissed him. He could taste the whiskey mixed with the unique musky taste he knew was Seth.

Seth moaned and opened for Jasper immediately.

CHAPTER 10

Seth woke with the taste of Jasper on his lips. He opened his eyes to find Jasper kissing him. Without thinking, he lifted his hands and wrapped his arms around him. Jasper pulled away and looked down at him.

"I'm sorry. I should have told you I was going for a walk. I just..." Jasper frowned down at him. "I just needed to be alone and think for a while."

"And..." Seth felt the terror rise up inside him. He felt his heart skip a beat. "What did you decide?"

Jasper threw his head back and laughed as he slowly slid from the bed. Seth watched as Jasper started to undress. He gazed at Jasper as he slowly and seductively began to remove each piece of clothing to reveal his naked flesh. Seth couldn't tear his eyes away from the gorgeous man standing before him. Throwing the covers off, he got out of bed and approached Jasper.

With every step Seth took, Jasper's cock seemed to get harder and harder. By the time he reached him, Jasper's cock was rock hard and straining against his stomach as precum

oozed from his slit. Seth stopped in front of Jasper and slid his thumbs inside his boxer shorts and shoved them down to the floor while watching Jasper's face. A moan escaped from Jasper's lips when Seth's boxer shorts fell to the floor.

He stepped forward and brought his hand up behind Jasper's neck and leaned forward, capturing Jasper's mouth. Their tongues collided, tasting and teasing each other. The kiss was passionate, demanding. Seth pulled away when he started getting dizzy from the lack of air. He just couldn't get enough of Jasper. He looked into Jasper's eyes and the desire he saw looking back at him made his knees weak.

Jasper's hand ran over Seth's body as he dropped down on his knees in front of Seth. He watched as Jasper leaned forward and kissed the mushroom head of his cock and started running the tip of his tongue up and down the length, lapping at the precum running down his shaft. Jasper nudged his leg with his elbow. Seth obliged and spread his legs further apart.

"Oh, baby. That feels so good." Seth visibly shivered when Jasper took one of balls into his mouth, nipping at the delicate skin. He held onto both of Jasper's shoulders when

he started sucking and teasing them with his tongue. It felt so good to be touched. Seth's emotions went into overdrive.

Seth looked down at him when Jasper's mouth left his balls. His hand wrapped around Seth's hard shaft. His tongue darted out and licked Seth's cock from root to tip then swirled around the sensitive head. Jasper stared back up at Seth before taking his hard cock all the way into his mouth, his nose rubbing in Seth's public hair.

"Oh..Oh...Jasper!"

"Hmm..." Seth knew he wouldn't last long if Jasper kept sucking him. Seeing his cock disappear between Jasper's lips and feeling the hot cavern surrounding him, had Seth getting hotter and his balls drawing up. Jasper wrapped his arms around Seth to steady him and pulled off his cock, laughing.

"You're going to kill me." Seth panted, trying to catch his breath. The feeling was more intense than he had ever experienced, all because it was Jasper doing it.

"Oh, that's a problem because I want you around for a very, very long time." Jasper seductively smiled at him as he slowly stood up.

Seth couldn't help but smile back. He just couldn't believe how happy he was at that very moment. "You bet your sweet ass I'm going to be around."

"You think my ass is sweet?"

"I don't know." Seth pretended to think for a moment. "But I'm about to find out." He pushed Jasper onto the bed and on his stomach. Seth put his hands on Jasper's butt cheeks and pulled them apart to reveal his puckered hole. When Jasper looked over his shoulder at him, Seth dove in and started lapping at the hole, running the tip of his tongue around it in circles.

Jasper squirmed under him, pushing back against him when Seth's tongue slipped into him. He put one hand on Jasper's hip and slipped the other hand beneath him, taking Jasper's hard shaft into his hand.

"Yes! That feels so..."

Seth didn't know how much longer he could last. He was literally shaking with lust. He wanted into that tight hole surrounding his tongue. At that moment, another thought came to him. "Dammit!"

"What is it?" Jasper stopped squirming as Seth sat back on his haunches as a worried look crossed his face.

Seth sighed. "I don't have stuff...but it's okay." He smiled at Jasper. "Turn around and lay on your back."

A wicked look came over Jasper's face. Seth watched as he leaned over to the top drawer of the bedside table and removed a box of condoms and some lube.

Seth's jaw dropped open in surprise.

"I...I didn't know if...you know. This was a...just in case kinda thing."

Seth's nostrils flared from the desire coursing through his body. He slowly bent down over Jasper, placing a hand on each side of his face. "Oh Jasper, you have no idea how much I want inside you."

"Maybe..." Jasper looked at him shyly as a blush colored his cheeks, "maybe we can get tested?"

"Jasper," Seth groaned and closed his eyes for a minute to pull himself together before he lost it, "I don't need to be tested. I can't give you anything."

Jasper looked at him with a confused look on his face.

"Because of....you know....I can't get any sexual diseases and well, I can't give you any either."

Seth watched Jasper's reaction and waited for the words to sink in. A slow smile spread over Jasper's face. He

took the condoms lying on the bed next to him and threw it across the room then wrapped his arms around Seth.

Seth entire body started to shake.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh baby, nothing’s wrong. You’re just....it’s been a long time and you...I’m going to lose it if I don’t get inside you soon.”

Jasper’s hands ran over his body in what was supposed to be a soothing way. But it just seemed to turn him on even more. Seth sat up again and tried to calm himself down. Precum leaked from the slit of his cock, dribbling a constant flow onto Jasper’s stomach.

Seth followed Jasper’s hand with his eyes as he ran two fingers through Seth’s precum pooling at his navel. Jasper brought the two soaked fingers up to his mouth and licked them as he stared at Seth.

Seth groaned out loud and grabbed the lube lying next to Jasper on the bed and flipped the lid.

Jasper smiled, spread his legs wide and pulled them up to his chest as Seth squeezed some lube onto his fingers.

He didn’t want to hurt Jasper. He knew he was much larger than average so he lubed his fingers thoroughly and

spread the lube around Jasper's tight hole. He slipped one digit in just past the ring of muscles. "Breathe for me baby. I'll be gentle, I promise."

When Jasper's muscles relaxed around his finger, Seth slowly pushed his finger deeper inside. Jasper lay there panting, the ring of muscles surrounding Seth's finger tightened with need. "More...please."

Seth squirted more lube onto his fingers before pushing two fingers inside Jasper. It wasn't long before a third finger slipped inside and when Seth's fingers grazed Jasper's gland, his hips lifted off the bed and shouted. "Seth! Please...now."

With Jasper so wanton, Seth didn't know if he'd even get inside him before coming but he was sure as hell going to try.

He slipped his fingers from Jasper's body and moved between his legs. Jasper instinctively wrapped them around his waist. Seth spread lube onto his hard, throbbing shaft and slowly pushed through the tight ring of muscles until he was completely seated inside Jasper. "Mine," Seth growled in Jasper's ear.

Jasper's head fell back, his mouth hung open and his eyes rolled back.

"Oh God...did I hurt you?" Seth tensed and started to pull out when Jasper's legs tightened around him.

"No! No, you didn't hurt me." Jasper panted and smiled up at him. "You're just so fucking huge." Jasper's hand came up behind his neck and pulled Seth's head down for a bone melting kiss.

Seth pulled back and looked down at Jasper. His lips were swollen from the kiss. "Are you ok?"

"You feel so perfect inside me."

"Are you sure? God, I don't want to hurt you."

"I'm sure, love. Now move or I'm going to kick your ass."

Seth was enormous but he felt perfect inside him. Jasper wasn't sure if he'd be able to take all of Seth, but the moment he was completely seated, Jasper was overcome with emotion. The feeling of perfection and peace that came over him was overwhelming. In that moment he knew they were meant to be together.

Jasper pushed back towards Seth, silently encouraging him to move. "Please...I need you."

"You feel so tight. I don't know how long I'll be able to last." Above him, Seth's nostrils flared and he looked as if he was on the brink of losing control. Slowly Seth started to pull out almost all the way and push back into him.

Jasper bucked when the head of Seth's cock grazed his gland. "Yes! Oh...yes...Seth...so good." The sensation of having Seth fill him, buried deep inside made Jasper delirious. "More...please...don't stop."

His words seemed to encourage Seth to move faster. Soon, Seth was pounding into him with such force, he could hear and feel Seth's balls slapping against his ass with each thrust. Jasper was sure he wouldn't be able to sit for a month, but he didn't care. Jasper felt his balls tighten and draw closer to his body.

"Seth...I'm so close...I'm gonna...Oh!" Jasper panted as he tried to catch his breath.

"Yes, baby. Let it go. Come for me."

Seth latched onto Jasper's mouth and thrust deep inside him one more time as Jasper lost it and shot his cum between their bodies. He could feel Seth's cock swelling and

throbbing deep inside him as Seth spilled his seed, the heat filling him up.

Jasper turned with Seth as he fell to the bed beside him, their bodies still joined with Seth deep inside. They lay there panting and looking at each other. Jasper stroked his fingers over Seth's face as Seth pulled him closer.

"Jasper..."

Jasper looked at Seth. He could see tears pooling in Seth's eyes.

"You're beautiful, so perfect."

"Oh, baby." He wiped away a stray tear from Seth's cheek and leaned forward to kiss Seth. It was sweet and sensual...and perfect. Jasper felt a sense of peace wash over him in Seth's arms. He knew he was exactly where he needed to be.

They pulled apart and Seth's shaft slipped from him. Jasper groaned at the loss and the feeling of emptiness. He watched as Seth slid from the bed and walked to the bathroom. He could hear the water run then turn off. Seth walked back into the room with a washcloth and leaned forward, giving Jasper a quick kiss before wiping the drying cum from his body.

Seth slid back onto the bed and dropped the washcloth on the floor. Jasper moved closer and laid his head on Seth's chest as he pulled the comforter over them. He fell asleep with a soft kiss to his temple and Seth's arms curled around him.

CHAPTER 11

Jasper woke when he felt Seth move next to him. He slowly opened his eyes and looked at Seth, smiling at him. "And what is that grin for?"

The room was bathed in darkness with only the moonlight lighting the room. Seth's smile faltered before he started talking. "Would you come with me? I...I want to share this with you."

"Okay." Jasper climbed over Seth and out of bed and held out his hand. Jasper could see fear clearly written on Seth's face. "What is it, love? What's wrong?" Jasper stepped back up to the bed and sat down facing him. "I can see something is bothering you."

"I don't want to lose you." Seth looked everywhere but at him. Jasper sensed that there was more to Seth's fear than just losing him. He had already accepted the fact that Seth was the white stallion. He might not understand it but he was certain Seth would answer his questions if he asked.

"You won't lose me. I already know and I accept it. I might not understand yet but...in time I will." Jasper

reached out and turned Seth to look at him. "You. Won't. Lose. Me."

Jasper was caught unawares by the tears that pooled in Seth's eyes and ran down his cheeks like tiny rivers. To Jasper it seemed like a dam was breaking with water just streaming over the banks of a river inside Seth. Jasper sat there and listened to Seth when he started talking. The words kept coming and all he could do was hold Seth's hand.

In stunned silence, Jasper listened to Seth's past and what his ex did to him and how he had to run away from home to save his own life. Jasper's heart almost broke into a million pieces when Seth told him he'd never opened up to another person. The closest thing to a relationship he had was his friendship with Greg.

"Shhh....it's okay." Jasper pulled a sobbing Seth into his arms. "I'm so sorry that happened to you." Tears prickled behind Jasper's eyelids. Pulling away, Jasper wiped the tears from Seth's cheeks and stood up from the bed and held out his hand to Seth. "Come. Show me."

Hesitantly, Seth took his hand and led him down the stairs, down the corridor to the back door. Before Seth

opened the door, he turned around and looked at Jasper.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes I am.” Jasper leaned forward and kissed Seth, teasing his lips with the tip of his tongue. When he pulled away, Jasper smiled at Seth. He looked at Seth, the corners of his mouth twitching.

“Wait here.” Seth turned around and ran back up the stairs. A few moments later he returned with a blanket.

“Here.” Seth wrapped the blanket around Jasper and gave him a quick peck on the lips and opened the door, stepping out into the night.

They walked down the back stairs and walked to the row of trees. Seth turned and faced him. “Stand here and just watch.” Jasper nodded as Seth walked a few feet away.

Jasper watched as flurries of sparkles appeared around Seth’s body. Jasper gasped. In an instant, Seth arched his back, his skin sparkled like glitter, and the horse appeared in his place. Slowly Jasper stepped forward towards the white stallion. A feeling of pride rose in him. This beautiful white stallion was his Seth. *How could he not love them both?*

He stepped closer. Jasper wrapped his arms around the stallion's neck in an embrace as the blanket fell to the ground. He closed his eyes as he nuzzled its neck and whispered, "you're so beautiful, my love."

The horse neighed and nudged him.

Jasper opened his eyes and saw the flurries of sparkles. Before he could step away, he blinked his eyes and it was over. Jasper stood with his arms wrapped around Seth's neck. Seth leaned forward and kissed him, their tongues tasting and dueling. Jasper felt his throat clog up with emotion and pulled away with a smile.

He watched Seth bend down and pick up the blanket, throwing it over his shoulders again. He leaned his head against Jasper's and said, "thank you."

Jasper squealed when Seth picked him up in his arms and carried him inside the house and up to the bedroom. "Hey! I can walk you know." Jasper laughed.

"I know but I've always wanted to do that."

Inside the bedroom Seth put Jasper on his feet again and removed the blanket from him, folding it neatly and placing it on the chair in the corner. Jasper turned to get into

bed when he noticed a postcard size note leaning against the bedside lamp with his name written on it. He reached over and picked it up as he looked over his shoulder at Seth.

Seth watched him with a nervous look on his face. Jasper turned the card around and read the two lines.

Since the day you wore my necklace, you've had my heart.

I love you. Always.

He felt the pressure building up behind his eyes as stray tears slipped down his cheeks. Jasper looked up and walked over to Seth, wrapping his arms around his neck.

"I love you...with all my heart, always." Jasper held Seth tight to him.

"I love you so very much." Seth placed a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you for coming into my life. I feel so blessed to have you."

Jasper stepped back and smiled at Seth. He took his hand and led him back to the bed. Placing the note back against the bed lamp, he slipped into bed and kept the covers open for Seth.

Seth came to bed and pulled Jasper on top of him.

Jasper settled in next to Seth and rested his head on his chest. "I'm blessed to have you, too."

Seth looked down at the man in his arms. He was so afraid Jasper would freak out and run away when he shifted. He was surprised when Jasper embraced him instead. Finally, he had found someone who knew him and loved him for who and what he was.

Seth turned off the bedside lamp and kissed Jasper's temple.

"Goodnight, my love." Leaning forward he whispered into Jasper's ear. "You...me...forever. I love you."

"I love you too, my stallion."

♥ THE END ♥

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