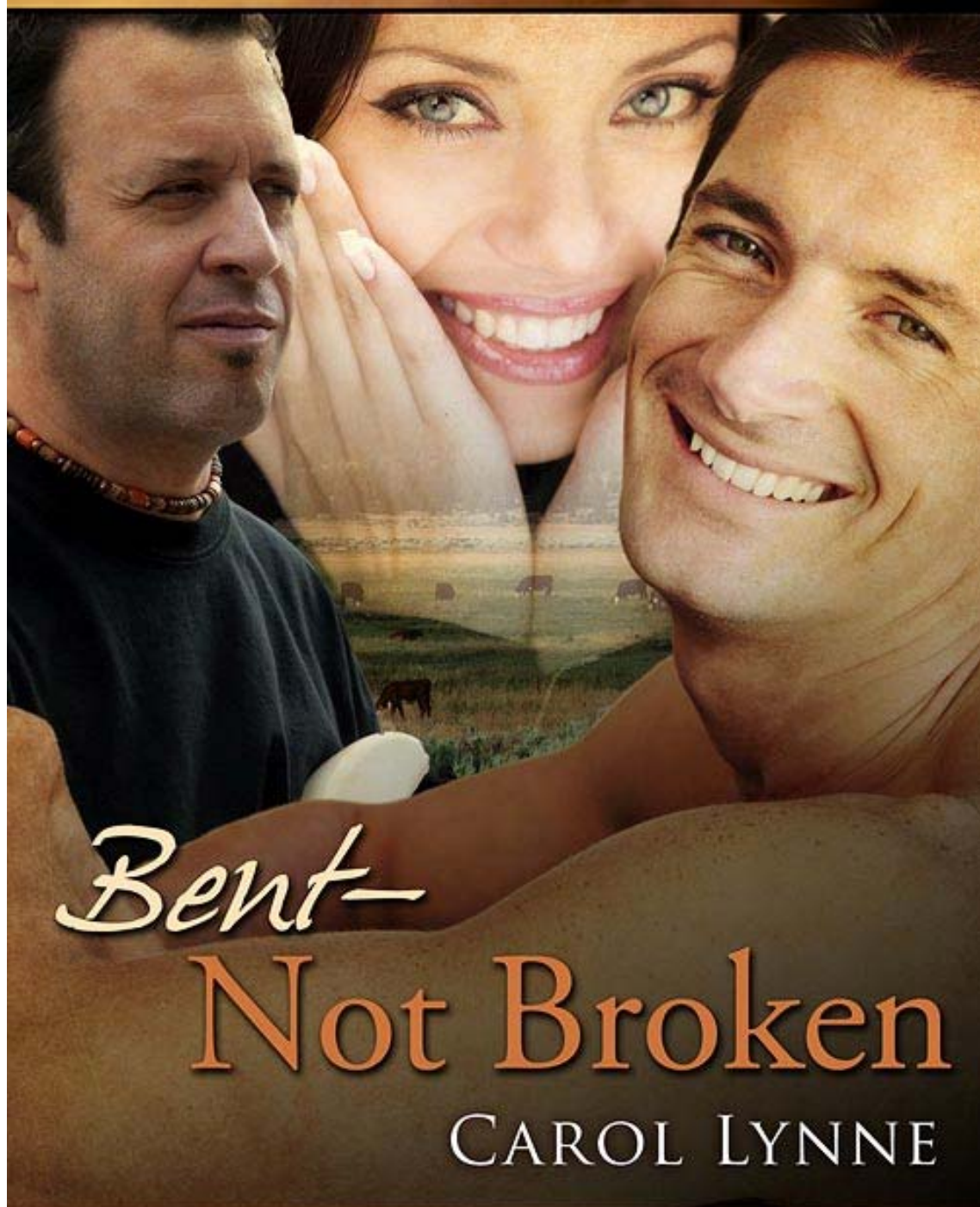




CATTLE
VALLEY



Bent—

Not Broken

CAROL LYNNE

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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Bent – Not Broken

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

Cattle Valley

BENT - NOT BROKEN

Carol Lynne

Dedication

For my new buddy, T.A. Chase. Your kindness and friendship means the world to me.

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CK One: Calvin Klein

Chapter One

Carol opened her eyes to the sight of George Manning's gorgeous face asleep beside her. How many times had she dreamt of waking with George? The beeping of the heart monitor on the opposite side of the bed brought her back to reality.

She remembered waking several days earlier to see George's face hovering over her bed, his hazel eyes filled with concern. What had prompted such emotion in the man? Although they'd spent a great deal of time together in the previous months, George hadn't even made a pass at her, much to her disappointment.

She lifted her hand and ran her fingers through his short, dark brown hair. George's eyes fluttered several times before opening.

"Hey," Carol said. Even though it had been several days since her surgery, there was still a slight rasp to it.

"How're you feeling?" George asked.

Despite being awake, George continued to allow Carol's fingers to stroke and pet.

"Probably more rested than you. Why don't you go home and get some sleep."

George shook his head but not enough to dislodge Carol's hand. "I'm okay. At least I'm in here with you. Mario slept in the lobby for two days."

"Have you gone home at all?" she asked as she traced one of his eyebrows with a fingertip. Although Sheridan was only forty-five minutes from home, Carol knew the man hadn't spent one night in his own bed since the accident.

"I've been running back to Cattle Valley every day to shower and change. I don't know that they'd let me stay with you if I smell."

Carol started to laugh and grabbed her stomach.

"Should I get the nurse?" George rose to his feet and offered her a drink of water

Carol shook her head and sipped at the water. "Just don't make me laugh anymore."

George took Carol's hand in his and leant down to place a kiss on her forehead. "I'm sorry."

Carol grinned. "Don't be silly. You didn't do anything on purpose."

She stared into his eyes. There was so much she wanted to ask him. His actions since the collapse confused her. "Aren't you supposed to be at the fire station?"

George's Adam's apple bobbed several times before he answered. "I don't want to be anywhere but with you."

Narrowing her eyes, she reached for George's hand. "What's going on?"

George resumed his seat and rested his cheek on their entwined hands. "I'm in love with you."

Shocked, Carol gasped. "What? You can't be."

Leaning his arms on the bed, George leant towards her. "I can't begin to tell you how many times I've wanted to kiss you. To just take you to my bed and keep you there, but certain things always stopped me."

"Like Trick?"

George lowered his gaze. "Yeah, like Trick. It wasn't until the collapse that I realised I was wasting my time with him."

Carol shook her head. She could see the mixed emotions in George's eyes. "You've been with him a long time."

"Nineteen years, too damn long to be shoved into the role of secret lover. I'm tired of that. I want a real life, with a real partner."

With her head swimming, Carol released George's hand. She may have only had one serious relationship in her life, but it had ended with her being alone. It had been years since she'd moved to Cattle Valley with Rodney and Lyle. At the time, she'd thought they would finally be able to openly be a family. That had all changed when her men decided they made a better twosome. Rodney and Lyle had taken off to Seattle without a backward glance.

No. She couldn't travel down that road again. She shook her head. "You still love him. I can't..."

George stopped her with a soft kiss. Their lips lingered in the chaste kiss until he eventually pulled back. "Give me a chance."

Her immediate reaction was to tell him thanks, but no thanks, but her heart stopped her. How many times had Quade teased her about staying in Cattle Valley? In a town where most of the men were either gay or bi. She seemed to be tempting fate. Carol countered that she wasn't, she was ensuring she never fell in love again.

With the feel of George's kiss still fresh in her mind, she wondered whether she could ever again trust a man with her heart. Trick was the wildcard. Although she'd met the handsome man, she'd never thought of him as anything other than George's lover.

"What about Trick?" she asked again.

"I told him I was done."

"Give me some time to think about it." She wouldn't tell George, but what she really wanted was to see if things were really over with the country music singer.

After everything she'd been through, Carol knew her heart couldn't take another betrayal. She had no doubt George would do everything in his power to keep his word regarding Trick, but the heart didn't always agree with the mind.

"Please don't shut me out," George begged.

"I'm not, but I learned the hard way that what someone says and what they do aren't always the same."

"Will you let me stay?"

"Of course. You're my dearest friend next to Quade. How could I do without you?"

"Hey. I thought I was your dearest friend." Nate said as he stepped into the room.

Even feeling like shit, Carol felt well enough to give Nate a hard time. "Biggest pain in my ass, you mean," she said in her typical dry tone.

Nate grinned and bent to give her a kiss on the forehead. "You must be feeling better."

Carol gave Nate a mock growl. "Why're you so chipper? Are you that happy to see me flat on my back?"

Chuckling, George stood and gave Carol another brief kiss. "I'm gonna run home and shower. Okay if I come back?"

"Only if you bring me some tacos. I may be in here, but I haven't forgotten what day it is."

George shook his head. "I don't think you're up to Jay's spicy taco meat yet. But as soon as they spring you from this place, it's a date."

Carol felt the blush creeping up her cheeks. "You've got yourself a deal."

As soon as George left the room, Nate started in. "What the hell was that about?" he asked as he sat in the chair George had vacated.

"None of your beeswax, Mr. Nosy Ass."

Nate clutched at his heart. "I'm hurt."

Carol grinned. Despite the constant ribbing between the two of them, Nate was an awesome friend. "George told me he loved me."

Nate's jaw dropped. "Oh my god."

"Yeah. My thoughts exactly."

Nate scooted closer. "So what're you going to do?"

Carol smiled and rolled her eyes. No matter the situation, Nate was always up for gossip. She sighed inwardly. She knew that wasn't a fair assessment. Nate had been put through the wringer lately. Maybe a bit of old-fashioned gossip would get him back to his old self.

"I don't know. I mean, I like him. Okay, I like him a lot. But you know my feelings about getting involved with two men."

Nate shook his head and looked over his shoulder. "Two men? As far as I saw, there was only one in the room with you."

"Yeah, but George has a lover."

Nate blinked. "What? Our George? George Manning? Since when?"

Carol bit her bottom lip. She knew the relationship between George and Trick was secret, and George had put an incredible amount of trust in her to tell her in the first place. "I can't tell you."

Nate narrowed his eyes and pointed his finger in Carol's face. "Oh, that's just mean. You are truly evil, woman."

"I try." Carol sobered, getting back to the subject at hand. "I'd love to believe George. I wish his relationship with...this other guy, was truly over, but I just can't."

Nate reached out and playfully pinched the end of Carol's nose. "Don't let fear stop you from living your life."

"Easy for you to say. You've got two hunks who worship you."

"Do you think I didn't take a chance by joining an already established couple? Believe me, sister, I did my share of worrying. But look how it's turned out."

Carol covered a yawn as it escaped her. "I told George I'd think about it."

Nate stood. "As much as I adore the pain in the ass who works for me, I think I'd kind of enjoy seeing you happier." Nate winked and touched his hands to his chest. "After all, I can't be the only sunlight in your day."

"Get out of here before you make me puke."

His expression serious, Nate reached out and squeezed Carol's hand. "Thanks for shootin' the shit with me. It seems a lot of people don't know what to say to me these days."

Carol didn't release Nate's hand. "How're people doing?"

Nate shrugged. "A lot of them are still in shock, I think. Some are angry."

"At you?"

Nate shook his head. "I don't think so. They're just mad at the world. It'll take time."

Carol thought she detected a trace of guilt in Nate's gaze. "You know it wasn't your fault, right?"

He tapped his head. "This knows, but it hasn't travelled down to my heart yet. If I could relive that day..."

"You can't, so don't start thinking that way. What happened, happened, and there was nothing you could've done to stop it. It's what you do from here on out that matters."

Nate grinned. "Sounds like pretty good advice, chickie. Maybe you should think about taking it."

With a flourish of his hand, Nate left the room.

Alone, Carol stared out the window. It looked like a typical hot summer day outside. She wondered how her yard was fairing without her constant attention. Her flowers were the only babies she had. Maybe she'd ask George to run by and water them.

Within minutes, she felt her eyelids grow heavy. She thought about the advice she'd given Nate. Would she ever be able to truly follow it?

* * * *

By the time George took care of things at home and had checked in at the station, it was almost dinner time. He smiled as he thought of the tacos Carol had asked for earlier. If he had believed they wouldn't hurt her, he'd have brought a truckload with him.

His mind drifted to his first kiss with a woman in over ten years. Before moving to Cattle Valley, he'd spent a month on tour with his lover. Trick told everyone he was George, the best friend from back home. George had admitted to Trick at the time that it hurt to be introduced in such a way, but it had fallen on deaf ears.

Although it had been nice to spend quality time with his lover, the pace got to him. It wasn't just the pace, it was the lifestyle demands. Trick had always been honest about his

mutual lust for women. He told George it was more a sexual thing than the need for an emotional connection.

Several times while he'd been on tour with Trick, his lover would pick out a pretty girl and take her back to their room. Because Trick felt he couldn't be honest about his bi-sexual nature, George wasn't allowed to touch him when they took a woman to bed with them.

George found that, although he loved fucking women, he, like Trick, didn't feel the emotional connection he did when he made love to his partner.

When the position for fire chief opened in Cattle Valley, he'd jumped on it, much to Trick's dismay. As the years went on, and Trick's career continued to take off, George began to live for the stolen weekends where he could lay in his lover's arms. He knew Trick slept with women while on tour, and had come to terms with their special arrangement years earlier. It wasn't until he got to know Carol that he'd suddenly felt unfulfilled by his relationship with Trick.

George stepped in the elevator, and punched the button for the third floor. He'd actually tried to break-up with Trick before the collapse occurred, but his lover had a way about him, and before George knew it, they were in bed in the back of Trick's tour bus.

When he'd eventually answered his cell phone and learned of the tragedy, all thoughts of breaking it off with Trick were put on hold. It wasn't until he'd heard the news of Carol's life-threatening injuries that he'd texted Trick.

Trick had even had the nerve to show up at the hospital while Carol was still in surgery. George had told him it wasn't convenient, but Trick demanded a moment of his time. The two of them had fought over the ending of their nineteen year relationship, and the conversation had concluded with Trick storming out of the hospital. George hadn't heard from his ex since.

The closer he got to Carol's hospital room, the lighter he felt. He knew the two of them had a lot to discuss, but he could tell by the way she'd kissed him that she felt something too.

Entering the room, George quietly made his way to his chair that the nurses had brought him. Unlike the usual straight-backed chairs, this one reclined into a full horizontal position, allowing him to get some shut-eye.

As he settled in, he couldn't take his eyes off the gorgeous woman asleep in front of him. Despite her odd, snarky sense of humour, Carol was everything any man could dream of sharing a life with.

George knew from listening to her that Carol often put herself down because of her weight. He'd told her many times that a real woman didn't wear a size three. Real women had breasts and an ass a man could grab without bruising their hands on bones.

What would it be like to suckle at Carol's breasts? He sighed as his cock began to harden behind the fly of his jeans. As if she knew what he was fantasising about, Carol's blue eyes opened.

"You're back," she mumbled.

"Of course. I told you I would."

Her eyes drifted shut, before opening once again. Even without makeup, her black lashes fanned onto her high cheekbones with each blink. "You are so beautiful," he whispered.

Carol's face screwed up into a grimace. "I can only imagine. I haven't even been allowed to shower in three days."

George smiled. "Well then you look good dirty, babe. Cuz it's taking every ounce of willpower I have to sit here and not jump you."

Carol's eyes rounded. "I don't think that would be a good idea."

"Maybe not now, but you'll heal." He could tell by the expression on her face that she knew it was a promise of things to come.

"Did you give any more thought to what we talked about?" he asked.

"Some. You know I'm afraid, right? I mean, I haven't exactly been secretive about my past."

"Those assholes were fools. Please don't paint me with the same brush," George pleaded.

Carol took a deep breath. Pervert that he was, George enjoyed the way her ample chest rose.

"I agree. My first instinct was to turn you down, but I realised you weren't Lyle or Rodney. So, I was wondering, once I get back to being well, if you'd be interested in dating me?"

George wasn't sure whether to be happy or let down. He decided to use his powers of persuasion to possibly move up the dating thing a bit. "How about this. I've already talked to the doctor about moving you into my spare bedroom until you're recovered."

He could see Carol's mouth open to protest and cut her off before she had a chance. "No funny business unless you decide you want it. At no time will I put the moves on you. However, if you'd like the occasional kisses, I'll be more than happy to supply them."

Carol seemed to study him for a long time before speaking. "Are you doing this because you feel guilty?"

This was a statement that could have angered him, instead it made him feel sorry for her. Why would she think he had an ulterior motive for wanting to be with her? Standing, he leaned over her and brushed the hair from her creamy skin.

"Remember when I told you that I was in love with you?"

"Yeah?"

"I meant it," he told her as he covered her lips with his. This time, Carol voluntarily opened for George's tongue. He took full advantage and swept through the interior of her mouth, teasing her teeth and tongue with his own. Pulling back from the kiss, he took a couple of seconds to nip and suck on her full lower lip.

He leant back and smiled. "Is that a good enough answer for you?"

"I don't know. Maybe we'd better try that again."

George chuckled as he swooped in for another taste. This time the kiss went even deeper. George subtly tried to rub his aching cock against the lowered handrail, but was quickly caught by a giggling Carol.

"That bad?" she asked, glancing towards his groin.

George stood proudly so Carol could see what she'd done to him. "No. That good."

Chapter Two

After much discussion, George eventually agreed to stay at Carol's instead of the other way around. Her flower beds were in full glory when they pulled into the shaded drive. She sighed when she laid eyes on her babies for the first time in almost ten days. "They're beautiful. You must have a green thumb as well," she told George.

George grinned. "I tried. Didn't think it would help my chances any if I let them all wither and die."

She started to open the door, but George stopped her with a hand on her thigh. "Hold on, and I'll help you inside."

Carol fanned herself with her hand. "Why, Mr. Manning, I do declare you're the perfect gentleman," she said in her best southern belle imitation.

Chuckling, George shook his head and exited the car. They'd gotten much closer since their talk the week prior. Not only was Carol starting to believe that George might actually love her, but she was quickly becoming addicted to his kisses.

She kept telling herself not to get too attached. Life in the hospital room had created a sort of bubble around them. Living day to day with another person would be the real test. Her door opened, and George reached for her hand. His grip was warm and gentle as he helped ease her from the car.

"Be careful on the steps," he reminded her as they neared the covered porch.

Although George had eventually gone back to work, he'd made a point to be with her at the hospital from the time he left the station until she drifted off to sleep. Never in her life had she felt so cared for. How many times had she compared the small things George had done that neither Lyle nor Rodney would've even thought of doing?

By the time they stepped into the air conditioned interior, Carol was panting. Beads of sweat had popped out on her forehead and were slowly dripping down her face, ruining the makeup she'd attempted to apply.

When George started to lead her to the bedroom, she stopped him. "The couch, please. I've spent enough time in bed lately."

George diverted their route to the deep, comfortable sofa. As she settled down, she sighed. "Feels good to be home."

"Let me get you a pillow and blanket," George said as he helped her out of her shoes.

She'd been a bit embarrassed to leave the hospital dressed in her nightgown and robe, but her stomach was still too tender for anything tight on her waist. The doctor said she was healing nicely, and was well on her way to being fit as a fiddle.

As Carol watched George's ass as he strode towards her bedroom, she giggled to herself. She'd really wanted to ask how long before she could engage in sex, but George had been in the room.

One thing they'd gotten out of the way while she was still incarcerated, as she liked to refer to it, was to get tested. They'd both come up negative, as she knew they would, and were just waiting for the day when she'd be well enough. Of course she hadn't told any of that to George. She enjoyed watching the guy sweat over their heated kisses.

She took off the bulky robe and laid it at the end of the couch. Her nightgown wasn't what she'd call sexy, but it was a pretty green satin. The sexy stuff was stored in the back of her closet, and Carol began to think they might actually fit her again after losing weight while in the hospital. Maybe after she'd recovered...

George came back into the room and gently placed a pillow behind her head before covering her with the quilt her grandma had made. She brought the quilt to her nose and inhaled. It had been almost sixteen years since her granny had died, but Carol could almost swear she still smelled her rose scented perfume on the fabric scraps.

George sat on the floor beside the couch and grinned. "Smell good?"

Carol uncovered her nose and nodded. "My granny McGowan made this for me." She held the blanket towards George. "Smell it."

Indulging her, George took a sniff.

"What do you smell?" she asked.

"You. The honeysuckle shampoo you use, the lemon lotion you apply to your skin, just you."

Carol's brows drew together. "I don't smell any of that. I swear I can smell my granny's rose perfume."

George took another whiff. "Nope. Maybe you smell what you love? In your case, your granny, in my case, you."

Carol's heart melted. George was always saying stuff like that. She'd often wondered if it had something to do with loving an absent partner. Maybe he'd longed to say these things to Trick over the years but had been unable to? Regardless, George's words always warmed her heart.

"If that were the case, I'm sure there'd be a little CK One scent mixed in."

George's hazel eyes lit up. She hadn't been as upfront about her feelings as he'd been, but she was trying.

"Maybe I'll need to sleep under that quilt a time or two before that happens."

Carol covered her smile with the edge of the blanket just as George's cell phone started ringing. He glanced down, evidently looking at the display, before returning his attention to her.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"No, but I could use a cup of tea if you don't mind."

George got to his knees and leant over her. She knew he was going to kiss her and happily opened to him as his tongue brushed her lips. The only problem with George's kiss was it made her body ache, evidently her pussy didn't realise that her stomach wasn't yet up to sex. She squeezed her legs together, hoping she could touch herself for a moment or two once George went to fix her tea.

George pulled out of the kiss slowly. In his usual style, he spent several moments licking and playfully biting her lips. The ache between her legs became almost unbearable before he finally rose and strode off to the kitchen.

The moment he was gone, she slid her hands beneath the covers. One went to her sensitive, protruding nipples, while the other lifted her nightgown out of the way before delving between the lips of her pussy.

As she silently pleased herself, Carol wondered if she was taking things too slow with George. She wanted him, that wasn't anything new to her. She'd been attracted to the man for years. When he'd taken over as mayor after Quade left, they'd become friends. Their friendship hadn't diminished a bit once Nate was elected and took over from George.

"Hey, did you want..."

Carol's hands stilled immediately as George came into the room, surprising her. She looked up and those intense hazel eyes were staring down at her. It was obvious she'd been caught, but what could she say?

Without a word, George reached down and lifted her arm from out of its hiding place under the covers. He stared at the thick, white moisture coating her fingers and drew them to his mouth.

Carol swallowed, afraid she might come just by watching the man lave the juices from her hand. His tongue caressed each digit with a master's touch. Once she was licked clean, he pressed her hand to the front of his jeans.

"You have no idea how much I want you." George moaned as Carol's hand contracted around the obvious bulge.

She knew it was a defining moment in their budding relationship. Would she continue to allow her fears to dictate the needs of her body, or live in the moment?

"Take me to bed," she whispered.

Reaching over the back of the couch, George tossed the blanket to the floor, uncovering her partially exposed body. His nostrils flared as he ran a hand over her breasts, stopping to gently pinch each nipple.

"You're not healed enough for me to do what I want. The last thing in the world I'd do is hurt you."

As George moved one hand down to explore the area between her legs, Carol began to unfasten the man's jeans. She gasped as he entered her with two fingers.

"I guess we'll need to find a way to relieve each other that doesn't include fucking," she finally said as she spread her legs.

The hand that had been playing with her breasts lifted the bottom of her nightgown until her scarred abdomen was fully exposed. Carol's first reaction was to grab the material and try once again to cover herself. It wasn't the scars that gave her pause, it was her body.

"Stop," George commanded. His thumb began to rub against her clit as he continued to pump his fingers in and out of her body. "Don't hide from me."

Carol searched his eyes for any sign of disgust. She mentally took stock of the way her body must look to him. On her earlier exploration, she'd felt the newly emerging stubble of a pussy desperately in need of another wax. The pink, healing scars, surely stood out in stark contrast to her otherwise milky-white skin. She was surprised to see none of the disgust in George's eyes that she'd expected. Instead, George's gaze travelled the length of her body in apparent lust. *Wow*. How long had it been since anyone looked at her like she was sexy?

George's phone once again began to ring, breaking the spell of the moment. He reached to the holster at his waist and turned it off without checking the display.

"Whoever it is, must want to talk to you really bad," she commented.

George shrugged.

Carol narrowed her eyes. "Is it Trick?"

George's hand paused, and she knew she'd hit the nail on the head. Suddenly she felt overly exposed. She reached down and tried to lift the blanket from the floor to cover herself. Even the weight of the quilt was too much for her healing body and she let out a slight gasp.

One second George was finger fucking her, and the next he was around the couch taking the blanket from her hand.

Carol relinquished her hold and stared up at him. "I bet the water's ready for the tea."

George held the blanket in his fists for several moments before eventually spreading it over her. "I came in earlier to ask if you wanted sugar."

Carol nodded. "Yes. Two teaspoons, please."

George nodded in return and made his way back to the kitchen, zipping his jeans as he went.

Covering her face with her hands, she squeezed her eyes shut to block out the threatening tears. If Trick was calling, there had to be a reason, and she wasn't sure she was ready to know. George had only been hers for a week, and she wasn't ready to give him up yet.

* * * *

George turned off the stove and gripped the kettle's handle. He felt like throwing the fucking thing across the room. *Damn Trick.*

He fixed Carol a cup of tea and carried it into the living room. "Here you go."

"Just set it on the table. If I try to drink it right now, I'll probably end up with second-degree burns on my neck."

As he set the cup on the table, he caught a whiff of her scent still lingering on his hand. "Will you be okay for an hour? I thought I'd run home and pack a bag."

"I'll be fine. I'm getting pretty sleepy anyway."

George hated the unspoken tension in the air, but he was at a loss as to what to say. He bent and kissed her, keeping it brief and chaste. "I'll be back in a few."

Carol nodded, and George grabbed the keys to his truck from the hook by the door. He'd stopped by earlier in the day and had traded Carol's more comfortable sedan for his big four-wheel drive.

It took mere minutes to reach his small house. As he walked up to the front door, he realised how much his house came up lacking when compared to Carol's. It wasn't that hers was bigger or newer. It was the small touches that made Carol's house a real home. The flower beds positioned around the porch and along the front walk, the large porch swing that she'd painted in the same black as her shutters, they all came together to welcome people.

George glanced around at the ornamental bushes he'd planted several years earlier. They were lined up like soldiers along the front of the house, no personality whatsoever. He shook his head and let himself into his house.

Before packing, he knew he needed to take care of the problem at hand. He grabbed his phone and called Trick. Falling to the bed, he waited four rings before his ex-partner picked up.

"Finally," Trick answered.

"I was busy. What do you need?"

"You."

George rolled his eyes and tried to fight the tightening in his chest. "We've been over this."

"I know. You had your say. It's my turn."

George heard a commotion in the background. He knew the sounds well. "You getting ready to go onstage?"

"In a few. Hang on."

He heard Trick tell his manager, Andy, he was headed back to the dressing room for a few minutes. George automatically grinned as Andy started to protest. Andy ran a very tight schedule and no doubt Trick's disappearing act was fucking with it.

"Okay," Trick said. "I bought myself a few minutes."

"See, this has always been the problem. I'm constantly being fitted in between rehearsals, recordings or performances."

"What the hell do you want me to do about it, George? You know it would be different if you were here, but you're the one who insisted on buying a house and settling down."

George did know his decision to move to Cattle Valley had taken a toll on their relationship, but he refused to take the blame. "I don't want to fight with you."

Trick sighed. George knew his ex-lover was pulling at the little patch of hair under his lip.

"I miss you," Trick finally told him. "I go onstage and the love songs I wrote for you almost kill me to sing."

George squeezed his eyes shut. There were too many memories associated with most of the songs Trick wrote for him. They'd spent hours of lying naked in bed together while Trick picked his way through a new song.

"I've been honest with you all along, Trick. I needed more. I didn't expect to fall in love with Carol, but it happened. She's here, and what I feel for her is the real deal."

"I know."

"I'm tired of loving someone behind closed doors. I wanna go out and dance with the person I love. I want to hold hands as we eat in a restaurant. They may sound like simple things, but they're things I've never been able to experience."

"I know, and I don't begrudge you for wanting them, but you know I'd do those things with you if I could."

George's sadness quickly turned to anger. "I used to think that was the truth, but I've realised how full of shit you are. It may have taken me nineteen fucking years, but I finally realised there was nothing stopping you from loving me the way I needed, except you and your own self-centred universe."

"That's not fair. You know this business. Do you think I'd be where I am today if I'd danced you around town on my arm like some love-sick fool?"

"No. I know how your fans would've reacted, but it just proves what comes first in your life. You may not have been able to achieve the fame you have, but it wouldn't have stopped you from singing. Yeah, maybe you would've been stuck playing small venues instead of coliseums, but you would've had me."

"I thought for nineteen years I had both."

"Yeah, well, things change." Tired of talking in circles, George sat up. "You'd better get on stage."

"I love you," Trick whispered.

George could hear the genuine pain in the man's voice. He swallowed around the lump in his throat. "I love you, too. You know I always will, but it just isn't enough anymore."

He hit the end button and turned the phone off. He wouldn't put it past Trick to call him back. His ex loved to get the last word. George knew there wasn't a last word in this particular situation. He'd be dealing with his love for Trick until the day he died. It didn't diminish the love he felt for Carol one ounce, but it would be his constant companion.

He rose from the bed and began packing a suitcase. At the last moment, he tossed in a bottle of lube, feeling slightly ashamed of himself. He knew Carol wasn't ready and after the tension earlier, he wasn't even sure if she was willing, but he still had hopes.

Lifting his hand to his nose, he inhaled the scent of her cream that still lingered on his fingers. He grinned as he wondered how long he could go without washing his hand. It was easy to picture himself at the station with his hand resting under his nose. *I'm a sick bastard.* He chuckled and closed the suitcase.

After locking up the house, he swung his bag into the back of his pickup. Realising he'd forgotten his scanner, he raced back inside and unplugged the machine from the wall. Life in Cattle Valley had been quiet lately, but he'd never forgive himself if he missed another emergency call.

"Hey," his cousin Tyler greeted.

George looked up to see the happy family as they walked up the driveway. Hearn had a tight rein on their newest family member, a female golden retriever named, appropriately enough, Goldie.

Gracie ran and jumped into his arms. George swung the sweet girl in circles several times before giving her a big hug. "What're you all up to this evening?"

"We're going to the park," Gracie replied, pulling playfully on George's earlobe.

He glanced down at Goldie and shook his head. "What're you feeding that dog? I think she's doubled in size since I saw her last."

Gracie smiled, showing off a missing front tooth. "Just regular stuff, but Daddy said it's the love that makes her grow."

George noticed the blush creeping up Hearn's neck. "You've got a pretty smart Daddy."

Gracie nodded her head in agreement.

"How's Carol?" Tyler asked.

"She's good. I brought her home earlier. I was just inside packing a bag before heading back over."

Tyler whistled. "I take it things are progressing between the two of you?"

Besides Carol, Tyler was the only one in town who knew about his years spent with Trick. He noticed the way Hearn shifted from foot to foot. Strike that. He guessed there were three people in town who knew. He couldn't get mad at his baby cousin. Partners should always share, and George didn't begrudge them that.

"We're taking things slow."

Tyler reached forward and took Gracie out of George's arms and set her on her feet. He then pulled George in for a hug. "I can tell by those all-telling eyes that you're hurting," Tyler whispered in George's ear.

"I'll be okay. Just got off the phone with Trick," he tried to explain.

Tyler pulled back. "It'll all work out. The important thing is you're trying for a life that you know you deserve. You've settled long enough."

George nodded. "Yeah."

"You should stop by the shop and pick Carol up a nice bouquet of flowers."

"Naw, she doesn't like cut flowers, but I might have you order me a couple of rose bushes."

"Consider it done. Anything in particular?"

George thought of the pastel pink, purple and yellow flowers that surrounded Carol's house. "Something in soft colours and hardy. I want to make sure they're around for years to come."

Tyler smiled and jabbed George in the arm. "You're such a romantic."

He'd never thought of himself that way. "If I am it's because she brings it out in me. There's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for that woman."

Tyler winked before turning back to his family. "Who's ready for the park?"

Goldie barked and Gracie clapped her hands. George waved as the group made their way back down the driveway to the sidewalk. He followed them with his gaze until they were out of sight. "That's what I want," he admitted to himself.

Climbing into his truck, he headed back to Carol's house, determined to set things right.

* * * *

By the time Trick left the stage, he felt lower than ever. He didn't even bother stopping by the dressing room to do the usual meet-and-greet that was customary after a concert. Instead, he waited for his security staff to escort him and retreated to his private bus.

As he stripped off his clothes and got into the shower he'd had designed with him and George in mind, he stuck his face under the spray. Growing up the poorest kid on the poor side of Indianapolis, Tomas de la Cruz had reinvented himself into Trick Allen.

It hadn't been easy, and he'd fought for every scrap of recognition with long hours and sacrifices. Meeting George at one of his first regular gigs was pure coincidence. Although he hadn't remembered him, George walked right up and introduced himself. He'd asked Trick if he remembered him from high school. When Trick apologised and shook his head, George had gifted him with a million dollar smile. He'd told Trick he didn't imagine he would, that he'd only been a freshman when Trick was a senior.

The two of them started talking, and the rest was history, so to speak. From that day forward, there were only two things in his life he cared about, music and George. Now that George no longer wanted to be in the picture, Trick was left with only his music and fame.

He opened his eyes and glanced around the empty shower. It suddenly hit him. When he was down, all the fame in the world couldn't cheer him up like one smile from George.

Trick rubbed his burning nose as tears threatened to overwhelm him. It was his own damn fault, and he knew it. He had known George needed more than what Trick was able to give him. As was typical of someone trying to gain fame and fortune, Trick always thought there'd be time for George's dreams after he'd taken care of his own. He'd been a dumb ass to think George would continue to put his life on hold.

"You in there?" Andy yelled from outside the bathroom door.

"No. I just left the shower on," Trick answered.

"You've got contest winners that are waiting to meet you," Andy reminded him.

Trick washed the remainder of the soap from his body and turned off the water. "I'll be out in a minute."

"Hurry up. Can't keep the fans waiting."

As Trick dried off, he felt the shame of his actions seep into his bones. He never left fans waiting, but he'd made George wait for nineteen years. George was right to break things off. His lover had been a saint for lasting as long as he did.

* * * *

By the time George had dinner ready and the flowers watered, Carol was sound asleep on the couch. He knelt and studied the woman he loved. Even in sleep, Carol's expression was tense. Had he put the crease between her brows? Leaning over, he kissed the worried expression away.

Carol's long lashes fluttered open as she accepted his tongue. He knew he could spend a lifetime kissing the plump lips currently sucking on his tongue. George pulled out of the kiss and scraped his teeth across the end of her nose in a mock-bite.

"Dinner's ready. Would you like to eat in here?"

"No. I think I can sit at the table without too much trouble."

George slid an arm under her back and helped raise her to a sitting position. When she started to reach for her robe, he shook his head. "Leave it off. Please?"

Carol glanced down at the thin material of her nightgown. Other than her hard nipples poking against the front of the satin, nothing was exposed.

George couldn't resist and ran the back of his hand over the twin nubs. "Are you still embarrassed for me to see your body?"

Carol sucked her bottom lip in to rest between her teeth. "I gained a lot of weight after Lyle and Rodney left me."

George turned his hand over and cupped one of her more than ample breasts. "You're body is absolutely perfect in my eyes."

Carol was self-conscious about her stomach, that much he already knew. Although not flat, the small protrusion did nothing to take away from her beauty. Carol looked the way a woman should. He knew it would take time to make her see herself for the sexy woman that she was.

"You ready to stand?" he asked.

Carol rose to her feet with George's help. He led her into the kitchen, filled with the smells of fried chicken, mashed potatoes and corn on the cob.

She covered her mouth and shook her head at the amount of food on the table. "This is more food than I could eat in a week."

George pulled out a chair and helped her sit. "I'm used to cooking for the volunteers at the station. Small portions won't fill five hungry guys."

Carol chuckled. "Maybe you should call and invite them over for dinner?"

Standing behind Carol's chair, George ran his hands down over her shoulders to once again land on her breasts. He knew he was becoming a bit obsessed with the twin globes, but it had been so long since he'd enjoyed the difference between men and women that he couldn't resist.

He didn't miss the way Carol's back arched, pushing her breasts further into his hands. "I don't think we need anyone but the two of us, do you?"

Carol tilted her head back, and George bent to kiss her. He could tell she wanted to ask about Trick, but he wasn't ready to go there yet. The phone call earlier still had him a bit shook up.

Kissing someone upside down was the oddest sensation, one he could definitely grow to enjoy. He rubbed his erection against the back of the chair. *Speaking of growing...*

George took a step back, releasing his hold on Carol's breasts. "What would you like to drink?"

"Ice water, please."

As George filled two glasses, he knew he was going to have to come up with something constructive to do after dinner. Although she'd been patient, he was sure having him grope her all night wasn't the best activity for her healing body.

Chapter Three

Carol glanced at the magazine on the swing beside her. The pictures of her friends immediately following the collapse, as well as the town mourning their losses at the service the next day, upset her more than anything. How dare someone invade their long-held privacy? She picked up the phone and called the one person she knew could soothe her.

"Hey, there, sunshine," George said.

"Did you see it?"

"Not yet, but I heard about it. I take it you did?"

"Yeah. It's awful."

"I'm sure it is. We just got back from the rodeo grounds. Nate bulldozed the sonofabitch to the ground. We've been helping Ryan and Rio load up the metal for recycling. They decided to use the wood for a big bonfire."

Although she wasn't surprised at Nate's reaction to the article, she was surprised they were planning a celebration. "How can you throw a party when people are still suffering?"

"Not a party, per se, and we won't do anything until the weather gets cooler."

Carol shook her head. "I still don't understand it."

"There's a lot of wood, babe. Our choices are limited with what to do with it. We could stick it in the town landfill or we could put it through the big mulcher like we do Christmas trees and fallen tree limbs. The problem with that is who wants the mulch made from sorrow of that day."

"So, you figure burning it is the best recourse," she surmised.

"Yeah."

"You know I'm usually onboard with things like this, but I think it's a mistake. Maybe you should take the scrap and use it for fire practice or something."

George said nothing for several heartbeats. "I'll suggest it to Nate."

Carol felt her breath catch in her chest. The men in her past had never taken her suggestions so seriously. "Thanks."

"You're welcome. So, besides the article, how're you feeling?"

Lonely. She wanted to tell him, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She'd been staying on her own for almost two weeks. George still came over after his shift at the station to check on her, but she'd found it wasn't the same as when he'd stayed there.

"I'm okay. I watered the flowers earlier without a bit of discomfort."

"Good. Think you might be up for tacos?"

"Is it Tuesday?"

George chuckled. "We need to get you back to work. Yeah, it's Tuesday. Remember my promise when you were in the hospital?"

"Yeah. And I'd love to try some tacos."

"Want me to stop and get 'em on the way over, or would you rather go out?"

"Out, please. I've been going stir-crazy lately." She tried to think about what she'd wear on her first official date in years. Her lack of appetite had done wonders for her figure, but she was seriously in need of new clothes.

"You got it. I'll be there by six-fifteen."

Carol covered her smile with her hand. Had she ever felt so happy? "I'll be waiting."

She hung up the phone and left the offending magazine on the swing as she headed in to take a shower. Getting a new razor out of the cabinet, she hummed as she stripped and stepped under the hot water.

Without the clearance to drive, she'd been unable to keep up with her waxing because she definitely wasn't the type who could wax at home, and had resorted to shaving. The feeling wasn't nearly the same, but it was better than nothing. Once her pussy was smooth, she started on her legs. They were actually harder to shave because she had to bend over as well as try to balance on one leg at a time.

Maybe the doctor would release her at her upcoming appointment. George had been right. She was itching to get back to work. Her days all seemed to blend together, and she would swear her intelligence had dropped due to the daytime television she'd been watching.

The thought of daytime television brought up memories of Trick. He'd been on one of the morning talk shows a few days earlier. Carol had immediately turned the channel, but her sick, twisted brain had her turning it back to look at the man, her man was still in love with.

Although Trick appeared tired and not as jovial as he usually did, the asshole was still hotter than hell. She barely paid attention to what he was saying until he mentioned an upcoming break in his schedule.

"Shit!" she cried as the razor sliced into her ankle.

Carol managed to finish shaving her legs without further injuring herself, and stepped out of the shower. She hadn't mentioned the interview to George, but it had worried her since. Deep in her heart, she knew if she hadn't been injured, George would be making plans to rendezvous with Trick at some undisclosed hideaway.

"Aaarghh," she growled in frustration. How was she supposed to try and build a future with a man who could easily see or hear his past by flipping on the television or radio?

One thing was for sure, the stress was starting to get to George. He never mentioned Trick, but there were times when she'd say something completely innocent and George's demeanour would change. He was still the same thoughtful man she was starting to love, but he seemed almost lost within his own skin.

The conversation she'd had with Nate drifted back to her. What would she be willing to do to keep the man she loved happy?

* * * *

After a quick shower and change of clothes at the station, George jumped into his truck and pushed the speed limit to reach Carol. He whistled as he drove. It was like this every evening. He couldn't wait to get off work to be with the woman he loved.

The previous weekend, he'd surprised her by planting three new rose bushes in her backyard. They'd spent the rest of the day wrapped in each other's arms watching incredibly gory movies.

His cell phone rang, and George moaned. *Please don't let it be work.* He unclipped the phone from its holster and smiled. "Hey, Mom."

"Hi, Georgie."

George rolled his eyes at the baby name she'd called him since birth. He usually spoke to his parents on Sunday afternoon right after they returned from church, so a call during the week usually meant bad news. "Everything okay?"

"I saw that magazine while in the checkout line at the grocery store. Oh, sweetheart, I can't imagine what you must've gone through. I just wanted to call and tell you how much we love you, and you and that gal of yours are in our prayers."

"Carol, Mom. Her name's Carol."

"Yes. That's right."

Although his mom didn't say it, George knew she was secretly hoping things with Carol blew over and he returned to Trick's side. He smiled. How many parents would prefer their son to be gay?

"I saw Tomas's mother last week."

"You did? That's nice. How's she doing?" George knew it was best to ride his mother's meddling out rather than try and stop her.

"Oh, she's fine. Her gout's been bothering her a bit lately, but nothing serious."

"That's too bad. Send her my love next time you run into her." George pulled into Carol's driveway and killed the engine. "I'm getting ready to pick Carol up for a date. Is there anything else?"

"I worry," his mom confessed.

"I know you do, Mom, but to be honest, I'm happier than I've been in years. It feels good to love someone you can actually hold in your arms."

"It's not Tomas' fault. You know how cruel the media can be."

"Please, Mom, I don't want to get into this with you. My relationship with Trick is over. He had nineteen years to change things. I'm ready for a real future with someone who puts me first for a change."

His mom sighed in that way she had. "Call on Sunday."

"I will. I always do."

George ended the call and got out of the truck. It wasn't until he was almost to the porch that he noticed a beautiful woman watching him from the swing. "Well, don't you look pretty."

Carol smiled as he took the steps two at a time until he was sitting by her side.

"Is that new?" he asked. The pretty yellow and white sundress left Carol's creamy shoulders bare to his touch.

"No, not new. I dug it out of the back of my closet."

George didn't like the idea of her exerting herself. He'd seen her closet and it was absolutely packed to the gills with clothes. It wouldn't have been easy to dig something out of the back. "You didn't hurt yourself, did you?"

He wrapped an arm around her and began to caress her neck and shoulder. Carol laid her head against George's chest.

"I'm fine."

They continued to swing for several moments before she spoke again. "Can I talk to you about something?"

George reached down and tilted her chin up before giving her a brief kiss. "I want you to talk to me about everything."

Her gaze shifted to the side before she spoke again. "I saw Trick on a show last week. He said he's got a planned break in his concert schedule coming up."

"Yeah." George didn't know what Carol was getting at, but he had a strong suspicion she was worried. "Baby, please don't worry about Trick. I'm a very loyal man. If I say I want to be with you, you can trust me."

Carol sat up and moved away enough so she could turn and face him. "I know. That's not what I was getting at."

"What is it then?"

Carol's fingers started pleating the cotton fabric of her dress in a nervous manner. "I've loved bi-sexual men in the past, you know that, right?"

"Yes, and I know what they did to you, but they're not me." He hated defending himself in such a way. Rodney Quartz and Lyle Flemming were assholes of the highest order.

Carol shook her head and grabbed his hands. "I know that." She sighed. "This is coming out all wrong."

"Just spit it out because my heart can't take much more of this."

"I want you to know if you'd like to invite Trick here, to Cattle Valley, I'm willing to share you with him."

George was stunned. Knowing what he did about Carol's past, he couldn't imagine how much courage it took for her to offer such a thing. His heart melted as his love for her grew even stronger. "No. As much as I was both charmed and hurt by Trick, I'd never

subject you to the same treatment. He's not a staying kind of guy. Trust me on this. His career will always come first. That's not what I want for us."

"But what happens when you start to long for male companionship? I can't give you that. I'd much rather share you a couple times a year with someone you already love instead of a stranger."

George stood and held out his hand. "Let's go to dinner."

"But..."

George shook his head. "Please. Come to dinner with me."

Carol took his hand and stood. With an arm around her waist, George led her to the truck. He was completely overwhelmed and knew if he talked about the possibility of having absolutely everything he'd ever dreamt of, he'd break down in tears.

He opened the passenger door and lifted Carol into the seat. Her recent weight-loss hadn't gone unnoticed. He hoped it was just a side effect of her surgery, and not something more serious. As touchy as she was about her weight, he didn't want to draw attention to it, but it worried him.

Getting behind the wheel, he pulled Carol across the seat until she sat snug against his side. Before starting the truck, he kissed her. "You're an amazing woman."

"No I'm not," she countered.

George groaned and dropped his chin to his chest. "I'm going to say this once and then never bring it up again. Okay?"

Carol's brows drew together as she nodded.

"Lyle and Rodney didn't deserve you. They didn't run off because they wanted to be a twosome like they told you. They ran off with a waitress from Sheridan that they got pregnant."

Carol's hands dropped to cover her stomach as she stared through the front windshield. "Can I take a raincheck on those tacos?"

George gathered Carol in his arms. "I'm sorry. I didn't tell you the truth to upset you."

Carol shook her head but wouldn't look at him. "We tried for two years to have a baby, but it never happened. I guess they found someone who could give them what they wanted."

With Carol still in his arms, George opened the door and carried her to the house. He hadn't known she'd tried to conceive and had been unable. If he had, he'd never have opened his big mouth.

Since the day he'd brought her home from the hospital, the two of them had only engaged in light petting and erotic kisses, but that was about to change. He vowed if it took him the rest of his life, he was going to make this woman believe in herself again, starting with her desirability.

Settling Carol in the centre of her bed, George kicked off his shoes and came down to lie beside her. His lovely woman curled up against his chest. He wished he had the words to take her pain away. It was even harder knowing that he'd been the one to cause it. "I'm so sorry."

"Not your fault. But I think maybe it was easier when I thought they'd just decided they didn't want a woman in their life at all. Now I know I was replaced."

Running his fingers through her long, dark hair, he searched for something to say. He finally decided on the truth. "I don't know what was wrong with your relationship with Lyle and Rodney, but I do know it couldn't have been you. I've honestly never met a woman I could see myself settling down with until you came along. I love you more each day, and I can't imagine living a single day without you by my side."

Carol started to unbutton George's shirt. "What about kids? Don't you want a family?"

He remembered what she'd said earlier about trying for two years to get pregnant. "Not unless I can have them with you. You're my family. Sure, kids would be a welcome addition, but they're not a prerequisite. You're my world, Carol McGowan."

Without a word, Carol swung her legs over the side of the bed and stood. He was about to protest when she reached behind her and lowered the zipper on her dress. As the pretty sundress fell to the floor, Carol stood before him totally nude with her shoulders back and her head up.

He smiled knowing what it cost her to disrobe in front of him. "You're breathtaking," he whispered.

As he shrugged out of his shirt, and lowered the zipper of his jeans, he tried to memorise every square inch of his woman. He licked his lips when his eyes travelled to her smooth pussy.

George glanced up to meet her eyes as he kicked his clothes to the floor. "Come here," he beckoned with his arms stretched towards her.

Carol melted against him with a moan. Their mouths came together in a frenzy of teeth and tongues.

He laid her back on the mattress as his hands started to roam over her soft skin. It was an important step in their sexual relationship. George needed Carol to understand that he loved all of her, and he set about proving it.

His lips began to travel down her neck. He scooted down her body slowly, paying homage to each and every patch of skin he came into contact with. His hands cupped her breasts as he pinched the nipples, preparing them for his mouth.

Carol's fingers threaded through his hair as her body began to writhe. He latched on to one of the hardened nubs as his hands continued to explore. Without being able to see the healing scars, he didn't apply any pressure to her abdomen, just running his caress over the skin and down to her hairless pussy.

"Oh," Carol gasped as his middle finger rubbed her swelling clit.

George gave the nipple in his mouth a playful bite before pulling away and sinking three fingers deep in her pussy. He sat back on his heels and stared into the eyes of his lover. "Tell me if anything starts to hurt, okay?"

Carol nodded and reached out to run her fingers from underneath his balls to the tip of his cock. He watched as she gathered some of his pre-cum on her finger and lifted it to her mouth. "Mmmm," she groaned, her eyes rolling back.

Watching her suck her finger, George's cock jerked. As much as he'd love to see those plump lips wrapped around his dick, he wanted inside her pussy even more. With their test coming up clean, there was only one question to ask. "Do you want me to wear a condom?"

Carol shook her head and spread her legs further apart. "Make love to me."

George pulled his fingers from inside her and lifted them to his mouth. He ran his tongue between and up each digit before sucking them into his mouth. Damn, he loved the taste of a woman's cream. It wasn't better or worse than the taste of a man's cum, just different, sweeter.

He knew it was too early for her to bear his weight, so he stretched out beside her. "Roll towards me, baby."

With Carol facing him, George stopped worrying about the logistics of making love and let his heart and passion take over. He took her mouth in another erotic dance of tongues as they began to grind against each other.

He knew Carol was ready when her leg wrapped around his hip and began to creep higher to his waist, leaving her pussy open and exposed. With one hand cupping her ass,

George's cock slid between the lips of her pussy to slowly invade the body of the woman he loved.

He couldn't stop the groan of pleasure as he filled her. Never in his life had he had the pleasure of entering a woman without a condom. The slick velvet of his lover's vaginal walls brushed his cock in a sweet caress. Carol broke their kiss and tilted her head back in an anguished cry.

George paused. "Did I hurt you?"

He started to pull out, but Carol wouldn't let him.

"No. You just reminded me what it felt like to be loved this way. It's been too long."

Although comforted in knowing he hadn't hurt her, George didn't like the thought of Lyle or Rodney fucking her. A picture of Trick came to mind, and he quickly tried to dispel it. This was about the two of them. Trick didn't deserve to be part of it, even in thought.

He tried to keep his rhythm slow and gentle. The last thing he wanted was to lose control and hurt her. As his grip on her ass tightened, he felt Carol press her butt further into his hand.

"Touch me," she whispered.

George released his hold and moved his hand between them. As he gathered some of Carol's escaping juice onto his fingers, he began to fuck her harder. Returning his wet fingers to her ass, he separated her cheeks and pressed his middle finger against her puckered hole.

"Yes," Carol cried as she began to move back and forth between his cock and finger, impaling herself.

George couldn't help the joyous feeling that overtook him. Carol truly was meant for a man like him. He worked his way up to three fingers in her ass and she went wild. She was like a completely different woman than she'd been the first day he'd caught her playing with herself on the couch. He hoped it had something to do with him and his many attempts to make her feel sexy and wanted.

"Fuck me," she panted.

George changed positions enough so that the trimmed hair above his cock rubbed repeatedly against her clit. Carol's deep groan as she came was the sexiest thing he'd ever heard. Her body contracted around his cock and fingers as she coated his dick with her cream.

Once the vice-like grip eased around his shaft, George plunged deep into her pussy four more times before howling his release. His fingers slid free of her ass as he tried like hell to catch his breath. How long had it been since he'd come with such intensity?

Carol began to kiss his neck, finally latching on to a spot on his collar bone. As she sucked at the skin, George had no doubt he'd have a nice-sized bruise. He knew he may take some ribbing if anyone saw it, but he liked the idea that his woman wanted to mark him as hers.

They continued to explore each other with mouths and hands until Carol's stomach growled loud enough for the neighbours to hear. George started to chuckle as he glanced up from his position between her legs. Although he'd had a nice snack of Carol's cream combined with his seed, he knew his lover needed to eat.

He glanced at the clock and saw that it was only eight. "Back in the mood for tacos?"

Carol ran a hand over her bed-mussed hair. "I'm sure I look like I've been well fucked."

George sat back and wiped his mouth. "You do, and it's damn sexy."

* * * *

With her hair pulled back in a ponytail, Carol walked into O'Brien's with George's hand resting on her ass. She grinned to herself. George was slick, but she knew exactly what he was doing.

The outing was their first as a couple, and George was staking his claim. She felt giddy inside knowing he wanted to openly declare his feelings for her.

"Hey!" Nate shouted from his usual table across the room. She saw the whole gang, including Rio and Ryan.

Carol smiled, surprised to see her boss out so late. They made their way to the long table at the back of the pub, and she was immediately enveloped in Nate's arms.

"How're you feeling?" Nate asked.

"Good. I'm hoping to be back to work soon."

"Don't rush it. Take some time for yourself."

Carol shook her head. "I'm getting bored, but I take it my replacement is working out."

Nate stepped back and gestured for her to sit down. Before she was able, she was swallowed by a small crowd of well-wishers. It actually came as quite a surprise how many people seemed to genuinely care for her.

She knew she hadn't made life easy for most people she came into contact with. Her normal snarky attitude had gotten even worse after Lyle and Rodney left. It seemed easier to keep people at a distance with her mouth than letting them see the real her.

After the last hug was given, she finally managed to sit down. Her chest ached at the way she'd talked to the people around her.

Taking a chair beside her, George leant over and kissed her. "What's wrong?"

"I can't believe what a bitch I've been to everyone," she admitted.

Sitting on her other side, Nate wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "You haven't been a bitch. We all knew it was a front and treated everything that came out of your mouth with a grain of salt."

Carol glanced at Nate and rolled her eyes. "Geez, that makes me feel so much better," she said in a dry tone.

Nate shrugged. "Sorry, but you really weren't fooling anyone. Well, maybe yourself, but that's it."

"You know you're digging yourself in deeper, right?" George told Nate.

Carol played the comments off. She could tell Nate had enjoyed a few too many beers and decided to let it go. After the article and the day he'd had, Nate deserved to get drunk.

Two large baskets of tacos were set in front of them. George glanced up and grinned. "We haven't even ordered yet."

Kitty winked. "I had a feeling you weren't here for hamburgers."

"Thanks." George gave Carol a gentle nudge. "Eat up, woman."

Carol laughed, and began to eat. Despite her hunger for Jay's spicy tacos, she knew they probably wouldn't sit well in her stomach. She'd been on a very bland diet since her surgeries, and the grease alone was enough to give her pause.

She managed to eat two of the five tacos before pushing her plate away. "I'm stuffed."

"Really? You didn't eat much," George commented.

"I've had plenty. Here, why don't you finish them for me while I go put some money in the jukebox."

Carol stood and motioned for Nate to follow her. She needed to get her friend alone to discuss the recent developments in her relationship.

Nate wove his way beside Carol to stand at the brightly lit mechanical DJ. "What's up?"

"I'm in love," she admitted.

"Yeah. I've known that for a while. What else is up?"

"How've you known? I didn't figure it out myself until recently."

Nate shook his head. "Women." He sighed and leaned his arm over the top of the jukebox. "Your eyes have followed George's every move since he took over for Quade."

"So? I thought he was sexy," Carol argued.

"And so am I, but you don't follow me around like that. I knew you must be in love with the guy. I'm just glad you finally figured it out."

"So what should I do about Trick?" As soon as she said the name, she covered her mouth. *Shit*. "Forget I said that."

"Trick Allen?!" Nate's jaw dropped. "Are you fucking kidding me? Why didn't I see it before?"

"Because you weren't meant to. Promise me you won't tell anyone. George'll never forgive me."

Nate scratched at his jaw. "So, Trick is the one George broke up with to date you?"

Carol nodded. She returned her attention to the song selections. Her gaze automatically going to several by Trick Allen and the Cowboys. "He's an incredibly handsome man," she murmured.

"Huh?"

"Trick. I said he's handsome."

Nate laughed. "Yeah, thinks you and half the women and gay men in the world."

"I told George I'd share him with Trick." She bit her lip waiting for Nate's reply.

"What did he say?"

"No, I guess. He said Trick didn't deserve to be with us."

Nate covered Carol's hand. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Why did you offer?"

"Because George loves him. Because if there comes a point when he needs male companionship, I'd rather he got it from Trick than someone else."

"That's all? Are you sure?"

"What're you asking, Nate?"

"Despite what happened to you, I think you enjoyed being with two men, both sexually and emotionally. Am I wrong?"

"That was different. I loved Lyle and Rodney."

"Yeah, I've no doubt of that, but do you miss having two men hold you at night? I know I've become quite accustomed to it. There's nothing wrong with it."

Images of her lying between Trick and George flooded her mind. "I'll have to think about it."

Nate kissed her cheek. "You do that. The only advice I have for you is this. Only enter into a threesome if you want it. You can't do it just for George's sake, it'll never work."

Sucking on her bottom lip again, she nodded as strong arms wrapped around her waist.

"You trying to steal my girl? Don't you have enough people in your bed already?" George asked Nate as he began kissing the side of Carol's neck.

She leant her head to the side to give her lover more room to play. Never in her adult life had she been able to so openly accept public displays of affection. It was the reason she'd moved to Cattle Valley with Lyle and Rodney in the first place. Of course she hadn't known at the time they were already over giving her affection, either privately or publicly.

Carol lifted her arms and began to slowly dance against George as one of the sexy songs she'd chosen began to play. Nate walked off laughing as George's big hands began to roam up and down her sides, grazing her breasts as she continued to dance for him.

The hard ridge of his erection ground against her, and Carol suddenly wanted to be home in bed. She turned around and ran a hand over the front of George's jeans. "Take me home, love."

Chapter Four

"Morning, Ethan," Carol greeted as she entered the office.

"Morning, Miss McGowan," Ethan returned from his small desk in the corner of the room.

"I know we've discussed this before, but please call me Carol. Miss McGowan makes me feel old." She put her purse in the bottom drawer before crossing to the coffee pot.

She inhaled the strong brew as she poured her cup. It was worth keeping Ethan around if for no other reason than the man made excellent coffee. On her first day back to work, she felt guilty about Nate moving the young man to the smaller desk, but Ethan had insisted that it was the way it should be.

Three days into her lightened schedule, Carol was getting used to it. She knew the reduced hours would only last another week and then she'd be back to tormenting Nate fulltime.

Carol set her cup on the corner of her desk and picked up the mail. A letter addressed to Nate quickly got her attention. It had been two weeks since the magazine spread on the grandstand collapse, and it had taken both her and Ethan to keep up with the condolences as well as the hate mail that had come flooding into the mayor's office.

Despite the hundreds of letters they received daily, Carol knew the one in her hands was different. She picked up the long metal letter opener and cleanly sliced through the top of the envelope.

After several calming breaths, she pulled out the letter. On the personal stationery of Trick Allen, a short note was handwritten.

Dear Nate,

I'm due for a concert break at the end of the week and was wondering if you'd be interested in a charity concert sometime in the next two weeks. Although it'll have to be just me without the band, I'd be more than happy to help raise money for anything the town may need.

Truly,

Trick Allen

Carol's gaze zeroed in on the phone number scratched under Trick's signature. She quickly copied it onto her desk blotter before putting the letter on the top of Nate's stack.

She knew the number would plague her for the rest of the morning. Maybe nothing would come of it? Nate might just turn Trick down. Although there were people in town who could definitely use the help, their little corner of the world had already received enough attention. A fundraiser given by Trick Allen would stir the media up once more.

Carol knew she had four more hours to decide whether or not to call Trick. She'd spoken to George several times, trying to get a feeling for his thoughts on her proposal, but never had gotten an answer from the man she loved.

Lately she'd become obsessed with reading and watching everything she could find on the internet about Trick. It wasn't the star-struck factor, it was more a case of trying to get to know a person before meeting them.

There were several things she'd learned about Trick over the previous couple of weeks. Although a superstar, he actually seemed to be quite shy. During interviews, his already deep voice often became so soft you could barely understand him. Oh, and the best thing she learned was that he had great hands. Several times she'd fantasised about watching those hands wrapped around George's cock, or squeezing her breasts. Of course these were never the kinds of fantasies she shared with George. The subject of his ex-lover still seemed to be a sore spot with him.

A few days earlier, they'd had drinks with Tyler and Hearn at the Grizzly Bar. It had been a fabulous evening, and George had asked Carol to dance. The two of them had moved as one on the dance floor. Never had she felt more connected to another human being.

The song ended and one of Trick's slow ballads had started to play. George had immediately tensed and tried to pull away, but Carol had held him tight. She had felt the growing erection in her lover's jeans as the two of them had danced to Trick's deep voice. For the first time, she had really listened to the words of the well-known recording.

"Was this written for you?" she'd asked.

George had nodded. "A long time ago."

The song spoke of loving someone so completely you ached with it. Carol had been able to tell by the tension in George's body that he was uncomfortable. "It's okay that you still love him," she'd whispered in his ear.

George had pulled back. "No. It's not. I'm sorry."

Gazing into George's eyes, she'd known he was being torn apart. She knew from past experience that some men believed that if you didn't love your lover exclusively, you didn't really love them at all. Carol knew that wasn't so. Maybe it was up to her to show George he could love more than one person at a time.

"Carol?" Nate's voice brought her out of the past.

"Sorry. Did you say something?"

Nate chuckled and took a sip of his coffee. "Good night I take it?"

"Does everything always have to be about sex with you?" she asked.

The smirk on Nate's face as he tried not to laugh was answer enough.

"Here's your mail. There's a letter on top from Trick Allen," she informed him, handing over the stack of paper.

Nate's brow rose. "Okay. I get it now." He gave her a knowing smile and disappeared into his office.

She noticed Ethan giving her a questioning look. Carol shook her head and waved her hand. "Inside joke, sorry."

Ethan shrugged and turned back to the stack of mail he was sifting through.

"Carol? Can you come in here?" Nate called.

She knew exactly what he wanted, and grabbed her coffee cup on the way into his office. After shutting the door, she filled her cup from Nate's private stash and took a seat. "What do you think?"

"I was about to ask you the same question," Nate answered.

Carol took a drink of her coffee as she stalled. "I think you should say yes."

"What would George say if I asked him?"

Carol squared her shoulders. "I think he'd tell you no, but I also think he'd come to regret it."

Nate leant back in his chair and crossed one leg over his knee. "Still no movement on that front?"

"No. Every time I try to talk to him about it, he changes the subject. But I see him staring off into space sometimes, and I know he's thinking about Trick."

Nate leant forward and picked up the letter before holding it out towards Carol. "Why don't you call Mr. Allen and discuss dates with him? I'm sure a nice concert in the park would do the city good."

"What about outsiders? I think Trick wants this to be a fundraiser," she reminded Nate.

Nate shook his head. "No. What Trick wants is an excuse to come back to town. See if he's got any pull with one of them cable networks. Maybe an intimate concert in the park for residents only, but the cable company could tape it to be broadcast later. I bet we'd raise more money and wouldn't upset our residents as much."

Carol liked the idea. "Maybe one of the gazebos for a stage?"

Nate nodded. "Yeah. The one by the lake would be pretty all lit up at night. Just make sure you tell him the press can't find out about it. I won't have my town overrun with news vans again."

Carol glanced down at the paper in her hand. "Are you sure I should be the one to call him?"

Nate leant against his desk. "I think you're the perfect person to talk to him."

He stood and walked around the edge of the desk. "I'm going to take off for a while. I think I'll head out to check on Asa. Feel free to use my office for your call."

"How is Asa?"

Nate shrugged. "Different. He's still pretty much confined to bed. Although I think he likes it when I take him for a ride outside in his wheelchair."

Despite her injuries being more severe, Carol knew she was lucky to be up and active in only a month and a half. Poor Asa would probably have months of therapy once the doctors let him start walking again. "Give him my best."

"I will. If I'm not back before you leave for the day, give me a call later to tell me how the conversation went."

Carol nodded. She moved to Nate's comfortable chair and picked up the phone. She wasn't sure how long she stared at the number before she finally dialled.

"Hello?"

Carol almost hung up in a panic. His voice sounded even deeper over the phone. "Trick Allen?"

"Who is this?"

"Carol McGowan. I'm calling from Mayor Gills' office in Cattle Valley." She held her breath waiting for his response.

"Hi. You sound like you're doing much better."

Carol exhaled. She was relieved he hadn't immediately hung up. "Yes. I've started working half days again."

"That's good to hear."

The silence seemed to stretch until they were both uncomfortable. "But I think he misses you," she blurted out.

Trick cleared his throat. "Did he say that?"

"No, but I see it in his eyes."

"D...do you love him?" Trick asked, his voice thick with emotion.

"Very much. I've been trying to gather the guts to call you, but I wasn't sure if you'd want to speak to me."

Carol heard someone yelling Trick's name in the background. "I'm sorry. Did I catch you at a bad time?"

"They're all bad lately. But you're right. I do need to go. May I call you later?"

"Um...before six?"

"Is that what time George gets home?"

"Yeah." She heard the same person yelling for Trick once again. "Do you have a piece of paper? I can give you my number."

"I have it."

"You do?" She wasn't listed in the phone book. All she had was a cell phone.

"Yeah. George left it for me last time he joined me on tour. He said if there was ever an emergency, and I couldn't reach him, to call you."

Carol's hand went to her chest. The pain in Trick's voice was so thick she could feel it seep into her own body.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"So am I. Listen, I've got to go tape a commercial, but I should be finished in a few hours. Will you be available then?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Thanks for talking to me."

"Trick?" she said before he could hang up.

"Yeah?"

"Do you still love him?"

She heard a noise she couldn't identify. "More than I ever have," he finally said and hung up.

By the time Carol put down the receiver, she was in tears. She buried her face in her hands and wept for the first time in weeks. At that moment, if she could've gone to Trick to soothe him, she would have. How could she possibly be happy at the expense of two men who loved each other so deeply?

She pulled a tissue out of the box on Nate's desk and blew her nose. The whole situation was complete nonsense. She stood and went through to her office.

"Will you be okay if I take off?" she asked Ethan.

"Sure. Is something wrong?"

"Yes, but I'm about to remedy that." She pulled her purse from the drawer and walked out.

* * * *

Washing the black soot from his body, George was surprised when a female throat cleared behind him. He glanced over his shoulder and spotted Carol standing at the entrance to the communal shower room.

"Hey, baby, what're you doing here?" he asked, turning around to face her. His cock immediately went hard like it did every time Carol was around. He was glad the other guys had already taken their showers.

"Been playing in the chimney again?" she teased.

George smiled and continued to soap his body. "Brush fire outside of town. Nothing serious."

Carol licked her lips and gestured up and down. "Can you finish and put some clothes on? I can't talk to you like this."

"Really?" George began soaping his cock and balls. "You've never had an issue with my nudity before."

"Do you really want Collin or Sammy to walk in and see me naked in the shower with you? Because I'm real close to stripping out of my clothes and sucking on that cock you've got in your hand."

George's nostrils flared at the mental image of Carol dropping to her knees. How many times had he dreamt of getting sucked off in this very shower? However, the thought of his men seeing Carol's full breasts exposed didn't sit well. He quickly rinsed the soap from his body and turned off the water. "You win. Would you toss me that towel?"

Carol grabbed the thick, white towel from its hook and walked towards him. He could tell by the sparkle in her eyes she was up to no good. She began to slowly pat the water from his body, following a few errant drops with her tongue. When she reached his erection, she made sure to dry it thoroughly, spending quite a few moments torturing him.

By the time he was dry, they were both moaning and horny as hell. George wrapped her in his embrace and kissed her, letting his hands roam her body. "I wanna fuck you."

Carol grinned. "Rain check?"

George groaned and wrapped the towel around his waist. "So what's up?" he asked as he strode towards his locker.

"It can wait. No big deal."

George balanced on one leg as he pulled on a pair of black boxer-briefs. "You wouldn't have come all the way down here unless it was important. What's bothering you?"

Carol glanced at her watch. "Don't suppose you can go out for lunch?"

A quick glance at the clock on the wall told him it was barely eleven. No way was she hungry. Something was definitely on her mind. "Give me a second to dress, and we can grab a cup of coffee from the kitchen and head across the street to the park."

"Okay."

He left Carol by the front door as he filled two large travel mugs with strong stationhouse coffee. "I've got my phone with me if you need me. Carol and I are going across the street," he told his newest fireman, Sammy Lee.

"Okay, Chief," Sammy answered and went back to waxing the pumper.

He passed Carol her cup and took her hand. It was obvious she was nervous about something. Several scenarios ran through his head, none of them good. Walking along the winding blacktop path, they made their way to a bench, nestled between two pine trees.

He'd just taken a sip of coffee when Carol spoke. "I talked to Trick earlier."

George almost choked on his coffee. "What?"

Carol's hand reached out to rub his back as he tried to swallow and regain a heartbeat. Even though the morning was relatively cool, sweat popped out on George's forehead as he ran through all the possible reasons she would have to talk to Trick.

"He sent a letter to Nate asking about a benefit concert."

George set his mug on the ground and scrubbed his hands over his face. "Why in the hell would he do that?"

Carol immediately removed her hand from his back, and George groaned. He hadn't meant for the question to come out like an accusation. Carol was the innocent party in the whole mess. The last thing he wanted was to take his anger out on the woman he loved.

"I'm sorry," he apologised.

Carol started to stand. "Maybe we should talk about this later."

George reached out and pulled her onto his lap. "You just surprised me. What did the two of you talk about?"

Carol started biting on her lower lip. George wrapped his hand around the back of her neck and pulled her in for a deep kiss. He laved the tortured lip before breaking away. "Talk to me," he pleaded.

"We didn't get to talk for long because he had something going on, but he asked if he could call me."

"And?"

"I said yes." Carol cupped George's face and placed a soft kiss on his nose. "I want him to stay with us when he comes to town."

"Did you already ask him?" George's feelings on the proposition were all over the place.

"No. That's why I'm talking to you about it."

George shook his head and buried his face against Carol's breasts. When she'd first proposed sharing him with Trick, he could tell it was because she thought he'd get bored and leave her but now something was different. Lately she'd brought it up at every available opportunity.

George leant back and gazed into her blue eyes. "You want him, don't you?"

"I want both of you. I love you, Trick loves you, and you love us both."

George shook his head. He didn't know how to make her understand his primary concern. "He won't stay. If we let him into our lives, he'll continue to flit in and out at his convenience."

Carol wiggled her ass against George's groin. "And in those times he's not here, we'll have each other. He'll be the one lonely."

George chuckled. "Trick's never lonely. He's got women lined up after every concert."

Carol stilled. "Are you saying no because you think he won't want me?"

"No!" *Damn.* Would he ever be able to convince his woman how desirable and sexy she was? "I just don't want you to be hurt when he takes off at a moment's notice. Believe me, I've lived the life of a secret lover for too many years not to know how it feels."

"And yet you're still in love with him. Please? Let me just mention the idea and see what he says?"

George opened his mouth to protest but snapped it shut before the words could be spoken. Maybe it was possible to have both. He wanted a stable life with Carol more than anything, but she was right, he did still love Trick. He'd caught himself thinking about his long-time lover many times over the previous months. It didn't seem to matter how much he thought of Trick, it never once diminished his love for Carol.

"Don't invite him to stay with us, but go ahead and ask him to dinner. We'll let things develop from there."

Carol smiled. "I love you."

"Not half as much as I love you." He sure as hell hoped he was doing the right thing.

Chapter Five

Trick drove up the mountain in a rented pickup. The last thing he wanted was to draw attention to his arrival. It was for that reason that he'd actually made hotel reservations under his real name. He'd already made arrangements with Chad Neal, The Tall Pines Lodge manager, and had been preregistered in one of the small guest cabins.

He consulted the directions he'd been given once again, and drove to the far side of the lodge. A string of around six cabins were nestled among the trees next to the main lodge. Trick parked next to the front door of cabin six, happy to see it was the most isolated and grabbed his bags out of the back.

The key was under the mat where Chad said it would be, and he let himself in. After setting his luggage inside the door, he walked through the small three room cabin. Not exactly what he'd been looking forward to upon his arrival in Cattle Valley, but it would do.

Pulling out his phone, he made himself comfortable on the couch and called George. The two of them had spoken a few times in the previous week. Trick knew George was still uneasy about his visit, but at least he was giving things a chance.

Carol was an entirely different story. They'd spoken for hours daily since their initial phone conversation. He found her to be incredibly funny and honest. She'd told him about her past and her fears. Trick couldn't remember ever relating to a woman like he did Carol. He quickly began to figure out exactly why George had fallen in love as completely as he had.

"Hello?" George answered, sounding groggy.

"Did I wake you?" Trick glanced at the clock. It was only three in the afternoon. Unless George had suddenly started taking naps, he had a feeling he was in bed, but not to sleep.

"Nope. Just lying here with my girl. Did you get in okay?"

George's voice rose at the tail end of the sentence. With the sound of slurping in the background, he had a feeling his lover was getting a blowjob.

Trick's cock began to harden. He unzipped his jeans and stuck a hand down his pants. "Yeah. We still on for dinner?"

"Mmmm," George moaned. "Come over anytime. We thought we'd grill some steaks."

Trick wanted to ask George if he could join them, but he knew that would be pushing his luck. He'd managed to have phone sex with both of them several days earlier. Carol had called, and she'd caught him masturbating. She must have known right away and had begun to talk him through it. He in turn, had said just the right things, to entice Carol to touch herself. He loved talking sexy to a woman. The way they moaned and purred really got him hot.

Evidently, Carol had told George when he came over that night, and George had called to bitch him out. Trick had turned the tables on his love and ended up making him come before the conversation was over.

In Trick's opinion, it was the best thing that could've happened. Carol had been upfront with her desires, but he knew what someone said over the phone wasn't always the way it worked out in person.

"Let me take a quick shower, and I'll be over. Tell Carol she has about thirty minutes to finish sucking you off."

George gasped. "How'd you know?"

"Please. Don't insult me. Just save me a kiss."

"We'll see ya in thirty," George said and hung up.

Trick dropped the phone to the small table and began stripping out of his clothes. He looked down at his hard cock and shook his head. "Guess I should've said forty-five minutes."

* * * *

Carol stood naked in front of her closet. She'd tried on about five outfits so far and none of them seemed right for her first meeting with Trick outside of the mayor's office. In the past, she'd had only brief glimpses of him when he'd roll into town for Cattle Valley Days.

Strong arms circled her waist and she was pulled back against George's chest. "What's wrong?" he asked, nipping her neck.

"I don't know what to wear."

"Well I guess that depends on what you want to happen."

Carol spun around. She was disappointed to see George already fully dressed. "What do you mean, what I want to happen?"

George grazed her breast with his palm before reaching over her shoulder to pull out one of her sundresses. "Here, wear this. If you want attention, leave off the panties. If you'd rather get to know him better, put them on. I'll check at some point and take that as your answer."

The doorbell rang before she could say anything. George kissed her and walked out of the bedroom.

Carol stood with the white sundress in her hands. The last thing she wanted was to come off like a groupie slut, she finally decided. She reached into the top dresser drawer and pulled out a pair of flesh-coloured underwear.

By the time she'd applied her makeup and fixed her hair, she could hear George and Trick talking in the kitchen. Following the voices, she stepped into the room and came face to face with Trick.

He pushed away from the island and took off his hat. "Hi."

Carol wasn't sure of the proper protocol in a situation like this. She started to hold out her hand but thought better of it and embraced him instead.

She started to step away, but Trick pulled her back in. He put his lips to her ear and whispered, "You're even prettier than I remembered." He ended the statement with a soft kiss to her bare shoulder.

Carol felt goosebumps travel down her arm as Trick released her. She stood dumfounded for several seconds before George's chuckle snapped her out of it. He was already deep in conversation with Trick.

With a deep breath, she opened the refrigerator. "Anyone need another beer?"

George gave his bottle a little shake and nodded. "Yes, please."

"None for me just yet," Trick answered.

Two bottles in hand, Carol walked back over to the table. She started to take her usual place on George's lap, but thought better of it and pulled out a chair. When George gave her a questioning expression, she shook her head. He must've realised she was still feeling awkward because he smiled and went back to his conversation.

The two of them continued talking about people she'd never met, all the while gazing into each other's eyes. "I'm going to start the grill."

Stepping out onto the deck, she took a deep breath. Although the two men were talking like old friends, the sexual tension in the room was so thick she hadn't been able to breathe.

She crossed to the large gas grill and turned on the propane. She heard the door open and shut before being enveloped in George's embrace.

"Everything okay?"

"Why do you keep asking me that?"

George's hands travelled up her thighs and under her dress. His middle finger ran the length of her pussy. She couldn't tell whether he was disappointed that she'd worn panties or not. He continued to rub his hand against her clit through the silk underwear.

"I keep worrying that you're going to change your mind about all this. Is it different seeing us in the same room?" he asked.

Carol pressed against his hand and shook her head. "If anything's making me uncomfortable it's the two of you trying so hard to act like you don't want to touch each other."

"I don't have the right to do that without your permission," George said, licking the side of her neck.

"I gave the two of you permission when I invited him into my home," she clarified.

Removing his hand from between her legs, he spun her around and kissed her. "Promise me this won't change us."

She could see the worry in his eyes. "I know you love me. I still don't always understand why, but I do accept it."

Stepping back, George took her by the hand and led her back into the house. Together they walked over to where Trick was sitting, and George bent down to give the country legend a kiss.

Carol watched as the kiss went deeper, spotting George's skilful tongue thrust into Trick's mouth. Trick moaned at the invasion and gave George's mouth the same treatment. By the time the two men separated, Carol was horny as hell. She tried not to let it show as she gestured towards the deck.

"I need to get the steaks on."

"I'll do it," George offered. He stared into her eyes. Carol could tell he was making sure she was okay with what just happened. She smiled and kissed him.

"Why don't you get the salad put together?" he asked.

"That's fine," she answered.

Before George could walk off, Carol gave him another kiss. This time, she swept the interior of his mouth with her tongue. She tasted the man she loved and what she assumed was Trick. George ended the kiss by sucking her bottom lip like he always did.

After retrieving the platter of ribeyes from the fridge, George winked at her. "Trick can help you in here."

Had she ever seen that particular spark in the man's eyes? She wondered if it was Trick, or a combination of the two of them. It shouldn't have surprised her, but it did. She'd known since the beginning that part of George's soul belonged to the man now in her kitchen.

Carol turned and started getting things out of the refrigerator. Trick was standing at the centre island when she turned around. "How are you at cutting up vegetables?"

Trick grinned. "Haven't done it since going home to visit my mom, but I'm sure I can handle it."

He stepped over to the sink to wash his hands as Carol got out the cutting board and one of her chef's knives. They worked side by side talking about the upcoming concert in the park. Carol was surprised when Trick's hand landed on the small of her back.

She turned to face him. "Something wrong?"

Trick nodded. "May I kiss you?"

Carol put down the paring knife she'd been using to slice tomatoes and dried her hands on a towel. She reached behind her and took Trick's hand in hers. "Follow me."

With Trick in tow, Carol went outside to stand next to the chair George had pulled over beside the grill. Turning slowly, she wrapped her arms around Trick's neck and tilted her chin up. In her mind, it was only right to give George the same courtesy he'd given her.

Trick made a little sound in his throat before sealing his lips over her mouth. She opened immediately and felt the slide of Trick's tongue as it stroked the roof of her mouth. No longer feeling shy, Carol moaned and pressed her body against Trick's.

His hands worked their way down her back to land on her ass. As he squeezed her ample cheeks, she heard George groan. Another set of arms encircled them as George pressed against her back, trapping Trick's hands.

The kiss continued to heat up as George began to grind against her. Needing air, Carol pulled out of the kiss and laid her head back on George's chest. She felt Trick's erection begin to press against her stomach as George leant over her to kiss him.

There was something about watching the two long-time lovers kiss that set her on fire.

Trick was the first to break the kiss with George. "This probably isn't the best place to be doing this."

At that point, Carol couldn't care less that she was in her backyard instead of the privacy of her house. She wanted more. Evidently George agreed because she received a quick nip to her neck.

"I'll bring in the steaks."

In a matter of minutes, her deepest fantasy had started and then been abruptly shut off. Carol felt like stomping her feet as George pulled away to tend to the grill. Trick must've known she was upset because he gave her another brief kiss.

"Not the end of the game, just a timeout."

He wrapped an arm around her waist and led her back inside. George came in right after them and set the steaks in the oven. He turned and faced Carol and Trick. "Let's go into the living room and talk."

"Talk?" Carol asked, more confused than ever.

George grabbed three bottles of beer from the fridge and led the way out of the kitchen without another word. Once they reached the living room, he gestured to the couch.

Why did she suddenly feel like she was being sent to the principal's office? Was he angry? She opened her mouth to apologise when George sat down and pulled her onto his lap.

"Are you mad at me?" she asked.

George turned her so she was facing sideways on his lap. "Why would I be mad at you?"

Carol shrugged. Maybe George had changed his mind about her sleeping with him and Trick. "Because I enjoyed it?"

Trick chuckled from his position beside them. He was also seated to the side with one leg hiked up on the sofa.

She tried not to stare at the large bulge outlined behind the fly of his jeans, but she couldn't help herself.

"You'd better speed this along," Trick told George.

With one arm wrapped around her, George leant forward and picked up one of the beers and handed it to her before getting his own. "Drink," he told her with a bright smile on his face.

Carol took several sips of her beer. "What's going on?"

"I said a little of this to Trick before he came here, but now it's time to clear the air between all of us," George began.

"I don't want this to be just about sex for you and Trick. The problem is, I'm not sure I want you to love him either."

Confused, Carol turned to look at George. "Why?"

"Because I end up hurting the people I love most," Trick mumbled.

George nodded. "As I've told you over and over, he won't stay. So if we're going to do this, I need you to go in with your eyes open. When he leaves us at the drop of a hat, or goes to Jamaica for a photo shoot without us, you can't get upset. He'll still have to parade a string of women around town for the paparazzi, but you can't let that upset you either. In order to keep his reputation as a ladies' man, he has to fuck them from time to time so they'll talk. It's just the way it is."

Carol's gaze swung to Trick. The man was downright pale. When his dark eyes glanced up at her, she saw the unshed tears pooling in their depths. "Are you okay?"

Trick shook his head and cleared his throat. He stared at George and tried to get his emotions under control. "I'm sorry I did that to you. I mean, I knew you complained, but I guess I never realised how much it hurt you. I don't even know why you'd consider giving me another chance."

"Because he loves you," Carol answered for George.

Trick stood and shifted from foot to foot. "I'm gonna go back to the lodge."

Carol reached out to him. "Please don't go."

Trick leant over and kissed her before moving to give George a quick kiss. Carol wondered why George hadn't asked Trick to stay. It wasn't like the man she loved to hurt someone and not acknowledge it.

After retrieving his hat from the kitchen, Trick walked towards the front door. With his hand on the knob, he spoke once more. "Sorry about running out on you like this, but I've got some thinking to do."

Carol kept waiting for George to stop him, but he didn't even try. When Trick left the house, she laid her head against George's chest. "What was that all about?"

George sighed. "To be honest? I'm not sure. Although the things I said were harsh, they were true, so I couldn't take them back. Trick saw the truth of the situation, so he ran, just like he always has."

"And what situation is that?"

"You're starting to fall in love with him. I saw it in your eyes, and I can't let it happen, not now, not when Trick's more concerned with his career than the people who love him."

Carol knew George was only trying to keep her from the same pain he'd lived with for so many years, but his making decisions for her didn't sit well. "How about we make a deal? You let me decide what I can and can't handle. Okay?"

George tilted her chin up for a kiss. "Can you honestly tell me it wouldn't hurt you to see him plastered on the front of magazines with his arm around another woman?"

Carol shook her head. "No. I'm not saying that, but it should be my choice, not yours."

After another kiss, Carol stood and held out her hand. "Come on. Let's go."

"Where?" George eyed her suspiciously.

"To console the man you love."

George shook his head. "He's not that kind of guy."

Carol put her hands on George's shoulders and leant towards him. "How do you know?"

"Because he never tried to console me when I got upset about his favourite girl of the week."

"Just because someone doesn't know how to console others, doesn't mean they don't need it themselves." She pulled George to his feet. "I think maybe he's gotten so wrapped up in this singing business, he's forgotten what it's like to be Tomas de la Cruz. Why don't we go show him how much we care for the man he is, not the star he's become."

* * * *

Trick stopped on the way back to his cabin and bought a twelve pack of his favourite Mexican beer. He was stripped to his underwear, and enjoying his third bottle, when someone knocked on the door.

"Go away," he yelled.

"Open up, Tomas."

Trick was surprised to hear George's voice. He'd already convinced himself things with George were over. Sure, he knew George still loved him, but he also knew he didn't deserve it. How many years had he run out on George at a moment's notice? Hell. They'd been together nineteen years and never had they had an actual public date.

The knock came again. "Please let us in," Carol pleaded.

With a resigned groan, Trick rose and opened the door. Carol's bright blue eyes went wide. It was then he remembered he was in his underwear. Never one to be shy, he motioned for them to follow him.

"Want a beer?" he asked.

"I'll get them," Carol offered and strode towards the kitchen.

George stood uneasily just inside the room for several moments before joining Trick on the couch. "I'm afraid you'll hurt her," he finally told Trick.

"I know you are." It was odd for him to see George so in love with someone else. For all the years they'd been together, Trick never really noticed the little things George did for him in the name of love. He did now. To see that love manifested in soft touches and smiles broke his heart. How could he have gone so long without noticing?

"I swear I never meant to hurt you," Trick confessed. "I guess I got so caught up in the hype everyone was feeding me, I started to believe it."

Carol came back into the room and handed out the bottles. "What hype is that?" she asked, taking a seat in George's lap.

"That it's the image, not the talent that makes a star."

Carol moved from George's lap to crawl into Trick's. He wrapped his arms around the special woman, gladly accepting the tender gesture.

"In many cases, I think that's true, but we all know you can sing. I guess it depends on whether you want your fans to love you for your voice or your image." Carol kissed Trick's throat. "How much money do you have?"

Trick was shocked by the question. He doubted anyone along the way had the nerve to ask him that question. "Enough."

Carol kissed her way up to his ear. "And how happy does that money make you?"

Trick was starting to have a hard time concentrating as she continued to lick and suck on his earlobe. He felt his cock filling and knew she had to feel it too.

George's hand cupped the other side of Trick's face. "I think what Carol's trying to say is, now that you've become the superstar you've always wanted, are you happy?"

Trick closed his eyes. How many times had he asked himself the very same question since George had broken things off? "If I come out, I'll be right back where I started, forced to sing in clubs and county fairs."

Carol sat up and wrapped her arms around his neck. "So you're telling me it's the fame you love more than the singing."

Was it? He'd dug himself out of poverty with the help of his voice, but it was his image that made the money. But how much money was enough? *Hell. I've got enough money to last four lifetimes, so why am I still living a lie?*

"I guess I need to figure out how much public opinion really matters to me. Because at this point, the money isn't an issue."

Carol nodded her agreement. He glanced at George to see his reaction, and saw the same accepting expression.

George scooted closer, leaning in for a kiss.

Trick gazed into the eyes of the man he loved. He knew he needed to say something to erase some of the pain he'd inflicted over the years, but he also knew there weren't enough words in the English language. He settled on the most honest. "I love you."

"I know," George answered, sealing his lips over Trick's.

With one hand still on Carol's lower back, Trick brought the other up to hold George's head in place as he took the kiss deeper. Even after all the years they'd been together, he never tired of kissing the man.

He felt Carol's hands kneading his cock through his underwear and moaned.

George broke their kiss and chuckled. "You feeling left out, baby?"

Carol shook her head. "Not really. Seeing the two of you kiss just gets me horny."

George's hand joined Carol's, as they both began to push Trick's underwear down to expose his erect penis. As soon as his cock was free of the tight material, Carol's hand wrapped around his girth.

"Oh," she gasped her approval.

Trick watched as George's hand disappeared underneath Carol's dress. The woman writhed with pleasure as George's hand continued to move.

"Why don't you stand up and show Trick what you did for him while I go hunt down a condom," George said, pulling his hand from between her legs.

George stood and looked at Trick. "Did you bring anything?"

Fuck! "No. Sorry. I'm not used to using anything with you. I guess it didn't even dawn on me."

George licked his fingers clean before heading towards the door. "I bet the lodge has some. The two of you get to know each other while I'm gone."

Before George had even opened the door, Trick was lifting Carol's dress up over her head and off. His first look at her naked breasts threatened his control. "Damn."

He heard George chuckle as he opened the door. "Fantastic, aren't they?"

Cupping the large breasts in his hand, he gave them a gentle squeeze. Carol's back bowed at the pressure, grinding her wet pussy against Trick's thigh. He'd been so mesmerised by her breasts that he hadn't even noticed she was now completely naked.

"I do enjoy a woman who goes commando."

Carol continued to ride his leg, as he pinched her nipples into hard peaks. "George prefers it that way," she eventually answered.

"Smart man."

Releasing her breasts, Trick put his hands on Carol's ass and slid her forward. She gasped as her pussy came into contact with Trick's erection. *Damn* he wanted to fuck her. He settled on running his shaft between her lips to rub the head against her clit.

"Oh, oh," Carol panted, moving her hips back and forth with more pressure.

With his arms around her waist, he turned them until Carol was lying under him on the couch. As good as her pussy felt on his cock, he wanted it on his tongue. He scooted down until he was eye level with the cleanly shaved mound.

His mouth began to water just looking at the glistening channel. After adjusting Carol's legs to accommodate his shoulders, Trick spread her plump lips and trailed his tongue from asshole to clit and back down.

Carol continued to moan as his tongue played with the pink rosebud, as he fingered her pussy. "I want you," she groaned.

"You want my dick?" He rubbed the small patch of hair under his lip against her clit as he continued to transfer her cream down to her hole. Normally he didn't ass fuck a woman.

That was one thing he'd always saved for George, but he knew it would be different with Carol.

"Yesss," she hissed.

He heard the door shut and glanced over at George. "Get 'em?"

George tossed a small bottle of lube and box of condoms onto the table before stripping his clothes off. Trick reached for the box and tore off one of the condoms from the strip as he leant back to sit on his heels.

Naked, George knelt beside the couch and leant down to kiss Carol. "Are you sure about this?"

Carol nodded and pulled George's head down to whisper something in his ear. Trick rolled the condom on and poised his cock at the entrance to Carol's pussy.

George chuckled and gave Carol another kiss before reaching for the lube and condoms.

"Problem?" Trick asked, sliding the first couple of inches inside Carol.

"She wants me to fuck you." George stood and gazed down at Trick. "If that's okay with you."

"My ass is yours, always has been, but why the condom?"

George opened the bottle of lube and poured some in his hand. "Because Carol and I have both been tested. I'm not the only one I have to worry about anymore. Until you decide Carol's pussy and my cock are the only ones you want, we'll play it safe."

He already knew they were the only people he wanted, but he couldn't tell them that until he got his shit together. George's skilful fingers began stretching him. "Missed you," he said over his shoulder.

George bent and placed a kiss on Trick's shoulder. "I've missed you, too."

As was typical with his lover, George gently moved from one finger to two. The dual sensation of his cock half in Carol's pussy and George brushing his prostate, almost sent him over the edge.

"Just do it," he groaned.

Carol nodded her agreement as she began to rub her clit. "Yes. Please."

Trick heard the rattle of the condom package as George tore it open. Using one hand to brace himself, Trick used the other to help hold himself open as George's sheathed cock pushed slowly in.

It had been long enough that the initial penetration burned like hell, but he knew it would give way to pleasure soon enough. Once his lover was fully seated, Trick sunk as far as he could go into Carol's pussy. All three of them groaned in unison.

"We're joined," Carol said, her eyes sparkling with lust and love.

It took several seconds for George and Trick to establish a rhythm, but once they got it, it was everything Trick knew it would be. He leant down and gave Carol a kiss. "Thank you," he whispered.

Threading her fingers through his hair, Carol moved her lips to his ear. "You hurt him again, and I'll track you down and cut off your balls."

Trick couldn't help but smile. "There's the Carol I remember."

Carol gifted him with a satisfied smirk as she repositioned her legs to drape over his shoulders. "George doesn't deserve the bitch in me, and neither do you...yet."

Trick knew he'd just been warned, strange how the thought comforted him. He knew if he could find a way to be with these two extraordinary people, he'd have allies for life.

Chapter Six

Trick held the phone to his ear and clenched the hand wrapped around the steering wheel. "Sorry, Andy. I've already told you I'm not working during my vacation."

He consulted the map Ezra had drawn and turned into the EZ Does It.

"Dammit, Trick. You can't do a benefit concert and not expect to do some promo for it."

"Wasn't part of the deal. I said on more than one occasion I wouldn't do promo until I return from my vacation. The folks of this town have enough to worry about without bringing press here. So help me God, Andy, if I find out anyone leaked this concert to the press, I'll cancel everything."

"I'll be there on Friday, we can talk more then."

"Nope, no need for you to be here. When I said a small sound and camera crew only, I meant it."

"Don't be ridiculous. Someone's going to need to coordinate everything," Andy spat.

"I've already taken care of that. Carol and her assistant Ethan have already agreed to help."

"The mayor's secretary? Why would you want to work with that bitch? I hate dealing with her."

"Don't ever, *ever*, let me hear you say that again."

"You fucking her? I thought you went there for George."

"Drop it, Andy. It's absolutely none of your business where I put my dick."

"It sure as hell is my business."

"Well, maybe that'll have to change." Andy had been his manager for more than half his career, but he was starting to demand more and more, and Trick was damn sick of it.

"Are you threatening me!" Andy screamed.

Trick sighed and waved to Ezra. "I'm not in the mood for this bullshit. I'm on vacation, and I'm getting ready to go ride a horse." Trick hung up and turned off his phone.

He knew Andy would try calling back, and he didn't care to hear anything the man had to say. He climbed out of the truck and walked towards Ezra.

"Sorry about that. My manager called, and I couldn't get him off the phone."

"No problem." Ezra greeted Trick with a strong handshake. "I've got Jax saddling a horse for you. You did say you were an experienced rider, right?"

Trick nodded. "You can't spend twenty years in country music and not learn how to ride a horse."

The two of them walked into the barn and ran into a red-faced Wyn.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" Wyn asked Ezra.

"Nothing. Trick mentioned he'd like to go for a ride, so I offered up one of our mounts."

"You don't plan on going with him, do you?" Wyn asked in an accusing manner.

"No, Mother. I'm still as aware of the doctor's restrictions as I was an hour ago," Ezra answered.

Trick couldn't help but grin. The two of them were so damn cute together. He could tell the much smaller Wyn got his way when it counted.

Wyn gave Ezra a satisfied smile and kissed him. "I'm going into the store for a few hours to train Ethan on the register."

"So he's gonna do it?" Ezra asked.

"Yeah, but just a few hours in the evenings when he gets off at the mayor's office. I still have to find someone full-time for the day shift."

Ezra pulled Wyn in for another kiss. This one went on so long, Trick started to get uncomfortable. When Ezra finally came up for air, he chuckled and gave Wyn a swat on the ass. "See ya later."

A red-faced Wyn narrowed his eyes. Trick could tell retribution would be exacted once the two men were alone.

After Wyn had sauntered off, Ezra turned back to Trick. "The doctor still won't let me do shit since my heart attack. I'm bored as hell and Wyn knows it, which is why he thinks I need a babysitter."

"No need to explain."

Ezra gestured to a big black mare already saddled and ready-to-go. "This is Miss Molly."

Trick walked up to the horse and ran his hands over the gleaming black coat. "She's gorgeous."

Ezra nodded and untied the reins. "You can pretty much go anywhere on the property you want. When you come to a gate, just make sure you close it behind you. Stay clear of the cattle."

Trick nodded. "Can I ride a little up into the hills?"

"Sure. No finer view of the land than up on Old Woman Rock. Once you get into the pasture, head due north and you'll see her."

Trick thanked Ezra and led Miss Molly out of the barn through the back door and straight into the pasture. Once his stirrups were adjusted to the proper length, he rode off towards Old Woman Rock. He had to chuckle at the name locals attached to landmarks.

On his way through the pretty countryside, he thought of Carol and George. Nothing new about that, he'd thought of them almost non-stop lately. He'd spent yet another enjoyable evening with the couple at Carol's house the previous night.

The best part about his time with them was their apparent ease around him. They hadn't really adjusted their lifestyle at all except to add him into their daily lives. He knew to some an extra man in the mix would be a big deal, but George and Carol seemed to take to it like it was perfectly natural. Trick assumed it had something to do with Carol's past experience with a threesome.

He still couldn't get over the thought of the two jackasses she'd once loved, leaving her for some knocked-up waitress from Sheridan. Some men had no taste whatsoever. Their loss, his and George's gain.

Trick took a deep breath. *Damn* he loved the fresh smell of the country. Even the cow manure didn't bother him. It was as if he'd come home, which was actually funny since he'd grown up in the city, but he'd always been a cowboy at heart.

He started going through his mental shopping list of things he needed to pick up on the way home. Trick stopped his mount, stunned. Since when had he come to think of Carol's house as home? Hell, he didn't even own a house, just a small apartment in Nashville. He'd considered the tour bus his home for more years than he cared to think about.

The tightening in his chest had him digging the phone out of his shirt pocket. After turning it on, and ignoring the five messages he was sure Andy had left, he tried to fix on a signal.

He noticed the further uphill he travelled, the better the service. Once he had enough bars, he called Carol's cell.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me. Just checking on my favourite girl."

"Ummm, can you hang on a sec?"

"Sure. I'd love to get you alone so I can talk dirty to you." Trick reached down and adjusted his hardening cock. "Although I'm on a saddle and getting hard might not be the best thing."

Carol laughed. "Okay, I'm in the storage closet, pretending to get supplies. Now, about that dirty talk you promised."

"You like that do ya?"

"Mmm, maybe."

"Tell me which you like better. Would you rather I talked to you about eating that sweet pussy of yours, or actually did it?"

Carol sighed. "What do you think?"

"I think you like both." He grinned at her silence.

"Which do you like better, sucking George's cock or licking my pussy?" Carol asked, turning the tables on him.

"Both. That's like comparing apples to oranges."

"Hmmm, you're pretty smart."

"I like to think so. I won't keep you, the saddle's getting damn uncomfortable on my cock, and I'm pretty much out in the open. All I need is a picture of me masturbating on the front page of one of those weekly newspapers."

"It would sell out in hours and you know it."

"You're probably right. I'll be by at noon to drive you home. Do you want me to get groceries on the way, or did you want to go with me?"

Carol laughed. "I detest grocery shopping. Feel free to take care of that particular chore before you pick me up. I'll wait if necessary."

"Okay, baby, I get it. See you soon."

"Bye."

As soon as he hung up the phone he switched it off and dropped it back into his pocket. He continued to ride up the hill until he reached the top. Though the view wasn't great, he did see Old Woman Rock in the distance.

"Well I'll be damned." No wonder the locals called the outcropping by that name. The rocks looked exactly like the profile of an old hag, complete with hook nose.

By the time he guided Miss Molly up the slope, he could see for miles. The town of Cattle Valley looked like a picture postcard from his new vantage point.

A whinny off to his left caught his attention. He rode towards the sound and was surprised to see a young cowboy sitting on a large rounded rock. The man was just as surprised to see Trick and quickly dried the tears from his face.

"I'm sorry," Trick apologised. "Ezra told me this was the best place to come for a good view."

The cowboy stood and extended his hand. "Ezra was right. I'm Neil Peters."

"Trick Allen," he greeted.

"I know. I heard Jax and Ezra talking before I left the barn. Sorry you caught me acting like a baby. Sometimes I need to get away and deal with things. This is my thinking spot."

Trick dismounted and tied his horse to a low scrub bush. "No apologies necessary. We all need to let go of our emotions from time to time."

Neil nodded but didn't say anything. Trick doubted he'd ever seen a more unhappy person in his life. "Need to talk? I know sometimes it helps."

Neil climbed back up on his rock and gazed out over the town. "It's changed, ya know." He glanced over his shoulder at Trick. "Cattle Valley, I mean."

Trick nodded and joined Neil on the rock. "No way it couldn't after what happened."

"Yeah. Everyone seems afraid to talk to me now. It makes me feel like I died with Gavin."

Trick recognised the name. Gavin had been one of the people killed in the collapse. "Were the two of you close?"

Neil took off his straw cowboy hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his forearm. "Yeah, guess so, although I never got up the guts to tell him how much he meant to me."

"And did you love him?"

"I don't know. We had a big fight the day of the rodeo. He accused me of being frigid. I wanted to tell him some stuff about me, but I was too afraid."

Neil slapped his hat against his thigh. "It was the reason we weren't sitting together when it happened. And now it's too late." He looked around. "So I come up here and talk to him. I don't know if he hears, but I'd like to think he does."

Neil turned and regarded Trick. "You ever been in love?"

Trick was so used to denying it to anyone, he almost said no. He stopped himself and took a deep breath. "Yeah. I think I love two people, actually."

"They know it?" Neil asked.

"One of them. The other's kind of a new development, so no, I haven't told her yet."

"You should, ya know? Because you never know what could happen."

Trick nodded. "It's a little harder for me. People expect certain things."

"Don't matter what people expect from you, it's what you expect of yourself that counts."

Trick didn't have a reply. He knew the boy was naïve in the way the world really worked, but he also liked how Neil cut things down to the bare bones. He wished his choices in life were that simple.

"I've got too many people counting on me to pay their wages. It would be a crime to think of just myself like that."

Neil laughed. Although the sound was a tad rusty, he could tell it was genuine. "Who's gonna think of you if not you? Believe me, those folks were looking for a job when you hired 'em. They'll find another, but will you give up your chance to tell those two people you love them? That's the crime right there."

Trick reached out and rubbed Neil's back. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen," he stated proudly. "Be twenty in another month and a half, though."

Hell. He'd been in love with George nearly as long as the boy had been alive. Trick wondered if it was some kind of omen, or fate, or another one of those new fangled terms. "You're a pretty wise young man. It sucks when you have to learn a lesson the way you had to learn it, but you'll be a better person because of it."

Neil ducked his head and resettled his hat. "Doubt it. People tend to avoid me these days."

"Probably because they don't know what to say. Hell, someone just has to look into your eyes to see you're hurting. Maybe they think if they bring it up, it'll hurt ya even more. Easier to avoid the elephant in the room, if you know what I mean."

Neil nodded. "So why're you talking to me?"

"Because maybe I needed to talk to someone, too. Sometimes the best way to work things out with yourself is to talk to someone about their own troubles. Like I imagine there are other folks in town who need to talk to someone."

Neil shrugged. "Wouldn't know who. Besides the cowboys here on the ranch and Gavin, I don't know many people."

"Then I guess it's the perfect time to change that. Try talking to the preacher man in town. I bet he knows of someone who could use a friend."

"I'll think about it. I used to talk to my neighbour, but he won't have anything to do with me since I came out of the closet. Some stuff happened, and then I moved here."

"I bet he would if he knew you were hurting."

Neil shook his head. "I doubt it."

Trick squeezed Neil's shoulder. He noticed the way Neil flinched, but the boy didn't pull away. "Do me a favour and try again."

"Maybe," Neil mumbled. He stood and slid off the rock. "Best be getting back to work. Thanks for listening."

"Thanks for talking. I'll be in town for another week or so. I'm staying with George Manning and Carol McGowan. You know them?"

"Some."

"Well, you can find me at Carol's house most days."

Neil retrieved his horse and mounted up. "Those the two people you were talking about?"

Trick nodded.

"You're lucky. They seem like nice folks."

"They are."

* * * *

George ran his hand down Trick's bare chest. "Now this is the way to spend a day off."

Trick grinned and rolled on top of George. "Now if we could just get that woman of ours to get here."

George chuckled. "She said she was going to Wynfield's after she got off to find something special to wear for the big concert."

He liked Trick thinking of Carol as their woman. It was obvious to him the two of them had fallen hard for each other, but they were both too damn scared of the future to say it. He knew it was partially his fault. He'd been upfront about Trick's lifestyle and had warned Carol on several occasions not to fall for him.

Staring into the face of the man he loved, he knew he should've saved his breath. You couldn't be around the real Trick Allen and not lose your heart. "You leaving Sunday?"

"For a bit. I've got some things lined up that I can't get out of. I'm hoping to be back in a month or so though. Why? You gonna miss me?"

"What do you think?" George wrapped his legs around Trick's waist and pulled him down for a kiss. After thoroughly fucking the man's mouth with his tongue, he could feel Trick's cock beginning to harden.

He knew he needed to talk to Trick about his fears before Carol got home, but he hated to spoil their time together. "Will you do me a favour?"

"Sure." Trick started grinding against George.

"Cool it with the photo ops for awhile? Despite what she says, I think it would damn near kill Carol to see a skinny blonde attached to your side."

Trick rolled to the side and sat up. "I've already decided I'm done with that shit. I don't want anyone besides the two of you. I'll tell Andy to go fuck himself if he doesn't like it."

Although George was more than pleased to hear it, a part of him was jealous. How long had he put up with seeing the man he loved draped by one bimbo after another?

"That's good." He tossed off the covers and threw his legs over the side of the bed. "I'll make some lunch. Carol will be hungry when she gets home."

"Hey," Trick said, reaching out to grab George's hand. "What the fuck's wrong? I thought you'd be happy about my decision."

George couldn't even turn and look Trick in the eyes. He knew he was being irrational, but he was hurt, damn it, and he didn't feel like saying something to make Trick feel proud about his decision.

"I lived through the pictures for nineteen years, and you never once offered to stand up to Andy on my behalf. Suddenly Carol's in the picture and everything's changed. So excuse me if it hurts."

He pulled his hand away and started for the door. Before he reached the opening, Trick bounded out of bed and blocked his path. "Hold up." Trick put a hand to the centre of George's chest.

"I made the decision for both of you. I've been doing a hell of a lot of thinking lately, and I realised I couldn't keep hurting you. I know I've acted like a bastard in the past, and I'm trying to fix it!" Trick screamed.

George took a step back. He couldn't remember a time when Trick had ever yelled at him with so much vehemence in his voice. The man was definitely passionate about his decision, that was for damn sure.

George dropped his head. "I guess I'm so used to you hurting me, I don't know what to do when you actually put me first for a change. I'm sorry."

Trick stepped forward and put his hands on either side of George's face. "I love you, you stupid jackass. I told you I was trying to make some changes, that's just one of them. And no, before you even get the idea into your head, it's not just because of Carol. Although I love her, I love you, too. What I'm doing is for all of us."

George started to answer, when Carol stepped around the corner. They'd been so busy yelling at each other, he hadn't heard her come in. "Hey, baby."

Carol smiled and pressed herself against Trick's back, effectively trapping him between her and George. "Did you mean it?" she whispered in Trick's ear.

George's attention moved back to Trick. He saw the emotion in his lover's eyes as he nodded.

"I did."

Carol moved around to squeeze between Trick and George. "I love you, too."

George watched as Trick buried his fingers in Carol's long hair and pulled her in for a kiss. Knowing the two of them needed some time alone, he placed a soft kiss on both their cheeks.

"I'll go make lunch," he said, backing up and moving around the pair of lovers. He didn't begrudge their new feelings for each other. On the contrary, he finally felt like his family was complete. No longer did he feel as though he were being pulled in two different directions. His life was now centred around two extraordinary people.

* * * *

"You guys hungry?" George asked, sticking his head in the room.

Trick was in the process of removing his condom. He gazed down at his seemingly well fucked woman. "You hungry?"

Carol smiled and stretched her arms over her head. "Mmm, lunch and then a nap sounds good."

Trick leant down to take one of Carol's well-loved nipples into his mouth for a quick suck before addressing a scrumptiously naked George. "Is this a formal affair, or can we come to the table like this?"

"Hey, as long as you don't mind a few gropes here and there, I'm happy to eat naked."

Trick stood and held out a hand to Carol. "Come on, pretty lady. Let's go torment George."

Before she'd leave the room, Carol insisted on stopping to brush her hair. "I don't mind the two of you staring at my girlie bits, but I draw the line at well-fucked bedhead."

Trick followed Carol and George into the kitchen, enjoying the view immensely. Hmmm, he wondered if the three of them could fit in one chair?

Despite the fact that he'd just come, his cock twitched at the idea of fucking in the kitchen. He'd always been more of a location guy than a position guy. "I'll be right back."

He quickly returned to the bedroom and grabbed a couple of condoms and the well-used bottle of lube. As soon as he got his shit together, he was definitely getting tested. He was starting to get jealous of George's naked cock being inside Carol's sweet pussy.

When he entered the kitchen, Carol was straddling George's lap as he fed her a sandwich in between kisses. He walked over to the pair and set the lube and condoms on the table before pulling a chair up next to them.

He picked up his sandwich in one hand and took a bite before reaching under Carol's ass with the other. Yep, just as he'd suspected, George had his cock buried in Carol's pussy. With the addition of Trick's fingers, Carol began to moan.

She leant back and offered her mouth to Trick. His sandwich forgotten, Trick dropped it as he thrust his tongue into Carol's mouth while reaching for the lube. With his tongue still fucking Carol's mouth, he glanced at George who was now feasting on her breasts.

He tried to imagine what it would be like after Sunday. He'd go back on tour, alone on his bus while travelling from town to town. In the meanwhile, his two lovers would be spending their nights in each other's arms.

It was a depressing fucking thought, and he tried his best to push it away. He uncapped the lube and slicked his fingers. Breaking the kiss, he grinned. "You'd better hurry and eat that sandwich while you still can."

Carol sat up for another bite as Trick smoothed his fingers over her asshole. The wiggle of her ass told him all he needed to know. He pressed his middle finger against the puckered skin and waited for her body to welcome him.

"Ohhh," she moaned as she began to pinch her own nipples.

Trick smiled at George. "I think she likes it."

"You know she does. Stop teasing her."

With their exuberance of late, it didn't take much time to work his way up to three fingers. By the time he added the third, Carol was riding George's cock like a regular cowgirl. He wondered what it would be like to see the woman naked on a horse. Of course galloping could be an issue, but the picture of a nude Carol riding through a field of wildflowers almost took his breath away.

Trick removed his fingers and reached for a condom. After a quick slick, Trick straddled George's long legs and allowed Carol to impale her ass on his cock. The thin membrane separating his cock from George's made it feel like he was fucking both the people he loved.

Carol lost her rhythm and cried out as her orgasm overtook her. The expression on George's face as he came sent Trick toppling over the edge a few strokes later. With his legs threatening to give out, Trick had no choice but to pull out and collapse back in his chair.

He reached for his glass of tea and drank it down in one gulp. "Damn."

"Someday I'm gonna build us a ranch." The statement seemed to shock all of them, himself included. Carol climbed off of George's lap to curl up in Trick's arms. "Do you really think you'll move here permanently someday?"

Trick could feel George's seed dripping from between Carol's legs to run down his thigh. He reached down and ran his fingers through her pussy and brought them to his mouth, getting the essence of the two people he loved most in the world.

"Would I be welcome?"

Carol slapped him, none too lightly, on the chest. "Of course you would. Why would you even ask that question?"

"Because if it happens, I'll be bringing a load of baggage. I'm sure the press isn't going to let me fade into the woodwork." It's what he'd been worrying about since talking to Neil.

Carol snuggled against him and rested her head on his shoulder. "George and I can protect you."

Trick chuckled. "If anyone can, I'm sure it's the two of you."

He held his breath, waiting for George to say something. He hoped his lover didn't, once again, jump to the conclusion he was doing it all because of Carol.

"George?" he finally asked.

"There's a spot on the backside of Overlook Mountain that no one's bothered to lease. It'll be a bitch to get a road built because of the way the rocks lay, but it'd definitely afford privacy."

"Would we be able to have horses?" Trick asked.

George shrugged. "Not sure. Right now there's no way to get up there besides a pretty hard hike. I can only think of a small handful of people that've attempted it."

"Sounds perfect." Trick began to make plans for the future. He had to put the brakes on saying anything out loud. It could be a while before he got his professional life sorted out enough to make the dream happen. One thing was for sure, he'd need to set his lawyer on getting that piece of land leased.

Chapter Seven

Carol wiped the sweat from the back of her neck as she looked up at the dark clouds. "Please, not today," she whispered.

Opening her phone, she called Nate.

"Yo," Nate answered.

"Seriously? You're the mayor. Act like one."

"Shut up, I knew it was you," Nate replied with a laugh. "What do you want now?"

Carol walked over to stand under a large tree. For the first of September, the heat was incredible. "I think it's going to rain. I need you to call the storage barn and have them bring out those awnings we bought several years ago."

"Why? You think people will melt if they get wet?"

"No. But I think the soundboard will fry and the cameramen will be unhappy if they have to stand out in the rain."

Nate laughed again. "I'm sorry. I've had a bad morning. That prick agent of Trick's just left my office."

"Andy James is here? Crap. I know for a fact Trick told him not to come."

"Yeah, well, prepare yourself. He was fired up because I wouldn't give him your address, but he knows where the concert's being held, so I imagine he's on his way over."

Carol pinched the bridge of her nose. Of all days to fuck with her, Andy picked the wrong one. "I'll deal with it."

"You want me to call Ryan and give him a heads up?" Nate asked with a trace of humour in his voice. "Maybe just calling Zac Alben would be faster. I've seen you in action, and I pity the man."

"As well you should. I'll take care of *him*. You just get my canopies over here."

"Yes, boss," Nate laughed.

Carol hung up and slid the phone into the front pocket of her shorts. She certainly didn't have time to deal with Andy. "Hey, Ethan!"

Ethan came jogging over. The poor guy looked as sweaty as she did. "Yeah?"

"Why don't you take a break and go grab us some burgers and shakes from Deb's." She handed him some money and waited for him to take it.

"I can pay for my own," Ethan replied, handing her half the money back.

"Nonsense. You've been busting your butt all day to help get things set up. It's the least I can do. Now take it or suffer my wrath."

Ethan laughed. "I've heard about that wrath from Mayor Gills, but I've yet to be on the receiving end."

"Well, take the money or find out what it feels like." She softened the statement with a wink.

Ethan eventually took the money back. "Thanks. I'll be right back."

"Take your time. You might as well eat while you're there. Just bring mine back when you're done."

She didn't tell Ethan, but she really preferred to have no witnesses when Andy showed up. As she watched the young man stride over to the junk car he'd recently purchased, she spotted a long, black limousine pull up.

Hell. Nothing like announcing your presence to everyone in the area, Andy.

Refusing to budge from her spot in the shade, Carol prepared herself. Andy was known as a shark from what Trick had said. She already knew how much trouble Trick had with him, but she also knew Andy had been the manager responsible for helping him get where he was in the music industry.

The somewhat handsome man strode towards Carol with his hands in his pockets. She already didn't like the attitude he was projecting.

"What can I do for you, Andy?" she asked when he was in range.

"You can start by telling me what the hell you've done to Trick."

She grinned. "Do you really want to know *everything* I've done to Trick in the last two weeks? Because it might start to get a little uncomfortable for you."

Andy's face screwed up into a sneer. "Don't be crass. I know you're behind Trick cancelling his planned winter tour, and I want to know what you're after."

Carol's heart skipped a beat, but she tried not to let Andy know he'd thrown her. "Did Trick not give you a reason?"

"Some story about being tired and ready to start stepping back from the limelight. That's bullshit, and we both know it. He was just fine until you got your hooks into him."

Carol could tell the conversation was on a downward spiral that could only end in bloodshed. "I'll have Trick call you, but say another word to me, and I won't be responsible for my actions."

She started to walk around the smarmy man when he grabbed her arm and swung her towards him. "I will...ooooomf."

Carol smiled, satisfied with herself as Andy crumpled to the ground after a well placed knee to his groin. "I warned you."

She turned and walked away without looking back. With work still to do before the concert, dealing with assholes wasn't on her schedule.

* * * *

George was dressed and standing beside the door waiting for his two prima donnas when there was a knock on the door. He opened the door to a red-faced Andy. He immediately shut the door in Andy's face and walked through to the bedroom.

Leaning on the doorframe, he crossed his arms over his chest. Here he'd been waiting for damn near fifteen minutes, and Trick was getting some action. He had one hand under Carol's long flowing skirt and one hand under the material of her halter.

"Having fun?" he asked.

Trick glanced over his shoulder and grinned. "Hell yeah. You wanna join me?"

"I'd love to, but Andy's here."

Trick's eyes went wide as he removed his hands. "What the hell is he doing here?" he asked, licking his fingers.

George walked over and decided to help him out. Sucking Trick's finger into his mouth he shook his head.

"He's mad," Carol finally said.

George and Trick both turned to face her.

"And how do you know that?" Trick asked.

"Because he came to the park ready to tear my head off because you cancelled your winter tour. By the way, did you forget to mention that to us?" She asked, casually tucking her breasts back inside the tight fitting red halter.

"I didn't want to tell the two of you anything until I got things worked out." Trick leant in and gave Carol a kiss. "Wait a fucking minute. Are you telling me Andy accosted you earlier and you didn't tell us?"

Carol shrugged. "I'm a big girl. I made it through his little tantrum just fine. 'Course I can't say the same for his balls."

George smirked. "That's my girl."

"That's all you have to say?" Trick asked George.

"What do you want me to do? Go out and punch Andy's face in? You know the two of us don't get along at the best of times, the last thing you need is me ripping into him."

He could see the disappointment on Trick's face. George pulled him into a hug as the doorbell began ringing nonstop. "If you decide to step back a little, that's fantastic, but if not, we'll make it work. Me getting between you and Andy isn't the solution."

"You're right." Trick gave George another quick kiss before turning to give Carol one. He strode out of the room, with an expression George had only witnessed on a few occasions.

"Uh oh, this isn't going to end well," he mumbled as he took Carol's hand and followed his lover.

Trick opened the door and held up his hand before Andy could get a word in. "You're fired!" he yelled before slamming the door.

Predictably, the doorbell started ringing again. Trick closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening it. "Say another word to me, and I'll have you arrested for harassment. Now I suggest you get your ass out of town."

After shutting the door the second time, he tilted his head to the side and George heard a loud pop.

"There, that's better." Trick held out his hands. "We ready?"

"What if Andy's still out there?" Carol asked as she lifted a large picnic blanket from the back of the couch.

Trick shook his head. "He won't be. I think Andy must've gotten into trouble as a kid, because the man's scared to death of cops."

George opened the door. Andy wasn't anywhere in sight. "Guess you were right."

They loaded into George's pickup and pulled out of the drive. "So...what now?"

Trick's hand ruffled George's hair from its position on the back of the seat. "I've got some things I've already committed to doing, but after that I'm ready for a break."

"You can't give up your career for us. It may be fine at first, but you'll come to miss the lights and the fans," George said.

"Don't plan to give it up completely. I thought maybe I'd set up a little recording studio out behind the house I plan for us to build up on that mountain. If I can record at home, I'll only have to travel occasionally. Maybe do a short concert tour every couple of years."

"Ticket prices will go up," Carol added with a chuckle.

"Hey, I never thought of that. You ever think about becoming a manager?"

George and Carol both laughed.

"I don't think my people skills are quite up to the challenge. But I may apply for the position of bodyguard."

"Baby, you can guard my body any day," Trick said in his deepest, sexiest voice.

That made George and Carol laugh even harder.

"Give it up, Trick. You've already won us, no need to do the Casanova act you're famous for." George swerved a bit when Trick flicked him on the ear, but it had been worth it.

* * * *

As Trick sang another of his ballads, he couldn't take his eyes off the couple in front. Carol was lying with her head on George's stomach as he played with her hair.

Trick wondered if the song still made George hard after all the years he'd heard him play it. He tried to keep the smile from his face as he noticed the way Carol was readjusting her head. Yep. He's still got it.

Performing without The Cowboys was different, but he found he enjoyed it for a change of pace. He'd spoken to his band members earlier in the day about his plans to semi-retire. Although they were disappointed, they all claimed to understand.

As he'd told them, he didn't plan on giving up the life completely, but a change in focus from career to family was in order. Trick knew several up and comers who'd kill to have The Cowboys as their backup, and he planned to start making calls as soon as he went back to work.

Until then, his focus was squarely on the good-looking couple in front of him. The song ended, and the small audience of Cattle Valley residents applauded.

"Thank you. Despite the clouds earlier in the day, it's turned out to be a perfect evening."

The crowd once again applauded for the fantastic weather. They were in a good mood, and Trick couldn't have felt better. Although he didn't know many of them, he knew every damn one of them would support his decision. That was the beauty of the place. In Cattle Valley, it didn't matter who you loved. The townspeople responded to the person you were, not the sex you preferred.

"I'd like to play something special I've been working on. There're still a few kinks I've yet to work out, but then the ink's still wet on the paper. I had a talk with a wise man on Old Woman Rock."

Trick's gaze sought out Neil. He'd spotted the young cowboy earlier sitting in the back of the crowd. Although they'd spoken for only a short time, he doubted he'd ever forget the conversation. He had a strong feeling he was going to like getting to know the young man.

"Anyway, this cowboy made me see that love is the one thing you can't count on being there if you don't take the time to acknowledge it when it happens. Well, I've been lucky over the years to have a damn good man that loves me. Problem was, instead of standing beside me, my fame forced him to stand behind me, hidden away like a secret. I didn't realise how unfair that was until recently. George, I can't tell you how sorry I am that I put you through so many years of feeling second best. I love you."

The crowd went wild, cheering and pointing at George. His lover looked like he wanted to crawl under the blanket when one of the cameramen swung around to where he and Carol were sitting.

Despite George's apparent discomfort, Trick could see the tears shimmering in Carol's eyes. "And you, little lady, have managed to win my heart, lock, stock and barrel."

Carol sat up and blew him a kiss as George's arms wrapped around her from behind.

"So I wrote this song for the two people I love. I've decided to sing it for you even though it isn't quite finished. Heck, depending on fan response to my lifestyle choice, this may be the last time I ever get to sing it in public. George, Carol, this one's for you."

With only his guitar for accompaniment, Trick slowly picked out the simple tune about standing up for what you believe in. He sang of tolerance and believing enough in yourself and the people you love to weather the storm.

By the time the last note ended, the entire town of Cattle Valley was on its feet with their hands in the air. There couldn't have been a more perfect place on earth to debut the song than the town that opened his eyes to a real way of life for him and the people he loved.

He knew despite the network's promise to not air the concert until a later date, his speech would most likely be on the news later that night. The thought should have terrified him, but instead, Trick felt at peace with himself for the first time in over twenty years.

If nothing else, it appeared the residents of Cattle Valley would let him continue to sing for them. Maybe he could get a regular gig at The Grizzly Bar if it came to it. He no longer cared as long as he could still write and sing music and openly love the people who loved him.

He finished the concert off with one of his many number one hits. The audience remained on their feet and he ended up doing two more numbers.

"Thanks for coming out. You're a fantastic group of people, and I'm proud to call myself the newest resident of Cattle Valley. Now if you don't mind, I need to call my momma before she finds a few things out about her baby boy from the eleven o'clock news."

After shaking damn near everyone in town's hand, Neil stepped up and held out his hand. Trick pulled the young man into a bear hug. "You give that friend of yours a call yet?"

"No, sir, not yet."

He held Neil at arm's length. "Follow what's in your heart and don't be afraid to tell someone you love them. That's what you taught me."

Neil gave him a hesitant grin. "I'll think about it."

"Yeah, yeah, you'll think about it. Just don't think too long, or it may be gone before you get your damn mouth open."

Neil chuckled and shook his head. "You talk to all your fans this way?"

"Nope, but I talk to my friends this way."

He watched as Neil's eyes filled with tears. The young cowboy gave him another hug before walking off.

"Seems you made quite an impression on him," George said, wrapping his arm around Trick's waist.

"I think it was a mutual impression." He turned to George and gave him a kiss. It was the first time in his life he'd kissed a man in public and it felt incredibly freeing. "Where's Carol?"

"Oh, one of the camera guys has her signing off on some paperwork. She should be done in a moment."

George gazed into Trick's eyes. "You really mean it this time, don't you?"

Trick laughed and pulled the man he loved into another kiss. When they eventually broke, he rubbed his nose against George's. "I just came out to millions of people. What do you think?"

"I think you were right, you'd better call your mom."

Epilogue

George led the station's newest hire, Leo Burkowski, into the main living area. Sammy was lying on the couch watching one of those damn soaps he said he couldn't miss. "Sammy, this is Assistant Chief Leo Burkowski."

Sammy glanced their way and immediately turned off the television and stood. He held out his hand to Leo. "Nice to meet you."

Leo shook Sammy's hand. "Same here. Were you watching Pirate's Cove?"

Despite his darker complexion, a blush rose in the small man's face. "Yeah. There's not much on this time of day."

"Tell me about it. I screwed up my knee about six months ago and got addicted to that damn show."

George waited for the two men to finish shaking hands. He had to hide the grin at their apparent attraction. As they continued to discuss the soap opera, their hands remained clenched. The contrast in their age as well as their size was stark. Leo was at least six-four and built like a linebacker, while Sammy was barely five-four, but the two of them didn't even seem to notice.

When the conversation continued, George glanced at his watch. "Okay," he finally said, breaking the two up. "I'm getting ready to head out. Sammy, do me a favour and show Leo where to stash his gear."

Sammy nodded. "You taking off?"

"Yeah." George turned to Leo. "I'll run by and let my neighbour know you'll be renting my house."

Leo shook George's hand. "Thanks. I'll see you when you get back."

"If you have any questions give me a call."

Leo nodded, and George waved to Sammy before walking out of the fire station. He climbed into his truck and pulled out of the parking lot. A couple of blocks down the road, he turned into The Gym's lot.

"Hey," he greeted Rio as he entered.

"Thought you'd be gone by now."

"Close, but I need to talk to Mario first. Is he busy?" George asked.

"I think he's getting ready for spin class. Tell him I'm headed out for lunch."

"Will do." George went down the short hall and entered the small room that held ten stationary bikes. Mario was busy stretching, and George took a moment to enjoy the view.

"Hey," he finally said.

Mario turned around and smiled. "What're you doing here?"

"Just came by to tell you I've rented my house to our new assistant fire chief. Leo's on shift now, but he'll probably be moving in tomorrow evening."

"Cool."

George wasn't sure if he should warn Mario, or let him take a gander at Leo and come to his own conclusions. He thought of the way Sammy's eyes lit up when he'd first met the man. "Umm, he's hot, even by Cattle Valley standards, so if you're interested, better make a move fast. I have a feeling Sammy's already trying to stake a claim."

Mario's smile faded as he turned around to grab a towel from the shelf. "Sorry. Not interested."

George felt like a shit for bringing it up. He knew the guy had carried a torch for Asa for a while, but George figured after the way Asa treated him at the hospital, Mario would've given up on the man.

"Sorry," George mumbled. "I didn't realise you were still interested in Asa."

"I'm not," Mario stated. "Doesn't mean I want anyone else, though."

"Have you been out to see him?"

Mario shook his head. "He called a couple times, but I let it go to voicemail."

Call him a sappy bastard, but now that George was happy, he wanted his friends to experience the same thing. "Maybe he wants to apologise."

"No. He wants to hire me to help him with his rehabilitation."

George mentally tried to work the strange dynamic between the two men. "Weren't you his personal trainer before the collapse?"

"Yeah."

"So what's the difference?"

"The difference is we were friends then. I imagine he's feeling like an ass after what he did in the hospital, so now he's trying to buy me." Mario shook his head. "Won't happen no matter how much money he tries to throw my way."

George glanced at his watch again. He knew Mario needed to talk, but if he stayed any longer he'd be late picking up Carol. "Listen. I gotta get going, but I want you to know you can call if you need to. I'm sure I'll have plenty of down time while I'm off."

Mario stuck out his hand. "Have a good trip."

George grabbed Mario's hand and pulled him into a friendly hug. "Don't write him off until you find out why he refused to see you."

Mario gave a noncommittal nod and stepped back.

"Oh, Rio said to tell you he went to lunch."

"Okay. Thanks for stopping by."

"I'll be back before you know it."

Mario chuckled. "You'd better be. Trying to keep up with Carol and Trick, you're going to need some intense cardio strengthening."

George laughed as he waved his goodbye.

* * * *

Carol was tapping her pencil against her coffee cup when George finally walked into the office. "There you are," she said, rising to give him a kiss.

"Sorry, babe, I got held up filling in the new guy at work and talking to Mario."

"Hey, boss, we're heading out," she called to Nate.

"Hang on." Nate came into the outer office and gave Carol a hug. "We're going to miss you."

"I'll only be gone for a month. Besides, Ethan's more than capable of the job," she answered, winking at Ethan.

"Of course he is, but he's too nice compared to you. Who'll fight off my attackers when they figure out I don't know what the hell I'm doing?"

Although Nate said it like a joke, Carol knew the sweet man still didn't quite believe in his talents as a leader. She leant in and kissed him on the cheek. "You just keep doing what you've been doing and there'll be no storming of the castle."

Carol stepped back, and George shook Nate's hand. "We really appreciate you cooperating with us on this."

Nate waved away George's statement with a flick of his wrist. "You're doing the same thing I'd do in the same situation. Give Trick our best. Tell him the whole town will welcome him with open arms when this tour's over."

"We will." Carol gave him one last hug and grabbed her purse from the corner of the desk. She stopped at Ethan's desk and gave the younger man a hug. "Don't let him try and push you around," she whispered in his ear.

Ethan smiled. "I won't."

She rushed out of the office with George in tow. "If we don't hurry, we're going to miss our plane."

"Don't worry," George said, opening his truck door and helping her in.

Of course she was going to worry. What kind of woman did he think she was? Since the news of their non-traditional love story broke, Trick had been on the road travelling from concert to concert. Each new city had not only its share of supporters, but an even greater number of haters. Carol and George decided it was time they made their own sacrifices in the name of love, and she couldn't have been happier.

* * * *

After a short meet-and-greet with a few contest winners, Trick had security lead him to his bus. He climbed up the steps, bone tired. "Okay, John. Ready when you are."

"Sure thing," the bus driver smiled.

Trick walked straight to the small kitchen and poured himself a healthy glass of Scotch. As the bus started to roll out of Austin, he sank down in his favourite chair and pulled out his phone.

"Hello?" George answered.

"Hey, love."

"Hi. What's wrong?" George asked.

"Nothing much. Miss you and Carol. My new manager isn't working out, and I'm already sick and tired of being on the road. Funny how it never bothered me before."

He heard the unmistakable sound of Carol's soft moan in the background. "Why do you have to torture me? Tonight of all nights, couldn't the two of you have been playing cards or something boring when I called?"

"Life with us will never be boring. Besides, with only me to keep Carol sexually satisfied, I've had to double my efforts lately. I guess she'd kind of gotten used to having another cock at her disposal."

George moaned low in his throat and Trick's cock went rock hard in nothing flat. "Damn. You're killing me. Is she sucking on your dick?"

"Lower," George answered.

"Damn. Your balls?"

"Lower."

"Fuck!" Trick made sure the curtain was closed between the driver and himself and unzipped his jeans. "She got that pretty little finger of hers up your ass?"

"Ohhh," George groaned again, louder this time. "Couple, actually."

Trick pulled his cock out and started stroking, thinking about being buried in George's ass. "Did I tell you I got those test results back?"

George chuckled. "Four times now."

"Oh."

"I love you," George whispered.

"Love you, too."

"Why don't you get some sleep and call me in the morning?"

Trick hated to hang up, but he figured the two of them deserved to fuck without having a phone to their ear every night. "Yeah. Okay. Give Carol a big kiss for me."

"Mmmm. I will, I'll give her that and more."

Trick chuckled. "I bet you will, stud."

He hung up the phone and finished his drink in one long gulp. He stood and poured another as he unbuttoned his western shirt. He opened the door to his private bedroom, and stopped in his tracks. "What the fuck?"

Carol released George's cock and held out her arms. "Sorry we started without you. We got bored waiting for the show to get done."

Trick swallowed his drink as fast as he could and stripped out of his clothes. He bounded onto the bed and wrapped both his naked lovers in his arms. "What're you doing here?"

"We missed you," George said as he licked up the side of Trick's neck.

"We decided you were in need of some of our special TLC, so we made arrangements to finish the tour with you." Carol reached over and retrieved a bottle of lube and handed it to Trick. "Is that okay?"

Trick wanted to jump for joy, but at the same time, he was worried. "From time to time, I run into some not so nice people. I hate the thought of the two of you getting mixed up in my mess."

George shook his head. "Not your mess. Our mess."

"Has it been really bad?" Carol asked with concern in her eyes.

He wasn't sure how much to tell them. "Families are staying away from the concerts. Even though I expected as much, it's been hard. I've been giving pre-concert refunds to ticket holders who ask for them."

Carol curled around him, kissing his chest. "I'm so sorry."

"It hurts, but I'm hoping things will mellow out eventually. Part of me knows it was a stupid-ass move on my part to announce it like I did. I should've probably finished off the tour and then faded away."

"So why didn't you?" George asked, running his hand down Trick's side to land on his ass.

"Because I felt the two of you deserved to be publicly acknowledged."

Carol giggled. "There are other ways to do that you know."

"Yeah?"

"Casey said he'd happily marry us."

"I don't want to marry Casey. Hell, I barely know the guy," Trick chuckled.

Carol leaned in and playfully bit his chest. "Even though legally only two of us can marry, the town will recognise a three-way union."

Trick couldn't believe what he was hearing. He wondered if there was a way to keep their union completely private. He hated to once again let the tabloids dictate his personal life, but certain things he wanted to keep for himself.

His hand absentmindedly began to fondle Carol's breasts. "Could we do it in a private ceremony on our side of the mountain?"

"Sure we can. Once we get a road built so we can get to it." George's hand joined Trick's on Carol's breasts. "But we should do it before then. I'd much rather have my child born before the wedding rather than after."

Trick's breath froze in his lungs. "Huh?" His full attention went to the beautiful woman snuggled against him. "You're pregnant?"

Carol nodded, biting that poor lip she always seemed to abuse when she was worried. "Are you upset?"

"Upset? Hell no, I'm not upset. Why would you ever think such a thing?"

Carol's gaze slid to George.

"Because the baby's mine. Carol's afraid you might..."

Trick kissed George, shutting him up before he could finish the sentence. After George was kissed into silence, he went to work on Carol's tasty mouth. He felt a lubed finger prod against his asshole as George kissed his neck.

He never in his wildest dreams thought he'd ever get the chance to experience fatherhood. It didn't matter to him one bit the child was George's. Even if it was the only one they'd ever have, it was more than he'd ever hoped for.

His body opened for George with enthusiasm, and his lover immediately rubbed against his prostate.

Trick broke the kiss with Carol to cry out. "Oh, fuck, I've missed you two."

He rolled to his side and turned Carol to face him. One of the still-pink scars on her abdomen caught his eye. "Have you been to the doctor?"

Carol nodded. "Dr. Brown confirmed it on Tuesday."

"What about your health? Did he say if your surgeries would pose any complications?"

Carol reached for Trick's erection and placed it at her pussy. "He said I'd be fine as long as I listened to my body, don't overexert myself and eat right."

With his cock poised at Carol's entrance, he stilled. "What about wild sex with two lust crazed men?"

"I don't know. I guess he enjoys it. He, Isaac and Matt seem to be quite happy together."

Trick gave Carol's ass a playful swat. "Brat. You know what I mean. What did he mean by overexerting?"

Carol grinned and impaled herself on Trick's cock. "He said no housework for at least the next five years."

Trick felt the head of George's cock gently pass through his outer ring of muscles. He held his breath until his lover was buried to the hilt.

“I can live with that.”

About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles between being a full-time mother and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find Carol either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favourite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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