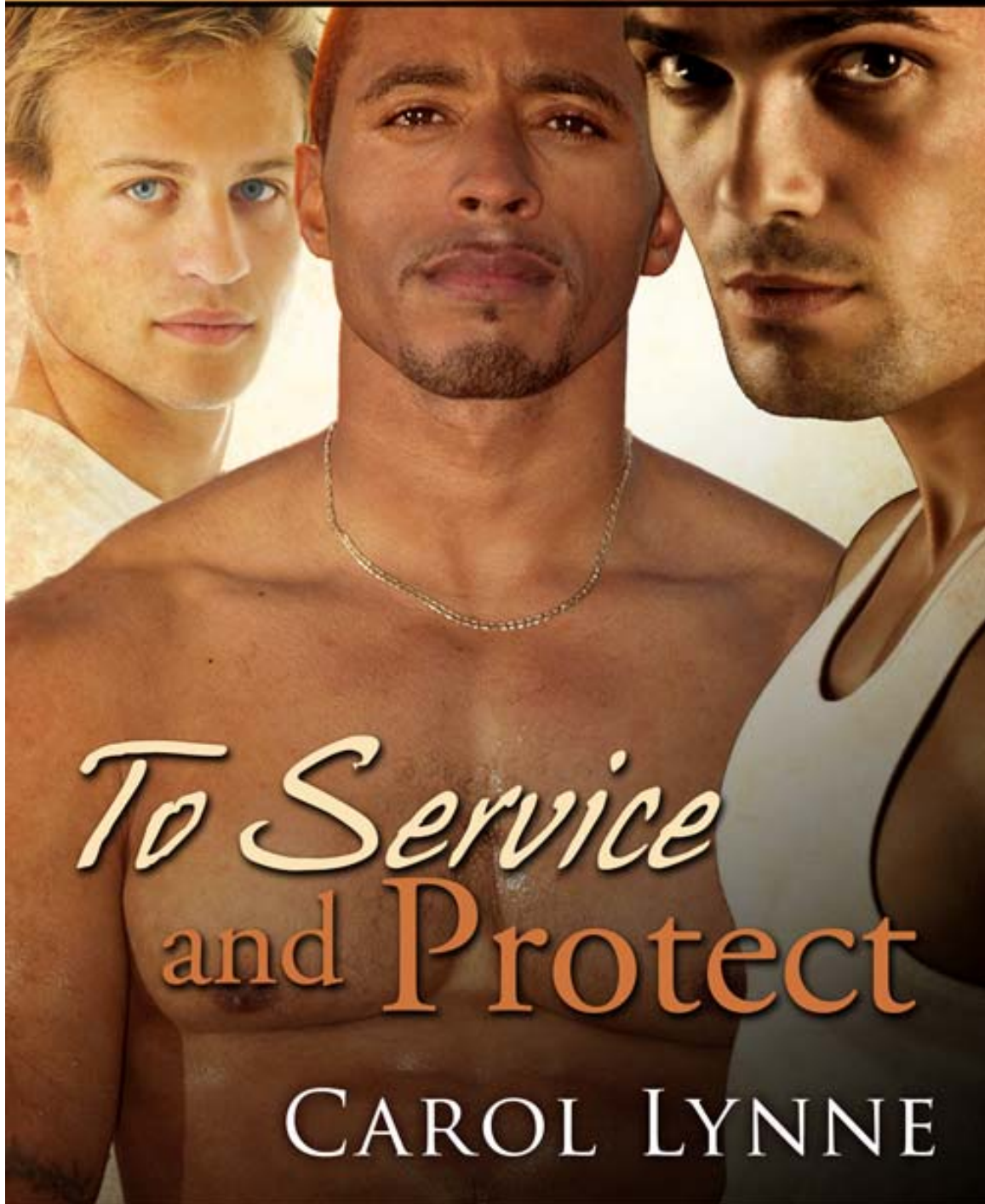




CATTLE  
VALLEY



*To Service*  
and **Protect**

CAROL LYNNE

A Total-E-Bound Publication



[www.total-e-bound.com](http://www.total-e-bound.com)

To Service and Protect

ISBN #978-0-85715-347-0

©Copyright Carol Lynne 2010

Cover Art by April Martinez ©Copyright November 2010

Edited by Claire Siemaszkiewicz

Total-E-Bound Publishing

This is a work of fiction. All characters, places and events are from the author's imagination and should not be confused with fact. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, events or places is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form, whether by printing, photocopying, scanning or otherwise without the written permission of the publisher, Total-E-Bound Publishing.

Applications should be addressed in the first instance, in writing, to Total-E-Bound Publishing. Unauthorised or restricted acts in relation to this publication may result in civil proceedings and/or criminal prosecution.

The author and illustrator have asserted their respective rights under the Copyright Designs and Patents Acts 1988 (as amended) to be identified as the author of this book and illustrator of the artwork.

Published in 2010 by Total-E-Bound Publishing, Think Tank, Ruston Way, Lincoln, LN6 7FL, United Kingdom.

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

**Cattle Valley**

**TO SERVICE AND PROTECT**

**Carol Lynne**

## *Dedication*

For Todd. You've waited long enough for Ethan's story. I hope you enjoy it.

## *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Guinness: Arthur Guinness Son & Company Limited

Miller Lite: Miller Products Company

Dodge Charger: Chrysler Corporation

Honda Accord: Honda Giken Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha

Camel cigarettes: Reynolds Innovations Inc.

Marlboro: Philip Morris Inc.

## Chapter One

Deputy Pete Nash was just getting off shift when his cell phone rang. He pulled the seldom-used phone out of his pocket and glanced at the display. "Well I'll be a sonofabitch," he mumbled, shaking his head.

Phone to his ear, Pete answered with a smile. People often told him his smile could melt the hearts of even the coldest bastard, evidently they'd been right. "Allenbrand, it's about time you called."

"Save the I-told-you-sos, asshole."

Pete's smile grew even wider. "You're in a good mood."

Brian grunted. "You want me to meet you for that beer or not?"

Pete pumped his arm against his side in silent celebration. "Yes. O'Brien's or my place?"

"O'Brien's. I don't have time to argue about fucking tonight," Brian said with a note of finality.

Rolling his eyes, Pete nodded. He wouldn't bring up the number of times the two of them had done just that over the previous ten months. Still, if Brian wanted to play hard to get, Pete was up for the game. "Fine. O'Brien's in an hour."

"I have to pick up Benny from practice in twenty, so I may be a little late. Gotta feed the boy which is no easy task."

"You know if you didn't feed him so well, he wouldn't keep growing, right? What is he, about six-three?"

Brian let out a snort. "No, that was last month. This month he's six-five."

"Damn. I'd hate to see your grocery bill."

"Shut up, you're depressing me," Brian said. "I'll see you when I see you."

"I'll be there." Pete hung up the phone and shoved it back into his pocket. He glanced in the rear-view mirror and considered swinging by his apartment to shave. He smiled at his reflexion. Naw. His face looked damned good with a five o'clock shadow. Maybe he'd get lucky and Brian would be so mesmerised, he'd be unable to resist a quick fuck. *Yeah, better shower and get cleaned up.*

Pete had no illusions of ever being anything but a booty call to Brian, but he'd put up with Brian's bullshit this long, he might as well get a few more good fucks in before Brian found what he was really looking for.

By the time Pete parked in front of his ground floor apartment, he was hard. He looked down at the erection pressing against the fly of his jeans and shook his head. "You've got a one-track mind."

He unlocked the door and went straight to the bedroom. It had been a relatively quiet shift so he hung his tan uniform shirt up instead of tossing it in the dry cleaner bag. He went to his dresser and grabbed a black T-shirt. Like all of his T-shirts, this one had a sexually suggestive phrase written on it. A large hardware screw with the words, "Wanna Screw?" written under it. Although some people might find his choice in clothes offensive, at least Pete left no doubts as to what was on his mind.

After stripping, Pete jumped in the shower for a quick wash-up. Despite Brian's earlier protests, Pete was still hoping to get some action. In no mood to risk the chance of getting laid by arguing over who would top, he cleaned and prepared himself to bottom. It wasn't something he did often, but hell, he was getting desperate. Anything that got the six-foot three-inch African American in his bed was worth it.

Instead of wondering what it would be like to fuck Brian, blue eyes and blond hair came to mind. He turned off the water and grabbed a towel. Yeah, the sweet little barback at O'Brien's was just what his dick needed, but Ethan had turned down practically every unattached man in town. Pete had no desire to be another in a long line of rejected fools.

After throwing his towel over the shower rod, he strolled back into the bedroom and started dressing. His cock was still rock hard after the finger job he'd given himself in the shower, but he wasn't even tempted to jack-off. He carefully worked the zipper on his jeans up over the erection straining against his underwear and tucked in his shirt. A quick check in the mirror and he was smiling once again.

"Damn, I look good." He reached down and cupped the front of his jeans. No way would Brian, or anyone else for that matter, be able to overlook something so obvious. *Excellent.*

\* \* \* \*

Ethan Drake set another tub of dirty dishes beside the sink. "Sorry," he told his best friend.

From his position at the grill, Jay glanced over his shoulder. "Someday I'm going to convince Sean to serve off paper plates."

"Good luck with that," Ethan said around a chuckle. He puffed out his chest, trying to mimic Sean O'Brien's physique. "It wouldn't be the O'Brien way. A customer deserves to feel like a king when he's in an O'Brien pub."

Jay laughed. "You're getting pretty good at that. Just don't let Sean hear you. I'm sure the O'Brien Way also includes kicking plenty of ass."

Ethan didn't doubt for one second that the fiery redhead could kick his share of ass. Sean's upper body was awesome, not that he'd been looking. Still, if he had, he'd be more than impressed. What was it about a muscular chest that made him weak in the knees? Ethan glanced down at his own, under-developed chest and silently sighed. It didn't seem to matter how much he went to the gym, he still had the muscular development of a prepubescent teen.

"This order's ready," Jay said, placing the final plate on a tray.

Ethan walked over and hoisted the tray up, balancing it against one shoulder. He'd hoped to have time to discuss the noises he'd heard lately with Jay, but when his friend was in chef mode, it was hard to get his attention long enough. "What time do you get off?"

"I'm outta here as soon as the grill closes at nine. Why?"

Ethan knew he'd still be delivering drinks until well after that. "Nothing. I just thought we could have a drink and catch up."

Jay set down the spoon he'd been using to stir the soup-of-the-day and turned to face Ethan. "Something going on?"

Ethan started to shrug his shoulders and almost toppled the tray of food onto the floor. "It's probably nothing, but I've been hearing noises again at night."

"Maybe you should mention it to Pete." Jay gestured to the handsome man through the cut-out in the wall.

"No, it'll just be like last time. I'd hate to get the reputation as the boy who cried wolf." Several months earlier Ethan had also heard what he thought was someone breaking into Brynn's Bakery downstairs, but every time he'd called the police, they'd found no evidence of a crime.

"Maybe you should think about moving," Jay said, concern in his voice.

Ethan shook his head. Although he made a nice salary at the mayor's office and in tips working evenings at O'Brien's, Ethan didn't have a car, hell, he didn't even know how to drive. A sad fact for a twenty-six year old, but he'd grown up in Washington, D.C. and until he'd been forced to flee the city he loved, he'd relied on public transportation. The only available apartments in town were too far from downtown to be manageable. It wasn't a big deal in the spring, summer and fall, but no way would he want to walk almost a mile in the winter.

"It's probably nothing." Ethan resettled the tray. "I'd better get this out before they yell at the cook for cold food."

After dropping off the food and carrying the tray back to the kitchen, Ethan approached Pete, order pad in hand. "What can I get ya?"

Pete set down the menu and smiled at Ethan. Oh, damn, the man had some pretty teeth. Ethan turned his gaze to Pete's shirt, always a source of amusement. "Nice," he said, gesturing to the phrase with his pen.

Pete ran his hand across his chest, drawing attention to the heavily muscled body underneath. "I like to think so."

It took Ethan several moments to work out what Pete was implying. "Oh, no, I meant your shirt."

"Well that's a shame. And here I thought I was finally gonna get my chance to impress you."

Ethan wanted to flirt back. Wanted to tell Pete he was impressed every time he saw him, but he kept his mouth shut. No way was he in league with the kind of man Pete Nash could have with a snap of his fingers. "Can I get you something from the bar?"

Pete sighed dramatically and nodded. "Just a Guinness for now. Brian's meeting me for dinner."

"Coming right up." Ethan walked away with the image of two of the hottest guys in Cattle Valley in his head. He'd heard the two had something going between them, but it was the first time he'd received confirmation first hand. "Guinness," he told Sean and leaned against the bar.



When his mind drifted to the two men fucking, Ethan's cock started to fill. He almost groaned at the image of the muscled bodies wrapped around each other, sweat glistening. *Oh my*. He quickly looked down, happy he was wearing the half-apron.

"It's time for your break if you want to take it," Sean said, sliding the Guinness across the bar.

Flustered at being caught daydreaming, Ethan shook his head. "That's okay. I'm good."

Ethan carried the Guinness over and set it in front of Pete. "I'll keep an eye out for Brian and come back when he shows up."

"Or...you could keep me company while I wait?" Pete offered.

Ethan turned to study the bar. Kitty seemed to have everything under control for the moment. He wondered if he should mention the noises.

"If you're thinking about it this long, I know you must want to. Have a seat."

Ethan looked back at Pete and finally nodded. He sat in the booth seat across from him and leaned his forearms on the table. "Can I ask you something?"

Pete sat back and stretched one arm over the back of the seat. "Sure."

"Have you seen anyone new hanging around town lately?"

After apparently considering the question for a few moments, Pete nodded. "The city's going ahead with the expansion, so there's a survey team in town as well as a small road crew. Why, what's going on?"

There was no way Bill Strelling would be working for either kind of outfit. Strelling was the asshole business executive back in DC who thought it was perfectly fine to beat on his wife and kids once he'd been fired from the bank where he worked. It had been Ethan's job at the time to help protect the man's family against him, but Strelling didn't take kindly to a piss-ant social service agent keeping him from them.

Ethan realised Pete's dark brown eyes had narrowed in suspicion. "Just wondered," Ethan tried to cover.

"You hearing noises again?" Pete asked.

Although Ethan didn't think Pete was making fun of him, he suddenly felt foolish for bringing it up in the first place. Standing, Ethan shook his head. "No. It's nothing. I'll, uh, be back when Brian joins you."

With those words Ethan escaped to the kitchen.

\* \* \* \*

By the time Brian made it to the pub, he was over thirty minutes late and in a sour mood. The argument with his sixteen-year old son was still fresh in his mind despite his resolve to meet Pete for a beer. He knew part of Benny's problem was teenage hormones, but why should Brian be made to feel guilty about meeting a friend for dinner? He pushed through the door, hoping Pete hadn't given up and either left or hooked up with someone else.

Brian's stomach fluttered when he spotted Pete. *Damn*. He hated the effect Pete had on him. Each time Pete managed to get him in bed, Brian swore it would be the last, but here he was, like a junky after his next fix.

"Sorry I'm late," Brian said, sliding into the booth.

Pete took his eyes off Ethan Drake long enough to smile at Brian and the argument with Benny fell to the wayside. "No problem. I'm one up on you though." Pete lifted his empty Guinness glass.

Brian made a face. "I don't know how you drink that." He glanced at Ethan. "You see something you like?"

Pete didn't pretend to misunderstand the question. "I see a couple of things in here I like. What about you? You gonna sit there and tell me you wouldn't like to have a piece of that cute ass?"

Brian glanced over his shoulder and zeroed in on Ethan's compact little bubble butt. Ethan was leaning over a table clearing away dirty dishes. *Mmm mmm mmm*. "Okay, you win."

"Thought so," Pete said, rubbing his foot against Brian's calf. His gaze once again went back to Ethan. "I think he's hearing things again."

Confused, Brian tilted his head to the side. He tried to ignore Pete's foot when it moved to the inside of his leg. "What're you talking about?"

Pete nodded towards Ethan. "He seems more skittish than usual, and he asked me if I'd seen any new people in town."

Brian nodded. He'd been on a few of the calls to Ethan's apartment. Despite having no evidence of a break-in, Brian had no doubt, then or now, that Ethan believed someone was after him. "You think there might be something to it?"

Pete shrugged. "Shhh, here he comes."

"Are you two ready to order?" Ethan asked, pad in hand.

"I'll have the chicken fried steak dinner and one of those pints of Miller Lite," Brian said. Pete's foot started to travel further up Brian's leg, threatening his control. It was obvious by the feel of it that Pete had slipped his foot out of his shoe. Brian trapped Pete's foot between his knees and held it there.

With a devilish grin on his handsome face, Pete ordered a burger and fries with another Guinness. As soon as Ethan left their table, Brian relaxed his legs enough to release Pete. He leaned back and glanced under the table. Yep, sure enough, Pete's sun-bronzed bare foot was working its way further up Brian's thigh. "What the hell're you doing wearing flip flops this time of year?"

Pete nestled his toes under Brian's balls. "My feet are always hot. Besides, this wouldn't feel nearly the same if I had my boots on. Don't you like it?"

Brian glanced around. The pub was dark and the tablecloth long enough, he doubted anyone could tell what was going on between the two of them. He leant forward, pressing himself further against Pete's foot. "I came here for dinner and a beer."

"Bullshit. You came here because you're horny. It's the only time I ever hear from you." Pete slid his foot out and up, massaging the erection pressed against the front of Brian's jeans.

Unable to help himself, Brian reached down and held Pete's foot in place while he ground himself against it. He hated his situation at home. It was the only reason he hadn't started a real relationship with Pete. Two years after his wife's death, Brian had sat Benny down and explained his sexuality to his son. It wasn't that he didn't love Benny's mother, Leigh, he had with all his heart, but Brian and Leigh had both known Brian preferred men to women. He thought moving Benny to Cattle Valley would help ease things between them. Back in Philadelphia, Benny had started getting into fights. Brian knew it was only a matter of time before either his son or opponent was seriously injured. Maybe it had been a stupid idea, but Brian thought the slow small town life would keep his son safe. Brian also hoped his sexuality wouldn't be a source of trouble for Benny in Cattle Valley. With any luck, Benny would be more comfortable with it if he was around other kids in similar situations, and although Benny hadn't had any problems in school, he still grumbled every time Brian wanted to go out.

Brian didn't notice Ethan step up to the table. Pete obviously did though and chuckled, getting Brian's attention. Brian glanced up to see the sweetest red blush colour Ethan's cheeks. He pushed Pete's bare foot away. "Excuse us."

Ethan set their drinks on the table. "Your order should be up in a few minutes."

Brian wanted to ask Ethan if he was okay but didn't feel he had the right. He started to reach for Ethan's arm, but he dropped his hand before it made contact. "I'm sorry if we embarrassed you."

With a shake of his head, Ethan smiled. "I don't think embarrass would be the right word."

"Really?" Pete chimed in. "What would be the right word then?"

Brian watched as Ethan's Adam's apple bobbed up and down several times. The younger man was clearly uncomfortable with the question. "Leave him alone," he told Pete.

Ethan opened his mouth to say something before snapping it shut and turning to walk away. Brian stared at Ethan's retreating back for several moments before regarding Pete. "That was wrong."

"Why? He said he wasn't embarrassed. I just wanted to know if seeing me feel you up with my foot excited him. It's about time something did. The guy's been living a solitary life for too long." Pete took a drink of his Guinness and licked the foam from his top lip in a provocative manner.

"How do you know he doesn't have the same arrangement with someone that we have with each other?" Brian asked.

Pete's dark eyebrows shot up. "We have an arrangement? What would that be? You call whenever you need an itch scratched, and I'm more than happy to lend my hand? You call that an *arrangement*?"

As much as Brian wanted to deny Pete's assessment, he couldn't. That was exactly what had transpired between the two of them. Despite his bravado to the contrary, Brian could see the genuine hurt in Pete's expression when he'd asked the questions. Reaching out across the table, Brian covered Pete's hand with his own. "It's not the way I want things between us, but Benny..."

"Yeah, I get it," Pete said, turning over his hand to thread his fingers through Brian's. "I'm not used to sleeping with someone who has a kid. Guess I don't know all the rules."

Brian started to release his grip but ended up rubbing his palm against Pete's. Even the touch of Pete's hand was enough to make Brian want more. He decided to open up a bit. Brian figured Pete deserved that much for putting up with his bullshit for so many months. "I keep hoping Benny will settle in. You know, get used to the idea that his old man prefers dick to pussy." Brian shook his head. "Maybe he's still dealing with Leigh's death and his melodramatic attitude has nothing to do with his dad being queer."

Before the conversation went any further, Ethan was back with their food. "Chicken fried steak," Ethan said, setting Brian's plate in front of him. "And burger with everything." Ethan set Pete's plate down. "Is there anything I can get you? Another beer?"

"Maybe later," Brian answered.

"I'm good," Pete said, reaching for the ketchup.

Pete waited until Ethan left before speaking. "I don't want to cause you problems at home, but I gotta say, this situation really isn't enough for me. Unless, of course, you don't mind me seeing other people, too."

Brian's initial reaction was one of jealousy. "Sorry I'm not enough for you," he growled.

"I didn't say *you* weren't enough. I said the *situation* wasn't enough. If I'm gonna get exclusive with someone, I expect to see them more than a couple of hours at a time once a month or so."

Although he hated to admit it, he could understand Pete's point of view. As much as it killed him to think of Pete with someone else, Brian didn't see his situation at home changing anytime soon. The big question was whether or not he could handle fucking a man who was also fucking someone else. Should he just walk away, cut his losses?

With his cock deflated and his appetite gone, Brian pushed his plate towards the centre of the table. "I understand what you're saying, and I can respect your position, but I'm not sure I can handle seeing you in the arms of someone else, at least not while we're still doing whatever it is we're doing."

Pete grabbed Brian's hand and squeezed. "Don't back away from me any further than you already have. I'm not saying I'm going to jump into bed with the first guy who seems interested. Believe it or not, I'm fairly picky about whose ass I lick."

Despite everything that was going on, Brian couldn't help but smile. "Damn you're crude sometimes."

Pete shrugged. "I've been told I was born without a filter."

"Is there something wrong with the food?" Ethan asked, stepping up to the table.

"No, the food's excellent as usual. It's my appetite that seems to be suffering at the moment," Brian answered. He glanced at Pete and gave an inward sigh. There was no doubt in Brian's mind that Pete would jump on Ethan if he was given the chance. Brian couldn't fault him for wanting the younger man, but it was a reminder of what he might lose if he didn't get his shit together.

Brian returned his attention to Ethan, cute as a button while being sexy as hell. "Would you mind boxing it up for me?"

"Not at all." Ethan reached for Brian's plate just as Brian did.

When their hands brushed, Brian's cock took notice. Brian quickly pulled his hand away and closed his eyes. He swallowed around the lump in his throat and tried to get his body under control. "Thanks," he managed to say before Ethan carried the plate towards the kitchen.

Although he hated the thought of losing Pete to Ethan, Brian knew he could never fault Pete for his attraction to the man. Hell, given the chance, Brian might go after Ethan himself.

"Come with me back to my place," Pete said, finishing up his burger.

Brian nodded, admitting to himself that it may very well be their last time together. "I'd like that."

Pete chuckled. "What? You mean you're not going to argue with me or make me beg like you usually do?"

"Do I really do that?" Brian asked. He'd never tried to play hard-to-get, but he realised that's how Pete saw his actions. "If I did, I didn't mean it like that. It's not that I don't want to be with you. I just always feel so guilty afterwards."

"Gee, thanks."

"That's not what I meant. It's just..." Brian sighed. "Getting up afterwards and sneaking back into the house bugs me."

"I'm not on shift again until tomorrow evening, and I sure as hell won't kick you out of bed, so stay the night." Pete stood and held out his hand. "Just once."

Tempted didn't begin to describe his reaction to Pete's offer. What would it feel like to wake in the morning with Pete's nude body wrapped around him? Brian stood and gave Pete a quick kiss. "I'd like to, but we both know it isn't possible. I'll stay longer than I usually do, though."

Brian spotted Ethan coming back towards their table, to-go box in hand. He reached into his back pocket and removed his wallet. When he noticed Pete doing the same, Brian shook his head. "My treat."

Pete brushed his knuckles against the front of Brian's jeans before he had a chance to turn around. "I'll pay you back."

## Chapter Two

Brian followed Pete's 1970 forest-green Dodge Charger towards the apartment building. The car reminded him a lot of Pete, fast, gorgeous and something every available man in town would love to have. He thought of his own 2008 Honda Accord and winced, reliable, used and practical. Yep, that seemed to sum Brian up as well.

He parked in one of the visitor spaces and climbed out. As he crossed the parking lot, he was aware of Pete's perusal and wondered if he came up lacking in the man's eyes. Sure he was fit, his job dictated he maintain a healthy lifestyle, but he'd never thought of himself as a catch. He brushed a hand over his short beard and moustache. They were a new addition, something he'd finally allowed himself after the death of his wife. Although he liked them, Benny said they made him look like he was trying too hard to appear cool.

Brian tried to push all thoughts of his son out of his mind as he joined Pete on the sidewalk. It wasn't until he was face-to-face with the guy that he realised the handsome man's expression had nothing to do with sexual want. "Something wrong?"

Pete took Brian's hand and led him towards the apartment. "I take it you don't have your scanner on?"

Brian stopped walking and pulled Pete's hand until he followed suit. "No. What's going on?"

"A call just came in about a suspicious man hanging around in the alley behind Brynn's Bakery."

Glancing over his shoulder towards Pete's car, Brian asked, "Do you want to go check it out?"

Pete didn't answer right away. "Kinda, but I know if we go, I won't get that prized dick of yours in my ass tonight."

Brian checked his watch. "It's still early enough for both." Although the thought of burying himself balls deep in Pete's ass was driving him crazy, he knew neither of them would be fully engaged if they were worrying about Ethan.



Pete pulled Brian in for a deep kiss, something they rarely did outside of the bedroom. It wasn't that Brian didn't like to kiss, he did, but kissing implied a level of intimacy he wasn't sure he had with Pete yet.

The feel of Pete's erection pressing against him, told Brian otherwise. Whether he admitted it or not, the intimacy was there, poking him. Brian opened for Pete's lapping tongue and groaned as he sucked it into his mouth.

Without breaking the kiss, Pete moved to straddle Brian's muscled thigh, giving himself something to grind against. *Fuck*. Brian knew if they didn't break apart, one or both of them, were going to come right out there in the open.

Brian released Pete's tongue and broke the kiss. "Your call. Do we go inside now or later?"

Pete's hips stilled, but the contact with Brian's thigh remained. "It shouldn't take too long. I just can't get past the feeling that I should've pressed Ethan more for answers when he asked me about strangers in town."

Brian nodded and cupped Pete's ass in his hands. He gave the twin globes a squeeze as he applied even more pressure to Pete's erection. "I promise to finish this when we're done in town."

"I'll hold you to that," Pete said, licking Brian's lips once more.

\* \* \* \*

"I do love this car," Brian said from the passenger seat.

Pete reached over and laid a hand on Brian's thigh. "You and everyone else with half a brain." Pete worked years to restore the Charger to its former glory, and it was still the thing he loved most in the world.

"You gonna let me drive it someday?" Brian asked.

Without hesitation, Pete shook his head. "No one drives Stella but me." He glanced at Brian. "Nothing personal. She's just the only thing that's ever been truly mine, and I don't share well."

Brian tipped his head. "I can respect that. I'm not big on sharing either."

Pete's thoughts went back to their discussion in the pub. Yeah, Brian was trying to tell him something, something Pete wasn't in the mood to think about. He cruised down Main Street at a crawl, surprised at the lack of deputies. "Where the hell are they?"

"Go around back. Maybe they caught the guy in the alley," Brian suggested.

When the alley showed no sign of activity, Pete stopped his car behind the bakery and put it in park. "Who's on duty tonight?"

Brian rubbed his chin. "If you're asking who you should call, the answer is Roy."

Pete winced. Although he tried to get along with all the guys he worked with, there were bound to be a few he rubbed the wrong way, and Roy was one of them. "Maybe you should call him."

Chuckling, Brian pulled out his phone. "Pussy."

Pete thought about how many times he'd bottomed for Brian over the previous ten months compared to the rest of his life. "Only for you, stud."

Before Brian could shoot Pete a comeback, Roy evidently answered. "Hey," Brian began. "I heard there was a report of a prowler behind the bakery but no one's here."

Brian listened for several moments and shook his head at Pete. "You can't say that if it wasn't Ethan who called it in." Brian sighed and rested his head back against the seat. "Yeah, fine. I'll keep an eye out."

By the time Brian hung up the phone, Pete was ready to pounce. "What'd he say?"

"They drove by and saw nothing suspicious so they figured it was another false alarm." Brian shoved the phone into his pocket. "I think we should question Ethan, so I can talk to Ryan in the morning." Brian hit the dash with his fist. "Dammit. I never thought the kid was making it up, and now I'm sure of it."

Pete agreed with Brian's assessment. Still, he couldn't resist reaching out to smooth his hand over the dash that had bore the brunt of Brian's anger. "It's okay, Stella, he didn't mean it."

Brian let out a chuckle and shook his head. "You're a freak."

"Maybe, but you wanna fuck me anyway."

The amusement left Brian's face as he stared into Pete's eyes. "Yeah. More than I think's good for me."

Pete leant across the divide in the seats and ran the tip of his tongue across Brian's plump lower lip. "Are you sure we need to question Ethan tonight? We could always go back to my place instead?"

Brian grabbed Pete by the back of the neck and pulled him in for another erotic kiss. Pete opened immediately, accepting the silky slide of Brian's tongue. Maybe he was wrong about their level of intimacy because for some reason Brian couldn't seem to get enough of Pete's mouth. Fuck, the man knew how to kiss.

Pulling back, Brian rested his forehead against Pete's. "I'd feel better if we let Ethan know someone believes him. Unless this is our last date, we've got plenty of time to fuck."

The statement surprised Pete. It was the first time Brian had made any indication that he would be seeing him again. Usually after a hook-up, Brian refused to talk to him for weeks at a time, but this, this felt different for some reason.

"Okay, let's go talk to Ethan," Pete agreed.

"Don't hit on him in front of me," Brian said, holding Pete in place when he started to move back behind the wheel.

"I won't ask him out or anything, but, hell, you can't blame me for flirting if the situation presents itself."

Brian released his hold on Pete. Starting the car, Pete glanced at Brian. "Besides, whether you admit it or not, you want him as much as I do."

Brian slumped back in his seat. "Just drive."

\* \* \* \*

Ethan spotted Brian and Pete walk in and immediately wondered if they'd realised they'd over-tipped him and were back to settle up. Pete lifted his hand and pointed at Ethan before indicating the booth in the corner.

Ethan made a drinking motion with his hand, and Pete shook his head no. Curious as to what the men wanted, Ethan walked to the bar. "I'm going to take my break now."

Sean nodded without looking away from the baseball game on TV.

"You sure you don't want something to drink?" Ethan asked, stepping up to the table.

Sitting across from Brian, Pete was the one to answer. "No. We came in to talk to you. Do you have a minute?"

Ethan looked from man to man, wondering where he was supposed to sit. He finally decided on the empty spot next to Brian. Not only did he feel safer with Brian, but he could look his fill of Pete without making it obvious. "What's going on?"

"That's what we need you to tell us," Brian said. "A call came into the station earlier about a man slinking around in the alley behind Brynn's."

Ethan's entire body tensed. "Did they catch him?"

Pete shook his head. "By the time the deputy got there, no one was around."

"Figures," Ethan mumbled. "So what do you want from me? I've been here all evening."

"We thought you might tell us why you think this guy from DC would come all the way out to Cattle Valley to harass you." Pete settled his crossed arms on the table and bent down until he was eye level with Ethan. "We believe you, but we need more information."

Ethan reached for a bundle of rolled silverware and began picking apart the napkin that held them together. "I don't even know if it's George Strelling doing it. I just can't think of anyone else who would want to fuck with me for so long."

Pete sat up straight. "You think there's a possibility that it could be someone else?"

Ethan shrugged. "Sure, I guess." He looked around the half-empty bar. "Could be someone in here for all I know. Makes more sense anyway. I mean, this shit's been going on for over a year. I don't know how George could come and go like that without eventually being seen."

Pete turned and looked over his shoulder. "How often do you get hit on?"

"Depends on what you mean by hit on, I guess. I mean, after a weekend shift my ass is usually pretty bruised from stupid drunks with wandering hands, but if you're asking how many times someone actually takes the time to ask me out, that would be different."

Next to Ethan, Brian made a noise that sounded surprisingly like a deep growl. "So how many times do you get asked out?" Brian wanted to know.

"Couple times a month. Sometimes by the same guys, sometimes new guys," Ethan answered, shrugging.

"Do you accept?" Pete asked, his hands now fisted where they rested on the table.

"No." Ethan wouldn't tell Pete and Brian he'd turned down dates hoping Jay would come around and see what was right in front of him. Since figuring out that Jay would never

see him in that way, Ethan had been too busy nursing his heart and pride to look at other men.

Brian put a hand on the centre of Ethan's back. "Will you tell us why? Did someone hurt you?"

Ethan shook his head. "I'm not Jay. I'd never let a boyfriend hit me and get away with it, if that's what you're asking."

"What's Jay have to do with it?" Pete asked.

*Shit.* "Nothing. He had trouble like that with his ex. That's what I thought you meant." Ethan hoped they wouldn't ask questions about Jay. Even though the two of them were still best friends, it hurt to know he hadn't been enough to attract his friend as a lover.

The three of them sat in silence for several moments. Either he was unaware of what he was doing, or Brian didn't care that he was driving Ethan crazy, because that hand on his back started rubbing up and down Ethan's spine.

Ethan glanced at Pete. Yep, Pete seemed to notice Brian's actions, but instead of pissing him off, Pete seemed almost amused. Pete caught Ethan staring and cleared his throat. "I know you haven't reported any noises lately, but have you been hearing them?"

"Off and on. About a month ago, I woke up and would've sworn I saw someone outside the window on the fire escape. Although I was still half-asleep, I grabbed the gun I bought myself and opened the window, but no one was there. I went downstairs and out the back door but the ladder was still up in its position." Ethan shook his head. "It was probably just a shadow."

Brian's hand stilled, low on Ethan's back. "You bought a gun?"

"Yeah. The law says I can have one, right?"

Brian nodded. "Has anyone taught you how to use it?"

"The guy at the store showed me how to clean and load it. I watched some videos on the internet and have fired it outside of town a few times."

Brian shook his head. "The thought of you going after whoever's doing this makes me sick to my stomach. Please don't do that anymore. If you feel you have to have one, at least let either me or Pete take you out and teach you how to properly handle a gun."

"From now on, call one of us if you hear something." Pete reached across the table and grabbed the pen from behind Ethan's ear. He scribbled two numbers on a drink coaster and

slid it across the table. "Programme these into your phone and use them if you hear anything. Call me if it's late. No sense waking Benny."

"Don't worry about Benny. He's been a cop's son for a long time," Brian added, removing his hand.

Ethan wanted to beg Brian to put the hand back but knew he didn't have the right. He had to remember that Brian and Pete were together. Still, he let out a small sigh, Brian's touch made him feel good. He stuck the coaster in his apron pocket. "I'll call if I need you."

After another quick glance around the pub, Ethan knew he should get back to work. There were a few tables to be bussed and it wouldn't be fair to make Kitty do it. She'd pulled a double and looked pretty damn ragged. "I'd better get back to work."

Standing at the end of the table, Ethan smiled at the two handsome men. "Thanks for believing me."

"Don't thank us. We should've paid more attention before. Sorry about that," Pete said. He reached out and clasped Ethan's wrist. "Promise you'll call so we can take you out for some target practice. As a matter of fact, what are you doing Sunday morning?"

"Sleeping," Ethan answered. "I work Saturday night until closing. I won't get to bed before three."

"I'll pick you up at noon. That should give you plenty of time to catch up on your sleep. Until then, keep the gun in its case. You do have a case, right?"

"Yeah." Ethan pulled the small chain he wore around his neck from its hiding place under his shirt. Dangling from the delicate silver chain was a small key. "I even got the kind with a lock."

"Good," Brian chimed in.

Ethan patted the pocket of his apron. "Well, I've got your numbers so I guess we're all set. I need to help Kitty."

Pete smiled and Brian gave him a reassuring nod. Reluctantly, Ethan turned away from them and got back to work. He was in the middle of bussing a table when he spotted Brian and Pete leave the pub. Once again, Ethan imagined the two men in a sexual embrace, their mouths fused in a passionate kiss.

"Shit."

"Something wrong, Sweetie?" Kitty asked, on her way by with a tray of drinks.

"No, just thinking." As soon as Kitty passed, Ethan glanced down at the front of his apron. If someone were to look closely, they'd definitely see the bump proclaiming his desire. What the hell was going on?

\* \* \* \*

By the time Pete started the car, he was hornier than he'd ever remembered being. He reached across the console and cupped Brian's cock, happy to see Brian was just as hard as he was. "Fuck, I need this."

He gave Brian's cock a squeeze, delighting in the moan he received in return. "You gonna fuck me, big guy?" Pete asked, massaging Brian's erection. He paid special attention to the head, rubbing it until the pre-cum soaked through the thick denim.

"Depends on how fast you can drive because I'm damn close to blowing." Brian reached over to Pete's lap and returned the favour.

With a groan, Pete removed his hand and put the Charger in gear. "Give me two minutes."

Brian unzipped Pete's jeans. "Take your time, I'll occupy myself."

Pete glanced down to see Brian's long brown fingers wrap around his reddening cock. "Oh, fuck that's nice."

Brian gathered some of Pete's pre-cum on his thumb and stuck it in his mouth. "Hurry, man, I don't think I'm going to last."

By the time he pulled in front of his apartment, Pete was panting with need. He raced towards his door with his jeans barely clinging to his hips and his erection bobbing in the cool night air, Brian hot on his heels.

Once inside, Pete continued towards his bedroom, stripping as he went. By the time Brian shut the front door and had joined him, Pete was already naked on his hands and knees. He bowed his back, presenting his ass to Brian. "Hurry. Stuff's in the drawer."

Pete heard Brian rooting around in the bedside table moments before the sound of the condom wrapper crinkling sang in his ears. "Yeah. Yeah. Fuck me," he moaned.

The lube was cold as it dripped down the crevice of his ass, but Pete wasn't about to complain. Brian did a quick finger job, making sure Pete's body would accept his bigger than average cock before placing the head at Pete's hole.

They both groaned as Brian filled Pete's ass with his length. "You feel good," Brian grunted.

"Yeah, likewise," Pete managed to say. He gripped the bedspread in his hands and braced himself as Brian immediately began fucking him fast and hard. The way Brian fucked was just one of the things Pete liked about the man. Brian held nothing back in bed. Outside the bedroom, he was often aloof and grouchy, but the man's shell seemed to disappear when his clothes dropped to the floor.

Brian slapped Pete's ass, causing a delicious sting. "You like my cock?"

"Love it," Pete answered, after receiving another slap. He closed his eyes and moaned when Brian buried his cock as deep as it would go.

The hand Brian had used to deliver the erotic spank reached under Pete and wrapped around his cock. "You wanna fuck Ethan, don't you?"

Pete's eyes sprang open. He looked over his shoulder and made eye contact with Brian. Did he tell him the truth? His thoughts went to the way Brian had touched Ethan's back earlier. "Do you?"

Brian's thrusts stuttered as he broke eye contact. "Ethan doesn't deserve to be treated like a fuck buddy, and that's all I have time for."

When Brian's words sank in, Pete went from hurt to angry. He swung out with his fist, connecting with Brian's jaw. Unprepared, Brian was thrown off balance, his cock pulling free of Pete's ass.

Pete was off the bed within seconds. He turned to face Brian, his fists at the ready. "You need to leave."

Rubbing his jaw, Brian fumed. "What the fuck was that for?"

"Get out," Pete ordered. Unable to reel in his emotions, Pete escaped to the bathroom and locked the door. *Fuck buddy*. The words played over and over again in his head. He knew Brian didn't think of him as a full-fledged boyfriend, but fuck buddy? And according to Brian, Pete deserved to be treated that way.

A fist pounded on the door. "When you pull your head out of your ass long enough to talk, give me a call." A moment later, the front door slammed shut.

"Sonofabitch!" Pete yelled, punching the bathroom door with his fist.



## Chapter Three

Brian pulled up to the high school and put the Honda in park. "Good luck tonight," he said to Benny.

"You going out after the game?" Benny asked.

Brian thought of Pete. "Doubt it," he mumbled. Pete still hadn't spoken to him since their argument.

Benny opened the car door but didn't appear to be in any hurry to get out. "Chase's having a party. I didn't think I'd go so I didn't say anything, but he told me today at school that I could crash at his house after the party if I wanted to go."

Brian narrowed his eyes. There was something in Benny's body language that made him suspicious. He knew Chase Hughs, the team quarterback and captain, was a friend of Benny's, but the senior didn't come around their house very often. "Will there be beer?"

Benny immediately shook his head. "Chase doesn't drink. He's all about conditioning. You know, eating healthy, exercising." Benny shrugged. "He needs a scholarship."

"With his talent, I'm sure he'll get one, too." Brian reached out and squeezed Benny's muscled shoulder. "You sure you want to go or are you giving in to peer pressure?"

Benny snorted. "Look at me, Dad, there isn't a guy in school that could pressure me into doing anything."

Brian nodded. His son was right. At six-foot-five, Benny towered over the majority of kids. "You need me to bring you a bag of clothes?"

"No. I'll just wear these home in the morning."

"Do you have your phone?" Brian asked as Benny climbed out of the car.

"Yeah, but you're not gonna call and embarrass me, are you?"

"You're damn right I'm going to call. I'm also going to talk to Chase's mom to make sure it's okay."

Benny rolled his eyes. "If you're gonna talk to his mom, why do you have to call, too? Come on, Dad."

Brian shook his head. "Sorry, kid, but that's the price. Take it or leave it."

"Fine," Benny spat. He started to slam the car door shut but stopped and bent down to look at Brian. "You know it's been hard enough to make friends in this town without you sabotaging me."

Before Brian could say anything, Benny shut the door and jogged towards the locker room. Brian had to fight himself to remain in the car instead of running after his son. *Pick your battles*, he reminded himself. It had been one of Leigh's favourite expressions before she died.

Despite Benny's outbursts, he really was a good kid, and Brian needed to remind himself to cut his son some slack. With a resigned sigh, he put the car in gear and pulled out of the school's parking lot.

He wondered if he should call Pete since he was free for the night. At some point the two of them needed to clear the air. It had finally dawned on Brian what he'd said to piss Pete off so much, but by that time he was already in his car headed home. He'd called three times since then and each time Pete refused to pick up.

Brian thought about going by the station. He knew Pete was working the evening shift and wouldn't get off until around eleven, but that would still give them plenty of time to work through the misunderstanding.

Pulling into his driveway, he tried calling Pete again. He closed his eyes when he reached Pete's voicemail. "It's me. I'm not sure how I'm supposed to apologise for being an asshole unless you talk to me. I'm going to the game this evening, but I'll be at O'Brien's by the time you get off shift. I would appreciate it if you would meet me there."

Brian hung up and tapped the phone on the steering wheel, half hoping Pete would call. After ten minutes he finally gave up and shoved the phone in his front pocket before going into the house.

The moment he stepped inside, he began to pace the living room. Although the game was still ninety minutes away, he couldn't relax. Since childhood, Brian had hated being alone. He wasn't afraid of things that went bump in the night. It was more an overwhelming feeling of isolation.

His gaze landed on Leigh's photograph on the fireplace mantel. "You always understood that, didn't you?"

Brian smiled and walked over to the photo of the pretty, ebony-skinned woman. Lifting the frame from its place of honour in the Allenbrand house, Brian carried it over to his

favourite chair. There wasn't a day that went by that he didn't miss his wife. They'd been more than friends, they'd been soulmates. Brian hadn't believed a gay man could fall in love with a woman, but he had, hook, line and sinker.

It hadn't mattered to either of them that their sex life was less than stellar because they made up for it in every other aspect of their lives together. There was no doubt in Brian's mind the two of them would have lived happily together for another fifty years or more if Leigh hadn't dove into the lake to save that boy. In the end, they'd both lost their lives. Benny had become motherless, and Brian had been left a widower.

"You always did think you could swim better than you actually could," he admonished the photograph. Brian shook his head. He knew Leigh hadn't even given her skills a second thought. As much as he hated the water, Brian knew he would have done the same thing had he been there. If Leigh had stood by and watched a boy drown without trying to save him, she wouldn't have been the woman he married.

Brian wiped the moisture from his eyes and carried the photograph back to the mantel. Before walking away, he posed one more question to his wife. "What should I do about these feelings I have? I'm starting to really care about Pete, so why can't I stop thinking and worrying about Ethan?"

\* \* \* \*

"You working tonight?" Nate asked Ethan before heading out of the office.

"Yeah." Ethan deftly closed down the computer. "The pub's always packed after a home game." He glanced at his watch. "I'll barely have time to get home and change before the pre-game crowd shows up."

"Come on, I'll give you a lift." Nate shrugged into his coat and picked up his briefcase.

Ethan grabbed his coat off its hook and eyed the briefcase. "Are you actually taking work home with you?"

"Hell no. This is all for looks and to carry my lunch dishes back home. Kinda like an executive lunchbox. Rio's been on my ass lately about eating out every day for lunch. Can you believe he actually said I was getting soft around the middle? Bastard," Nate said with a grin.

Nate held the door open for Ethan before locking it.

"So Rio has you on a diet?" Ethan asked, walking down the steps of City Hall. Unless Nate's clothes were deceiving, Ethan couldn't tell his boss had gained weight.

"Some kind of low carb crap. Although Rio says it isn't a diet but a lifestyle change. I just call it shit." Nate chuckled and unlocked his SUV.

Ethan climbed in and fastened his seatbelt. "You're lucky. I could eat jelly beans three times a day and no one would give a rat's ass."

Nate started to pull out of the parking lot, but stopped and looked at Ethan. "I would." He smiled. "I love those red jelly beans, can't get enough of 'em."

In less than two minutes, Nate pulled up outside Kyle's bakery. "We'll probably stop by O'Brien's after the game, so I guess I'll see you then."

"Thanks for the ride," Ethan said before shutting the door. He unlocked the bakery door and stepped into the darkened store. There was still a faint trace of cinnamon clinging to the air, reminding him he hadn't had lunch.

He trudged up the steps leading to his apartment and unlocked the door. Although some tenants might balk at not having a private entrance, it had never bothered Ethan. As a matter of fact, it made him feel even more secure knowing the burglar alarm would sound if someone tried to force their way into the building.

Inside his apartment, Ethan threw his coat off and went directly to his bedroom. He dug a clean pair of jeans and a Cattle Valley Booster Club T-shirt out of his dresser and tossed them to the bed. He always felt guilty for wearing the shirt because he'd yet to sit in the stands of a sporting event, but it was expected on game day.

Ethan quickly dressed and washed his face before shoving his wallet in his back pocket. He grabbed his cell phone off the dresser and was out the door within ten minutes of his arrival home.

Locking his apartment, Ethan jumped when someone started pounding on the bakery's glass door. His initial reaction was to call either Brian or Pete, but he shook the thought away. It was the front door, not a window. Surely it was someone after a dessert or something they'd forgotten to pick up earlier.

Ethan slowly climbed down the staircase, hoping whoever it was would just go away. He sighed as the door came into view. Thankfully, whoever it was must've realised the bakery was closed and had moved on. Still slightly paranoid, Ethan looked up and down the

street before unlocking the door and stepping outside. He stood there for several moments, studying the area before turning around to lock up.

Crossing the street, Ethan spotted one of the town's deputies get out of his pick-up. "Hey, Roy," Ethan greeted.

"Ethan," Roy replied with a tip of his cowboy hat. "I see you have our school colours on this evening."

Ethan glanced down at the brown T-shirt and nodded. "You stopping in before the game?" Ethan held the door open for Roy.

"Yeah. I'm working security, so I'm not sure how much of the game I'll get to actually watch."

"Would you like a table or would you rather sit at the bar?"

"Neither. I called in an order earlier. It should be ready by now," Roy answered.

"Hang on." Ethan went into the kitchen after an acknowledging wave to Sean. "Is Roy's order ready?" he asked Jay.

"Got it right here." Jay closed the lid on the fried chicken dinner container and handed it to Ethan. "Tell him the breasts are pretty small today so I added an extra one for him."

"Will do." Ethan carried the to-go container to the bar. "You want to ring this up, Sean?"

"Already did," Sean answered before going back to his conversation with one of the regulars.

Ethan smiled. "Guess you're all set then." He gestured to the to-go box. "Jay added an extra piece of chicken for you."

"I appreciate that." Roy didn't make a move to leave. Instead he leaned his forearms on the bar and stared at Ethan. "I don't suppose you've changed your mind about going out with me?"

*Shoot!* Ethan thought Roy had moved on. It wasn't that Roy wasn't a hell of a nice guy because he was. Ethan simply wasn't attracted to him. An image of two other deputies came to mind. With an inward sigh, Ethan shook his head. "Sorry."

Roy smiled and tapped the bar with the palm of his hand. "No problem. Just thought I'd give it another shot. You know where to find me if you change your mind."

Ethan nodded and tried his best to smile in return. Roy picked up his dinner and left, leaving Ethan to rub his knotted stomach. He hated getting hit on. There had never been

rhyme or reason to who he was attracted to. Pete and Brian couldn't be more different from Jay, yet Ethan had been attracted to Jay for years. He even thought he was in love with his best friend at one point. Lucky for him, Jay set Ethan to rights on that score before he could fall completely in love. Ethan had been hurt for a while, but it didn't take long before he realised Erico was good for Jay.

Of course that still didn't explain his attraction to Pete and Brian. Individually, the men were smoking hot, but there was just something about seeing the two of them together that set Ethan's imagination on fire.

Ethan had gone over their last meeting with a fine tooth-comb. The more he thought about it, the more certain he was that the two men were also attracted to him. Brian's subtle touches combined with Pete's wandering eyes and devilish grin almost had Ethan begging for more of their attention.

"Everything okay?" Sean asked, coming up behind Ethan.

With a slight jump, Ethan glanced over his shoulder and smiled. "Yeah. I was just daydreaming again."

Sean tilted his head to the side and narrowed his eyes. "You've been doing that a lot lately. Something going on?"

"Not really. More wishful thinking than anything else." The admission surprised Ethan. Rarely did he open himself up like that. He shrugged, embarrassed. "I'd better go clock-in."

"Just bring your card out, and I'll fill it in. It wouldn't be fair for you to be shorted because you were helping a customer."

"Thanks." Ethan pushed through the swinging door to the kitchen and found his timecard in the rack beside the time clock. He wondered if Pete and Brian would be in later for a beer. Was Pete still planning to take him out for target practice?

Goosebumps covered Ethan's body at the thought. He needed to calm down before he made a fool of himself. The last thing Pete needed was a twenty-six year old drooling over him, especially when he already had a man like Brian.

\* \* \* \*

Before heading to the pub, Pete stopped by his apartment for a quick shower. He chose a pair of threadbare jeans and one of his favourite drinking T-shirts that read *Warning: Alcohol Makes Me Horny*.

Walking into O'Brien's he was immediately assaulted by the noise. Evidently the football team won if the loud and rowdy crowd was any indication. Pete nodded to a few people he knew but continued to weave his way through the throng. He doubted he'd be able to get a table unless Brian had already claimed one.

After a thorough perusal of the pub, he shook his head. Not only was there no available seats, but Brian wasn't anywhere to be found. *Shit*. He made his way towards the bar just in time to see a guy he didn't know squeeze Ethan's ass.

Ethan immediately slapped the man's hand away. Pete couldn't hear what was being said, but the expression on Ethan's face was murderous. The offender with the grabby hands merely laughed and tried once again to get a feel of what the available men in town were after on a Friday night.

Pete managed to grab the man's wrist before it had a chance to connect to its intended target. "Keep your hands to yourself, pal."

When the man looked like he was about to start something, Ethan stepped closer. "Thanks for the help, *Deputy Nash*."

The man pulled his hand away. "I was just having some fun," he pouted.

"It's not fun when you're groping someone who doesn't want to be touched," Pete admonished.

"That'll be four dollars, Sid," Ethan prompted while holding out his hand.

Sid dug in his wallet and slapped a five dollar bill against Ethan's palm. "Keep it."

"Thanks." Ethan started back towards the bar with Pete on his heels.

"He been bothering you?" Pete asked in Ethan's ear when he stopped to refill his drink tray.

Ethan turned around, putting his body in close proximity to Pete's. "He's just drunk. It kinda goes with the job." Ethan's gaze wandered to Pete's T-shirt. "Wanna drink?"

Pete smiled and ran a hand over the warning sign printed on the front of his shirt. "You trying to get me horny?"

Ethan's eyes followed the movement of Pete's hand as it brushed across his nipples. "Wouldn't do me much good, I reckon," Ethan mumbled. "Where's Brian?"

Pete didn't miss the interest in Ethan's body language. "Not sure. He was supposed to meet me here but he hasn't shown. Doesn't matter much anyway, there's nowhere for us to sit."

Ethan licked his lips. "I've got a table that should open up in about twenty minutes. If you want to go stand over by the window, I'll make sure I save it for you."

Pure lust overrode Pete's good sense. He reached out and pressed the palm of his hand against Ethan's chest, letting his fingers spread to brush across one of Ethan's covered nipples. He delighted in the way the small nub pebbled under his touch. "You sure? I don't want to get you in trouble."

Ethan swallowed, his body swaying a fraction towards Pete. "If you didn't want to get me in trouble, you wouldn't keep coming in here."

A throat cleared beside them loud enough to be heard over the crowd. Pete glanced to his left to find Brian, staring at Pete's hand where it still rested on Ethan's chest. Pete expected Brian to be pissed, but instead the man seemed...aroused.

"Am I interrupting?" Brian finally asked.

Pete shook his head, never breaking eye contact with Brian. "Not at all. Ethan's going to snag us a table as soon as one becomes available."

Clearly uncomfortable with the situation, Ethan pushed Pete's hand away. "I'd better get these drinks delivered."

Before moving away from the bar, Pete ordered a Guinness and a Miller Lite. He turned to rest his elbow on the bar and grinned at Brian. "You liked that, didn't you?"

Brian's eyebrows drew together. "Liked what?"

"Watching me touch Ethan."

"You're crazy," Brian tried to argue.

With the press of the crowd, it was easy for Pete to reach down and cup Brian's erection without being noticed. "Am I?"

Brian knocked Pete's hand away as he dug in his jeans for his wallet. He took out a couple of bills and laid them on the bar. "Thanks," Brian said to Sean before handing Pete his Guinness.

Amused with the situation, Pete smiled at Brian and took a drink, licking the thick foam seductively from his upper lip. He knew he should probably still be pissed at Brian for his fuck buddy comment, but the sexual tension diffused any lingering resentment. At first Pete



didn't understand why, but the expression on Brian's face said it all. It wasn't that Brian didn't want more, he was simply either too afraid, or too embarrassed to go after what he really desired.

"Follow me," Pete said and wove his way through the throng of people once more. He stopped in a fairly empty corner and turned to face Brian. "Can I ask you something personal?"

Brian shrugged and took a swig of his beer.

"Have you ever been with two men at the same time?" Pete asked, watching closely for Brian's initial reaction.

Brian's eyelids dipped in a sign of need before opening wide. "No."

"Have you ever thought about it?" Pete continued to push.

Brian ignored the question and turned to study the room.

"There's nothing wrong with it, you know." Pete brushed his shoulder against Brian's. "I've only done it once, and I was kinda the odd man out since the guys I was with were already partners, but the sex was fantastic. I can't imagine how good it would be if all three people were really into it."

Brian looked sideways at Pete. "You didn't take my calls because I referred to you as a fuck buddy, which is not what I meant, by the way. Yet you want to have a fuck-a-thon with Ethan in our bed?"

Pete moved to stand toe-to-toe with Brian. "Who says it has to be all about the sex? I like Ethan. I could see the three of us hanging out together outside the bedroom. Couldn't you? I mean, I know you feel something for him or you wouldn't have been so concerned the other night."

Brian shook his head. "Benny's having a hard enough time with all this as it is. I couldn't ask him to accept two men in my life."

Pete was close, he knew it. He took half a step and kissed Brian's neck, using his tongue to trail along the prominent vein he loved to bite during sex. "Benny doesn't know about me. Who says he has to find out about the three of us?"

Although Brian often said he hated public displays of affection, he tilted his head to the side as Pete continued to lick and kiss his neck.

"Because I'm tired of sneaking around. Don't you think I'd like to have you over for dinner? Benny's just not ready for it."

With one last nip, Pete pulled back to stare Brian in the eyes. "Benny's not ready or you're not?"

Brian glanced over Pete's shoulder. "Ethan's gesturing to an open table."

Pete stepped back and let Brian lead the way. He might not have received an answer to his question, but at least he gave Brian something to think about.

\* \* \* \*

Ethan brought them another round of drinks and a big basket of cheese fries. "The grill's getting ready to close so I thought I'd bring you something to munch on in case you're hungry."

Brian studied the sexy waiter. Was Pete right about Ethan? Brian hadn't noticed Ethan bringing unordered food out to any of the other tables. The idea of being with Ethan and Pete was too much for him to seriously contemplate, but the fantasy would fuel his morning jack-off sessions for weeks, maybe longer.

Looking uneasy, Ethan stepped from foot to foot before speaking. "Are we still on for target practice Sunday?"

Pete nodded. "As long as you're still up for it. I was just trying to get Brian to come along."

Ethan's gaze shot to Brian. "You should. It'll be fun. I can even pack a lunch or something."

Brian was at a fork in the road. Whether he went or not, he had no doubt Pete would make a play for Ethan. The question was, did Brian want to be a part of it, or would he rather go back to his boring, lonely life without even Pete to keep him company?

"I'll have to see what's going on with Benny, but I'll try," Brian said. There, that would buy him some time to think about it some more. It was a huge decision to make on the spur of the moment and with a few beers in his belly, not to mention the foot pressing against his cock from under the table.

Ethan's smile matched Pete's. "Okay, well, just give me a call so I know how much food to bring."

"I'll do that," Brian said with a nod of his head.

Ethan nodded in return before jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "I should probably get back to work. Holler if you need anything."

"Thanks for the fries," Pete said.

"No problem," Ethan answered before disappearing in the crowd.

When Brian looked back to Pete, the gorgeous man had a big smile on his face. "Did you mean it? Are you really interested in coming with us Sunday?"

"Maybe. I need to think about it." Brian set his elbow on the table and rested his chin against his fist. "What if someone finds out?"

Pete shrugged. "I think sometimes you forget where you're living. The town sheriff and mayor are involved in a ménage relationship. Evidently the people of Cattle Valley could care less as long as they can still do their jobs."

"Yeah, but that doesn't help me out with Benny."

"Maybe you should try talking to him man to man. In another few years Benny will be off at college. Do you really think he would want you rattling around in that big house alone?"

Brian shook his head. "Naw, I won't talk to him until something happens. We might be deluding ourselves that Ethan's interested in one or both of us."

"You're a pessimist. Now me, I'm an optimist all the way. As a matter of fact, I'm going to make sure I bring a king-sized blanket, condoms and about the biggest bottle of lube the pharmacy carries."

"God help us," Brian moaned.

## Chapter Four

Ethan fell into bed around three Sunday morning, exhausted. The pub seemed to get busier all the time, and he was rethinking his part-time job. With his work in the mayor's office, he really didn't need the added income. In the beginning, working at the pub had been a way to meet people while sticking close to Jay. Now that Jay was in a committed relationship with Erico, the added work seemed pointless.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to relax, but his mind wouldn't shut down. Something big was happening with Brian and Pete and Ethan still wasn't sure if he was ready. Hell, he wasn't even sure he'd read the signals right. Maybe Pete was just a flirt and Brian put up with it.

What Ethan couldn't decide on was whether or not he'd have the guts to go through with a three-way if the situation presented itself. Never had he been faced with the possibility of a ménage. He'd read plenty of books about three men fucking and falling in love, but could it happen in the real world? Ethan wasn't so sure. Jealousy had to play a huge part in a relationship like that, and Ethan was only human. Still, the idea of watching Pete and Brian make love totally turned him on. Ethan wasn't sure if that said more about him or the other two men involved, but either way, in his heart, he knew he wouldn't pass up an invitation should it come.

Ethan licked his palm and burrowed his hand under the cover to his cock. He'd just given his erection a good squeeze when something pinged against his bedroom window. Ethan froze and waited for the sound again. He watched as a small pebble hit the glass. *Shit.* Ethan threw off the covers and, despite his nudity, walked to the window.

He gasped when he spotted the man in the skeleton mask and dark robe, staring back at him. Stepping back from the window, he reached for his discarded jeans, pulling his cell phone out of the pocket. His finger hovered over the keypad for several moments. Should he call Pete, Brian or the police?

Decision made, he hit the pre-programmed number. While he waited for Pete to pick up, he inched his way back to the window. *Not again.* The alley was empty with no apparent sign of his tormentor.

"Hello?" Pete answered, his voice heavy with sleep.

"It's Ethan. Sorry to wake you. There was someone in the alley throwing rocks at my window, but whoever it was is gone now. Just...just go back to sleep. I shouldn't have called."

"Did you get a good look at him?" Pete asked.

"No. He was wearing a mask. I know it sounds crazy, but I saw what I saw."

"I'll be there in five minutes. Don't open the door to anyone until you see my car pull up in the alley."

"You don't have to do that. It's late. Like I said, I shouldn't have called." Ethan hugged his jeans to his chest and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Bullshit. I'm glad you did. I'll call you when I get there."

Before Ethan could protest further, Pete hung up. Ethan threw the phone onto the bed behind him and took a deep breath. It was obvious someone was trying to scare him. If the masked man wanted to hurt him, he would've broken in, not alerted Ethan to his presence by throwing rocks at the window. It just didn't make sense. Was the whole idea to keep him in a state of fear? That didn't sound like something George Strelling would do. Maybe he'd been wrong and it wasn't George at all, but if not George then who?

Headlights coming down the alley illuminated the wall of Ethan's bedroom, reminding him he was still naked. He shook out the jeans still clutched in his hand and pulled them on before stepping towards the window.

Ethan watched as Pete climbed out of the car. When the man crossed in front of the headlights, Ethan sucked in a breath. Dressed in only a pair of jeans, Pete's chest was amazing, better than Ethan's fantasies.

Admonishing himself, Ethan shook his head. It wasn't the time to be ogling the man, especially not after getting him out of bed in the middle of the night. Pete looked up and shook his head.

Ethan unlocked the window and pushed it up. "I didn't figure he'd still be around."

"Where exactly was he standing?" Pete asked.

Ethan pointed towards the dumpster. "A couple of feet from there."

Pete walked over to the area and squatted down for a closer look. Another set of headlights illuminated the area and both Pete and Ethan watched as Brian stepped out of his Honda.

"Find anything?" Brian asked, walking towards Pete.

"Not sure." Pete held up a cigarette butt. "There are three or four of these sprinkled around the area, but they could've fallen out of someone's garbage."

"The dumpster is only used by me and Kyle and neither of us smoke," Ethan called down.

Pete and Brian looked up. Pete held up the butt. "Do you know anyone who smokes Camel Menthol?"

Ethan shook his head. *Did George Strelling smoke?* He wondered if there was a way to find out.

Before Pete could ask another question, yet another car pulled into the alley. Ethan was surprised to see Roy step out of the sheriff's department cruiser.

"What's going on?" Roy asked, joining Pete and Brian in the alley.

Pete gestured towards Ethan, half hanging out of the window. "Ethan called. There was a man in a mask throwing rocks at his window."

Roy looked up at Ethan. "Why didn't you call the sheriff's department?"

The last thing Ethan wanted was to get Pete and Brian into trouble. He searched for something to say, but Brian stepped in and answered for him. "We told him to call us if he heard any more noises."

Roy shook his head. "Next time call the sheriff's department. We're usually cruising around anyway and can get here a hell of a lot faster than someone who's off-duty."

Ethan glanced at Pete and Brian before nodding. "Sorry. I just didn't want to bother you guys again after so many false alarms."

"That's what we're here for. In a town this size, there's usually not much going on anyway," Roy said before returning his attention to Pete. "What'd you find?"

"Not much, but there are several of these on the ground." Pete held up the cigarette butt. "If they belong to our masked man, I'd say he was standing down here for a good while."

*He was waiting for me to get home.* The realisation that he was either being watched or followed shook Ethan to the core. His hands started to shake as his stomach heaved. He stepped back out of view to get himself under control.

"Ethan? You okay?" Brian's voice carried up and through the window.

"Yeah," Ethan answered. "Just give me a minute."

He sat in the dark listening to the conversation below as Roy bagged the butts for evidence after taking a couple of pictures. It wasn't until Roy said his goodnights that Brian addressed Ethan again.

"Can you unlock this back door for us, Ethan?" Brian asked.

Ethan wanted to shake his head no. He felt too raw to let the other men see him. The sweat that ran in drops down his face was testament to his nerves.

"Ethan?" Pete called out.

"Yeah." Ethan knew he couldn't ignore the two men after they'd jumped out of bed to come to his rescue. "Give me a sec."

Without turning on the lights, he made his way to the door of his apartment and down the stairs. He turned on a single overhead light in the back of the bakery and unlocked the back door. "Hey."

Pete stepped inside first. "Are you okay?"

Ethan nodded. "Yeah, sorry, guess I'm just weirded out by the whole thing."

After studying the door for several moments, Brian stepped inside and shut it behind him. "Are you sure this guy didn't try to get in?"

"Sure? No, but I was awake and didn't hear anything until the sound at my window." Ethan gestured to the ceiling. The last thing he wanted was to be left alone. "Can I make you a cup of coffee or do you need to get home?"

"Coffee sounds good," Brian answered.

After making sure the door was securely locked, Ethan led the way upstairs and into his kitchen. "I hope regular coffee's okay. I don't have any of the fancy stuff."

"Regular's fine," Pete said from behind Ethan.

Ethan's hands were shaking, making it hard to separate the filters. He wasn't sure if it was the evening's events, the two sexy half-dressed men in his kitchen or a combination of both. Giving up on the coffee filters, he finally turned around and held the stack out to Pete. "Sorry, but I can't get these separated."

Pete's gaze went to the shaking filters in Ethan's hand. Pete cursed under his breath and pulled Ethan into his arms. The filters dropped to the floor as Ethan wrapped his arms around Pete's waist. It was probably the wrong reaction since Brian stood less than four feet away, but Ethan couldn't help himself. He buried his face against Pete's neck and let the handsome deputy's strength surround him.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled against the spicy scented skin of Pete's neck.

"Shhh." Pete held Ethan even tighter, placing a kiss on the top of his head. "We all need someone to lean on occasionally."

Ethan tilted his chin up and stared into Pete's dark brown eyes. Pete's lips lowered to Ethan's, but he stopped just before making contact and glanced over at Brian. Ethan wasn't sure what was going on between the two men, but Pete gave Brian a sweet smile before pressing his lips against Ethan's.

Ethan's lips slowly parted, allowing Pete's tongue inside. Pete lapped at the inside of Ethan's mouth as his hands moved lower. With his hands firmly on Ethan's ass, Pete insinuated his thigh between Ethan's legs.

*Oh fuck.* How was Ethan supposed to reject what felt so incredible? He ground his erection against the muscled thigh as he continued to kiss the handsome man. A moan from behind him, reminded Ethan they weren't alone. He hesitantly broke the kiss and glanced over his shoulder, feeling guilty. An apology was on the tip of his tongue when Brian moved forward to press himself against Ethan's back.

Brian's lips moved to Ethan's ear. "Is this okay?"

Ethan's eyes drifted shut. "I don't think I've ever been so turned on in my life," he confessed. Even if the two men were only after one night of passion with him, Ethan knew there was no way he could reject them.

Brian kissed Ethan's neck. "Don't be afraid to tell us if we go too far."

Going too far wasn't a problem as far as Ethan was concerned. He wanted it all, everything the two men were willing to give. When Brian leant over Ethan's shoulder to kiss Pete, Ethan got a glimpse of one of his biggest fantasies. He ground his cock against Pete's thigh, once again. Would inviting the two men to his bed break the spell they seemed to be under? He thought of the full-sized bed and winced. Still, a mattress would be better than the kitchen floor.

When Brian's hands moved down to unbutton Ethan's jeans, all other thoughts ceased to exist. "Touch me," Ethan moaned.

"Oh, I plan to do more than touch you," Pete chuckled, pushing Ethan's jeans down.

Brian moved away and helped Ethan step out of his clothing. Ethan heard a rustling and soon Brian was back, the bigger man's naked flesh pressing against him. "Do you have stuff?" Brian asked, skimming his lips over Ethan's jaw.



Ethan's eyes sprang open. "No. Shit! Since I've been here, I haven't...I mean, I have lube but that's it."

Pete chuckled. "That's okay. It's our first time together. I'm sure we can think of other things to keep us occupied."

*First time?* Ethan sucked in a breath. Did that mean he was more than a one-night fling to Brian and Pete? "My bed's small, but we can move into the bedroom if you want?"

Pete, who'd been busy running his fingers up and down the crease of Ethan's ass, nodded. "Yeah, you need to be horizontal."

Brian's fingers encircled Ethan's erection as soon as Pete stepped back to get undressed. "Watch him," Brian whispered, squeezing Ethan's cock. "Pete's body is a work of art." Brian began a slow rhythm, stroking Ethan's cock.

As Pete slowly pushed his jeans to the floor, Ethan moaned. Brian was right. Ethan thought Pete's chest was incredible, but the whole picture was even better than he'd ever imagined. Pete's cock was glorious. Ethan licked his lips, dying to wrap them around Pete's girth.

Evidently, Pete read Ethan's thoughts loud and clear. He smiled and shook his head. "Bedroom." He walked out of the kitchen, beckoning for Brian and Ethan to follow.

Brian released his hold on Ethan's cock and rested his hand on his hip, close enough to Ethan's groin to tickle the short blond pubic hair that surrounded Ethan's cock. "We'd better get in there before he starts without us."

Ethan glanced up at Brian. "He'd do that?" He could only imagine what Pete masturbating would do to his control.

"Oh yeah, he's rather fond of his own body," Brian answered, leading Ethan out of the kitchen.

"I can see why. If I had a body like that, I'd lock myself in the house and never put a stitch of clothes on again." When they stepped into the bedroom, Ethan was surprised to see Pete standing at the window instead of in bed. The small bedside lamp was on, illuminating Pete's nude body in a soft glow.

"You know people can see in, right?" Ethan asked.

Pete nodded. He stood there for several more seconds before stepping away from the window. "If someone's still watching, I want them to know you're no longer alone." He pointed towards the window. "You need to get a set of shades."

"I had a roll blind, but it broke," Ethan mumbled, pushing the covers to the foot of the bed. The exchange had been a reminder that someone was watching him. He sat on the edge of the bed. Why hadn't he replaced the blind? He thought of the tight jeans he wore to work and sighed. "Do you think it's my fault? Do I broadcast something to creeps that I'm not even aware of?"

Brian crawled onto the bed and sat behind Ethan, his legs dangling over the edge with Ethan trapped between them. He wrapped his arms around Ethan's chest and kissed his shoulder. "It's not your fault."

Pete knelt on the floor between Ethan's legs and shook his head. "I don't know why this asshole's fucking with you, but you've done nothing wrong." Pete leant in and brushed his lips across Ethan's left nipple. "Now there are three of us to watch your back, we stand a better chance at catching the fucker."

Ethan pulled back, pressing himself further against Brian's chest. He wanted to ask what was going on between the three of them but wondered if he had a right. It was only their first night and they really hadn't done anything other than getting naked. Still, the concern in Pete's eyes confused him. "Are the two of you here because you feel guilty about not believing me before?"

Brian pressed his cock against Ethan's back. "Does this feel like guilt to you?"

Ethan shook his head. "But, if you have each other, why would you want me?"

Pete's expression turned completely serious. "Neither of us planned to add someone into our already fucked up relationship, but we're both drawn to you."

"I find myself thinking about you both at all hours of the day," Brian said, his chin resting on Ethan's shoulder. "I'm still not sure what it means, or how to deal with it, but I can't let the chance to explore my feelings pass me by without at least trying."

"Brian's worried about Benny," Pete added.

"Shit. I hadn't even thought of that." Ethan had no idea how a teenage son would cope with something so out of the ordinary. He guessed it was the reason Pete and Brian seemed so secretive about their relationship. Adding another into the mix would make keeping secrets even more difficult, but Ethan knew he would do it if it meant a chance with the two men. "I won't tell anyone."

"I can't ask you to do that, but maybe we shouldn't broadcast it either, at least until we see how things go." Brian kissed Ethan's temple.

Ethan was still having a hard time wrapping his mind around the situation. When he felt Pete's tongue swipe across the head of his cock, he decided there would be plenty of time to think and worry later. For now, he had two gorgeous men in his bedroom.

\* \* \* \*

Once they managed to get Ethan relaxed and spread out in the centre of the bed, Pete studied their situation and shook his head. "After tonight, we should meet up at my place."

Ethan bit his lip. "Sorry about the bed. I know it's small."

"Don't be sorry. I'm just not sure how we're all going to fit," Pete said with a smile.

"Well, I'm fine right here," Brian said, kneeling on the foot of the bed between Ethan's legs.

As Pete watched, Brian lowered his mouth to Ethan's cock. Pete reached down and wrapped his fingers around his own cock at the sight. "Damn that's sexy," he moaned, stroking himself. He felt Ethan's hand land on his lower back.

"Come up here," Ethan encouraged.

With a groan, Pete crawled to the top of the bed and straddled Ethan's face. He braced his hands on either side of Ethan's hips and lowered himself until he had a bird's eye view of Brian sucking Ethan's cock.

When Ethan twirled his tongue around the head of Pete's erection, Pete was completely lost. How long had he wanted to feel Ethan's mouth on him? If he were honest with himself, his desire for the hot barback went back to the first time he'd stepped into O'Brien's. He'd almost asked him out that night until he'd witnessed Ethan quickly turn down an offer from a fantastic looking guy.

Pete had played it cool for the next several weeks, silently watching Ethan turn down guy after guy. It wasn't until he knew Ethan was out of his reach that he'd turned his attentions on Brian. He didn't regret hooking up with Brian for a second and doubted he ever would. Although he'd had to play bottom to Brian's top, the sex and semi-friendship was well worth it.

Now, watching Brian suck Ethan's cock while his own was being engulfed deep in Ethan's throat, Pete felt completely content. He started a shallow thrust in and out of Ethan's mouth as his tongue explored the base of Ethan's cock.

Brian pulled off Ethan's length long enough to give Pete a deep, passionate kiss and a smile. "You okay?"

Pete returned the smile and stole a lick of Ethan's pre-cum. "I'm fantastic," he said as he continued to fuck Ethan's mouth. "What about you?"

Brian gazed into Pete's eyes for several moments before giving a contented nod. "Better than I ever thought I'd be."

Ethan's hand pushed against Pete's groin. Pete took the hint and withdrew his cock. "What're you two whispering about?" Ethan asked.

"Just how right this all feels," Pete answered.

With an uncharacteristic giggle, Ethan once again fit his lips over the end of Pete's cock. Pete grinned at Brian. "Guess he feels the same way." Pete patted the bed beside Ethan. "Swing around here."

Brian's eyes lit up as he followed Pete's suggestion.

Wrapping his hand around the base of Brian's cock, Pete's mouth began to water. Brian's cock had gone without attention and the pre-cum flowed down its long length. Pete ran his tongue from base to tip, gathering the silky fluid in his mouth before slipping his lips over the crown.

Brian moaned and used his free hand to grab the back of Pete's head and push him further down his length. Happy to oblige, Pete took as much of Brian's cock as he could and used his hand for the rest.

When Ethan's mouth slipped off Pete's cock and a tongue ran across his asshole, Pete couldn't help but buck. How did Ethan know rimming was Pete's favourite thing to do and have done? He spread his legs further apart in hopes that Ethan would continue. *Fuck!* The skilled tongue was back, the tip teasing Pete's opening.

Pete's body responded immediately. He fisted the bottom sheet with his free hand as he pulled off Brian's cock enough to take a deep breath. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end, signalling his imminent release. The first rope of cum shot from his cock with such force it nearly stole Pete's breath.

Ethan moaned, his tongue still teasing Pete's hole. Pete's climax had evidently set off a chain reaction. Pete barely had time to wrap his lips around Brian's cock before Brian's seed coated his tongue and throat. He gulped Brian's cum as fast as he could, surprised by the excessive amount. In the end, only a few drops escaped to run down Pete's chin.

Pete untangled his legs from Ethan's arms and collapsed on his side next to Ethan. The room was quiet except for the sounds of the three men trying to catch their breath.

After several moments, Pete opened his eyes and looked at Brian. With his body curled in an unnatural position, Brian had to be uncomfortable. Damn full-sized bed. Pete sat up and ran his hand over the top of Brian's head. "Why don't you come up here? I think we'll all fit if we lay on our sides."

Brian groaned and shook his head. "I should probably get home. Benny'll be up in a few hours."

Pete hated the way Brian always took off as soon as he recovered from an orgasm. It was one of the things they argued about most. Maybe he was a fool for hoping things were starting to change between them.

Brian slid off the end of the bed and eventually got to his feet. Pete reached out, hoping to change Brian's mind. "Can't you at least stay for a little while?" He glanced over at Ethan, not surprised to see the younger man sound asleep.

Coming around the end of the bed, Brian sat next to Pete. "I'd love to hold the two of you and fall asleep, but you know it isn't possible, at least not yet."

Pete wanted to argue, but there was something in Brian's big brown eyes that stopped him. There was a sadness there Pete had never seen before. For the first time since they'd started messing around, Pete believed Brian when he said he didn't want to leave. What would it be like to straddle two worlds and not find true contentment in either of them?

Leaning in, Pete gave Brian a gentle kiss. He pulled back and smiled. "I'm sorry you have to go, but I understand."

"Do you?"

Pete nodded and cupped Brian's cheek in his palm. "I know you think you'll lose the respect of your son if you open up to him about me, about the three of us, but I wonder how long you can continue to lead two lives."

"Benny'll be off to college in a couple of years..." Brian began.

"Yeah, and he'll still be your son. If you're ashamed to let him see who you really are now, don't expect it to change two years down the road."

Brian shook his head. "It's not that I'm ashamed."

“Really? Because that’s what it feels like to me. I mean, you’ve already come out of the closet. Hell, you moved to Cattle Valley. Yet you’re still living in fear that your son will find out you have a male lover.” Pete glanced at Ethan. “Or two.”

Brian stood with a troubled sigh. “I understand what you’re saying. I’m just not ready to throw my sexuality in his face. He’s still mourning the loss of his mother for Christsake.”

Brian bent over the bed and placed a soft kiss on Ethan’s lips. “Tell him I’m sorry I couldn’t stay.”

Pete tilted his chin up for another kiss from Brian. “You can tell him in a few hours when we pick you up for target practice.”

Brian gave Pete a short nod. “I’ll call you.”

Pete didn’t try to stop Brian as he slowly walked out of the room. Brian was the only one who had the ability to take control of his life, and Pete knew there was nothing he could say to change that.

## Chapter Five

Sleep hadn't come for Brian once he made it home. He'd spent the entire morning staring at the ceiling thinking about what Pete had said. A noise from downstairs told him Benny was finally up. Maybe telling Benny was like ripping off a bandage, better to just hold your breath and get it over with as quickly as possible. With that in mind, he texted Pete to let him know he'd be spending the day at home. He hated the thought of not going on the planned outing with Ethan and Pete, but if things worked out the way he hoped, they'd all be better off.

He threw off the covers and sat on the edge of the bed, wishing he'd been able to at least get a few hours of sleep. Brian waited for his head to clear before he stood and crossed to his dresser. He pulled on his normal Sunday clothes of sweatpants and a T-shirt and made his way downstairs.

When he entered the kitchen, Brian could tell immediately there was something wrong with Benny. He assumed his son had heard him leave during the night which also meant he probably heard him return. "Hope I didn't wake you last night. I got a call about a prowler."

Benny barely acknowledged Brian. "You didn't." Benny poured more cereal into his bowl.

Brian walked over and started to make a pot of coffee, the stronger the better. "Something wrong?" he asked over his shoulder, pouring the water into the coffeemaker.

"You mean other than the fact that I'm sixteen and you're still treating me like a baby?"

Spinning around, Brian faced his son. "What the hell's that supposed to mean? Didn't I let you go to Chase's party two nights ago?"

"Yeah, after calling his mom and checking up on me *twice*."

Brian bit back his anger and turned around to finish preparing the coffee. Once the aromatic liquid started pouring into the pot, he approached the table and sat across from his son. "I know you feel as though you're grown up, but you're only sixteen. I'm not saying you're a baby, but you still have a lot of learning to do before I can just let you go off on your own. Believe me, son, I've seen what can happen when parents fail to supervise their children, and I want more for you than that."

"I don't know what you want from me, Dad. I get good grades, I've never even tried drugs, and I moved here for you." Benny shook his head and continued. "But none of that seems good enough for you. I feel like you're constantly waiting for me to screw up."

Brian rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. How had he let his relationship with Benny deteriorate to this point? "I'm sorry you feel that way. It's not true, ya know? No parent could ask for a better son. I'm sorry if I've made you feel differently."

*Tell him.* Before Brian could open his mouth, Benny hit him between the eyes with a question.

"Did you really love Mom?"

"What? Of course I did." Brian felt the sting of tears that always accompanied thoughts of Leigh. "Your mom was the love of my life and nothing will ever change that."

"But how can you claim to be gay if you loved a woman? Wouldn't that make you bisexual?" Benny asked, clearly trying to understand.

Brian stood and poured himself a cup of coffee, trying to buy himself some time. How did he explain his complicated relationship with Leigh?

"Dad?"

Brian returned to the table and took a tentative sip of his hot coffee. "I don't refer to myself as bisexual because your mother was the only woman I ever slept with. I fell in love with Leigh's soul, not her body or her sex. The two of us together seemed right to me despite her gender."

"And you know there's absolutely no chance there's another woman out there who could make you feel the same way?" Benny asked, carrying his empty bowl to the sink.

"Sorry, but no." *Tell him.* "Would you think less of me for getting involved with a man?"

Benny put his bowl into the dishwasher. "Do we have to talk about that now? I just ate."

The sour expression on Benny's face felt like a punch in the stomach to Brian. He set his cup on the table and shook his head, unable to meet Benny's gaze. "No, I guess not. Wouldn't wanna make you sick."

"It's not that. It's just...I don't know. It makes me uncomfortable to think about you doing stuff with another guy. I mean, you're my dad." Benny shook his head and walked out of the kitchen, leaving Brian more confused than ever.



\* \* \* \*

With his belly full and his head resting on Pete's shoulder, Ethan tried to digest everything Pete had just told him. "So you're saying Brian can only be with us if he sneaks around?"

"Yeah." Pete continued to play with Ethan's hair. "Although he is getting better about meeting me places. In the beginning, he'd drop by my apartment at odd hours but that was it. Now, I think, it's more about keeping Benny in the dark."

Ethan thought of Benny. He didn't know the teenager, but he'd seen him around town. "I think it's sad. Not just for Brian but for Benny, too. How does Brian think his son will react when he finds out his dad's been sneaking around?"

"Good question." Pete rolled to his side and pulled Ethan to his chest.

Ethan nuzzled his face against Pete's neck. Although waking in Pete's arms had been fantastic, he'd missed Brian. He'd clung to the idea that Brian would join them for target practice but even that had fallen through. Even though it had been a great day with Pete, Ethan couldn't help wishing Brian was there. Now that he knew why Brian bugged out on them, he wondered if it would become a usual thing.

He thought of the man holding him. What happened if he and Pete continued to get closer instead of the three of them? *Shit*. What if Pete only agreed to see him if Brian could get away? "What about us?"

"Huh?" Pete asked, kissing Ethan's forehead.

"If Brian can't get away often does that mean we're not allowed to see each other either?" Ethan held his breath. Although he'd only spent one night and most of a day with Pete, Ethan couldn't imagine taking a step back.

Pete pulled back enough to tilt Ethan's chin up. "I guess the three of us should sit down and talk about it, but as far as I'm concerned, my free time is my own. And I'd like nothing more than to spend it with you whether Brian can get away or not."

"Will that make him mad?" Ethan asked.

Pete shrugged. "I don't know, but I'm tired of spending my nights alone, waiting for Brian to think of an excuse to see me."

From the corner of the blanket, Pete's cell phone rang. With a groan, Pete rolled to his back and grabbed the phone. "It's Brian," he told Ethan before answering. "Hey." Pete glanced at Ethan and grinned. He rattled off their location before ending the call and tossing the phone aside. "He's on his way."

"What happened?"

"Benny took off to play football in the park so Brian's going to join us until he has to get home to make dinner." Pete shook his head. "That's the way it is with him, snatches of time here and there. Can you handle it?"

"Honestly? I don't know. It's different that's for sure. Not that I ever have, but it's almost like dating a married man."

"Exactly," Pete agreed.

\* \* \* \*

As Brian neared Ethan and Pete's location, his palms started to sweat. He still felt terrible for leaving without saying goodbye to Ethan that morning. With Pete spending the entire day with Ethan, Brian worried he'd no longer be welcomed. Still, Pete had easily given Brian their location, so maybe he still had a chance with the two of them.

Brian stepped into the small clearing and smiled at the two sleeping men. Although they were both dressed in warm, long-sleeved shirts and jeans, Brian had no problem imagining them naked.

He stepped over to the blanket and took off his boots before lying on the other side of Ethan. Sleeping may not have been what he'd hoped for, but at least he'd be able to do what he'd wanted to do hours earlier.

After snuggling up to Ethan's back, Brian draped his arm across Ethan to rest on Pete's hip. Whether it was the isolated spot or the company, Brian didn't know but he let out a breath, releasing the day's tension.

Pete opened his eyes and met Brian's gaze. "Glad you could make it."

"Me, too. Sorry I'm late." Brian ran his hand up and down Pete's side. "How'd target practice go?"

"Pretty good. Although I still don't like the thought of Ethan having a gun, at least I'm more confident he knows how to use it." Pete glanced down at Ethan where he rested against Pete's chest. "I hope he never finds out what it feels like to shoot someone."

The statement surprised Brian. "Have you?"

Pete nodded. "Once. It was a kill or be killed situation, but it changed everything. For the first time I truly understood just how dangerous my job was. I was in a nowhere relationship, living in a tiny apartment, and I realised if I was going to put my life on the line every day, I'd better start living it to the fullest." Pete grinned. "So I said goodbye to my boyfriend, packed my shit and left Salt Lake for Cattle Valley."

It was the first time Pete ever mentioned another boyfriend, not that Brian should be surprised. Pete was a gorgeous, sexually active man. Even though it shouldn't, he couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy. Brian wondered if the two still talked. "Do you miss him?"

"Who? Josh? No. I stopped thinking about him the day I drove out of the city. Says a lot for our relationship, doesn't it?" Pete reached out and smoothed Ethan's blond hair off his forehead. "So explain to me why I already know I can't walk away from the two of you? I was with Josh for three years and barely looked back, but the thought of leaving you and Ethan after only a short time is unthinkable."

Brian shook his head. "I don't know." He knew the answer was inadequate. Pete had shared more of himself than he ever had before, and Brian felt that he owed him the same in return. "I tried to talk to Benny today."

Pete's eyebrows rose. "Really? How'd it go?"

"Terribly. He asked me if I'd ever really loved Leigh, and how that was possible if I considered myself a gay man."

"I have to admit, I've wondered the same thing."

Brian smiled. "I guess you just had to know Leigh. She was the finest person I've ever known, and I couldn't help but fall in love with her."

"Did she know you were gay?" Ethan asked, rolled to his back.

Brian wondered how long Ethan had been awake. "Yeah, she knew. I think she was as confused by our relationship as I was. I can't explain it, it just...worked."

Ethan cleared his throat. "I imagine that's why Benny's having a hard time accepting your homosexuality. I mean, if you really loved his mom, why couldn't you love another woman?"

"Yeah, maybe, but how can I explain what I don't really understand?" Brian rolled to his back and threw his arm over his eyes. "I'm hopeless at this stuff. Maybe you guys would be better off without me."

"Stop it," Ethan said, climbing on top of Brian. "If you need to keep this thing between us quiet for a while, that's what we'll do."

Brian uncovered his eyes and stared up at Ethan. "Why would you do that?"

Ethan grinned and lay down on top of Brian. "Because I think you're worth it."

Brian accepted Ethan's deep kiss with enthusiasm. He wasn't sure what he'd done to deserve Ethan's understanding, but he still had Pete to deal with. Something told him Pete wouldn't be as understanding, and to be honest, Brian couldn't blame him. Unlike Ethan, Pete had dealt with Brian's issues for months.

Breaking the kiss, Ethan sat up and looked at Pete. "Why are you still way over there?"

Pete scooted closer, but Brian could see the hesitation. Oh boy. Brian reached out a hand, hoping like hell Pete would take it.

With a sigh of resignation, Pete stretched out beside Brian and slung his arm over Brian's chest. "I'll wait," Pete offered, "as long as we can come to an agreement on how this is going to work."

"What do you mean?" Brian asked.

Pete's jaw clenched, something Brian knew he did when he was about to say something important. "I'm willing to keep what we have on the down low, but I won't spend every night waiting for you to slip away. I think we should see each other whenever we can, whether that's two of us or all three of us."

Brian narrowed his eyes. "In other words, you want to be free to date Ethan even if I'm not around."

"Yeah," Pete agreed. "But it'll go the other way, too. If the two of us are off work and Ethan's working, we'll hang out. Same with me working and the two of you being off." Pete shook his head. "And I won't hide the fact that Ethan and I are dating. If you choose to hide, I'll respect that, but I won't do it, not with Ethan."

Although Pete's terms seemed amicable, Brian could sense the underlying anger in Pete's voice. Brian wanted to call him on it, but realised he didn't have the right. He was the one who was asking for time to get his shit together. The fact that Pete and Ethan were still willing to be patient said a lot about their desire to be with him.

"Okay," Brian agreed. He looked from Pete to Ethan. "I promise, I'll figure out a way to talk to Benny."

"Now that that's settled, why don't we go back to my place and watch the game," Pete said.

"You wanna watch football?" Ethan asked, a disgusted expression on his face.

"No, but that's what we can tell people if they ask." Pete chuckled and swatted Ethan's ass. "Climb off, toots, and let's go."

\* \* \* \*

"I'm in love with this bed," Ethan said after a mid-afternoon shower.

Pete finished drying off before launching himself onto the bed. Ethan barely rolled to the side in time to avoid being squashed like a bug.

"Are you nuts? You could've killed me," Ethan said around a giggle.

Pete wrapped his nude body around Ethan's and kissed him. Ethan opened immediately for Pete's sliding tongue. The taste of beer Pete had drunk before their shower still clung to his mouth. Although Ethan had never been much of a drinker, he was warming up to its taste.

Another set of lips joined them as Brian stretched out on the other side of Ethan. The three-way kisses were hot, but always ended up making them laugh. Pete was usually the cause of their laughter, he'd start making little pig noises as he rooted for a pair of lips to latch onto. The same thing happened again, and the three of them broke apart in a fit of laughter.

Never had Ethan enjoyed making love more than with Pete and Brian. Each brought something different to the building relationship that seemed to not only make it more pleasing but stronger.

Brian reached for the remote and turned the television volume up. He reached to the bedside table and grabbed the half-eaten bowl of popcorn. "Want some?" he asked Ethan, holding the bowl out.

Ethan shook his head. "I'm gonna go get me something to drink. Anyone else need anything?" he asked, sliding down to the foot of the bed.

"Beer?" Brian asked.

Ethan nodded and looked at Pete. "You need anything?"

Pete swung his legs off the bed and stood. "I'll come with you. I'm hungry for some nachos."

Ethan gestured for Pete to take the lead, but Pete shook his head with a grin. Ethan had an idea of what he was in for, but just shook his head and walked out of the room. He got as far as the living room before he felt Pete's hand on his ass. A second later, Pete's muscular body pressed against him from behind. Glancing over his shoulder, Ethan smiled. "What're you doing?"

"Keeping warm."

"You poor baby. Maybe you should've put on some clothes." Ethan continued walking with Pete glued to his back.

Pete's hands wandered down Ethan's chest to the short patch of pubic hair surrounding his cock. "I like naked."

By the time Ethan opened the refrigerator to retrieve the pitcher of tea he'd made earlier, he was hard as a rock. Despite his condition, he continued to act like Pete's hand on his cock wasn't a big deal. "You want some?"

"Oh yeah," Pete said, his hand continued to pump Ethan's erection.

"Tea. Do you want some tea?" Ethan clarified.

"No." Pete squeezed Ethan's cock. "Why aren't you responding? Something wrong?"

"Nope, just want to get my drink and get back in bed as soon as possible. We have Brian here now, why waste the opportunity?"

"Ooh, good thinking." Pete released Ethan and reached for the bag of tortilla chips.

Although it was what he'd basically asked for, Ethan missed Pete's touch. With a disappointed shrug, he filled a glass with ice before pouring in the tea. The whole thing was still surreal to him. Had it only been a day? Ethan glanced sideways at Pete and watched his new lover put a plate piled high with tortillas and shredded cheese into the microwave.

Ethan bit his lip. *We're just fucking*, he told himself. His track record with relationships was shit. Other than his blown-out-of-proportion love for Jay, he'd made it a point not to date anyone in town. Going slow, taking time to build a relationship had never been his thing. He was more of a jump-in-the-deep-end kind of guy which had led to more broken hearts than he cared to think about. Ethan wanted his present situation to be different.

Scaring Pete and Brian off with his enthusiasm just wouldn't do. *Play it cool.* Yeah, that's what he'd do.

The moment Pete ran his hand down Ethan's back to land on his ass, Ethan forgot about his resolve to take it slow. He wanted these men, not just for a couple of weeks, but forever. As stupid as it sounded, he could honestly see himself falling under their spell.

"Something wrong?" Pete asked.

"Nope." He was saved from further questions by the ding of the microwave. "Grab your plate and let's get back to bed." Ethan opened the refrigerator and pulled two bottles of beer out before picking up his glass of tea.

"Ready?"

"Lead the way," Pete said with a grin.

\* \* \* \*

By the time Pete and Ethan climbed back into bed, Brian had finished with the bowl of popcorn and eagerly took the offered beer. "Benny texted. He's going with his friends to Deb's for dinner."

"Excellent." Pete sat up against the headboard and pulled the covers over his lap. "That gives us more time."

Brian nodded. He was torn between being a good father or a good lover. Although he'd told Benny when he left to make sure he made it home for dinner, his son had gone against his wishes and made other plans. Brian should be pissed at Benny's lack of respect, but how could he be when he'd rather be here with Pete and Ethan than at home making spaghetti?

Ethan leaned over Brian to set his glass on the nightstand, and stayed there. Brian welcomed Ethan by wrapping him in his arms. There was something about Ethan that pulled at Brian's heartstrings. At first he'd thought it was his protective instincts kicking in, but he'd come to the conclusion it was more than that. Although Brian already cared a great deal for Pete, there were times when they were too much alike, too head strong. As much as Brian hated to admit it to himself, he knew a relationship between just the two of them probably wouldn't work. That, more than anything, had kept him from talking to Benny. It wasn't something he was proud of, just the opposite. The guilt had kept him from spending every free moment with Pete.

Holding Ethan with Pete lying next to them felt right. Pete was funny and charming and Oh-My-God sexy, but he didn't like to be coddled. Taking care of someone he loved was Brian's favourite part of a relationship. Once again, it came back to the fact that they were too much alike. Maybe two alphas needed a beta to bridge the gap between them.

Brian kissed the top of Ethan's head. With luck, Ethan would be the glue that kept them together for the long haul. He decided to give the new arrangement another week before talking to Benny. In the meantime, he'd do everything in his power to spend as much time with his two men as his busy life would allow.

"You're awfully quiet," Ethan whispered, swiping Brian's nipple with his tongue. "Everything okay?"

Brian hauled Ethan up until they were nose to nose. He stared into those big blue eyes and nodded. "Yeah, I think so." He lifted his head off the pillow and pressed his lips against Ethan's.

With his arms firmly wrapped around Ethan, Brian rolled them until Ethan was flat on his back and Brian was on his side. The new position gave him better access to Ethan's mouth while leaving room for Pete to join them. He reached over Ethan and ran his hand up Pete's thigh in silent invitation.

"Damn, hold on," Pete said.

Brian heard the plate hit the bedside table seconds before he felt Pete's warmth join them. Opening his eyes, he pulled out of the kiss and watched as Pete dove in to take his place. Watching Ethan and Pete kiss was almost as good as participating. Brian let his hands wander from man to man, paying particular attention to Pete's cock and heavy set of balls. He could tell Pete wanted to fuck Ethan by the way he rocked back and forth, pressing his erection against Ethan's hip.

Ethan moaned, his mouth still being ravaged by Pete's tongue, and Brian knew it was showtime. He climbed off the mattress and went around to Pete's side of the bed. After moving the plate of half-eaten nachos to a more secure spot, he reached into the bedside drawer and removed two condoms and the bottle of lube.

As soon as Pete heard the snick of the lube bottle opening, he held up his hand, never breaking his kiss with Ethan. Brian coated Pete's fingers in lube before scooting down the bed until he was eye level with Pete's gorgeous ass. Giving Pete a nudge, Brian waited until Pete rolled onto his stomach and got to his knees. With perfect access, Brian playfully bit



Pete's butt cheek before licking his way from scrotum to pucker. He could still taste the lingering bitterness of soap and realised they'd spent more time in the shower playing than rinsing.

Brian reached between his legs and gave his erection several good strokes while remembering the fingering he'd given Pete in the shower while Ethan sucked him off. Pete was incredibly sensual and loved being touched, something Brian wasn't used to.

Running the tip of his tongue around Pete's hole caused a low moan to erupt from his lover. Brian smiled and continued, holding back just enough to make Pete beg. It didn't take long and Pete was doing just that.

"Fuck. In me," Pete begged.

Brian pulled back and reached for the lube. While he coated his fingers, he watched Pete manipulate Ethan's ass with three long digits. *Damn*. Realising he was behind the other two, Brian pressed his pointer finger against Pete's opening and slowly pushed inside. Pete took him in easily and soon Brian added his middle finger.

When two fingers slid in and out of Pete's ass easily, Brian reached for the two condoms he'd thrown to the mattress earlier. Sitting back on his heels, he tore the first package open with the aid of his teeth and reached under Pete to slowly roll it down his length. "Wait," he told Pete as he moved to crawl between Ethan's legs.

Pete glanced over his shoulder. "Then hurry."

Chuckling, Brian quickly rolled on his own condom before reaching for the lube once more. He coated his hand and ran it up and down Pete's sheathed cock several times, delighting in the curses that sprang from Pete.

"Easy," Brian soothed, patting Pete's ass.

"My damn cock is about to fucking explode, asshole," Pete spat.

"Ethan, scoot up until your head is in the far corner of the mattress," Brian instructed.

Ethan inched his way up and over and soon the three of them were in a diagonal line down the bed. With plenty of room to play, Brian waited for Pete to ease his cock into Ethan's hole.

When Pete was buried ball's deep, Brian used one hand to spread Pete's ass and the other to guide his cock to Pete's stretched opening. Brian pushed inside in slow increments, wondering how the dual pleasure felt to Pete.

The first time they'd made love, Pete and Ethan enjoyed a sixty-nine while Brian fucked the hell out of Ethan's ass. Once he was all the way inside, he took a deep breath. Knowing the three of them were connected through each other brought forth stronger emotions than Brian had expected. Any doubts he'd carried about adding Ethan to his relationship with Pete fell to the wayside. This was right. He felt it in his soul.

Brian placed his hands on Pete's ass, holding the other man's cheeks apart, as he waited for Pete to establish a rhythm of in and out. With each withdrawal from Ethan's ass, Pete impaled himself on Brian's cock.

"Oh my God," Pete cried out at the dual pleasure. "So good," he moaned as he picked up speed.

Brian wanted to close his eyes in bliss, but he wanted to watch Pete fuck Ethan more. He reached around Pete's hip and brushed his fingers over Pete's cock as it plunged inside Ethan. "Fuck."

"Uh huh," Ethan groaned, his gaze darting from Pete to Brian. "Better than good."

Hell yes it was better than good. Brian had never been so turned on in his life. Even though he'd been inside Pete's ass on many occasions, the three of them together took the sensations to a whole other level. With each thrust of Pete's hips, his internal muscles squeezed Brian's cock in a vice-like grip, threatening every ounce of control Brian could muster.

When Pete's hand went to work on Ethan's cock, Brian knew he was close. Brian rested his forehead against Pete's back and prayed he wouldn't be the first to cum.

Ethan's moans became louder until he cried Pete's name, signalling his climax. With an animalistic growl, Pete drove his cock in to the hilt and shuddered. The contraction of Pete's muscles was Brian's undoing. The restraint he'd fought so hard to maintain fell away as his seed filled the condom buried in Pete's ass.

Barely coherent, Brian reached down and held onto the soiled condom as he withdrew from Pete's warmth. As much as he wanted to collapse on the pile, he rolled to the side, tied the condom off and tossed it into the trash can beside the bed. After no sleep the previous night, all Brian wanted to do was close his eyes and snuggle up with his two lovers for the night, but he knew it wasn't a possibility. Sooner or later, Benny would decide to go home and Brian needed to be there. *Damn, I've really gotta get my shit together before I lose everything.*

## Chapter Six

Monday evenings, Ethan always joined Erico and Jay for dinner at their house. It was a routine that had become comfortable over the months, and Ethan usually looked forward to it. However, with Pete getting off shift, all Ethan could think about was seeing him. He only wished Brian was available.

"I think I'm going to quit working at O'Brien's," Ethan said from his stool at the kitchen island.

Erico continued chopping tomatoes, but Jay, who was rubbing seasoning on the pork chops, stopped and stared. "Are you kidding? I thought you liked working there?"

Ethan shrugged. "I did, but I don't really need the money, and I'd rather spend my evenings doing something other than getting my ass pinched."

Jay's eyes narrowed. "Does this have something to do with your good mood?" Jay's jaw dropped open. "Oh my God, you've met someone."

*Two someones actually.* "Yeah."

The admission got Erico's full attention. "Who? Do I know him?"

Jay rolled his eyes. "In other words, has he slept with Erico before?"

"That's not what I meant," Erico tried to defend himself. "There are plenty of men in town I haven't slept with."

Ethan held up his hands to prevent an argument from starting. He knew Erico's past was a sore spot with Jay. Revealing Brian's name didn't feel right, at least not until Brian had talked to Benny. "Pete Nash."

Erico grinned. "See?" He turned his attention back to Jay. "I haven't slept with him."

"Only because he hasn't been here that long," Jay chuckled.

Ethan was glad he managed to diffuse the situation, but he held his breath as Jay's expression turned questioning.

"I thought Pete was seeing Brian." Jay rubbed the last of the seasoning on the meat and washed his hands.

Lying wasn't something Ethan was comfortable with, especially not to Jay. "Yeah, kinda."

"Kinda? So...they're not exclusive?" Jay asked.

"Something like that." Ethan held up his hand, hoping to put an end to further questions. "Anyway, I think it's time I freed up my evenings and weekends."

Jay bit his bottom lip. "So when are you going to tell Sean?"

"Tomorrow. I'll give him two weeks to find a replacement, but hopefully it won't take him that long."

Jay picked up the plate of pork chops and nodded towards the back door. "Why don't you help me get the grill going?"

Ethan nodded, knowing it was Jay's way of telling him he wasn't finished with the discussion. He climbed off the stool and started to follow Jay to the back deck.

"Good luck," Erico snickered when Ethan walked by.

"Thanks. I've a feeling I'll need it."

"You know he's just concerned," Erico said.

"Yeah, I know."

Ethan grabbed his jacket from the hook beside the door and joined Jay at the large professional grill. He took a seat at the table and waited for Jay's questions. It didn't take long for Jay to fire up the grill, close the lid and turn to Ethan.

"You're involved with both of them, aren't you?" Jay asked.

Ethan swallowed around the lump in his throat. "Benny, Brian's son, doesn't know yet."

With a loud sigh, Jay took a seat across from Ethan. "It's not a good idea. Someone'll get hurt, and the last thing I want is for that someone to be you."

"I know it's a possibility, but I really like both of them. I'm trying to keep my head on straight about the whole thing. A happily-ever-after would be great, but I'm really not counting on it. In the meantime, I just want to enjoy the time I have with them."

Jay shook his head. "You fall in love too easily. You barely know these guys and already you're all starry-eyed when you talk about them."

"I'm not in love." Ethan bristled. He was older than Jay, yet Jay was talking to him like he was a child. "And who I fuck or don't fuck isn't any of your concern."

Jay's head jerked back as though he'd been slapped. "You seemed to have plenty to say to me when I started going out with Erico."

"Yeah, and you got in my face over it." Ethan shook his head. "You can't have it both ways. If I'm not allowed to comment on your relationship, then stay out of mine."

Jay opened his mouth before snapping it shut. The two of them stared at each other for several moments, before Jay spoke. "Fine."

Ethan reached across the table and threaded his fingers through Jay's. "You're my best friend. Will you please at least try to be happy for me?"

"You're family and always will be. I'm just worried."

"I know, but right now, I'm happier than I've ever been." Ethan realised how true the statement was. After losing his mother at a young age, he'd spent the next four years battling his stepfather, until he'd finally left. At the age of seventeen, he was out on the streets, looking for work. He'd been luckier than most and got a job as a stock boy in a small grocery store. The pay sucked, but it was enough for his portion of a one bedroom apartment he'd shared with two other guys.

Before moving to Cattle Valley, Ethan spent his life making sure he always had a place to sleep, but for the first time, he wanted more. Sappy or not, he wanted someone to come home to. Sure it had only been a few days, but he hoped his new relationship with Pete and Brian would continue to grow.

\* \* \* \*

Pete hated working the night shift. Not only was it lonely, but it gave him too much time to think. He turned down Maple Drive, continuing his cruise of the neighbourhoods. It was a waste of gas, but it was better than sitting at the station with Roy. Pete didn't give a shit that the majority of townspeople thought Roy hung the moon. The man was an asshole and no one would convince Pete otherwise.

He slowed his patrol car to a crawl when he neared Brian's house. It was routine whenever he worked the night shift to drive by and watch Brian and Benny eat dinner through the big picture window. When he saw that Brian was eating alone, he stopped the car at the kerb and picked up his phone.

"Hey," Brian answered.

"All alone?" Pete asked.

"Not really. Benny's eating in his room."

"The two of you get into a fight?" Pete crossed his fingers that Brian had finally talked to his son.

"No. I don't know what the hell's wrong with him. He came home from practice, made a plate and disappeared, telling me he wanted to be left alone." Brian rose from the table, and made his way to the window.

Pete's chest tightened. *So close yet still untouchable.* "Probably just some teenage bullshit."

"Yeah, you're probably right." Brian touched his hand to the glass. "I miss you."

Pete opened his door and stood up, looking at Brian over the top of the car. "I think that's a first."

"No it isn't. Just the first time I've admitted it to you."

"Say the word, and I'll take my dinner break." Pete held his breath.

The hand that was pressed to the window, lifted and rubbed at Brian's eyes. With his head down, Brian answered. "I can't. Not yet." Brian's gaze lifted until he once again stared at Pete. "I'm sorry."

Pete cleared his throat. The longing he'd felt only a few moments earlier had quickly been replaced with bitterness. "Okay, well I'd better head out before Benny decides to look out his window. Couldn't have him thinking you have friends or anything."

"That's not fair. I told you I'd tell him, and I will."

"Yeah, I've heard that a time or two." Pete climbed back behind the wheel. "Have a nice evening."

Without giving Brian a chance to answer, Pete ended the call and pulled away from the kerb.

Wednesdays were typically slow at O'Brien's, so Pete hoped Ethan could join him. Stepping up to the bar, he nodded to Sean. "Ethan working tonight?"

Sean nodded. "I think he's helping Jay with the dishes. Grab a table and I'll send him over."

"Thanks." He made his way to his favourite corner booth in the back of the pub and settled in.

The moment Ethan saw Pete, a wide smile lit up his gorgeous face. *Yeah. That's what I want. Someone who's actually happy to see me.*

Once Ethan made his way across the pub, he didn't hesitate to lean down and give Pete a kiss.

Pete's bad mood fell away in an instant as he thrust his tongue deep between Ethan's lips. "Mmm," he said, pulling back. "That's just what I needed."

Ethan stood close enough for Pete to wrap an arm around his waist. "Me, too."

"You have time to eat dinner with me?" Pete asked.

"I've already eaten, but I'm sure Sean will let me take a break. What can I get you? Jay made a fantastic new pasta dish with black olives, roasted tomatoes and garlic."

Pete smacked his lips. "I didn't taste any garlic on your breath. Are you sure you've already eaten?"

Ethan grinned. "I had some fried cheese."

Pete shook his head. "You should take better care of yourself. You work in a restaurant. Try some vegetables once in a while."

Ethan sighed, but Pete wasn't sure what it meant. "Thanks. I'll do that." Ethan bent down once again and gave Pete a quick kiss. "Did you want the pasta?"

"Sure if you don't mind kissing someone with garlic breath."

"Not as long as that someone is you," Ethan answered.

As Ethan turned towards the kitchen, Pete gave his ass a playful slap. Damn he couldn't get enough of Ethan's body. Pete's cock hardened as he watched him cross the room. The phone call from Ethan on Monday night had been a welcome surprise, but the two of them had taken advantage of the few hours they had together before falling asleep. The size of Ethan's bed wasn't an issue with just the two of them. It also helped a great deal that Ethan was a snuggler.

The way things were progressing, Pete wondered why he'd resisted asking Ethan out for so long. *Brian*, Pete reminded himself.

"Here you go," Ethan said, setting down a large bowl of pasta and a glass of water.

Pete shook off thoughts of the what-should-have-beens with Brian and scooted over, patting the space next to him.

"What's wrong?" Ethan asked, placing his hand on Pete's thigh.

"Nothing." Pete ate a bite of his dinner before holding a forkful of the pasta to Ethan's lips. "Eat some so I don't have to worry so much about my breath."

Ethan opened his mouth and stared into Pete's eyes, closing his lips over the fork. "Mmm," Ethan moaned, swallowing the tender pasta. "I was right, that is good."

Pete leaned in and licked some of the olive oil-based sauce from Ethan's bottom lip. "I wish I could take you across the street to your apartment and eat this entire meal off your body."

Ethan's eyes rounded. "What time do you get off shift?"

"I'm on a twelve-hour tonight, so it'll be six in the morning before I finish. We'll have to settle for tomorrow night."

"Do you think Brian will be able to get away?" Ethan asked, stealing another bite of Pete's dinner.

"Who knows?" Pete pushed his bowl in front of Ethan, no longer hungry.

Ethan set his fork down and pushed the half-eaten dinner towards the centre of the table. "He loves you, you know that right?"

Pete chuckled. "Yeah, sure. That's why I've been relegated to the position of his dirty little secret for ten months."

Ethan tucked himself under Pete's arm and rested his head against Pete's shoulder. "I think it's just different for him. He's a father first and a lover second. I'm not saying I don't miss spending time with him, but I guess I can understand it."

"You haven't dealt with it for as long as I have," Pete cut in.

"You're totally right, I haven't. Maybe I'd have a different opinion if I was in your shoes, but every time I see the two of you together, I see the pain in his eyes." Ethan kissed Pete's neck. "But I also see the love. Brian's the kind of man who feels his wants and needs come second to Benny's, which is really commendable, but it also seems to be tearing him apart."

"So what're you saying? We should just continue to sit back and wait for him to make time for us?"

"I'm saying maybe it's better to cherish the hours we have with him rather than focusing on the times he can't get away."

Pete wrapped both arms around Ethan's waist and kissed his temple. He wouldn't argue with Ethan over Brian. As far as he was concerned, his new relationship with Ethan was free to grow as much as possible. If Brian didn't care enough to be part of it, that was his problem.

"Shouldn't you be patrolling?"



Pete glanced up to find Roy, staring down at Pete's arms wrapped around Ethan. "I'm on my dinner break. I called it in."

With his hands on his hips, Roy turned his head to study the pub. "I don't think it's appropriate for the two of you to be carrying on like this with you still in uniform."

Pete had had enough of Roy's arrogance. "We're not fuckin'. We're having dinner. So unless the city wants to pay me overtime for that, I'm free to spend my dinner hour any way I want."

"We'll see about that," Roy said.

"Yeah, I guess we will," Pete agreed. He had no doubt Roy would run straight to Ryan. No problem as far as Pete was concerned. At least Ryan didn't have a stick shoved up his ass.

Roy continued to glare at Pete for several moments before turning and storming out of the pub.

"Fucker," Pete mumbled.

"What was that?" Ethan asked. "I've never seen Roy in such a pissy mood."

"Hang around me long enough and you will. The guy hates me for some reason."

Ethan bit his bottom lip. "You don't think it has anything to do with me, do you?"

"Why would it?" Pete asked.

Ethan looked towards the door before answering. "He's asked me out quite a few times, but I've never been interested. I mean, I guess he's cute and everything, but he's never really done it for me."

With narrowed eyes, Pete fought hard to control his jealousy. He didn't believe Roy was being an ass over Ethan's refusal to date him, hell, Roy had asked Pete out as soon as he'd moved to town, but the idea of Ethan with Roy didn't sit well at all.

"Ethan? Phone," Sean called across the pub.

"Do you get many calls here?" Pete asked.

Ethan shrugged. "I have to turn off my phone when I clock in, so if Nate or Carol need me for something they'll sometimes call."

Ethan started to scoot out of the booth, but Pete stopped him with a gentle tug, puckering his lips. With a sweet grin, Ethan gave him just what he'd wanted. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Count on it," Ethan answered, standing.

Pete dug into his pocket and removed a twenty, handing it to Ethan.

"Hang on, I'll get your change," Ethan said.

"Don't worry about it. You can pay me back tomorrow." Pete waggled his eyebrows and smiled as they separated. Despite his sour disposition stepping into the pub, he left in a much better mood with fantasies of bending Ethan over the table.

\* \* \* \*

With a grouchy teenager beside him, Brian pulled out of the driveway and headed towards the high school. "You have lunch money?"

"Yeah," Benny said.

"Are you ready to tell me what's going on?"

"There's nothing going on. I told you that last night."

"You know, some kids actually find it helpful to talk over things with their parents."

"Yeah, well, maybe I'm not one of those *kids*."

Brian bit his tongue, arguing with Benny first thing in the morning required more energy than he had at the moment. When his cell rang, Brian was actually thankful. He reached to the console and grabbed his phone, schooling his features when he saw the display. "Hey."

"Are you alone?" Ethan asked.

"Not quite." He pulled into the school parking lot and glanced at Benny. "Can you hold on a minute?"

"Sure," Ethan answered.

Brian stopped in front of the school and put the car into park. "I'm playing cards tonight, remember?" he asked Benny.

"Yeah, sure."

"I left some pizza money on the kitchen counter."

Benny got out of the car and slung his backpack over his shoulder. "Whatever," he said before slamming the door shut.

Brian sighed into the phone. "Sorry about that."

"Is he always like that?" Ethan asked.

"Lately? Yeah. I keep telling myself it's normal for a teenage boy, but my momma would've laid me out if I spoke to her like Benny does me." Brian had never believed in

spanking a child. Maybe it was because his momma had ruled over him with an iron fist, and even though she had kept him on the straight and narrow, he'd always been afraid of her. The last thing he'd wanted was for his only child to be afraid of him.

"I've never heard you talk about your mom. Is she still alive?"

"No. She died last year. Her death gave me the final push I needed to get out of the city and move here."

"So Benny's lost two important people in a relatively short time," Ethan said.

"Yeah."

"Do you think maybe he's afraid of losing you, too?"

Brian had never thought of that, but it was impossible. "I've always been a cop. I mean, I think he's glad I'm not a cop in Philadelphia anymore, but, no, I don't think that's the reason."

"Maybe it's not your job he's afraid of losing you to but another person."

Brian pulled into the parking lot of the sheriff's department and turned off the ignition. "I don't know. I guess it's possible, but that still doesn't help me."

"I don't mean to overstep, but maybe if you made time for just the two of you to do something special every week, it would help put his mind at ease."

"I'm with him almost every night, but he spends most of it locked away in his room. His choice, not mine," Brian added.

"I'm not talking about every night. It could be as simple as a weekly night out in Sheridan to grab a bite to eat and a movie. It doesn't really matter what it is. I'm sure Leigh had routines. Maybe that's what he misses. Give him something he can rely on to happen without fail."

Everything Ethan said made sense. "Sounds like you'd make a better father than me."

Ethan chuckled. "Naw. I just think sometimes people are too close to each other to see the bigger picture. When I lived in DC, I worked at the homeless teen shelter. It gave me a lot of time to talk to kids."

Brian couldn't help but feel comforted. There was something about Ethan that warmed Brian from the inside out. Maybe it was Ethan's practical side that drew Brian in? He realised they'd done nothing but talk about Benny. "Sorry for hijacking the conversation with my own problems."

"Don't be. I...well...you know...care about you. If something's troubling you, I want to help if I can."

"Thanks. You have." Brian took a deep breath. "I care about you, too."

"Good." Ethan cleared his throat. "Umm, so Pete and I are getting together tonight, and I just wondered if you were going to join us, but maybe it's not a good time."

"I've already told Benny I wouldn't be home until late." Brian doubted Benny's mood would change because of one night.

"Okay. Great. I'll call you later?"

"Yeah, I'd like that."

"Be safe today," Ethan said.

"I will. Bye, Ethan."

"Bye."

Brian stared at the phone in his hand for several moments with a big grin on his face. It was the perfect way to start out his day. Ethan could easily become an addiction, and Brian knew it.

\* \* \* \*

Ethan drummed his fingertips against the desk, lost in thought. The phone call with Brian earlier in the day hadn't gone as planned, not that it had been wasted. He was glad he'd had a chance to talk to Brian about Benny, but it hadn't solved Ethan's immediate problem.

All morning he'd gone back and forth over his options. If he told Pete about the phone call he'd received the previous night, he had no doubt Pete would do something stupid and get himself into deeper shit.

With his mind made up, Ethan stood and stuck his head inside Nate's office. "You got a minute?"

Nate glanced up from the computer and beckoned Ethan inside. "Yes, please, rescue me from these bewildering figures."

With Carol out for lunch, Ethan didn't bother closing the office door. He stepped into the room and sat in one of the chairs in front of Nate's desk. "I've got a problem, and I'm not really sure who to talk to about it."

Nate grinned and rubbed his hands together. "Oooh, I love a good problem. Lay it on me."

Ethan couldn't help but laugh. "Something tells me you're going to enjoy this too much."

"Probably," Nate acknowledged. He turned serious. "No, really, what's wrong?"

With one leg crossed over his knee, Ethan began picking at the sole of his shoe. He took a deep breath and glanced up at Nate. "I've been seeing Pete and Brian for a couple of weeks."

"I figured something was going on. You've been in a particularly good mood lately."

"Yeah, it's going well so far."

"So what's the problem?" Nate asked.

"Well, Pete came into O'Brien's last night for dinner, and I took my break so I could sit with him."

"Yeah?"

"We kissed a few times, but we were mostly talking and Roy came in. He wasn't happy about Pete being there while on duty. They exchanged a few words..."

Before Ethan could finish the sentence, Ryan popped his head in the doorway. "You ready for lunch?"

Nate smiled and waved Ryan inside. "I think you need to hear this."

"Hi, Ethan," Ryan greeted, walking into the office. "What's going on?" he asked after giving Nate a quick kiss.

Nate quickly filled Ryan in on the conversation so far. When he was finished, he gestured to Ethan. "Okay, go on."

Even more nervous with Ryan in the room, Ethan shook his head. "You know, maybe I should just deal with this myself."

"Bullshit. If it's something involving my men, I need to know," Ryan argued.

Ethan sent up a quick prayer, hoping he wasn't about to get Pete into trouble. "Well, after Roy left, a phone call came into the bar for me. I said goodbye to Pete before answering the call. It was Roy. He told me I should talk to Pete about carrying on inappropriately while in uniform and that he could make a lot of trouble for Pete if he wanted to. He then went on to say Pete and Brian were just using me, and it would be better for me and them if I quit sleeping with them."

"Pete was on his dinner break, right?" Ryan asked.

"Yes. He told Roy he'd called dispatch."

"And the two of you weren't fucking in a patrol car, right?"

Ethan felt the flush work its way up his neck and cheeks. "No, sir, we weren't fucking anywhere, just a few kisses."

"So why do you think Roy had such a problem with seeing the two of you together?" Ryan sat on the edge of the chair and rested his forearms on his thighs.

"I don't know." Ethan knew that was a lie. "Well, he's asked me out quite a few times, but he's never been nasty or anything when I've turned him down."

Ryan stared at his clasped hands for several moments before glancing up at Nate. He held Nate's gaze for a few seconds before turning his head to address Ethan. "First of all, Pete did nothing wrong, so you don't have to worry about him getting into trouble. Secondly, Roy should've never called you. I'll have a talk with him this evening when he gets to work. On behalf of the Sheriff's Department, please accept my apology for the misconduct of Deputy Jenkins."

Ethan shook his head. "No apology necessary. I just wanted to make sure I wasn't getting Pete into trouble. He loves his job, and that's important to me."

Ryan smiled. "Sounds like you're on your way to understanding what it's like to love a cop."

Ethan shrugged. "He's a man first, cop second. I'm still not sure things will work out between the three of us, but I don't want to do anything to jeopardise the relationship before it really has a chance."

Ryan stood and stretched his arms over his head. "Well, as far as Pete and Brian's jobs are concerned, you don't have to worry." He grinned. "As long as there's no fucking in the patrol cars, that is."

Nate cleared his throat.

"While they're on duty," Ryan clarified with a wink.

Ethan shook his head. Although some communities might be appalled by a sheriff so lax with his men, Ethan knew Ryan took his job seriously. "Thanks," he said, standing. "I'll let the two of you enjoy what's left of your lunch hour. Sorry to interrupt."

"Ethan," Ryan called before Ethan could leave the room.

Ethan glanced back over his shoulder. "Yeah?"

“It means a lot to me that you trust me enough to say something,” Ryan said.

“It means a lot to me that you trust me enough to believe me without question,” Ethan returned.

## Chapter Seven

Brian pulled up in front of the bakery to find an anxious-looking Ethan standing on the sidewalk. Brian's heart took off, beating a mile a minute, as Ethan smiled and walked towards the car.

"Hi," Ethan said, getting in.

Brian leaned over and gave Ethan a short, but deep kiss. "It's good to see you."

Ethan buckled his seatbelt and leaned his head against the seat, a dreamy expression on his handsome face. "It's been almost a week since we've spent any real time together. I hope you missed me because I've been going crazy thinking about you."

Brian reached out and ran the back of his hand over Ethan's smooth cheek. "Every minute of the day."

"Pete's missed you, too. He might not acknowledge it often, but I can tell. When the two of us are together, he says little things that tell me he wishes you were with us."

"Soon, I promise." Brian turned away and put the Honda in reverse. He pulled out of the parking space and headed towards Pete's.

"So the two of you have been spending a lot of time together?" Brian asked, trying to tamp down the jealousy that threatened.

"The nights he's not on shift we usually get together. Did I tell you my last day working at O'Brien's is Saturday?"

"No," Brian said with a shake of his head. How much was he missing out on? It wasn't that he thought Ethan was keeping things from him, Brian realised he just wasn't around as much as he should and wanted to be.

"Yeah. Homecoming weekend is huge for Sean, so I promised to work, but he's already hired another guy to take my place." Ethan's hand rested comfortably on Brian's thigh. "Anyway, it'll free up my evenings."

Brian heard the unspoken plea in the statement. "If I can work things out with Benny, I'll still have to be there for him if he needs me, but hopefully it'll give me a lot more time to spend with you and Pete as well."

"I understand. No pressure."



Brian had done a lot of thinking about where he wanted the relationship between the three of them to go, and he'd made a few decisions. Although it could drive a wedge between them, he knew he had to be completely honest. "You know, if this all works out, I still won't be able to really be with the two of you until Benny leaves for college. I just wouldn't feel comfortable moving two men into my house with Benny still at home."

Ethan dropped his jaw as his big blue eyes widened in apparent surprise. "I never even considered the three of us being able to live together." He shook his head. "I've been trying to be realistic about the whole situation. I mean, I know I'm the third guy. You and Pete have been involved for a lot longer."

"What're you saying?" Brian asked, parking in front of Pete's apartment.

"I don't know, I guess I've convinced myself that it'll be you and Pete in the end. Don't get me wrong, I'm more than grateful for the time the two of you are spending with me, but you don't really need me in the middle of things for the two of you to be happy together."

Brian unbuckled Ethan's seatbelt and pulled him over the console into his lap. "You're wrong. We do need you. You've brought us closer together. Now, I can't imagine a life with Pete without you in it too. Maybe it's only been a few weeks, but I knew that first night you'd be the glue that bound us all together."

The declaration was completely out of character for Brian, but he knew Ethan was willing to hear it without cracking jokes about him being a sap. Maybe there would come a time when he could look Pete in the eyes and tell him how he really felt, but Brian knew he had to talk to Benny first. No matter what he said now to Pete, the stubborn man wouldn't believe him unless things with Benny were settled.

Ethan rested his head on Brian's shoulder. "Thanks."

"For what?" Brian asked.

"Giving me permission to fall for the two of you."

Brian kissed the side of Ethan's head. "You didn't need our permission."

"Yeah, I kinda did. It was getting really hard to keep my feelings inside. I kept telling myself I was making more of the relationship than what it was, but I feel better now."

The rumble of Pete's engine cut through the peace that had settled within the Honda as Pete pulled up beside them. Ethan sat up and Brian gave him another kiss before opening his door.

"Sorry I'm late. I had to run by the grocery store. You should've just gone in," Pete told Ethan before giving him a kiss.

"We were talking, besides, I figured your door was locked," Brian said, joining his two men on the sidewalk.

"It is, but Ethan has a key," Pete informed Brian.

*Wow.* Brian hadn't been expecting that. Pete started to lean in for a kiss, but Brian held back. "You gave Ethan a key?"

"Yeah. I'd have given you one, too, except you don't come over unless I'm here begging you to."

Brian stared into Pete's brown eyes for several moments before kissing him. "I guess I deserved that."

Pete rolled his eyes and turned to unlock the door. "It wasn't a jab at you, just the truth. Sorry if you took it that way."

"So what're we having for dinner?" Ethan asked, clearly trying to head off an argument.

Pete carried the sacks through the living room and hoisted them onto the kitchen counter. "I bought some already-stuffed chicken breasts. All I have to do is stick them into the oven."

Brian lifted a salad bar container filled with various greens, vegetables and cheese out of the sack and put it into the refrigerator. He was still smarting over Pete's earlier comment, but not because Pete said it. He hadn't visited Pete as often as he wanted to and they both knew it. Brian recognised his own guilt for what it was.

Brian walked over to where Pete was oiling a baking dish and wrapped his arms around him from behind. After placing several kisses on Pete's neck, he buried his face against his lover's skin. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. Just do something about it," Pete mumbled, turning on the oven. "Excuse me."

Brian took a couple of steps back, releasing Pete. He couldn't help but stare at Pete's muscled ass encased in blue jeans. Thank God Ryan didn't make the deputies wear those nasty uniform pants.

A chuckle from across the room drew Brian's attention to Ethan. "You caught me, didn't you?"

"Sure did." Ethan handed Brian a bottle of beer. "Not that I blame you."

With the chicken in the oven, Pete washed his hands. "Wanna watch some TV while those cook?"

Ethan pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it onto the kitchen table. "Only if you're talking TV in bed."

Before Pete could answer, Ethan toed off his shoes, unzipped his jeans and pushed them down. Clad only in a pair of tiny boy shorts and white socks, Ethan's slim build was breathtaking. Brian's cock hardened on the spot. He glanced at Pete and smiled. "I agree with Ethan."

Pete started to unbutton his uniform shirt. "Guess it's unanimous. Just let me set the oven timer."

While Pete messed with the oven, Brian followed a nearly-naked Ethan into the bedroom, undressing as he went. By the time he joined Ethan in bed, his cock had already begun to produce excessive amounts of pre-cum, and he wasted no time pulling Ethan into his arms. Brian's lips fused with Ethan's immediately and soon the two were locked in an erotic, tongue tangling kiss. Brian loved the way Ethan tasted. It didn't seem to matter what time of day it was, Ethan's mouth was always minty fresh.

"Damn, this is even better than anything on TV," Pete chuckled, coming into the room.

Brian broke the kiss and grinned at Pete. "Get naked and join us."

"Don't mind if I do." Pete quickly removed his clothes and knelt on the bed beside Brian and Ethan.

The proximity of Pete's bobbing erection to Brian and Ethan's mouths left no doubts as to what their lover wanted. With a mutual nod to each other, Brian and Ethan descended on Pete's cock.

Ethan attacked the crown, while Brian ran his tongue down Pete's length to the heavy set of balls that swung below. He took one of the large testicles into his mouth and sucked, knowing how much Pete enjoyed the particular act.

"Aahhh, fuck," Pete moaned, one hand moving to grab hold of Brian's hair while the other caressed Ethan's cheek.

Brian released the lightly furred sac and began to lave the balls individually before lapping at the sensitive area just behind Pete's testicles. With another moan, Pete moved to plant one foot firmly on the bed, opening himself further for Brian's explorations.

"Mmmm," Brian moaned as he licked his way up the crevice, zeroing in on the puckered skin. Traces of soap clung to Brian's tongue as he continued to pleasure Pete's hole. Although the station offered several showers for the deputies in the locker room, rarely did any of them use them. Evidently Pete had readied himself after getting off shift. Brian wondered if anyone else had been in the locker room at the time.

Shoving his jealousy aside, he continued to rim the hole for several moments before pulling back. He reached for a condom and rolled it down his length. Brian knew from Ethan's soft whimper and Pete's answering grunt, his lovers wouldn't last long.

After sheathing himself, Brian tore open another condom package and sat up. It was immediately obvious why he'd heard Ethan whimper. Although Ethan was still sucking Pete's cock, Pete was bent over enough to pleasure Ethan's hole with his fingers.

Brian stroked Ethan's cheek to get his attention. Once those big blue eyes focused on him, Brian held up the unwrapped condom.

With a wide smile, Ethan released Pete's cock and took the rubber. While Ethan applied protection to Pete's cock, Brian grabbed the bottle of lube. The first touch of his slicked fingers quickly got Pete's attention.

Glancing over his shoulder, Pete shook his head. "Don't do too much playing back there or Ethan's fun will be over before it starts."

Brian held up the bottle and poured lube onto Pete's hand. "Then you'd better hurry and get him slicked."

Despite Pete's protests, Brian continued to finger his hole, more to get Pete fired up than anything else. When Pete slapped Brian's hand and pointed towards the bed, Brian nodded and moved into position.

The three of them lay on their sides facing the small apartment window. Ethan grabbed the extra pillow and clutched it to his chest with one hand before reaching behind him with the other to brush Pete's hip.

Pete's hand disappeared between them while he buried his face against Ethan's neck. "You ready for me?"

Ethan nodded a moment before he moaned, signalling Pete's entrance. Brian sat up enough to watch as Pete slowly impaled Ethan with his long, sheathed cock. If someone had told him he'd enjoy watching his lover fuck someone else he would've called them crazy, but Brian's mind had been changed by the other two men in the bed.

There was something magical in the way Pete made love to Ethan. Brian bit his bottom lip. How often did the two of them spend the night together while he was at home in bed alone? Decisions needed to be made if he had any hopes of a real relationship with Ethan and Pete. The longer his situation with Benny dragged out, the closer he was to being squeezed out of the love affair Pete and Ethan were building with each other.

Pete curled his thigh over Ethan's hip, opening himself to Brian. The last thing Brian wanted was to be left out. He lay back down and wrapped a hand around the base of his cock. Pete's hips stopped rocking at the first touch of Brian's cock against his hole.

"Give it to me," Pete moaned when Brian's crown breached the opening.

Although Brian knew Pete could handle a hard and brutal thrust, he entered his lover gently, relishing in the slow glide as his cock was enveloped by Pete's body. He wanted more from the next few minutes than a physical release. Brian wanted to connect with Pete spiritually.

Pete must have noticed something was different because he pulled his lips from Ethan's neck to look over his shoulder at Brian. In a departure from his usual bedroom banter, Pete stared into Brian's eyes, silently.

If he were asked, Brian couldn't have explained what passed between the two of them in that moment, but Pete seemed to understand what Brian was thinking. A sweet smile widened Pete's mouth. *Yep, he knows I'm going to talk to Benny as soon as possible*, Brian thought.

With a simple nod, Pete laid his head on the pillow and began a slow rhythm in and out of Ethan's body. It took several moments for Brian to get his thrusts timed perfectly with Pete's, but soon the only thing Brian could concentrate on was not coming prematurely. The grip of Pete's body around Brian's length as Pete buried himself balls deep inside Ethan was absolute heaven.

Brian leant forward and skimmed his mouth over Pete's shoulder, alternating soft kisses with small nips to the bronzed skin. Several times emotions fought to overwhelm him, and Brian could do nothing but press his face against Pete's sweaty flesh and close his eyes.

He continued the rhythm as his hand roamed the front of Pete's body from collarbone to the heavy set of balls that slapped against Ethan's ass on each thrust. The words were on the tip of his tongue, his emotions too close to the surface to stop from erupting. "I love you," he whispered.

Pete stilled mid-thrust and cried his release, his body squeezing Brian's cock to the point of pain. Ethan was the next to let loose a cry of pleasure. With both of his men satisfied, Brian wrapped his arm around Pete's chest and pumped deep several more times before the first burst of seed shot into the condom. "Hell, yeah," he groaned as his body jerked with the intensity of his climax.

Minutes went by before Brian could speak. He pulled out of Pete and removed the soiled condom. "I'll talk to Benny first thing Saturday morning. I'd do it tomorrow, but with the homecoming game tomorrow night it wouldn't be right to hit him with this before such a big event in his high school career."

Ethan launched himself over Pete to land on Brian's chest. "You really mean it?"

Brian nodded. "I love the way I feel when I'm with the two of you. I still don't know how Benny will take the news, but I can't pretend this thing between us is casual anymore." He brushed his lips over Ethan's forehead. "It doesn't feel casual. It feels...right."

\* \* \* \*

"Oh, shit," Brian said, jumping out of bed.

Ethan opened his eyes and stared up at the bigger man. "What's wrong?"

"It's almost five. I can't believe I fell asleep." Brian pulled on his underwear and began untangling his jeans.

Ethan sat up and rubbed his eyes. "If I hurry, will you drop me home?"

"Sure." Brian stopped and leant over the bed to kiss Ethan.

Moving to his knees, Ethan wrapped his arms around Brian's neck and accepted his lover's tongue with zeal. He could kiss Brian all day and still want more. There was just something about the way the man put his entire body into a kiss that turned Ethan on.

Brian was the first to break the kiss. "You'd better wake Pete and tell him you're leaving so he doesn't worry."

With a nod, Ethan turned to the softly snoring man on his right. He placed tiny kisses around Pete's mouth before speaking. "We're leaving," he whispered.

Although Pete grunted, he didn't wake up enough to acknowledge the kisses or Ethan's goodbye. Ethan decided to get dressed before trying again. He crawled out of bed and Brian handed him his clothes. "He's so cute when he sleeps."

"So are you," Brian said, brushing his knuckles down Ethan's cheek.

"You watch me sleep?" Ethan zipped his jeans and stuck his feet into his sneakers, stuffing his socks in his pocket.

"Sure. We both do." Brian shrugged. "Neither of us can believe you want to be with us."

Ethan chuckled. "And I still can't believe the two of you want to be with me."

Fully dressed, Brian walked around to Pete's side of the bed. "I love him, ya know? He's the first man I ever fell in love with."

When Ethan moved to join Brian at Pete's side, Brian wrapped an arm around Ethan's waist and pulled him in for a hug. "I would've never believed I had room for two loves in my heart, but you proved that theory wrong."

Ethan stared up into Brian's dark brown eyes. It was so early in their relationship. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You love me?"

Brian nodded. "I realised last night I didn't want to live my life without the two of you. So, yeah, I've fallen for you."

Pete stretched his arms over his head and groaned. "Are the two of you stayin' or going?"

Even though Ethan wanted to hear more of Brian's feelings, he knew it wasn't the time. "We're going." He bent over and kissed Pete, dipping his tongue inside Pete's mouth for a quick taste of his man. Although it might turn some people off, Ethan liked the warmth of Pete's mouth first thing in the morning. "This is my last weekend at O'Brien's. You coming in tonight?"

Pete nodded without opening his eyes. "I'll be there."

Ethan turned to Brian. "What about you?"

Brian shook his head. "I'm working the game before I go on patrol. It sucks but the extra money helps."

"Come by when you get off, if you want. I can leave the door unlocked," Pete mumbled.

"Maybe. It depends what Benny's doing tonight." Brian leant down and gave Pete a quick kiss. He started to break away, but Pete grabbed the back of his head and pulled him in for a longer, deeper kiss before releasing him. "You're still planning on talking to him tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah. Promise." Brian stood and rested his hand on the small of Ethan's back. "You ready?"

Ethan gazed at the warm bed and the hot man in it. "Not really, but I need to get ready for work."

"Lock up when you leave," Pete mumbled again and rolled to his side.

Before they were out of the bedroom, Pete's soft snores sounded again. Ethan couldn't help but smile. He followed Brian out of the apartment and used his key to lock the door. Brian didn't start the car until Ethan had his seatbelt securely fastened. He rested his head against the seat and turned to watch Brian. Although Brian didn't say it, Ethan knew he was worried about going home.

"Benny's probably still sound asleep," Ethan reminded Brian.

Brian's grip on the wheel tightened. "Probably."

Ethan reached over and put a comforting hand on Brian's thigh. "You know you can call me anytime if you need to talk, right?"

Brian removed one hand from the wheel and threaded his fingers through Ethan's. "I'm not used to doing that, but I'll work on it. I can't talk about Benny with Pete, it just sets him off."

"Pete loves you," Ethan reminded Brian.

"I know." Brian shook his head as they drove down Main Street. "I still can't believe I almost let the fear of losing my son ruin my relationship with Pete. Hell, I don't blame Pete for being bitter. I'm sure I'd feel the same way if our positions were reversed."

"I'll work on getting Pete to chill, and you work on getting Benny to accept you for who you are." Ethan smiled. "Deal?"

Brian pulled up in front of the bakery and put the car in park. He leant across the console and gave Ethan a soft kiss. "Deal."

As much as Ethan wanted to linger in the quiet car with Brian, he knew Brian was in a hurry to get home. "I'll talk to you later."

Brian gave Ethan's hand one last squeeze before releasing it. "I'll have to take a nap this afternoon, but call me this morning when you get time."

"Will do." Ethan reluctantly got out of the car. He waved to Brian one last time before unlocking the bakery door and stepping inside.



Kyle and Gill were busy loading the display counter with everything from muffins to cinnamon rolls. "Late night?" Kyle asked with a goofy grin on his face.

"Something like that," Ethan answered, his face heating with embarrassment. Although he hadn't come out and admitted to seeing Brian and Pete, Ethan had a feeling there wasn't much happening in town that Kyle didn't know about.

"You know I don't care who you sleep with, but would you do me a favour and ask them not to smoke inside the building?" Kyle asked.

"Huh? None of us smoke."

Kyle looked at Gill before returning his attention to Ethan. "It reeked of smoke in here this morning, and Gill found a cigarette butt at the bottom of the steps leading to your apartment."

Ethan's stomach dropped to the floor. His gaze went to the staircase. "The man who's been watching me smokes."

"Fuck!" Gill said and picked up the phone.

Ethan stumbled over to one of the small tables and sat down before he dropped to his knees. Someone had been inside the bakery. He looked towards the steps again. If whoever it was could make it inside the building, they'd surely be able to pick the lock to Ethan's apartment. A cup of water was set in front of him, and the next thing he knew, Ryan was kneeling at his side.

"You okay, Ethan?" Ryan asked.

Ethan blinked several times, trying to focus on Ryan's words. "The cigarette butt was a Camel Menthol, wasn't it?"

"No. Why?" Ryan stood and pulled out a chair to sit on.

Confused, Ethan's head tilted to the side. "Because the butts Roy took into evidence, that night I saw the man outside my window, were Camel Menthol."

Ryan shook his head and held up his hand. "Wait a second. I didn't get any evidence to send off to the crime lab. Are you sure they were Camels? Because this one's a Marlboro."

"Positive," Ethan answered. "Ask Brian and Pete. They were here. As a matter of fact, would you please call Pete for me and ask him to come down?" He wished he could call Brian, but until Brian had the talk with Benny, Ethan thought better of it. "You don't think there are two people doing this, do you?"

Ryan sighed and ran his fingers through his long hair. The action drew Ethan's attention to the tattoos on the Sheriff's neck. "Right now, I don't know what to think. First thing I need to do is find out why I didn't get those butts Roy took into evidence."

## Chapter Eight

Pete leaned with his back against Ryan's office door, his arms crossed in front of his chest. It took everything he had not to launch himself at Roy. The fucker continued to deny he'd done anything wrong.

"I'm telling you, I logged the evidence in as soon as I returned to the station. I don't know what the hell happened to it after that. Ask Pam. She's in charge of processing."

"I already did," Ryan said, the muscles in his jaw twitching with his apparent frustration. "According to Pam, the only evidence she's received in the last month was for the vandalism to Eli Sanchez's place."

Roy threw up his hands. "I don't know what else to say. I've told you the truth. Who you choose to believe is your business."

Pete narrowed his eyes. There was something about the vehemence in Roy's voice he didn't trust for a second. "You're a damn liar, and I'm gonna find a way to prove it."

Before Pete could uncross his arms, Roy launched himself out of the chair and landed a punch to Pete's jaw. Pete's instincts kicked in and he came back swinging, immediately throwing a satisfying jab to Roy's perfect little nose.

"Mother fucker," Roy snarled, fists flying.

Pete gave as good as he got until an amazingly strong arm wrapped around his neck and pulled him off of Roy. Pete started to elbow whoever was holding him in the stomach when Ryan's voice sounded in his ear. "Don't even think about it. Just calm down and let's get this sorted."

Pete dropped his arms, but kept his eyes on Roy, who used the back of his sleeve to wipe some of the blood from his nose. Roy had thrown the first punch so why was he acting like the innocent one?

Ryan squeezed Pete's shoulder. "I'll deal with you in a minute. Go out in the hall and wait for me to call you back."

Without a word, Pete left the office. He didn't know why he should get into trouble, hell, Roy was the one who jumped him. Pete pulled out his phone and called Brian, who was currently sitting with Ethan above the bakery.

"Hey," Brian answered.

"How's Ethan?"

"Still pretty shaken. I think the butt found in his apartment was what did him in. Did you find out anything on the lost evidence?"

"Nope, other than Roy claims it was Pam who lost it. According to him, he turned the bag over with the rest of his paperwork for that night."

"Pam's militant about that shit. No way would she lose something," Brian said.

"Exactly. But when I tried to say the same thing, Roy launched himself across the room and punched me in the fucking face."

"Aww, fuck. What happened?"

"I think you know what happened. I hit the little shit back square in the nose. Ryan pulled us apart, but I have a feeling my ass is about to get reamed and not in a good way. He's got Roy in there now. Dammit. I feel like a kid waiting to go back into the principal's office."

"Anyone would have done the exact same thing, and Ryan has to know that."

"Hope you're right." Pete leaned his head back against the wall. His life was finally falling into place. The last thing he needed was to lose his job over a scumbag like Roy Jenkins. "Do you think Ethan feels like talking to me?"

"Are you kidding? He's practically sitting in my lap, trying to eavesdrop on our conversation."

"Am not," Ethan said in the background.

Pete smiled for the first time all day. "Put him on."

"No matter what happens, I'll support you," Brian said before handing the phone over.

"What's going on?" Ethan asked.

With everything Ethan was going through, the last thing he needed was to hear Pete's problems. "Nothing really. I just got into a little scuffle with Roy, but don't worry about it. I can handle that asshole."

"Don't do something stupid because of me." Ethan sighed into the phone. "I'm not worth it," he mumbled so softly Pete barely heard him.

Pete closed his eyes. Crying at work wasn't cool. Hell, crying anytime wasn't cool, at least not for him. "You're worth more to me than you'll ever know." The words sat on the tip

of his tongue. It wasn't really the time or place to lay his heart on the line, but something told him Ethan needed to hear the words. "I love you."

Holding his breath, Pete prayed he hadn't made a mistake. Professing his feelings wasn't something he was used to. It wasn't until Ethan spoke again that Pete could finally resume breathing.

"I love you, too," Ethan whispered. "That's why it's so important to me that you don't jeopardise your career over this."

The door beside Pete opened and Roy stepped out. He turned to say something to Pete, but Ryan was right there, standing in the doorway. Roy's mouth snapped shut, but his eyes narrowed to mere slits before he stormed down the hall.

"You're up," Ryan said, stepping back.

"Gotta go," Pete told Ethan. "I'll call as soon as I can."

"Good luck. That's from me and Brian."

"Thanks. By the expression on Ryan's face, I'll probably need it." Pete ended the call and stuffed the phone back into his pocket before following Ryan into the office.

"Have a seat," Ryan offered, pointing at the chair in front of his desk.

"He threw the first punch," Pete immediately said, trying to defend himself.

Ryan leant back in his chair and threaded his fingers together on his chest. "Physically, yes, but you started it by calling him a liar."

"But he is lying," Pete started to argue.

"I agree."

Pete stilled. He was surprised by Ryan's admission. "Wow. I wasn't expecting that."

Ryan held up his hand. "I'm not saying Roy's not a good man. Maybe he fucked up and forgot to hand in the evidence and is trying to cover his ass, I don't know. But his story just doesn't wash with me. Pam's the best there is, and if she tells me she never got it, I believe her."

Ryan picked up the evidence bag containing the two cigarette butts taken from the bakery and Ethan's apartment. "I'm gonna go sweet-talk Nate into okaying a rush job on these. It'll cost a fortune, but the sooner we get to the bottom of this, the better. To be honest, I still don't feel right about that phone call Roy made to Ethan."

Pete's stomach clenched. "What call?"

Ryan shifted in his chair, suddenly looking very uneasy. "Sorry. I assumed Ethan told you." He shook his head. "The last thing I want is to start any trouble between the two of you."

After a deep breath, Pete moved to sit on the edge of the chair, his clasped hands resting on Ryan's desk. "I need you to tell me about the phone call."

After a few moments, Ryan began to fill Pete in on the visit he'd had in Nate's office with Ethan the day after the call. He finished the story by adding, "I typed up a disciplinary action form and put it into Roy's file, but he assured me nothing like that would happen again."

Pete ran through the story again. Although Ethan had mentioned Roy's interest, he'd made it sound like it wasn't a big deal. He remembered how quickly Roy had appeared in the alley the night Ethan had called Pete in a panic. "Do you think Roy could be the person stalking Ethan?"

Ryan stared at the butts in the evidence bag. "I don't know. Maybe these will tell us."

Pete shook his head. "I don't think so. I think maybe the missing evidence was the link to Roy." He pointed towards the evidence. "Not only is that a different brand, but don't you think it's convenient that we found more butts inside the building? Especially with the original bag missing?"

With a troubled sigh, Ryan started running his fingers through his hair. It was an action Pete had seen on several occasions since moving to Cattle Valley. It meant Ryan was frustrated. He suddenly sat forward in his chair. "Wait a minute. Roy doesn't smoke."

"I think this whole fucked up mess is proving we don't know Roy as much as we thought we did. There are thousands of closet smokers out there. What if Roy's one of them?"

"What're you suggesting?" Ryan asked.

"Maybe a little detective work is in order. Have you ever been to Roy's house?"

"Once or twice for parties. Why?"

"Did you notice the lingering smell of smoke while you were there?" Pete asked.

"Of course, but several guys in the department smoke. The house is usually full of it. To be honest, it's the reason I don't often go to his parties. Nate has issues." Ryan grinned.

Pete nodded his head. "How many non-smokers would allow guests to smoke in their house?"

"Fuck. I never thought of that." Ryan drummed his long fingers on the desk. "I'll need to get a search warrant."

Pete shook his head. "A search of his house won't prove anything without the missing evidence, and I've no doubt Roy's already destroyed the butts we found. Even if you discover he smokes Camel Menthol, it won't prove anything in court."

"What're you suggesting we do then?"

"Set him up. Catch him in the act."

\* \* \* \*

"Yeah!" Brian cheered, pumping his arm in the air.

"Fantastic run," Pete said, coming up beside Brian.

Brian nodded. "Chase's got a heck of a future ahead of him. I think he runs even better than he passes and that's saying something. He threw a forty-seven yard pass in the second quarter."

Pete whistled, mimicking Brian's position of leaning against the top of the fence that separated the football field from the crowd of fans. "Has he signed a letter of intent yet?"

Brian nodded. "He'll be playing for Coach Nelson at North Central Idaho."

Pete shook his head. "I don't think I know him."

"From what I hear, he's one of the best at taking care of his players."

"Good. Chase seems like a great kid. I'm sure his mom's mind will be put at ease."

"So what's going on with Roy?" Brian asked. He knew Pete hadn't shown up to the game to shoot the breeze.

"You and I'll be on duty tomorrow night, leaving Ethan alone in his apartment."

"Alone?" Brian didn't like the idea, even if they were watching from the shadows.

"Don't worry. Ryan'll be inside with Ethan. For now, we'll just play it cool. If you see Roy, don't let on that we suspect him."

"That might be hard since all I want to do is smash his face in," Brian admitted.

"You and me both," Pete agreed.

\* \* \* \*

Ethan carried a tub of dirty glasses into the kitchen and set them beside the sink. "I think everyone in Cattle Valley's out there. Thank God it's my last night."

"I thought tomorrow was your last night?" Jay asked, unloading the tub.

Ethan wasn't sure how much to tell his friend about the plan to trap Roy. "Sean wants the new guy to jump into the fire with a busy Saturday night. I'll be in early in the evening to train him for a few hours, but then he'll be on his own."

Jay's eyebrows rose. "Really? That's just cruel, man. We'll be lucky if the poor guy survives the night."

With a shrug, Ethan turned to leave the kitchen. "Back to the madhouse."

Laughing, Jay threw a dishtowel at him. "Yeah, well at least you're escaping in a few hours."

"You're just blowing smoke. You know you could get a job at the Canoe with a single kiss."

"And put up with Erico's ego all day and night? No thanks. I love that man to death, but even I couldn't stand to work for him."

With a smile, Ethan pushed through the swinging door and was once again assaulted by the crowd of thirsty revellers. He wove his way through the crowd, spotting Pete almost immediately.

"Can I get another pitcher?" Eli Sanchez asked as Ethan passed.

"Sure thing." Ethan continued across the pub to Pete, who stood by the dart board. "Hey, you."

Pete pulled Ethan against him long enough for a kiss. "How's your night going?"

Ethan glanced around and grinned. "Crazy, but at least the tips have been good." He heard the bell, signalling an order was up. "Oops, that's my order for table five." Ethan gave Pete another quick kiss. "I'll see you in a bit. Don't get yourself into trouble."

Pete brushed the bruise on his jaw with his fingers. "Don't worry. I think I've had enough excitement for one day."

On his way back to the bar, Ethan started grabbing empty bottles off the tables. He carried the load into the kitchen and towards the recycling bin Sean insisted on. Jay was busy cooking, so Ethan didn't bother him.

A knock on the door that led to the alley surprised him. No one ever came in through the back door except Sean and deliveries and it was too late for the beer man. He dumped the



bottles into the large barrel and approached the door. Whoever was on the other side began pounding, obviously becoming impatient.

"Hang on," Ethan called as he made his way to the door.

\* \* \* \*

While cruising down Sycamore, Brian's cell phone rang. He picked it up from the seat beside him and glanced at the display, funny how just seeing Pete's name made his night better. "Hey."

"Ethan's gone," Pete growled.

Brian made a U-turn and headed towards downtown. "What do you mean, 'he's gone?'"

"I mean he was here ten minutes ago, but he's disappeared. Jay remembers him coming into the kitchen, but he was busy and doesn't remember seeing him leave. The backdoor was left partially open, but so far no sign of Ethan."

Brian flipped on the lights but left the siren off. Turning the corner onto Main, Brian spotted two figures sitting on the steps of city hall. "Hang on," he said into the phone. Pulling into the circular drive, his headlights illuminated Ethan and..."Benny?"

"What?" Pete asked.

"I found Ethan. He's at city hall with Benny." What the hell would Benny want with Ethan? As far as Brian knew, the two of them had never met.

"I'll be right there."

"Wait. Let me see what's going on first. I'll call you in a few." As soon as Brian parked the car, Ethan and Benny both stood. It didn't escape Brian's notice how nervous both of them appeared. He turned off the lights and shut down the engine before getting out of the car. He stood at the front fender before approaching. "What's going on?"

Benny glanced at Ethan. Neither of them looked angry, which helped put Brian at ease. It was Ethan who finally motioned for Brian to join them. He turned and whispered in Benny's ear. Benny nodded and sat down once again. Ethan took several steps down to meet Brian half-way.

"What's this about?" Brian asked.

"Benny came by the pub to talk to me." Ethan looked over his shoulder. "He begged me not to take you away from him."

"What? Why would he come to you instead of me? And how'd he even know about you?"

Ethan shrugged. "He also knows about Pete, but he didn't tell me how he found out. We've mostly been talking about his mom, and how much you've changed since she died. I think maybe he's feeling left out of your life."

"That's bullshit," Brian said, soft enough so Benny couldn't overhear.

"Maybe so, but I think sometimes you forget he's still young. He may look like a man, but he's only sixteen." Ethan reached out and placed his palm over Brian's heart. "Just be honest with him. I think that's what he's really after."

Brian glanced at his son. "Pete's worried about you. Even though I told him to stay at the pub, I've no doubt he's on his way here."

"I'll head him off." Ethan gestured to Benny. "If you need to talk later, call me."

"Thanks." Brian wanted to pull Ethan into his arms, but thought better of it.

After Ethan started down the sidewalk towards O'Brien's, Brian climbed the steps and took a seat beside Benny. He rested his forearms on his thighs and sighed.

"You mad at me?" Benny asked.

"No. I'm mad at myself," Brian answered. "I'm not sure what I've done to make you feel like you couldn't come to me about this instead of Ethan."

Benny shrugged. "I've given you plenty of opportunities to tell me about Pete and Ethan, and you never did."

"What're you talking about? Lately all you do is come home from practice and shut yourself in your room. Even when I tried to get you to tell me what was wrong, you kept telling me nothing. What else was I supposed to do, *make* you talk to me?"

"Yeah. I sat up in my room every night just waiting for you to barge in and demand to know what was going on, but you didn't care enough to do that. Even though I know you'd rather have me out of the house so you can sneak around with those two guys, you could at least pay attention to me when I'm home."

Brian's head jerked backwards. He felt like he'd been punched right between the eyes. What he saw as trying to give Benny personal space and the freedom to make new friends, Benny had taken as him not caring. He wondered what Leigh would say if she were the one

sitting beside Benny. Brian didn't have to think long. "I'm sorry. I fucked up." He shook his head. "I felt guilty about going behind your back, but I was afraid I'd lose you if I told you the truth. I know my lifestyle change hasn't been easy for you."

"I don't give a shit if you like dudes, Dad."

"Watch your mouth," Brian was quick to say.

"Sorry," Benny mumbled.

"If it's not me being gay, then why did you go to Ethan and ask him not to take me away from you?"

Benny buried his face in his hands. "Because of the way you've been acting lately." He shook his head. "I would've asked a woman the same thing if she was the one hogging all your attention."

Brian reached out and rubbed Benny's broad back. "You're the most important person in my life. Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it." His chest started to ache as he said the next words. "Even if it's giving up Pete and Ethan."

"I just want you to be honest with me. And I guess I want us to be like we used to be. You and Mom used to take me fishing almost every weekend, but we haven't gone once since she died."

Brian's nose began to burn as he felt the sting of tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry. It's hard for me to sit beside a lake and not think of her."

"What's so wrong with that? Sometimes it would be nice if the two of us could talk about her." Benny turned to face Brian. "I don't want to forget her, Dad, and there's no one else here who even knew her except you."

Brian nodded, unable to talk.

"Do you love those two guys?" Benny finally asked.

"Yeah," Brian admitted. "But not as much as I love you."

"I don't want you to give them up if it'll make you unhappy. Just promise not to lie to me when you want to see them. I may be young, but I'm not completely naive."

"It's times like this when I wish your mother was here. I'm not as good at this parenting thing as I'd like to be."

"Naw," Benny said, bumping Brian with his shoulder. "Mom usually told me to go ask you when I had a question about serious shi...stuff."

Brian chuckled. "Yeah, that sounds like her."

They sat in silence for several moments. "I like Ethan."

"You do?"

"Yeah. I don't really know Pete though. Maybe you could have them over for dinner sometime this week."

Brian took a deep breath as the huge weight was lifted off his shoulders. "I'd like that."

"Just do me a favour?"

"Anything."

"Don't shack up until I leave for college. I can handle a lot, but I think knowing you're in the other room with the two of them would creep me out."

"Deal," Brian agreed with a kiss to Benny's temple.

\* \* \* \*

"Don't you ever do that to me again," Pete said, pulling Ethan into his arms. With only a thin shirt on, Ethan's body shivered against Pete's chest.

"Benny needed to talk."

"You should've told me before you left the pub. I was worried sick."

Ethan's hands landed on Pete's chest and he pushed back, separating himself from Pete. "I'm not a kid. I don't need anyone's permission to come or go."

"I know that, but with everything going on, you have to admit I had a reason to worry," Pete started to argue.

Ethan took a step forward and leaned his forehead against Pete's shoulder. "You're right. I didn't mean to worry you, but Benny looked like he was about to go off the deep end. All I could think about was helping him."

With Ethan once again in his arms, Pete kissed the top of his head. "What'd he want?"

"If I tell you, you have to promise to try and understand his point of view."

"I can only try," Pete said.

## Chapter Nine

The sound of the front door closing roused Ethan from a fitful sleep. He nudged Pete. "There's someone here."

"It's just me," Brian said, stepping into the bedroom of Pete's apartment. "I can't stay. I just needed to make sure you were okay after everything that happened."

Ethan scooted closer to a grumbling Pete, making room for Brian. "I'm fine. How about you? Are you here to break up with us?" Although Brian had called Pete after taking Benny home, several hours had past. Ethan hoped Brian hadn't changed his mind.

"Nope. Not going to happen." Brian sat on the side of the bed and kicked his shoes off before climbing under the covers to wrap himself around Ethan. "Mmm, you're warm."

Ethan squeaked and batted at Brian's hands. "And you're freezing."

Pete reached across Ethan and grabbed Brian's wrists, placing the hands on his chest. "I could use a little cold. Sleeping with Ethan's like having my own personal furnace in bed with me."

"If you're going to complain, I could always have Brian take me home." Ethan wasn't serious. Pete would literally have to kick him out of bed before he left.

"Don't even joke about that." Pete directed Brian's hands down his torso. "My chest isn't the only thing that's hot."

Ethan stretched his arms over his head and yawned as Brian began to jerk Pete's cock. Not willing to waste the opportunity, Ethan scooted up to rest his back against the headboard. Not only did the new position allow Brian to reach Pete more easily, it put Ethan's hardening cock at just the right level.

It didn't take long before two sets of lips began kissing Ethan's length. Pete concentrated on the crown, while Brian worked the shaft and balls. Ethan moaned. He loved it when both his men pleased him. Burying his fingers in their hair, he smiled at the difference in texture. Where Pete's short cut felt bristly against his palm, Brian's short afro was almost spongy.

Pete began to suck Ethan's cock down his throat while Brian's skilled tongue manipulated his sac. "God, I love this," Ethan groaned.

Brian chuckled against Ethan's balls before taking one into his mouth. Damn, Brian's mouth was never anything but hot and welcoming. Although Ethan had already climaxed twice in the last few hours, he was on the verge of shooting again. "I'm close," he told Pete.

Pete's cheeks hollowed as he increased the suction. If Ethan didn't know better, he'd guess Pete enjoyed swallowing cum as much as Ethan enjoyed feeding it to him. He thrust his hips twice, burying his length in Pete's throat before letting loose the first string of seed.

"Aahh, shit!" Ethan howled, his body quivering with the force of his climax.

Before he could catch his breath, Brian leaned over Ethan's body and wrapped his lips around the head of Pete's cock. Too tired to do much more than rub Brian's cock through his jeans, Ethan grinned when Brian let out a grunt and soaked his pants. Within moments, Pete let out a cry of pleasure.

Ethan waited several seconds before scooting back down the bed. He nestled his head in his pillow and yawned. "Sleepy," he mumbled.

Almost asleep, he was surprised when he felt Brian pull away and climb out from under the covers. "Where're you going?" Ethan mumbled.

"Home. I promised Benny I'd take him fishing. If I leave now, I'll be lucky to catch three hours of sleep before he's pounding on my door."

"Love you," Ethan said, reaching for Brian.

Brian bent over and kissed Ethan softly. "I love you, too." Brian moved to give Pete a goodbye kiss. "I'll call you in a few hours."

Brian stood up straight and shoved his feet in his shoes. "By the way, Benny wants the two of you to come for dinner this week. Since we usually have a fairly decent meal on Sunday, why don't you try to come then?"

"I'd like that," Pete said.

"Mmm hmm," Ethan agreed, barely awake. He was so tired he didn't even remember Brian leaving the room.

\* \* \* \*

Ethan gestured for the new guy, Moby, to follow him to the kitchen. "I forgot to show you the beer fridge." He opened the large walk-in refrigerator and stepped inside. "You'll get used to the cold, besides, on a jumping night, it's a good place to cool off."

Moby nodded and looked at the small tablet he'd made notes in. "So Sean tells me what he needs, and I come here and get it, right?"

"Yep. Sean always gets the kegs himself, but I have a feeling that's more because of my size than his desire to actually do it. With the guns on you, I've no doubt it'll soon become part of your job."

Ethan left the refrigerator and shut the door securely. "I saw from your timecard that your real name is William. How'd you get the nickname?"

The tall, solidly built man winked and glanced down at the prominent bulge behind the fly of his jeans. "The guys in my high school gym class started calling me Moby Dick and it just kinda got shortened to Moby over the years."

A blush worked its way up Ethan's neck. Until Moby had drawn attention to his cock, Ethan hadn't even noticed. Now that he had, he couldn't think of anything else. "Well, uh, wow, yeah, I guess I should get going. Are you comfortable with everything?"

Moby grinned. It was obvious he knew why Ethan was suddenly uncomfortable. "It's not the first time I've worked in a bar. Now that I know where everything is, I should be fine."

Ethan stuck out his hand. "Good luck, and don't be afraid to tell the customers to fuck off if they start getting handsy."

"Will it get me bigger tips if I let them?" Moby asked with a huge smile.

"Probably, but Sean wouldn't like it."

Moby sighed dramatically. "Too bad."

Ethan shook his head as he pulled out his timecard for the last time. Typical Cattle Valley, as soon as one playboy settled down, another showed up to take his place. He timed out and carried his card to the bar. "Well, I guess that's it," he told Sean.

Sean scribbled his signature on the bottom of the card and tucked it in his shirt pocket. "You think he'll work out?" he asked, gesturing to Moby.

"Yeah. Just do yourself a favour and don't ask him how he got his nickname."

Sean's eyebrows rose. "Really?" He chuckled. "I think I can guess," he said, eyeing Moby as he returned to the bar.

Ethan slapped his friend on the back. "Good luck."

He pushed through the swinging door and smiled at Jay. "Well, guess I'm done here."

Jay quickly rinsed his hands and dried them on the towel tucked into his apron. "Just because you won't be working here, doesn't mean you can't come in, ya know."

"Yeah. I'm sure you'll still see plenty of me. We are still on for our regular Monday nights, right?"

"Definitely. Although it sounds like we may need to put a couple more steaks on the grill from now on."

Ethan shrugged. "Probably, if they're both welcome."

"You know they are. It's still strange to me, but who am I to judge?"

Ethan bit his bottom lip. He wondered if he dared ask. "Would you mind if Benny came with us once in a while?"

Jay's eyes rounded. "I can't believe you just asked me that. Helloooo, I'm the guy who loves kids."

"Benny's sixteen. Not exactly a kid," Ethan reminded his friend.

"Bring him if he wants to come. Just let me know ahead of time so I have enough food."

"Thanks." Ethan moved in and gave his friend a hug. As he held Jay's slight frame, he realised they were no longer best friends, but still good friends. He supposed it was the way it should be. Jay had Erico and he had Pete and Brian. Still, the memories of long nights sitting up with Jay as they worked through life's problems would always be special to him. "Love you, man."

"Love you, too, you dork."

\* \* \* \*

The plan was for Ethan to walk home from the bar like nothing was wrong. Ethan quickly discovered it was easier said than done. Although he knew Ryan, Pete, Brian and Rio were hiding in the shadows, it still made him uneasy.

Ethan glanced over his shoulder as he unlocked the bakery door. What if Roy was watching him? Would he be able to tell something was up? His fingers itched to grab his phone and call either Pete or Brian, but he wasn't sure where they were hiding, and giving away their location was the last thing he wanted.

He walked into the darkened building and immediately relocked the door. Taking a step back, he studied the street outside, looking for any sign of Roy. Fingering the chain



around his neck, Ethan hurried up the steps to his apartment. Although Brian had told him not to remove the gun from its case, Ethan knew his nerves wouldn't calm down until it was at least within reach.

As planned, he turned on the kitchen light as soon as he entered his apartment. Ethan double checked the lock before making his way to the bedroom, flipping on lights as he went. He tore off his coat and tossed it to the bed before opening his bedside drawer.

Fuck! Ethan reached for his phone, but a voice stopped him.

"Don't even think about it," Roy said, stepping out of the closet, Ethan's gun in hand.

Ethan glanced towards the window, wondering if the closet door shielded Roy from his protectors. "What do you want?" Ethan asked, the phone still in his hand.

Roy chuckled. "If you'd asked me that question a month ago, I would've had a completely different answer than I do now."

It was obvious what Roy wanted a month earlier, but now what? "Are you going to kill me because I wouldn't go out with you?"

"Turn off the light," Roy ordered.

"Why? You plan to shoot me in the dark?"

"I'm not in the mood to put on a show for your *boyfriends*," Roy spat. "Now do what I told you!"

The plan had been for Ethan to turn on all the lights. Hopefully if the bedroom light turned off, Pete, Brian or Ryan would know something was wrong. He slowly backed his way towards the light switch. "You never answered my question," he said, trying to buy some time.

"Which one was that?" Roy asked.

"Are you going to kill me just because I wouldn't go out with you?" Ethan flipped the switch, sending the room into shadowed darkness.

Roy walked out of the closet and closed in on Ethan. "What you're doing is disgusting. I thought you were a man of morals. The longer you refused me, the higher I put you on a pedestal." He tsked Ethan with his tongue. "Little did I know that pedestal was built on lies. There's absolutely nothing moral about a man who would give himself to two men. You're disgusting."

Ethan inched his way closer to the doorway. "So that's it? You're going to ruin your career and your life by killing me because you think I'm disgusting?" Ethan shook his head. "You're even sicker than I thought."

"Don't say that. I ran off that fella from Washington when he was down here trying to start trouble. I did that for you. I took it upon myself to watch you, to make sure he didn't come back."

"And did he?" Ethan asked. Hearing that George Strelling was anywhere near Cattle Valley made bile rise in his throat.

"No, but after a while, I couldn't stop myself from watching you. Night after night I sat outside your window making sure you were safe. I kept hoping you would drop your guard enough to go out with me. All I wanted was a chance to make you see that I could protect you."

"Is that why you kept trying to scare me? You thought I'd run to you for protection?" Ethan reached behind him and grasped the doorknob.

"I'm a cop. It's what was supposed to happen!" Roy yelled, scratching the side of his head with the gun.

The second Roy seemed to lose his focus, Ethan rushed over the threshold, slamming the solid wood door behind him. A shot rang out and Ethan dove for the light switch, sending the living room into darkness.

The bedroom door opened as Ethan tried to inch his way towards the kitchen without being seen. The sound of breaking glass stopped Roy in his tracks before he was able to find him.

Ethan watched as Roy planted his feet and held the gun up, ready to fire the moment someone came through the bedroom door. "He's got my gun!" Ethan shouted, giving away his location.

Roy rounded on him and fired. The bullet whizzed by Ethan's ear and slammed into the entertainment centre, sending a piece of oak into his cheek. His head jerked back as another shot fired. The sounds of a struggle ensued. Ethan wished he could see well enough to help. He held his breath, praying Roy had been on the wrong end of the bullet and not one of the men he loved.

"Ethan? You okay?" Ryan asked.

With a sigh of relief, Ethan answered. "Yeah. Roy?"

"I've got him pinned to the floor. Will you turn on the light?"

Ethan made his way to a standing position. Although shaky, he managed to find the light and turn it on. Before his eyes had a chance to adjust, Ryan had Roy cuffed with his arms behind his back.

With his knee firmly planted in the centre of Roy's back, Ryan pulled out his radio. "Send an ambulance to three zero two Main, top floor." Ryan clipped the radio back onto his belt and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

Pete came bursting into the room from the bedroom, his gun drawn. "Everything under control?" he asked, staring at the blood-stained floor under Roy.

"Yeah. I thought I told you to wait outside until I sounded the all-clear?"

"You did. That's why I waited until the last shot sounded to make my way up the fire escape." Pete started across the room to Ethan.

"Go unlock the doors. An ambulance is on its way," Ryan ordered.

Pete looked from Ethan to Ryan and back to Ethan, clearly conflicted. "I'm okay," Ethan assured Pete. "Go unlock the doors and let Brian in."

Pete gestured to the bedroom. "He's already in. Hey, Brian, get your ass out here and go unlock the doors."

Brian came into the room, and Ethan would swear the man was three shades lighter. "Are you okay?" Brian asked Ethan.

Ethan nodded. "I'm fine."

Pete opened his mouth to say something, but snapped it shut. He crossed the room towards the kitchen. "You stay with Ethan," he told Brian over his shoulder.

A second later, Ethan was scooped up into Brian's arms and carried to the couch. "You're hurt," Brian said, examining Ethan's cheek.

"It's just a scratch." Ethan rested his head on Brian's shoulder. He stared down at Roy who seemed to go in and out of consciousness. Ryan had rolled him over and was applying pressure to the shoulder wound. "Will he make it?"

The hurt of Roy's betrayal was obvious in Ryan's expression. "He'll live to stand trial. Unfortunately, prisons aren't healthy for cops."

"It's what he deserves," Brian barked.

"I'm not denying that," Ryan said. "It's just a damn shame, that's all."

Ethan buried his face against Brian's neck. He wasn't sure how he felt one way or the other. He was just glad to be alive and in the arms of a man he loved. There would be plenty of time to come to terms with what Roy had done.

\* \* \* \*

Ethan stood in Brian's kitchen watching him put the lasagne into the oven. Although Brian had greeted him with a warm hug and kiss, there seemed to be something wrong. He glanced in the living room, happy to see Pete and Benny talking casually while watching a football game. "They seem to be getting along."

"Huh?" Brian asked, setting the oven timer.

Ethan gestured to the other room. "Benny and Pete. I said they seem to be getting along."

"That's good." Brian opened the refrigerator and started pulling out the fixings for a salad.

"Let me help." Ethan snapped up the bundle of lettuce and carried it to the sink.

"That's okay, I'll do it." Brian started to take the lettuce out of Ethan's hand.

Ethan held the bundle out of reach and stared at Brian. "What's going on with you?"

"Nothing. I'd just like to get this dinner finished." He reached for the lettuce once again.

Ethan dropped it in the sink before walking away. There was definitely something wrong, and he wasn't about to pretend there wasn't. "When you're ready to tell me what the hell's going on in that thick head of yours, give me a call."

Striding through the living room, Ethan stopped beside the couch and gave Benny the best smile he could muster. "It was good to see you again."

Confusion written all over his face, Benny nodded. "You, too. You going somewhere?"

"Yeah." Ethan made his way to the front closet and grabbed his coat off the hanger. When Pete started to get up, Ethan held up his hand. "No. I just need some time by myself."

Ethan left the house feeling like an idiot. He should've known the spark Brian felt would fade as soon as the trouble surrounding him was over. Ethan had met guys like Brian before. They loved to ride up on their white horse and save the day, but as soon as life settled down they lost interest.

"Wait!" Brian called running up behind Ethan.

Although he didn't immediately stop and turn around, Ethan slowed his pace. "What, you suddenly feel like talking?"

"Just...stop." Brian ran in front of Ethan and held up his hands. "Please, let me explain."

With his arms crossed over his chest, Ethan gazed up into Brian's dark eyes. "I would love for you to. You've got me so confused I walked out of the house without my shoes." He glanced down at his socked feet. When he looked back up, he could tell Brian was trying his best not to laugh. "Don't you dare."

As hard as Ethan tried to stay mad, he was more concerned about the damage he was about to do to his bottom lip. "Okay, laugh and get it over with."

Brian wrapped his arms around Ethan, but what started out as a laugh began to sound more like his lover was crying. Ethan tried to pull back enough to look into Brian's eyes. "It's okay," he soothed, wiping at the tears as they ran down Brian's handsome face.

Brian shook his head. "I've already lost one person I thought I'd spend the rest of my life with. When I heard that shot..." Brian's hold on Ethan tightened. "It reminded me how quickly love can be taken."

Ethan wrapped his arms around Brian's waist and hugged him. He remembered Brian's pallor and expression when he walked into the living room the previous night. "I'm okay."

"Yeah, today, but what about tomorrow or the next day?"

"There are no guarantees, Brian. You and Pete could decide to go at this on your own, but it's a chance I'm willing to take. Because every minute with you is a gift, and that's exactly how I have to think of it. It may all disappear tomorrow, but dammit, I have today."

Brian nodded. "You're right."

"Of course I am. I've given this entire situation a lot of thought." Ethan's stomach rumbled. "You think that lasagne is about done?"

Brian leant down and gave Ethan a deep kiss. "Probably getting close."

They turned and started back towards the house. Ethan glanced up at Brian and grinned. "You're making your own damn salad though."

## Epilogue

Pete rushed into the apartment, already unbuttoning his uniform shirt. "Give me ten minutes to shower and change."

Ethan glanced at the clock as he set a freshly baked pumpkin pie on the top of the stove. "I'm timing you."

"You could join me." Pete pushed his jeans down and off. He hooked his thumbs in his underwear and grinned.

Ethan covered his eyes. "Do not tempt me into making us late. Brian's nervous enough about hosting Thanksgiving as it is."

With a resigned shrug, Pete picked up his clothes and carried them into the bedroom. With the clock ticking, he turned on the shower and immediately jumped in. "Shit!" he swore as the cold water hit him. He grabbed the shampoo and poured a small amount into his palm.

As he massaged his scalp, Pete began to hum. Life had been good the previous month. One of his dreams had come true the day Ethan had moved in with him. Although Kyle was sad to see his favourite tenant move, Pete knew Kyle and Gill understood. The mess with Roy was far from over, but at least the man was behind bars, awaiting trial. According to the District Attorney's Office, it was an open and shut case. Ethan would still have to testify, but with Ryan also taking the stand, they didn't anticipate any problems.

Sticking his head under the heated water, he sighed as the hard spray made his scalp tingle. So many things had changed, not just for him, but for Ethan and Brian as well. Ethan had sat through his first high school football game. With Pete and Brian on either side of him, Ethan slowly learned the rules of the game. Pete's next battle would be teaching Ethan to drive.

The thought of a twenty-six year old man who didn't know how to drive was funny as hell to Pete and he let out a laugh.

"What's so funny that you're exceeding your shower time?" Ethan asked.

"The thought of you learning to drive," Pete answered. He opened the curtain and flicked water towards Ethan.

"That does it. You are not teaching me to drive. I was going along with it so I could get behind the wheel of that car of yours, but forget it."

Pete turned the water off and reached for a towel. "Who said anything about learning in my car? I've already talked to Brian about borrowing his nerdy sedan while he's on shift. I figured once spring came along and you had your licence I'd let you take my baby out for a spin."

Ethan rolled his eyes. "There's something seriously wrong about the relationship you have with that car."

Pete stepped out of the shower and pulled Ethan into his arms. "Before you and Brian stormed your way into my heart, that car was the only thing I ever had that was my own. I know it sounds stupid, but at one point in my life, Stella gave me something to focus on when I needed it the most."

"You mean after the shooting in Salt Lake?" Ethan asked.

"No, before that, when my folks died in the car wreck. I'd started working on the car with my dad when I was around sixteen. We didn't have money for parts, but we did the best we could. I used my dad's life insurance money to finish it." Pete shrugged. "It was like seeing a piece of him come back to life. Like I still had him around, ya know? So you learn to drive Brian's car, and I'll share Stella with you."

Ethan sniffed and wiped his eyes. "I can't believe you made me cry on Thanksgiving. That's cruel."

Pete grinned. He loved Ethan's soft heart. Lord knew between his temper and Brian's aloofness at times, they would need that soft heart to lean on when times were bad. "Let me get dressed and we'll go."

"Yeah, about that. I laid out another shirt for you to wear. I don't really think one that says *You're on My To Do List* is appropriate to wear around Benny."

With a dramatic sigh, Pete shook his head and released Ethan. He walked into the bedroom and picked up the white button-up shirt. "But this is boring."

"Please," Ethan begged, his big blue eyes looking up at Pete. "It's Thanksgiving, and I'm taking my camera with me. I really want a nice family picture of the four of us."

How could Pete resist? He leant down and kissed Ethan. "You win."

"Need some help?" Benny asked, walking into the kitchen.

"Sure, you could get that linen tablecloth of your mom's off the ironing board and set the table." Why he was nervous, Brian didn't understand. Pete and Ethan had been over at least twice a week for dinner since the night he'd almost lost Ethan, but this was different. Somehow celebrating a holiday together cemented their relationship in Brian's eyes.

Benny walked through the kitchen carrying the tablecloth. "I've been thinking..."

"Uh oh," Brian said with a chuckle.

Rolling his eyes, Benny continued to the adjoining dining room. "If you want to ask Pete and Ethan to go fishing with us on Sundays, I don't have a problem with it."

Brian couldn't help but smile. "That's okay. I like spending time alone with you. Maybe someday you'll actually tell me about that girl you've been sneaking off to see."

A crash from the dining room got Brian's attention. He dropped the spoon in his hand and rushed in. Benny held up one of his mom's china plates that had broken in three pieces.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to drop it," Benny rushed to say.

Brian reached for the pieces and shook his head. "It's okay. We've still got eleven more."

He could tell there was something wrong by Benny's expression. Brian pulled out a chair and sat down, placing the broken china on the table. "What's going on?"

"I don't think I like girls, Dad." Benny turned away from Brian and retrieved another plate out of the china cabinet.

The announcement came as a shock to Brian. Never had he suspected Benny might be gay. He remembered breaking the news of his sexuality to his parents and what a mess it had been. In one swoop, Brian had been cut out of their life, and even though they'd tried to reconcile with him once he'd married Leigh, Brian wasn't interested. "How do you feel about that?"

Benny shrugged. "Not sure."

Brian needed to ask the question, but damn, he wasn't sure he wanted to know the answer. "Have you done anything about these feelings you're having?"

"I kissed someone a couple of times, but that's as far as it went."

"Chase." Brian should've seen it coming. Benny seemed to spend a lot of time with the handsome quarterback.



"Yeah. He says he likes me, but I'm too young."

"Legally, you are. Chase is eighteen. He could get into trouble messing with a sixteen-year-old."

"Only if you or his mom objected," Benny was quick to add.

"You're right, but I'm not sure how I feel about it." Brian thought of the things he'd done as a teenager. Experimenting with sex could be a dangerous game, especially in today's world.

"There are guys in my class who've been banging girls for a couple of years. Why's this any different?"

Benny's statement made sense. It also made Brian face the real reason he didn't want to see Benny involved with someone. "Chase'll be going off to college soon. It's not so much the sex I have a problem with. It's seeing you get hurt that bothers me."

Benny nodded. "That's what Chase says too. He'll be staying in this gay dorm they have there. He says he doesn't want to feel like he's cheating on someone back home if he enjoys everything college has to offer."

Two points for Chase. "I think he's a pretty smart guy. You know he's just trying to protect you, right?"

Benny crossed his arms. "I think he just wants to let a million guys fuck him and not feel guilty about it."

"Maybe so. But at least he's being totally honest with you. That's a hell of a lot more than most guys would do."

The doorbell rang and Brian gave an inward thank you. "Why don't you let Pete and Ethan in, and we can talk more about this later."

"You're not mad at me, are you?" Benny asked before leaving the room.

"No way. I think I've learned the hard way that you have to follow your heart, no matter what direction it leads."

"Thanks."

Once Benny left to answer the door, Brian stared down at the broken pieces of china. The dishes always reminded him of the argument he'd had with Leigh when they'd picked them out. He wanted the simple white trimmed in silver pattern, but Leigh was dead set on getting the white with intricate gold scrolling around the rim. Brian traced the design with the tip of his finger. She'd been right, as usual.

"Uh oh, casualty?" Pete asked, coming into the dining room.

"Yep," Brian answered. He tipped his chin up for his welcoming kiss. "You've already been into the apple salad."

Pete smiled. "You won't blame me when you see it. Ethan added extra nuts and dried cranberries for the occasion."

Brian picked up the plate and carried the pieces to the kitchen trash. "Turkey's almost done, but then I have to put the stuffing in. I figured we could have a beer and watch some of the game."

"Sounds good," Pete said, wrapping his arms around Brian's waist.

Ethan and Benny came into the room carrying pies and bowls. Pete started to release his hold on Brian, but Brian pulled him back in. "Those look good," Brian said.

Ethan set the pumpkin, pecan and chocolate pies on the counter. "This chocolate one should go in the fridge if you have room."

Apple salad in hand, Benny opened the refrigerator before addressing Brian. "Can I put some of this pop and beer in a cooler?"

"Sure. There's one right inside the garage," Brian told him. He dug into his jeans pocket and tossed a set of keys towards Benny. "Why don't you run up the street and get a bag of ice?"

With a big smile on his face, Benny held up the keys. "You're gonna let me go by myself?"

"Sure, you're legal now. Just watch your speed."

Benny glanced at the bowl he'd set on the counter. "Will this be okay here until I get back?"

"Sure," Ethan answered.

Benny was out the door before anyone could say another word. Ethan looked at Pete. "Maybe I should ask Benny to teach me how to drive?"

Brian shook his head. "I don't think so. To be honest, Benny isn't that good of a driver. I think he passed the driving portion more on his charm than his driving ability."

"Then why'd you let him take your car?" Pete asked.

"So I can greet my two men properly," Brian answered before pulling Ethan into a group hug.

## **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.

Email: [carol@carol-lynn.net](mailto:carol@carol-lynn.net)

## **Also by Carol Lynne**

Campus Cravings: Coach  
Campus Cravings: Side-Lined  
Campus Cravings: Sacking the Quarterback  
Campus Cravings: Off-Season  
Campus Cravings: Forbidden Freshman  
Campus Cravings: Broken Pottery  
Campus Cravings: In Bear's Bed  
Campus Cravings: Office Advances  
Campus Cravings: A Biker's Vow  
Campus Cravings: Hershie's Kiss  
Campus Cravings: Theron's Return  
Campus Cravings: Live for Today  
Good Time Boys: Sonny's Salvation  
Good-time Boys: Garron's Gift  
Good-time Boys: Rawley's Redemption  
Good-time Boys: Twin Temptations  
Cattle Valley: All Play & No Work  
Cattle Valley: Cattle Valley Mistletoe  
Cattle Valley: Sweet Topping  
Cattle Valley: Rough Ride  
Cattle Valley: Physical Therapy  
Cattle Valley: Out of the Shadow  
Cattle Valley: Bad Boy Cowboy  
Cattle Valley: The Sound of White  
Cattle Valley: Gone Surfin'  
Cattle Valley: The Last Bouquet  
Cattle Valley: Eye of the Beholder  
Cattle Valley: Cattle Valley Days  
Cattle Valley: Bent-Not Broken  
Cattle Valley: Arm Candy  
Cattle Valley: Recipe for Love  
Cattle Valley: Firehouse Heat

Cattle Valley: Neil's Guardian Angel  
Cattle Valley: Scarred  
Cattle Valley: Making the Grade  
Karaoke at the Tumbleweed  
Legend Anthology: Healing Doctor Ryan  
Joey's First Time  
Between Two Lovers  
Corporate Passion  
Poker Night: Texas Hold Em  
Poker Night: Slow-Play  
Poker Night: Different Suits  
Poker Night: Full House  
Men in Love: Reunion  
Bodyguards in Love: Brier's Bargain  
Bodyguards in Love: Seb's Surrender  
Bodyguards in Love: I Love Rock N Roll  
Bodyguards in Love: Taming Black Dog Four  
Bodyguards in Love: Seducing the Sheik  
Bodyguards in Love: To Bed a King  
Neo's Realm: Liquid Crimson

**Also by Carol Lynne and T.A Chase**

Dracul's Revenge: Dracul's Blood  
Dracul's Revenge: Anarchy in Blood

Carol loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

# Total-E-Bound Publishing



[www.total-e-bound.com](http://www.total-e-bound.com)

Take a look at our exciting range of literagasmic™  
erotic romance titles and discover pure quality  
at Total-E-Bound.