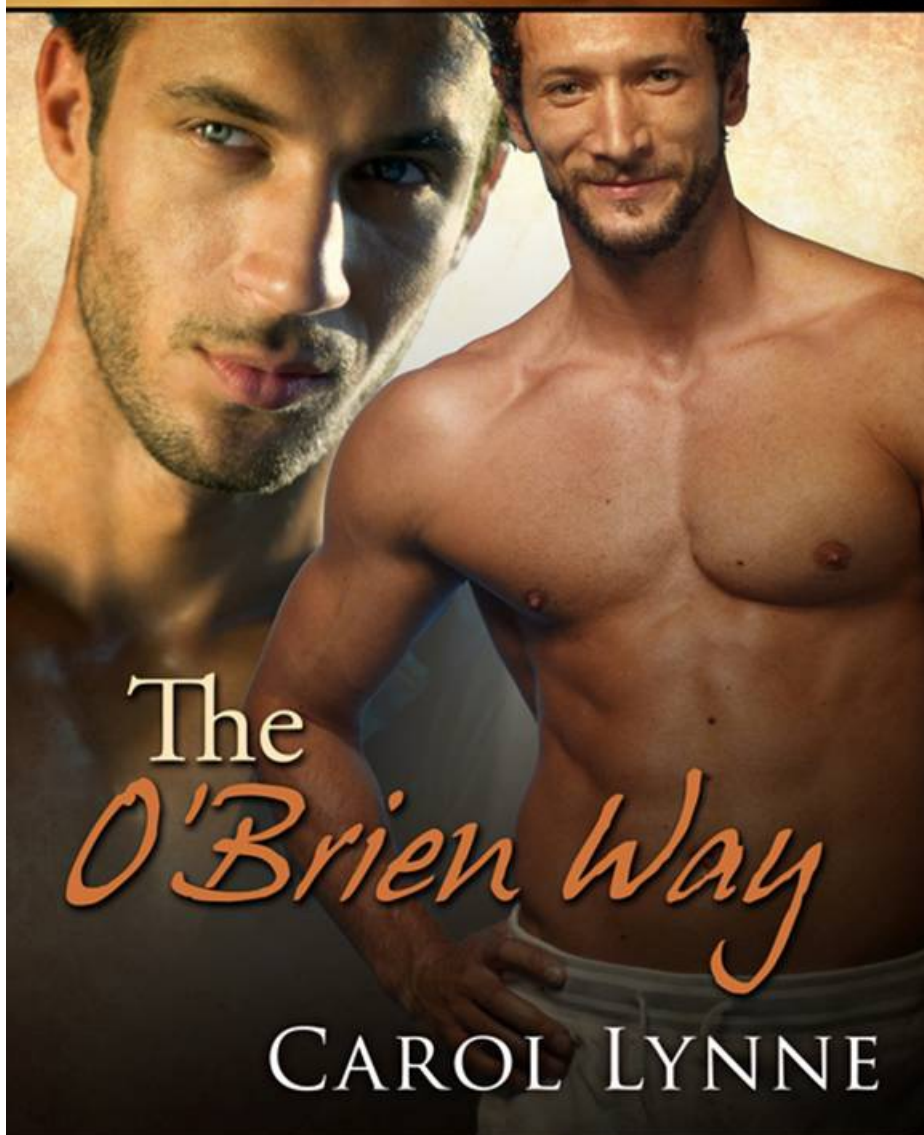




CATTLE  
VALLEY



The  
*O'Brien Way*

CAROL LYNNE

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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The O'Brien Way

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

**Cattle Valley**

**THE O'BRIEN WAY**

**Carol Lynne**

## *Dedication*

For Theresa Angelosanto. Thank you for always being there. I've leaned on you a lot this year, and I appreciate the solid shoulder you always have ready for me.

## *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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

Glee: Ryan Murphy Productions, 20th Century Fox Television

Miller Lite: Miller Products Company

Wal-Mart: Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

House Hunters: Pie Town Productions

Bruce Dickinson: Bruce Dickinson

# Chapter One

William 'Moby' Haines pulled on a faded sleeveless Bruce Dickinson T-shirt and his tightest low-rise jeans. It was a work night and there seemed to be a direct correlation between how sexy he dressed and the amount of tips he received. It didn't surprise him. He'd worked in Vegas for a number of years, dancing and stripping in the hottest strip show in town, right smack in the middle of the famous Vegas strip. It had been a hell of a life, full of money and a different man every night, but one phone call from the Sheridan Wyoming Police Department had changed everything.

Moby adjusted his cock inside his tight jeans and turned off the bedroom light. He found his mother, Virginia, still sitting at the kitchen table. "I'm getting ready to leave."

He looked at his mom's dinner plate. "Aren't you hungry?"

"I don't like being left alone," she said with a pout.

Moby bent over and kissed her cheek. "I know, but I have to work. Daddy left you with a lot of bills and it's up to me to take care of them."

"Don't you talk about Bill," Virginia reprimanded.

Moby bit his tongue and picked up his mom's plate. It wouldn't do any good to remind her of the years they'd been forced to be away from each other. The day he'd come out had been the last day he'd seen his mom until he'd been called home to Sheridan to make funeral arrangements.

"Mrs. Baines will be by around seven. She's looking forward to watching that television show you two enjoy."

"Glee," his mom reminded him. "It has a queer boy in it. You'd probably like it."

Moby rolled his eyes. "Gay."

"Huh?" Virginia asked, looking up at Moby.

"Gay boy, not queer." Moby grabbed his winter coat off the back of the kitchen chair and pulled it on.

"Sorry. I didn't mean anything by it," she said, the pout returning.

"I know you didn't." It had been one of the nicer words his dad had used to describe his son. Moby gave his mom one last kiss on the cheek. "I'll try not to wake you when I get home."

"I don't usually sleep well until I know you're home safely. I don't like you driving to that town every day. The weather's getting bad. What if you slide off the road or something?"

"I'm a good driver," he reminded her, slipping his feet into his snow boots.

"That's what Bill used to say, too, but do you remember that time he ran into the fire hydrant?"

Moby didn't bother reminding his mom that his dad was also ticketed and taken to jail for drunk driving. He decided to bring up a subject he'd been thinking about lately. "Have you ever thought of getting a dog or a cat?"

"Bill doesn't allow animals in the house," she reminded him.

"I know, but Dad's not here anymore, and I think it'd be nice to have a pet." He hoped it would give his mom the company she seemed to need. "Please, Mom. I've always wanted a dog."

Virginia tapped her fingers on the table for several seconds. "You'll have to clean up after it."

"I will," Moby agreed.

"And I won't have it on the furniture."

"Okay." Moby tried not to smile. He picked his keys up off the counter. "Maybe we can go tomorrow to the local shelter?"

"Tomorrow's grocery day," she reminded him.

"I know, but I think we can do both," he said on his way out of the door. Moby scraped the windshield and side windows as the rusty pickup did its best to heat up. Before pulling out, he grabbed the shovel out of the back of the truck and added a few more pounds of snow to the bed. He wished he'd had the money to get something with four-wheel drive, but the bulk of his savings had gone to his dad's funeral expenses and a few of the debts he'd left behind. Weight added to the truck, Moby pulled out of the driveway into the near-blinding storm.

He glanced at the watch taped to his dash and cringed. With the current weather conditions, he'd be lucky to make it to work on time. If he wanted to keep his job, Moby would have to adjust his schedule, not an easy task with a mother who needed him.

\* \* \* \*

Sean looked at the clock when Moby rushed into the bar. "You're late."

"Sorry. There was a wreck on the three-thirty-six." Moby took off his gloves, stuffing them into the pocket of his coat. "I'll leave earlier from now on. I've forgotten what Wyoming winters are like."

"Yeah, not much snow in Vegas." Sean's gaze went to Moby's body as he took off his coat. He was thankful the bar was between them to hide the effect Moby had on him. "Even though I have the heat turned up, it can still get cold in here with customers coming through the door all the time. You might think about wearing more clothes."

Moby ran a hand across his chest. "The tighter the clothes, the higher the tips, boss."

*Bingo.* It was the reason Sean wouldn't let himself be sucked in by Moby's sex appeal. "You can also earn tips by being a good waiter. You don't have to let these guys paw you to get them. And if I see it happening, I'll shut it down."

"It's not like I let them pull my cock out of my jeans or anything. If I don't have a problem with the occasional pat on the ass, I guess I'm not sure why you would."

"It's demeaning. Why can't you see that?" Sean questioned.

"Dude, I paraded around in nothing but a G-string for a living. Do you think I care that people look at me like a sex object?" Moby gestured to his body. "This is all I've got." He tapped his temple with his finger. "No one's ever wanted to pay me for what's up here, not that there's all that much."

Sean leaned his forearms on the top of the bar. Getting involved on a personal level wasn't something he had any intention of doing, but Moby's statement broke his heart. "You're more than your body, but until you realise that, no one will treat you differently."

The front door opened and a group of men came inside, all brushing snow from their arms and shoulders. "Hey," Wyn greeted with a wave.

Moby glanced over and stepped towards the kitchen. "I need to time in."

Sean gave an inward sigh. He'd run across men like Moby before. Sean might not know Moby's full story, but he suspected the man had never learned self-worth. Moby came out of the kitchen and went to work. Sean continued to watch Moby as he interacted with the men. There was a definite

difference in Moby when waiting on couples. It was the single men who came into the pub Sean was concerned with.

Sean shook his head. Why he was worried at all was bothersome. He'd finally got over his failed attempt at a relationship with Ryan Bronwyn. The last thing he needed was to start caring about a man like Moby Haines.

\* \* \* \*

Moby wasn't as upbeat as he thought he'd be while walking down the line of available dogs at the shelter. He'd hoped his mom would be at his side, helping to choose the newest member of the household. Unfortunately, she seemed indifferent to the idea of a pet.

As he walked down the aisle, Moby noticed the towels and blankets in the individual kennels. He'd never taken the time to think about it, but now he wondered how many towels the shelter went through on a given day. He thought of the packed boxes of blankets and towels in the attic. When he'd moved back home, Moby had replaced his mom's old and faded towels with the thick ones he'd brought from Vegas. His mom had a fit when he started to throw them away so he'd agreed to box them up.

He turned to the shelter volunteer who walked beside him. "Do you take donations of old towels and stuff?"

"Yeah," Cheryl said. "We'll take just about anything we can get. We're non-profit so we depend on donations."

Moby noticed a red tag on one of the kennels. "What's that mean?"

Cheryl's expression changed to one of concern. She squatted and did her best to pet the black Rottweiler mix through the cage. "Unfortunately, Jilly's time's up. We have a policy of euthanasia after six months. I know it seems cruel, but it's really not fair to the dog to be confined if they're not adopted by then."

Moby sank down in front of the kennel. He stuck his fingers through the cage and was surprised by the dog's friendly nature. "She seems sweet. Why hasn't she been adopted?"

Cheryl shrugged. "Her size. Her breed. Her age. They're all strikes against her. Most people who come in want a small dog or a puppy. Most of the time these older dogs get over-looked." She smiled at Moby. "Are you interested in her?"

Moby nodded. His mom would probably kill him, but he couldn't sit by while such a sweet dog was put to sleep. "Why's she here?"

"From what I understand, she grew up. Once she grew to seventy pounds, they moved her outside and refused to take care of her properly."

Moby stared into Jilly's dark brown eyes. They had a lot in common. Within those few seconds, a bond was formed, and Moby knew he couldn't walk away without her. "I'd like to adopt her."

Cheryl nodded. "Well, you've already filled out an application but there are a few more steps before we can allow you to take her."

"Okay, but starting the process will be enough to save her, right?"

"Yeah." Cheryl stood and retrieved a leash from a hook on the wall. "Why don't you take her for a walk in the back yard while I gather everything we'll need to get the process started."

"May I?" Moby asked, holding his hand out for the leash.



With a nod, Cheryl opened the kennel and passed the leash to Moby. She pointed towards the door at the end of the aisle. "Just take her through there. The yard is fenced, but it would be best to keep her on-leash until she's more comfortable with you."

After securing the leash to Jilly's collar, Moby opened the kennel fully, getting an even better look at his new pet. "You're a beauty."

Jilly stood on her hind legs and began bathing Moby's face with her tongue. "She likes you," Cheryl said.

Moby rubbed Jilly's face and neck for several seconds. "Down," he commanded. Jilly continued to lick Moby's face.

"Sit," Cheryl said.

Jilly released her hold on Moby and sat. "Cool. I was afraid we might have a few problems there for a second."

"She's house and leash trained and can understand basic commands. The only thing she still has to work on is her confidence. She tends to curl into a ball at loud noises."

Moby reached down and petted Jilly's side. "Ready to go for a walk?"

Jilly's stubby tail began to wag back and forth. Moby led her towards the yard, feeling better than he had in a long time. He hoped his mom would adjust to such a large dog because he already knew he wouldn't get rid of her.

After walking Jilly for several minutes, he found a bench and sat down. The large Rottweiler climbed up on the bench and laid her head in Moby's lap. "Such a sweet girl," Moby crooned, scratching the area around her ears.

"All you need is love, isn't it?" He realised he had more in common with Jilly than just being kicked out of the house. How was it possible that he could bond with a dog so fast while making that kind of a connection with another man had always eluded him?

"Mr. Haines? I have the paperwork ready if you are?"

Moby smiled at Cheryl. "More than ready."

\* \* \* \*

"Hey, Sean, do you know a good vet?" Moby asked, taking a seat at the bar during a break.

"I didn't think you were taking that dog home until Friday." Moby had talked about little else since the day before.

"I'm not, but I have to give the shelter the name and number of the vet I'm planning to use as a condition of the adoption."

"

*Well Dr.*

Garza's a good man, but he's here in CattleValley. You need to find someone in Sheridan," Sean explained.

"But I can't trust her to just anyone. It won't be a big deal to bring her here for shots and stuff."

Sean stared at the handsome man. There was a sparkle in Moby's eyes that hadn't been present

before. "That's true, but what if Jilly gets sick in the middle of the night or something? You'll want to find someone you trust close to your house in case of an emergency."

Moby's dark eyebrows rose. "I hadn't even thought of that." He rubbed the back of his neck. "There's a lot more to this than just loving her, isn't there?"

Sean nodded. "I used to have a bulldog back in Boston, but I eventually realised I didn't have enough time for him. It wasn't that I didn't love him or want to take care of him, but I simply wasn't home enough. Giving attention to a pet is as important as feeding it."

"So you just gave him away?" Moby asked.

Sean pushed back and went to the large bulletin board beside the bar. He pulled a thumbtack out of a Christmas card and handed it to Moby. "That's Duke. I gave him to my best friend and his family. They send me a picture of him every year."

Moby smiled as he stared at the picture of the large bulldog in the Santa hat. "Cute."

Sean agreed. "Like I said, it wasn't that I didn't love Duke, but sometimes the nicest thing you can do is give someone else a chance to give an animal what you can't." He gestured to the picture. "I made the right choice."

Moby handed the card back. "Are you trying to tell me I shouldn't bring Jilly home?"

"Not at all. I think it's great that you have the time and desire to give Jilly the love she deserves. I was just telling you why I had to give *my* dog away. I didn't mean to make you feel like I disapproved in any way."

Sean could tell he hadn't convinced Moby that he'd meant no harm. "Maybe on one of your days off, you could bring Jilly down so I could meet her?"

A grin appeared on Moby's gorgeous mouth. "I'd like that."

"Maybe you could bring your mother, too," Sean suggested.

Moby's face fell. "Nah. She seems okay with me now that Dad's gone, but Mom's not accepting of my lifestyle. I doubt I'd be able to get her inside CattleValley city limits."

At last Sean got a peek into Moby's home life. He wondered how bad it had got at Moby's house while he was growing up. Sean decided to share a piece of his past. "My dad and brothers don't understand me either. I never thought of myself as feminine, but they've always treated me like I didn't belong in the family."

"There's nothing feminine about you."

"Good to hear," Sean said with a chuckle. He carried the Christmas card back to the bulletin board and secured it with the push pin. The door opened and several men who worked at the EZ Does It ranch came in, slapping snow from their coats.

Sean was grateful for the customers. Talking with Moby was too easy and sooner or later, Sean knew the good-looking guy would begin to work himself under his skin.

\* \* \* \*

"Hey, boss, you feel okay?" Jay asked.

Sean rubbed his forehead and shook his head. He'd hoped all morning his stomach would settle before he opened the pub, but if anything, he was getting sicker. "I feel like shit."

"Go back upstairs. I'm sure we can handle things for one night."

Sean shook his head. "There's no one to tend the bar."

Jay tried to urge Sean towards the door to his apartment. "I'll call one of Erico's back-up bartenders. Go on. The last thing you want is to spread something nasty to one of your customers."

Since relocating to CattleValley, Sean had only missed three days of work, the day of the grandstand collapse, one for the community-wide memorial service and the day after Ryan Bronwyn picked up and left town when things between them started getting serious. Maybe he was due. Sean wondered what the rest of the O'Brien clan would think of him for giving in to his body's demands for rest on a work day. *Do I care?*

"See if you can get someone to fill in for me. Until then, I'll stick it out," Sean told Jay.

Jay pulled out his phone and walked into the kitchen. He was back several moments later with a smile on his face. "Go on to bed. Smitty's on his way."

"Smitty? I thought he was still working at The Gym?"

"He is, but since he graduated from college, he's been moonlighting at The Canoe as a bartender." Jay grinned. "He's a good-looking guy."

"Yeah," Sean agreed. Why that bothered him, he couldn't say.

"I'll keep him away from Moby," Jay added with a chuckle.

Sean absently rubbed his stomach. The statement struck too close to home and he didn't like it. "Why would I care?"

Although Jay grinned, he shook his head. "No reason."

"Don't go getting ideas in your head about me and Moby. It's not gonna happen. I've learned my lesson about falling for screwed up men."

"Ryan was a mess. There's no denying that, but you did everything you could to help him deal with his issues."

"Issues? Ryan had more than issues. He had a mother who brow-beat him to the point the man couldn't make a single decision on his own." Sean glanced up as Moby walked into the pub. It didn't matter how attracted to the man he was, Sean was finished with momma's boys.

Sean gestured towards the door of his apartment above the pub. "I'm going to go on upstairs. Let me know if you need me."

"Will do. I'll make up a batch of my special chicken noodle soup for you," Jay told Sean.

"Don't go to any trouble. You'll probably have your hands full down here."

"It's Wednesday. I'll have time," Jay countered.

"What's going on?" Moby asked, shedding his coat and hat.

"Sean's sick. I finally managed to convince him to go upstairs and sleep," Jay said.

Moby's dark eyebrows drew together. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Sean didn't like the concern in Moby's pale green eyes. It would be far too easy to take Moby's concern for true caring. *Nope, not travelling down that road again.* "I'll be fine. I just need a few hours of sleep."

Moby continued to watch Sean but eventually nodded. "Well, I'm here if you need anything."

Sean broke eye contact and addressed Jay. "Can you fill Smitty in on the way I do things?"

Jay laughed. "Yeah. I'll instruct him on *The O'Brien Way* of serving customers."

"Laugh all you want, but *The O'Brien Way* has proved successful for generations," Sean grumbled as he pushed through the kitchen door. He was on his way upstairs when the bile started to rise in his throat. With no time to spare, Sean ran into his apartment and straight to the bathroom.

After emptying his stomach, Sean laid on the bathroom floor, his heated cheek soothed by the cool tiles. Maybe if he didn't move, the churning in his gut would settle. "Kill me now," he groaned, sitting up to heave once more.

\* \* \* \*

Although an evening without Sean looking over his shoulder would've been the perfect time to flirt his way to bigger tips, Moby's heart just wasn't in it. He couldn't get the grey pallor of Sean's skin off his mind.

"Have you checked on Sean?" he asked Jay.

Jay shook his head. "There're two kinds of men. Those, like Erico, who enjoy being babied when they're sick and those, like Sean, who'd prefer to be left the hell alone."

"But he really looked terrible. What if he's sicker than we thought?" Moby looked towards the ceiling. "Maybe he's up there suffering because he doesn't feel comfortable asking for help."

Jay grinned. "I'll make a cup of tea and some dry toast and you can take it up."

"Me?" Although Moby had worried about Sean all evening, he doubted his boss would appreciate him delivering food to his sickbed. "Maybe you should do it. He likes you."

Jay reached out and squeezed Moby's shoulder. "He likes you, too. He's just too damn stubborn to admit it."

While Moby pondered the meaning of Jay's statement, the last customer left. Smitty had gone home after last call which left Jay, Moby and Sean in the building. Moby followed Jay into the kitchen. "Are you gonna stick around until after I check on Sean?"

Jay set a large cup of tea on a tray along with two pieces of dry toast. "Erico's going nuts that I've stayed this long. I'm usually home by nine-thirty during the week. Would you mind if I just left you a key to lock up?"

Moby bit the inside of his cheek. He'd feel a lot better if he knew Jay was downstairs. What if Sean got angry that Moby had been left alone in the pub? Although Moby had never been in love, he melted every time Jay spoke of his life with Erico. What kind of man would he be if he kept the two lovers apart just because he was afraid of being alone with Sean?

"Okay," he agreed. "If he fires me, it'll be up to you to help me find another job."

## Chapter Two

Moby steadied the tray as he opened the door and walked upstairs. "Sean?" he called upon entering the apartment. The room was open and inviting with gleaming wood floors and beams overhead. "Sean?"

Moby heard what sounded like a muffled reply from the opposite end of the apartment and walked towards it. "I brought you some tea."

"No," Sean grumbled.

Instead of being in a comfortable bed, Sean was curled in on himself on the bathroom floor, a large towel wrapped around his shaking body. Moby set the tray on the sink and rushed to Sean's side. The heat emanating from his boss was unbelievable. "You're burning up."

"Freezing," Sean said through chattering teeth.

Despite Sean's statement, Moby knew he had to get Sean's fever down. Without a bathtub to cool Sean's heated skin, Moby had little choice but to get Sean into the small tiled shower. Although roughly the same height, Sean was a hell of a lot more muscular, making him outweigh Moby by at least twenty pounds.

Moby pulled Sean's makeshift blanket from his hands. "You need to get in the shower."

Sean shook his head. "I'm going to throw up again." He managed to push up to a sitting position and heaved bile into the toilet.

Grabbing up the towel, Moby turned on the shower and soaked the plush terrycloth with cool water. He wrung out the towel and carried it back to Sean who had begun a series of dry heaves.

Despite the sweat soaking through his shirt, Sean growled and tried to push the cool towel away from his shivering body.

"No," Moby said, wrapping his arms around Sean's torso to keep the towel in place. "We've got to get your fever down or call an ambulance."

"No ambulance," Sean managed to say into the depths of the toilet bowl.

"Then work with me to lower your body temperature," Moby pleaded.

Sean nodded and, with Moby's help, turned to crawl towards the shower. Moby knew the cool shower wouldn't be comfortable for Sean and decided to hold the shivering man. He reached up and turned on the spray, letting out a momentary yelp when the cold water hit him.

"Sorry," Moby tried to apologise. As Sean's tremors grew stronger, Moby began to question his approach. "Maybe I should call someone."

Sean shook his head and pressed himself against Moby. Despite the cold water raining down on them, Moby could still feel the heat of Sean's skin through his wet T-shirt.

Moby wrapped his arms around Sean and held the bigger man as he continued to shake. After ten minutes, Moby reached up and turned off the water. It would be a few minutes before he could take an accurate temperature, but now the important thing was getting fluids and pain relievers into Sean.

"I'll get us some towels," he said, releasing Sean. Before climbing out of the shower, Moby pulled off his shoes, shirt and jeans. The cold wet underwear clung to his cock uncomfortably, but he didn't dare strip out of them, not yet anyway.

After grabbing several towels from the shelf, he turned back to Sean. "We need to get you out of those clothes." As Moby tried to pull the sodden jeans down and off, Sean began to retch once again. "Hang on," Moby said, helping Sean towards the toilet.

Giving Sean a few moments of privacy, Moby turned his back and quickly dried off, slipping out of his underwear and wrapping a towel around his waist. When he turned around, Sean was resting his cheek on the porcelain bowl, watching him.

"Sorry about this," Sean mumbled, wiping his mouth.

Moby knelt beside Sean and started drying his back, head and neck. "Don't apologise. Everyone gets sick."

"Not me. Not usually." Sean allowed Moby to help him to his feet.

Before leaving the bathroom, Moby grabbed the trashcan. He rested his free hand on the small of Sean's back to steady his boss as they made their way across the hall to the bedroom. The tall four-poster antique bed surprised him. "Wow, that's quite a bed."

"It was my great granddad's." Sean took a seat on a straight backed chair in the corner and gestured to the dresser. "Would you mind handing me a pair of shorts outta the top drawer?"

Moby set the trashcan down beside the bed and crossed to the dresser. He opened the drawer and pulled out a pair of black briefs. Plundering Sean's underwear wasn't his goal, but he couldn't help running his hand over a silky pair of boxers with red lips on them. The smile was hard to hide as he shut the drawer and walked back to Sean.

With a blanket across his lap, Sean held out his hand to accept the briefs. "Thanks."

Moby bent and retrieved the wet underwear Sean had removed. "Do you have a dryer?"

Sean nodded. "Room behind the kitchen."

"Mind if I toss the clothes in?" Moby asked.

"Sure, go ahead." Sean continued to sit with his underwear in his hand, obviously waiting for Moby to give him some privacy. Although Sean's teeth still chattered, his colour looked better.

Moby stepped forward and felt Sean's forehead, moving his hand down to cup the man's cheek. "You'd better get in bed. You're still too warm."

"Could've fooled me." Visibly shivering, Sean held the blanket in front of his groin as he made his way towards the bed.

Moby moved to pull the blankets down and helped steady Sean as he sat on the mattress. Sean dropped the dry underwear beside the bed and crawled under the covers. Although it was just a glimpse, Moby noticed the red hair surrounding Sean's flaccid cock. It was a shade darker than the hair on his head but just as curly. Staring at the heavily muscled chest right in front of him made Moby's mouth water. The urge to explore Sean's body was incredible, but Moby turned and walked towards the door. "I'll throw these in the dryer and get you something to drink. Your fever might be down but it won't stay that way for long unless we get some fluid and medicine in you."

Sean pulled the covers up around his neck. "Whatever goes in is just gonna come right back up."

"At least then you'll actually have something to throw up." He left the room and retrieved the tray along with the wet piles of clothing from the bathroom. Calling his mom at two-thirty in the morning wasn't something he looked forward to, but Moby knew she'd worry if he didn't.

\* \* \* \*

Sean let out a groan as soon as he was left alone. Although it felt nice to have someone take care of him, why did it have to be Moby? The attraction was there, no doubt about it, but Sean had resisted Moby's allure by telling himself his employee was a shallow, self-absorbed player. It was Moby's kindness that Sean feared would be his undoing.

He buried his face in his pillow as another round of nausea hit him. *I will not throwup.* The thought of Moby scrubbing the trashcan was heavy incentive to keep the bile in his stomach.

A clattering came from the kitchen followed by a string of cuss words. Sean couldn't help but grin as he pictured Moby trying to navigate the kitchen. It was doubtful a man who looked like Moby had spent much time in a domestic setting, but Sean found the prospect of Moby in that role sexy as hell.

"What the hell?" Even sick he couldn't push his attraction to Moby aside. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the ill-fated relationship with Ryan. The two men couldn't be more different in so many ways. It seemed Moby thrived on being touched by everyone, while Ryan wasn't affectionate at all, even with Sean.

The majority of the arguments between them had been Sean's desire to touch and cuddle the man he loved. He didn't need a psychiatrist to tell him he was trying to make up for the lack of affection growing up. Sean had figured that much out years earlier. He knew sex with Moby would be everything he desired, but sharing the object of his lust wasn't something he could do. Moby wasn't the kind of man even Sean could tame.

*Why the hell am I even thinking about this?* It wouldn't work, period. Besides Moby's desire to do anything to bring in bigger tips, there was the whole mother issue to consider. Sean's body shivered, but not from his illness. Ryan's mom had been a real piece of work. She'd stuck her pointy nose into his relationship with Ryan too many times. Always calling to tell Ryan she'd had dinner with his ex and how good the two of them had been together. Florence Bronwyn had made it clear the first time she'd met Sean that he came up lacking in her eyes, and she wasn't afraid to continually point that out to her son.

*No. I will never put myself through that kind of scrutiny again.*

The door opened and Moby stepped into the room carrying a tray from the pub. "Oh good, you're still awake. Hope you don't mind, but I borrowed your robe from the bathroom. I had to throw out the tea and toast Jay made, but I made you something else."

"I don't mind."

Moby smiled. "I wasn't sure if I should make you something hot or cold so I brought both."

Sean looked at the bowl on the tray. "I have chicken broth in the house?"

Moby set the tray down and turned on the small dresser lamp. "No. I hope you don't mind, but I drained one of the cans of chicken noodle soup that was in the cupboard and added water to it."

Sean was surprised at Moby's apparent uncertainty. "I thought you were used to taking care of sick people."

Moby's eyes rounded. "What gave you that idea? This is all new to me."

"What about the cold shower thing?" Sean asked.

"I saw that on TV." Moby stood beside the bed looking embarrassed at his admission.

"What about your mom? I thought she was sick?"

"My mom? No. I don't know if she's ever been sick a day in her life."

Sean leaned up on an elbow and reached for the water. He looked at Moby over the rim of the glass. Setting it down, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Why did I think she was sick?"

"I don't know." Moby sat on the edge of the bed. "I mean, I live with her. I came back here after

Dad died to help take care of her, but it has nothing to do with her being ill.”

“Then why would you give up your fancy life in Vegas to move back to Sheridan?” Sean’s head began to spin, so he lay back down, nestling into the down pillow. He watched as Moby began to rub the robe’s belt between his thumb and middle finger.

“It’s the everyday stuff Mom can’t handle. My dad was a drunk and a control freak. He never allowed Mom to work or have access to money. He handled everything. I think it was his way of making sure she couldn’t leave.” Moby shook his head. “I hated that sonofabitch. They were married for forty-two years and in that time he convinced my mom she couldn’t survive without him. Then the bastard up and died, leaving her with a pile of unpaid bills and no way of taking care of herself. She gets his social security money, but with him only working on and off, it isn’t much.”

“Is she physically able to work?” Sean asked. He resisted the desire to reach out and comfort Moby.

“Physically? Yeah, but she’ll be sixty-one in a couple of months. Who’s going to hire a woman that old who’s never worked a day in her life?” Moby sighed. “I tried to convince her to return with me to Vegas, but she wouldn’t hear of it. So I made the decision to move back to Sheridan. I hate it, but I love my mom despite the years my dad kept us apart.”

Sean didn’t know what to say. He didn’t understand a bond so strong that a person would give up everything. It must be a mom thing. He’d never had one, so maybe he just didn’t get it. Sean thought of Ryan’s unusual relationship with his mother.

“You think I’m a sucker for taking care of her, don’t you?” Moby asked, breaking into the silence that had fallen between them.

“No. I guess I just don’t understand it. My mom died when I was born, and I never had that kind of connection with my dad or brothers.”

“Sorry to hear about your mom,” Moby said.

With his stomach settled, Sean reached for the aspirin on the tray. “I didn’t tell you so you’d feel sorry for me. You can’t miss what you never had.” He popped the pills into his mouth and washed them down with another drink. “Is your mom affectionate with you?”

“You mean does she hug me and stuff?”

“Yeah.”

“No. But I know she loves me. Dad just screwed up her way of thinking after he kicked me out of the house. She’s slowly coming around though. I know she likes me to be home with her, so that’s something.”

“I guess so,” Sean replied.

Moby stretched out and felt Sean’s forehead. When his hand slid down to Sean’s cheek, Sean closed his eyes and leaned into the touch.

“I think your fever’s going down.”

When Moby didn’t remove his hand, Sean opened his eyes. They stared at each other for several moments before Moby eventually pulled away. “My clothes are probably dry. I should head home and let you get some sleep.”

“Are you sure you’re okay to drive?” Sean asked. He wanted to ask Moby to spend the night but was afraid it was the fever talking.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. Mom may be able to take care of herself but Jilly’s another story. I imagine she’s crossing her legs by now.”

“Can’t your mom let Jilly out?” Sean asked.



Moby shook his head. "I didn't realise until Jilly got out of the yard the first time that a large section of the privacy fence was rotten. Until I get the money to fix it, she has to be walked on a leash. Mom isn't strong enough to control her."

"Sounds like you need to enrol Jilly in an obedience class."

"Yeah, I'll get right on that in all my spare time," Moby said with a chuckle. "Until then, I don't mind walking her. It gives me a chance to get out of the house and unwind."

Faced with the thought of Moby leaving, Sean reached out and rested his hand on the other man's thigh. He wasn't sure how to put into words what he felt at the moment. "No one's ever taken care of me like you did tonight. Thanks."

Moby covered Sean's hand. "I find that hard to believe."

"Nope, it's the truth. As a matter of fact, if you didn't work for me, I'd probably ask you out right now."

"That's another one of those O'Brien rules, huh?"

"Yeah. I know everyone laughs at my rules but they've been proven to work."

Moby readjusted the robe. "Then it's too bad because I'd love to get to know you better. Unfortunately I can't afford to quit my job."

Sean nodded. "I understand." And he did, so why did he feel so damn disappointed? He knew it would probably be the last time the two of them had a tender moment and he couldn't let it slip by without one more thing. Sean pushed himself to a sitting position and pulled Moby into his arms. He buried his face against the other man's neck and lightly kissed it. "I'd kiss you for real if I weren't afraid of getting you sick."

"And I'd let you if you'd felt like brushing your teeth," Moby said, adding humour into the somewhat awkward moment.

Sean chuckled and gave Moby one last kiss before releasing him. "I won't forget what you've done for me tonight."

"Thanks for not throwing me out the moment I came in," Moby replied.

Sean shook his head. "I wouldn't have done that."

"Good to know."

\* \* \* \*

After his afternoon jog with Jilly, Moby started dinner. He heard his mom enter the room and glanced over his shoulder. "I found a great deal on pork chops so I picked up two for dinner."

"I don't like pork chops," Virginia said.

Moby rinsed his hands and pulled a couple of paper towels off the roll. "What? We used to have pork chops at least twice a week while I was growing up."

"Bill liked them."

Moby turned back towards the counter and squeezed his eyes shut. "Will you eat one this evening if I make it?"

"Is there anything else?" Virginia asked.

"Not really."

"Then I guess I will," she answered on her way out of the kitchen.

Moby wiped his face with the paper towel before tossing it into the trash. When he'd moved in, he thought he was doing his mom a favour by offering to cook a couple of times a week, but it seemed he always managed to get it wrong.

He opened the fridge and stared down at the pork chops. He'd been so excited to find them in the sales circular that he'd travelled across town to a different grocery store to get them. Unfortunately, they no longer held the appeal they once had.

Pulling the package out of the refrigerator, Moby started preparing them. After opening the package, he gave the chops a quick rinse before patting them dry with a paper towel. As he seasoned the meat, he decided he would stop trying to impress his mom with his self-taught cooking skills. From then on it would be pizza or take-out when it was his turn to take care of dinner.

As he worked to prepare the pork chops and wild rice, his thoughts went to Sean. It had been a week since he'd found his boss on the floor of the bathroom. The days since had been awkward to say the least. Every shift was a test of Moby's control. To make it worse, Moby could tell Sean was having the same problem.

The attraction between them was intense, leading Moby to question the wisdom of *The O'Brien Way* of business. Quitting a job that paid more than anything he was qualified for in Sheridan just wasn't an option.

Moby glanced outside and shook his head. The snow was coming down like crazy. He wondered if he'd still be able to fix the fence on his day off. He'd finally saved enough for the panels, which were currently keeping dry in the garage, but getting someone to help him in a blizzard wouldn't be as easy. Jay was out of the question. Although he loved his new friend, he needed someone with strength. With the weight of the fence panels and the blowing wind, it would take someone with some muscle. *Sean*. Sure, his boss had the muscle he needed and more, but would he be willing to drive all the way to Sheridan to help him?

Once dinner was prepared, Moby walked into the living room to tell his mom. He was surprised to find Jilly on the sofa beside her. "Jilly! Get down," he ordered, snapping his fingers.

Jilly immediately jumped off the couch and went to her large dog bed. "Sorry, Mom."

"Don't be sorry. I told her she could get up here."

That was a new development. Instead of arguing, Moby went to the linen closet and pulled out an old blanket. He spread it out on the couch and glanced at Jilly. "From now on make her lay on that."

Virginia shrugged.

"Dinner's ready," Moby said, heading back to the kitchen. He waited for his mom to join him before pulling out the chair for her. "Christmas is just around the corner and you still haven't told me what you want Santa to bring you."

Moby took a seat and waited for his mom's answer. He watched her take a bite of the wild rice and nod her acceptance. "There has to be something," he prompted.

Virginia closed her eyes and shook her head. "The only thing I want, you can't give me."

Moby reached over and put his hand on his mom's thin arm. "I'm sorry. I can't bring Dad back."

Virginia opened her eyes, their depths still swimming with moisture. "Grandchildren."

It was the first time his mom had mentioned her desire for grandchildren. He wondered if that, more than anything, was the reason she'd reacted to his sexuality like she had. The really hard part was trying to understand why his mom wanted grandchildren. Although she hadn't been a bad mother, she hadn't been overly attentive either. "Sorry. Maybe you should've had more than one kid."

"I wanted to, but Bill said one was plenty," she mumbled, cutting a small piece of meat from the

pork chop.

Moby noticed she didn't eat the bite, just let it sit on her plate. "I didn't know. I assumed neither of you wanted more. I mean, it's not like you really took the time to lavish attention on me." Yeah, his bitterness was still in place, but dammit, hearing his mom say she wanted more children pissed him off.

Virginia shook her head. "If I'd had the time and support, I would've had an entire houseful." She set her fork down and reached across the table to squeeze Moby's hand. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" he asked, dropping his fork to hold her hand in return.

"Bill required a lot of attention." Virginia used her free hand to wipe the tears from the corners of her big green eyes. "I was so busy being a wife. I didn't have the time to be the kind of mother you deserved."

Although it hurt, Moby was relieved to hear his mom admit what he'd always felt to be the case. "Well, you have me now, and Dad's no longer here to come between us. Maybe instead of resenting me for being here, we could try to become friends."

Virginia looked shocked. "I don't resent you for being here. I resent the fact that you *have* to be here. I'm a grown woman who should be able to do all this stuff on her own, but I let myself get into a position that I don't know how to get out of."

"If you'd like, I could teach you some of the basics like budgeting and how to balance a cheque book?"

Virginia's face lit up. "You'd do that? Do you think I could really do it?"

Moby nodded and stood to lean over the table. He kissed his mom's cheek and smiled. "I think you can master anything you put your mind to."

Virginia cupped Moby's cheek. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Mom."

## Chapter Three

Moby felt a hand on his ass and glanced down at Lorenzo. The touch became a painful squeeze. "You do a whole lot of groping and very little tipping."

"What're you saying? I gotta pay to play?" Lorenzo asked.

"Something like that." Moby set down the pitcher of beer and a frosted glass. He gestured towards the bar. "One word and Sean would toss you out on your ass."

"Only if you say something to him," Lorenzo said.

"You're right. So do yourself a favour and take your hand off my ass." Moby waited until Lorenzo released his hold. "Thank you. Flag me down if you need a refill." He carried his empty tray back to the bar to pick up another order.

"Problem?" Sean asked, setting a gin and tonic on the tray along with two beers.

Moby leaned against the bar and shook his head. "Nothing I can't deal with."

Sean mimicked Moby's position and stared into his eyes. "You shouldn't have to deal with harassment. You're a damn good waiter."

"And you're too damn sexy for your own good," Moby said, winking. He hadn't been able to get Sean out of his head and it was becoming a real problem at work. Moby decided to ask the question that had plagued him since the night he took care of Sean. "Would you really go out with me if I didn't work here?"

Sean's eyes narrowed. "Why're you asking? You planning to quit?"

Moby moved closer, standing on his tip toes. With his mouth an inch from Sean's, he smiled. "Are you worth it?"

Sean's nostrils flared. "You'd better believe it."

Moby closed the distance and let his lips brush Sean's. He pulled away and shook his head. "Too bad I'm not worth breaking the O'Brien code for." He picked up the tray of drinks and walked away from the bar. The hair on the back of his neck prickled as he felt Sean's gaze follow him through the crowd. Hopefully it would give his boss something to think about. If Moby had to suffer his attraction, so should Sean.

\* \* \* \*

"Kitchen's shut down," Jay told Sean.

Sean nodded. His run-in with Moby earlier in the evening continued to plague him. "Have a good night."

"You know," Jay began, leaning his back against the bar to face Sean, "Moby asked me if Erico was hiring."

Sean's jaw clenched. "What'd you tell him?"

"I lied and told him no."

"Why'd you do that?" Sean questioned. If Moby went to work for Erico, Sean would be all over him in a heartbeat.

"Because he belongs here and we both know it." Jay looked up at Sean in a pleading manner. "He's not Ryan."

Sean's gaze drifted across the bar to Moby. The gorgeous man was laughing with a table of stragglers. "What do you expect me to do, take him to my bed for a couple of weeks until he gets bored and moves on? Do you think it'd be easy for me to watch him suck up to every man who walks through that door after that?" Sean shook his head. "I'm not made that way."

Jay walked back towards the kitchen and motioned for Sean to follow him. With a resigned sigh, Sean did just that. "What?" he asked as soon as they were alone.

"You're judging Moby unfairly."

"Really? Have you not seen the way he behaves? He lets those guys paw all over him. And for what, a couple extra bucks?"

Jay pulled the ponytail holder from his hair and shook his head. "That's all he knows. He was kicked out of his house at eighteen. As far as he's concerned, the only thing he has going for him are his looks. His life in Vegas, making big money by stripping, has only proved what he's felt about himself all along." Jay put his hand over his heart. "No one's ever shown him he's worth more than the size of his cock."

While Sean let that sink in, Jay shrugged into his coat. "I'm outta here. I'm going home to my own ex-playboy. Who, by the way, has morphed into an incredibly loving and devoted partner."

"Can I take off?" Kitty asked, coming into the kitchen.

"Sure," Sean answered, his thoughts still a million miles away. It wasn't until Kitty left that he realised he was alone with Moby.

He ran his fingers through the unruly curls on his head and pushed through the swinging door to the bar. Moby was bussing the last table. The rest of the room had already been prepared, complete with chairs upside down on the tables. Jay had been right. Moby was a hell of an employee. Did he dare risk breaking the O'Brien rules that had been drilled into him since he was a child?

Sean filled the bar sink with hot, soapy water. He continued to watch Moby as he washed the few remaining glasses.

"Here's a few more," Moby said, bringing a tray of dishes to the bar.

"Thanks." Sean took the dishes. "You can go on home. I'll finish up in here."

Moby shook his head and disappeared into the kitchen. He was back a moment later with a broom. "I've had a good night. I don't mind staying to finish."

Sean shoved his hand inside a glass with more force than necessary. "Shit!" he yelled when the glass broke and dug painfully into his hand. Lifting his hand out of the dishwasher, Sean reached for a towel.

Moby got to it first. "What happened?" he asked, wrapping the towel around Sean's injured hand.

"Glass broke," Sean explained. "That's okay. I got it." He tried to pull his hand away, but Moby held on.

"Just hang on a damn minute," Moby admonished, lifting the corner of the towel to look at the cut. "You should probably have it checked."

Despite the stinging cut, Moby's touch concerned Sean more than his injured hand. "I've got bandages in the first aid kit by the time clock."

Moby's lips thinned into a tight line. "Put pressure right here," he instructed.

"I know how the hell to get the bleeding stopped," Sean snapped. It was the second time in as many weeks that Moby had shown real concern for Sean's welfare. Sean applied pressure to his hand as Moby went in search of the bandages. His dick was so hard he was surprised he had enough blood left in his hand to even bleed.

The door swung open and Moby set the white metal kit on the bar. "Maybe we should go into the bathroom," Sean suggested.

"Makes sense." Moby picked up the box and headed towards the men's restroom.

It wasn't until he rounded the end of the bar that Sean realised his desire for Moby would be exposed. "Maybe it would be better to do it here. After all, there's probably less germs."

Moby stopped and turned around. "Make up your mind."

Sean slid behind the bar once more. "Here. Here's good."

Moby rejoined Sean and let the bloody water out of the sink.

"Careful, there are still pieces of glass in there," Sean warned.

Moby grinned. "Worried about me?" He picked the large pieces of glass from the sink and tossed them into a nearby trashcan. "We need to run water over the wound before we bandage it."

"I know. I'm not stupid," Sean growled. Sure he was being a dick, but Moby's tenderness threatened every ounce of his control. How much longer could he fight his attraction?

Sean pulled off the towel and stuck his hand under the running water. It was easy to see he'd been right about the cut. Stitches weren't needed but it would be sore for a week or so. He pulled his hand out of the water. "Dry it off. Wrap it up. It'll be fine."

Moby looked at Sean and rolled his eyes. "I don't know who you're trying to be tough for, but I can only imagine how much this hurts. So just shut up and let me take care of it."

"I can't help it, you make me nervous," Sean said without thinking as Moby bandaged his hand.

A lopsided grin transformed Moby's handsome face to one of a sultry male on the prowl. *Oh fuck.* Sean tried to pull his hand away, but Moby was too quick.

Moby took a step forward, pressing himself against Sean. He reached between them and palmed the front of Sean's jeans. "I'm having the same problem."

Sean tried to turn his head away when Moby's lips skimmed over his cheek towards his mouth. He closed his eyes when Moby latched onto his bottom lip and sucked. Sean's need took over. He reached out and grabbed the back of Moby's head and devoured his mouth.

With a groan of acceptance, Moby opened to Sean's thrusting tongue. Each tooth and every ridge was explored in detail. The press of Moby's body fully against Sean's pushed his need into overdrive.

Suddenly Sean couldn't get close enough. "Skin," he ground out, pulling at Moby's T-shirt. For the first time in his life, Sean's desire became feral. His boy wanted one thing, to be buried balls-deep within Moby's warmth, branding him. Despite his injury, Sean used both hands to strip Moby of his shirt.

Sean wasn't alone in his enthusiasm. Moby's hands shook as he opened Sean's jeans and tried to push them down. "Oh God," Moby groaned when Sean's cock sprang free. "Need to taste you," he said, sinking to his knees.

As much as Sean enjoyed a good blowjob, he wanted more. "I wanna fuck you," he argued, even as he guided Moby's mouth to the head of his cock. Moby nodded but continued to lave the dripping crown.

Sean's knees grew weak as he struggled to refrain from ramming his entire length down Moby's

throat. "Condom. Please tell me you have one?"

"My wallet's in my coat pocket," Moby answered, between licks. "Just let me finish what I've started."

Moby went back to giving Sean the best blowjob of his life. *Fuck*. If getting sucked off by the gorgeous man had this kind of power over him, what would happen when he had Moby in his bed? Sean's breath hitched when Moby sucked him in to the root and ran his fingers down the crack of Sean's ass.

Reaching up with his good hand, Sean pulled at his own hair, trying to stave off his eminent climax. The painful act helped only momentarily. The instant he felt Moby's finger press against his hole, Sean lost his concentration and came hard without time to give Moby warning.

As the last of his cum shot from his cock, shame started to set in. "I'm sorry," he begged Moby for forgiveness. It was considered selfish to come in a lover's mouth without first asking for approval. Some men didn't ever swallow. Some didn't mind. While others got off on the taste of a lover's cum coating his mouth. The fact that he hadn't taken the time to find out in which category Moby's desires ran, was inexcusable.

Moby sat back on his heels and stared up at Sean. "For what?"

"Not warning you." Sean stepped back and worked one-handed to try and get his jeans up.

Moby slapped Sean's hand away and stood, bringing Sean's jeans up with him. "Don't tell me you regret what we just did," he said, looking Sean in the eyes.

Sean doubted he'd ever seen anything prettier than Moby's pale green eyes at that moment. Rimmed in long black lashes, the green orbs looked even lighter. "I should, but I don't."

After a deep breath, Sean pulled Moby into his arms and kissed him. The taste of his cum still clung to the interior of Moby's mouth, threatening Sean's control once again. "Can you stay?"

Moby shook his head. "Not tonight. I still don't have the fence done out back, but hopefully I'll get it started tomorrow."

"You need help?" Sean asked automatically. He didn't really have time, but Moby had helped him on several occasions. Besides, spending time with the man away from the pub might help him make up his mind on how to progress with his growing feelings.

"You sure? The weather kinda sucks right now, but I don't think I can wait."

"I'm sure." He brushed a kiss across Moby's lips. "What about your mom? Is she going to have a problem with me showing up at her house?"

Moby shrugged and reached for a paper towel. As Sean watched with interest, Moby unzipped his jeans and began to clean himself. Moby caught Sean looking and grinned. "I haven't done this since I was a teenager."

Sean would've answered, but the sight of Moby's cock stunned him. He'd seen the larger-than-normal bulge trapped behind Moby's fly, but it was completely different seeing it in person. Even flaccid, Moby's cock was beyond anything Sean had seen in a porno flick. It deserved to be praised and worshipped. Hopefully he'd get a chance soon.

\* \* \* \*

By the time Sean arrived the following day, Moby had the fencing out of the garage and as much of the snow cleared as he'd had time for. He stood by the front door, waiting for Sean to get out of his car and up the walk. "Be nice," he told his mom.

From her seat on the couch, Virginia's eyes rounded. "I'm always nice. That dog of yours is the one you should be talking to."

Despite the way his mom made it sound, Moby knew she was quickly falling in love with the huge beast. He opened the door, happy to see the man on the front porch. "Come in," he greeted. It would have been nice to pull Sean into his arms and give him a proper welcome, but Moby doubted his mom would think much of it.

Jilly jumped from her spot on the sofa and bounded towards their visitor. "Down, girl," Moby commanded, trying to head off a disaster before it happened.

Sean bent down and held out his hand for Jilly's inspection. After thoroughly smelling the offered hand, Jilly's nose seemed to go straight to Sean's groin.

"Jilly," Moby admonished, tugging the Rottweiler by the collar. "Be nice." Moby wondered if Jilly had smelled Sean's scent on him earlier that morning. Although it was his usual practice to come home from work and jump into the shower, Moby was so exhausted after walking Jilly he'd gone straight to bed.

Sean chuckled and reached out to pet the top of Jilly's head and down behind her ears. "She's a dog. It's what they do."

Moby gestured to his mom. "Sean, this is my mother, Virginia. Mom, this is my boss, Sean."

Virginia nodded her head in greeting. "Thank you for helping William with the fence."

"No problem, Ma'am. Mob—William, has helped me out on several occasions."

Moby was thankful Sean had caught his slip before it came out. Although he preferred the nickname given to him as a teenager, he'd never been able to explain to his mother why they'd started calling him Moby.

Moby gestured towards the backyard. "Are you ready?"

Sean nodded. "Yeah, we'd better get started. I have to be back to the pub by five."

Moby led the way to the backdoor. "Shouldn't be a problem. The posts are all in good condition. It's just one side of the yard that needs the panels replaced."

As soon as they stepped outside, Moby led Sean around to the corner of the house. It wasn't exactly private, but at least his mom couldn't see them if she spied out of the window. With his gloved hands jammed into his coat pockets, Moby leaned against Sean's muscled body and kissed him. He was surprised to taste whisky so early in the morning. He pulled out of the kiss. "Drinking already?"

"Just a small shot of liquid courage," Sean explained. "I wasn't exactly sure what kind of greeting to expect."

"By me, Jilly or my mom?"

"Any and all," Sean replied. "The last mother I met didn't care too much for me."

Jay had mentioned Sean's brief relationship with Ryan Bronwyn so he wasn't totally lost by the comment. "I've never let my parent's opinions about my lifestyle sway me one way or the other." He kissed Sean once more before stepping back. "Let's get this done so we can get the hell out of this weather."

\* \* \* \*

"You're in a good mood," Rio said, taking a seat at the bar.



Sean immediately reached for a glass and started building his good friend a Guinness. "What're you doing out of the house alone?"

Rio let out a snort. "Council night. I've been left on my own for dinner. What do you have that's good?"

"The meatloaf's damn good. I had some of that for dinner. But Jay seems pretty proud of the chicken and dumplings he's cooked up as well."

Rio licked his lips. "Lordy, I haven't had dumplings in forever. Give me a double order."

Laughing, Sean walked over to the order window and peered through to Jay. "The big man needs a double of dumplings."

"Hey, Rio," Jay hollered from the back.

Sean turned around, laughing even harder. "It says a lot that he knew who the hell I was ordering for."

"Yeah, that's just because it's not Taco Tuesday. Otherwise he would've thought I was Ezra." Rio pretended to pout as he picked up his drink.

Sean could see right through Rio. "What's going on?"

Rio's black brows rose towards his hairline. "Excuse me?"

Sean leaned against the bar and clasped his hands. "What's on your mind? You seem kinda... off."

Rio sat there for several moments before blowing out a long breath. "I'm tired of doing laundry."

"Huh?" Sean asked, suddenly unable to follow the conversation.

Rio leaned his head in his hands. "Okay, here's the deal. We used to all do our own laundry. It just worked for us. But then Ryan and Nate started having all these meetings at night, so I tried to help by doing their laundry and now they just expect it. Before he left the house tonight Ryan asked what was going on because he didn't have clean jeans for tomorrow. Like it's my job now to make sure his laundry's done when he wants it." Rio shook his head.

Sean's mouth opened but nothing came out. Not only was the picture of Rio doing laundry disturbing, but the fact that he was so upset over it was over the top.

"I mean, is it too much to ask to be asked?" Rio continued.

"No," Sean answered, seeing his friend in an entirely different light. "Have you talked to them about it?"

Rio shook his head. "I don't want to start shit. I just want to be appreciated, ya know?"

"Yeah, sure," Sean agreed. When Jay rang the bell signalling Rio's dinner was ready, Sean let out a sigh of relief. "Hang on a sec." He went to the order window and grabbed the large plate heaped with chicken and dumplings.

*Change the subject.* He set Rio's dinner in front of him. "So what're your plans for Christmas?"

Rio's forkful of dinner paused on the way to his mouth. "Same old thing, I imagine. There's the thing at the church on Christmas Eve," he began with a wave of his fork. "That usually takes a while. Lots of planning and stuff. I usually get stuck on the clean-up crew, not that I mind, but ya know, sometimes it would be nice to just sit home with my partners by the fire."

Sean's gaze continued to follow the fork, waiting for the huge pile to flip across the bar at him. Once he was sure the dumplings were safe, Moby crossed the bar, garnering Sean's complete attention. With the fence fixed for Jilly, Sean hoped Moby would agree to spend the night with him.

"Sean?"

Sean blinked and wiped the bar in front of him. "Oh, yeah, totally." He hoped he had responded appropriately.

"Okay, I've told you my troubles, now spill," Rio said around a mouthful of food.

"Spill what? I'm not the one flailing my fork around."

"What's with the goofy grin every time you look over my shoulder? You got your eye on someone back there?"

*Am I telegraphing my feelings for Moby? Has Moby seen me do it?* The thoughts horrified Sean. He'd never been so into a guy that he put it out there for everyone to see.

"Cosmo and two Miller Lites," Moby said, stepping up to the bar.

Sean shifted uncomfortably. Play it cool. Without looking up, Sean immediately went to work filling the order. He glanced at Rio out of the corner of his eye and was relieved to see his friend inhaling his dinner.

Setting the bottles of beer on Moby's tray, Sean caught the object of his lust grinning at him. He averted his eyes and walked back to his usual spot at the bar. Moby chuckled and walked off with his order.

"Yeah, he's a good-lookin' guy. Can't say I blame you," Rio mumbled.

"What?"

Rio glanced up and looked into the long mirror behind the bar. His eyes tracked something or *someone* around the bar for several moments before returning his attention to Sean. "He likes you."

"Who?" Sean asked, continuing to play dumb.

Rio reached across the bar and smacked Sean on the side of the head.

Sean rubbed his head. The slap hadn't hurt. It had surprised him more than anything. He knew very well Rio could've knocked him flat on the floor with little effort if he'd meant to. "What the hell was that for?"

"You know exactly what that was for. So stop being an ass and tell me how long it's been going on?"

"It's new, okay? And I'm not comfortable with it. So just drop it," Sean grumbled.

Rio tracked Moby in the mirror again. "Well, I can't tell you what to do, but if I had a man like that interested in me, I'd sure as hell stake my claim before someone else tried to."

As Sean watched, yet another hand landed on Moby's ass. Guy Hoisington was a regular, even though he owned the lodge up on the mountain. Not only was the handsome man an ex pro and Olympic skier, but with the kind of money he had in the bank, Guy was known for being a big tipper. Sean's gut clenched. He had to refrain from jumping over the bar and tossing Guy out on his ass. His self-protection instincts prevailed, but he wondered for how long.

## Chapter Four

More than one customer had noticed Moby's condition every time he caught Sean eyeing him across the bar. A hard dick wasn't something Moby had ever tried to hide. His need for a man wasn't something he was ashamed of, no matter who that man was. Whether or not it had something to do with his years as a stripper, he didn't know. Although for the most part it was women who used to frequent his show, touched in the right way, a hand was a hand and his cock usually responded.

Moby glanced at the large clock on the wall and smiled. Last call had already been announced and there were only two tables of diehards still trying to finish their drinks. Moby had already scrubbed the empty tables and picked the chairs up off the floor so he could sweep. Until the last customer left, he had nothing else to do.

Sean had a protective rubber glove over his injured hand as he washed a sink full of glasses. Moby grinned as he walked towards the bar. All evening he'd felt Sean watching him, but every time Moby tried to catch his gaze, Sean turned away. Was the man playing hard to get or was he embarrassed?

Moby decided to find out. With the remaining customers busy with each other, Moby set down his tray and joined Sean at the sink. He stood close enough to brush the hard bulge behind his fly across Sean's ass. "Am I staying?"

Sean removed his glove. "If you want."

"Oh, I more than want." Moby stepped even closer, pressing his cock against Sean.

Sean cleared his throat and looked over his shoulder to stare into Moby's eyes. "Did you make good tips tonight?"

Moby thought of the wad of cash in his pocket. Thanks to his favourite customer, he was packing a lot more money than usual. "Yeah. I already logged it in."

"All of it?" Sean questioned.

Moby had never tried to cheat on his taxes and having his boss question him, didn't sit well. "Yes, all of it. If you don't trust me, frisk me."

Sean shook his head. "Don't go getting all riled up. I've been in your shoes, and I know it's incredibly tempting to hold back reporting when you have an exceptional night." Sean flashed an apologetic smile. "So, how much did Guy slip you?"

Moby glanced up and saw the last of the customers walking towards the door. He waited until he'd locked the door behind them to place a kiss to Sean's neck and answer the question. "Fifty."

"And what did he get for that fifty?"

Moby hid his grin by kissing Sean again. "I kept my hands to myself. He likes me, that's all. Why, jealous?"

"No, I just don't approve, and you know that." Sean turned around and put his hands on Moby's hips. He pulled Moby fully against him. "If you want me for more than a night, knock it off."

Moby ran his fingers over Sean's short beard and moustache before tracing his lips. He'd never allowed himself to fall in love, so dealing with another man's jealousy wasn't something he was comfortable with. "I've told you a million times that it doesn't mean anything to me."

"But it means something to me," Sean argued. "This is exactly the reason the rules have been put

in place.”

“These rules, are they yours or your family’s?” Moby asked.

“Doesn’t matter,” Sean mumbled.

Moby tried to understand Sean’s point of view, but no matter how many times he ran it around in his head, he still didn’t get it. “I’m sorry. I just don’t understand why it should matter as long as I’m not touching them back. I mean, it’s just my body, not my heart.”

Sean wrapped his arms around Moby. “I don’t think you have any idea of your real worth and it has nothing to do with your body. Most people have physical boundaries, those little invisible lines that they won’t let others cross, but you don’t seem to have those.” He took Moby’s hand and lifted it to his heart. “When I see someone cross those boundaries that should be in place, it makes me angry on your behalf.”

Moby didn’t like the direction of the conversation. He tried to derail the subject by running his thumb over Sean’s pebbled nipple. “It’s late. Can we talk about this another time?”

Sean nipped Moby’s shoulder. “Sure. Let’s finish down here and go on up.”

\* \* \* \*

“Mind if I take a shower?” Moby asked.

Sean stopped counting and scribbled a figure on a sheet of paper. “Not at all. I’ll be done here in about ten minutes.”

Before walking off, Moby grabbed Sean by the back of the neck and kissed him. Sean opened willingly for Moby’s probing tongue. With each thrust, Sean’s cock hardened further. He finally broke away and shook his head. “I need to get this balanced and put into the safe. Go scrub yourself, and I’ll be up to enjoy it in a bit.”

With a big smile, Moby nodded and disappeared through the swinging door.

Sean tried to go back to the pile of cash and credit card receipts, but it was useless. *Dammit*. Tilting his head back, he stared at the ceiling. His longing for the man upstairs was overpowering.

“Fuck it,” he grumbled, throwing everything into a large canvas money bag. He shut off the lights, turned on the alarm and carried the bag upstairs. As he entered his apartment, he heard the squeak as the shower cut off. Sean chuckled and shook his head. He’d been meaning to fix that stupid handle for months but never seemed to get around to it. It was normal for him to work a seven day week. In the few hours he had to relax, the last thing he felt like doing was playing repairman.

He crossed to the corner of the living room and lifted the tablecloth on his favourite piece of furniture. Squatting, Sean spun the lock of the safe until he heard a click and turned the handle.

After his daily totals were tucked away, he took off his shoes and locked the front door. As he neared the bedroom, a combination of guilt and lust threatened to overwhelm him. He wanted Moby, there was no doubt about it, but would he be able to handle a working relationship after he’d been intimate with the gorgeous flirt?

The sight of a freshly showered naked man sprawled across his bed drove all hesitations from Sean’s mind. His gaze went to Moby’s hard cock as he scrambled to undress. “I take it the shower was satisfactory?” he joked, pointing towards Moby’s erection.

Moby grinned and ran a hand from his collarbone to his balls before moving back up to give his cock a seductive stroke. “Yeah, the shower was nice, but this bed is even better. How do you ever bring yourself to get out of it?”

Sean knelt at the end of the mattress and openly stared while Moby continued to pump his cock. "It's not hard when you don't have a sexy man in it." He reached down and ran his hands up Moby's legs to rest at the juncture of his thighs and groin.

Moby's eyes seemed glued to the dark auburn hair surrounding Sean's cock. "I love a man in red," he said with a lick of his lips.

Sean remembered vividly what those lips felt like wrapped around his length. He trailed one hand to Moby's sac and gave the heavy balls a firm, but gentle squeeze. Unbelievably, Moby's cock seemed to harden even further. There was no doubt in Sean's mind why Moby had made so much money as a dancer in Vegas. The man's body was absolutely flawless. "Perfect," he whispered.

"Far from it," Moby returned. He tilted the head of his cock towards Sean. "See that scar?"

Sean hadn't, but he did once Moby pointed it out. He ran the tip of his finger over the shinier than normal skin coming out of the urethral opening to run down half the length of the glans. "What happened?"

"One of the guys in the show convinced me to get a Prince Albert. I had no idea how much I'd love it, but I did. Until a drunk woman, at a private bachelorette party, decided to get my attention by hooking her finger into it and trying to pull me towards her."

Sean's free hand automatically flew to cover his cock. "Ouch!"

"You ain't shittin'. It didn't pull all the way out, but it sure as hell ripped enough that I was convinced I was going to die." Moby shook his head. "Of course I tried to treat it myself because I was too embarrassed to go to the doctor and ended up with a nasty infection."

Sean shook his head. "No thanks. I like my cock just the way it is. If I want to adorn something, I'll buy a Christmas tree."

"Speaking of, why don't you have one?"

Sean looked down at the dick being covered by his hand. "Last time I checked, I do." He moved his hand and smiled. "Yep, there it is."

Laughing, Moby rolled his eyes and reached out to encircle Sean's cock in his palm. "And a very nice one, but I was talking about a Christmas tree."

With a shrug, Sean laid on the bed beside Moby. "My mom died on Christmas, so we never really celebrated it."

Moby rolled on top of Sean. "Damn. That must've been rough. Do you mind if I ask how old you were?"

Sean swallowed around the lump in his throat. It wasn't that he missed his mother, how could he miss what he'd never had, but people tended to look at him funny when he told them. "She died giving birth to me."

Moby's eyes rounded. "So your birthday is on Christmas?"

"Yeah. We never really celebrated that either, for obvious reasons."

"Doesn't seem obvious to me at all. I think it's sad. I mean, it sucks she died, but you still deserved to have your family celebrate your birth. My dad was a complete drunken asshole but at least he'd sit and have a piece of birthday cake before he went out for the evening."

"Yeah, but you still had your mom. Maybe that's the difference. There wasn't anyone in my house to even bake a cake."

"Bullshit. Grocery stores sell cakes. It just takes someone to care enough to buy one."

Looking up into Moby's pale green eyes, Sean could tell he was pissed but why? "I didn't mean to make you mad. Let's forget the talking for now."

He pulled Moby's head down for a hungry kiss. Swirling his tongue into the depths of Moby's mouth helped Sean forget about the years he'd spent either alone or in his dad's office on his birthday. With his brothers being much older, they'd been put to work in the family pub while Sean was still too young to even be in the bar at night. His dad had tried to transform the office into a comfortable place for Sean, going as far as bringing in a fold-out couch and television. After a while, the office felt more like home than his actual home did. Maybe that was the reason he, himself, felt more at home downstairs than in his own apartment.

*Being alone sucks.* Sean opened his eyes and pulled out of the kiss. He'd hoped to build a future with Ryan but that road had only led to heartbreak. As he ground his cock up against Moby, he wondered if he was making yet another mistake. What if a man like Moby couldn't be tamed? Sure, Jay had domesticated Erico, but what if that was a fluke?

Moby sat up, straddling Sean's lap and began to move his hips. "I'm celebrating your birthday this year," Moby announced. "And Christmas. Believe it or not, you can actually celebrate two things in one day and not explode."

"Yeah, well keep that up and I'm gonna explode," Sean warned, trying to still Moby's ass as it slid back and forth over his erection.

Moby reached down and placed his palms on Sean's chest. "Do you prefer to top or bottom?"

Sean reached to the bedside drawer and removed a condom and a rarely used bottle of lube. "I usually top, but I can go either way." His gaze went to the long length of Moby's cock. "I'd be a fool to pass something as beautiful as that up."

Moby threw his head back and laughed. "Good, then I'll make you wait until next time for it. At least that way I'll know I'm more than a one-night stand."

"I don't do one night stands," Sean growled, his hands tightening on Moby's hips. "So if you're not serious about this it would be better if you leave now."

Dark eyebrows drew together as Moby continued to stare down at Sean. "Are you saying you want to...like...date me?"

*Did he?* Sean really enjoyed the man's company. For him it was about more than sex. It was finding a companion that could return his emotions that he yearned for more than anything. "Yeah I do, but only if your heart's in it."

Moby removed his hands from Sean's chest and slid off his lap. He continued to watch Sean closely until he finally opened his mouth. "What're the conditions?" he asked warily.

"Conditions?"

"Yeah. What do you want in exchange for being nice to me?"

Sean absently rubbed the sudden tightness in his chest. The guarded expression on Moby's face as well as his body posture spoke volumes. Although Moby seemed comfortable with sexual contact, he wasn't used to any kind of emotional bond with a lover. Sean wondered if he was making a huge mistake. "I guess what I want is for you to drop your walls enough to let me inside." He rolled to his side and placed a hand on Moby's thigh. "Opening myself up to a relationship with you isn't easy. Although I've given it a try a time or two, I always seem to come up on the losing end."

Sean ducked his head under Moby's. Eye contact was crucial if Moby was to believe him. "I'd like to take this thing between us as far as it can go. But making a fool of myself if you're not serious would kill me."

Moby's eyes started to fill with moisture, but he quickly rubbed them dry before clearing his throat. "No one's ever..." Moby shook his head. "What if I screw up?"

Sean pulled Moby down into his arms. Although Moby was definitely new to relationships, Sean

refused to sugar-coat his thoughts on the matter. "Honesty and loyalty mean everything to me. I have to know you have my back. That you'll be there for me, just like I'll be there for you, but most of all, I need to know you're mine while we're together."

"Does this go back to letting the customers touch me?" Moby mumbled, his cheek resting on Sean's chest.

"I can't watch you every minute of the day, that's where the honesty comes in." Sean sighed and kissed the top of Moby's head. "Would it bother you if I let another guy rub all up on me?"

Although Moby didn't say anything, Sean felt the man's body stiffen at the question. He decided to continue to make Moby understand. "Jealousy's a real problem for me, I won't lie about that. The thought of another man's hands on you, whether it means anything to you or not, drives me crazy."

Moby nodded. "Maybe if people knew we were dating they wouldn't touch me like they do?"

"Yeah, I'm sure that'll help, but you have to make sure they understand their attention isn't welcome any longer." Sean ran his hand up and down Moby's spine. He'd love nothing more than to roll on top of Moby and bury himself deep inside the man he hoped to make his, but he quickly realised it was even more important to give Moby what he'd obviously never had. He reached to the bedside table and returned the condom and lube before turning out the lamp.

"What're you doing?" Moby asked.

"I'd like to just hold you all night." Sean pulled the covers up, tucking them around Moby.

"No sex?"

"Nope. Hopefully there'll be plenty of time for that." Sean hoped Moby understood. It sure as hell wasn't that he didn't find the man sexually attractive, nothing could be further from the truth, but he wanted more than sex to define the beginning of what he hoped would be a real relationship.

Moby scooted up in bed and moved the spare pillow to lie against Sean's. He draped his arm over Sean's chest and kissed his cheek. "Are you sure? Sometimes I snore."

Sean chuckled. "I'm sure, and I hate to break it to you, but I snore, too."

\* \* \* \*

Moby woke with Sean pressed against his back, snoring in his ear. He grinned. Sean hadn't been kidding when he told Moby he snored. Lifting his head, he tried to peer over Sean's muscular body to the clock on the nightstand. It wasn't that he had a curfew, but he knew he'd have to answer to his mom when he returned home. Although things with his mom were slowly improving, Moby doubted she was ready to hear about the new man in his life.

The arm around Moby tightened as Sean pulled him closer. "Go back to sleep," Sean whispered.

"I should probably get going." Moby pressed back against Sean. There was something incredible about being held by the man. If he lived alone, Moby doubted he'd ever want to leave Sean's bed.

Sean's hand moved down to brush against Moby's cock. "You feel nice and warm. Stay with me."

Unable to resist Sean's touch, Moby hooked one leg over Sean's and opened himself to further attention. Sean took the invitation for what it was and palmed Moby's morning erection.

"Mmm," Sean moaned, kissing Moby's shoulder and neck. His hand continued to touch the stretched skin of Moby's cock for several moments before taking it in-hand. "Tell me what you like?"

"Doesn't matter how you touch me, I like it all," Moby said honestly.

Sean's grip increased as he began to thrust against Moby's ass. "I know I told you we had plenty of time, but my body seems to be in charge at the moment."

"Grab the lube. I've waited for over a month to finally feel you inside of me." Moby stayed where he was while Sean pulled away long enough to retrieve supplies. He squeezed his eyes shut as nerves started to get the better of him. He'd been fucked by a lot of guys over the years. The fact that he understood how different it would be with Sean worried him. What if he didn't live up to Sean's expectations? In the past, he never stuck around long enough to care whether or not a partner was satisfied completely, but Sean was different. He was suddenly glad he wasn't working later in the evening. If things between them didn't go well, Moby would have at least thirty hours before he had to see Sean again.

The crinkle of the condom wrapper brought Moby back to the moment. He glanced over his shoulder and watched as Sean rolled the condom down his length. "Is there a certain position you prefer?" he asked.

Sean shook his head and snuggled against Moby's back. "I like 'em all." He licked a path up Moby's neck to his ear. Sucking the lobe into his mouth, Sean ran a slicked finger down the crack of Moby's ass to reach the tight pucker.

Moby turned his head, begging without words for a kiss. As Sean's lips closed over his, Moby mentally braced himself for the invasion he knew would come. He accepted the tip of Sean's cock with as much enthusiasm as he welcomed the tongue plundering his mouth. Sean certainly knew how to kiss, and as Sean's length slowly rocked back and forth inside his body, Moby knew the man had skills in other areas as well.

Sean broke the kiss and pulled out of Moby's body. "Turn over. I want to hold you."

Moby nodded. Never had he wanted anything more. He rolled to his back and welcomed Sean between his spread thighs. As Sean once again entered him, Moby felt his body open to accept the full length of his new lover. The burn quickly turned to a thrum of pure pleasure.

"Oh God," he moaned. Moby hitched his legs higher around Sean's broad back but it wasn't enough. "I need..." He shook his head not sure what he needed.

A grunt sounded from deep in Sean's throat as he hooked Moby's legs over his forearms and spread him even more. The new position allowed Sean to go deeper. With each thrust of his hips, his body rubbed against Moby's cock.

"Yes," Moby howled. Closing his eyes, he raked his short nails across Sean's shoulders and down his arms.

"Look at me," Sean ordered.

Moby opened his eyes and stared up at Sean. The connection that passed between them in that moment was more profound than anything Moby had experienced. *He really does like me.* The thought was both thrilling and terrifying. He'd never been good at living up to another's expectations. What if Sean figured out he wasn't good enough? It wasn't a stretch. Moby knew he'd never been good enough. His body, sure, but Moby the man wasn't nearly as put together as his physique.

With each thrust, Sean drew Moby closer and closer to the edge. Although he didn't want the feeling to end, Moby was curious how Sean would react once their bodies had been sated. Would the feelings he detected in Sean's gaze still be there, or was he misreading lust for something deeper?

Sean's rhythm increased as they both neared the pinnacle of release. The sounds of heavy breathing and slapping skin filled the small bedroom with an erotic song Moby doubted he'd ever forget.

"Close," Moby cautioned. The fullness of the cock filling him along with the delicious slide of Sean's body against his cock with each thrust was too much. Four strokes later, Moby shot his seed



between them.

Sean braced himself on his arms and watched Moby's face as he came. "God, you're something else." He leant down for a kiss, swiping his tongue against Moby's before delving in deep.

Moby threaded his fingers through Sean's auburn curls and broke the kiss. Cheek to cheek he listened to Sean's ragged breathing as he increased the intensity of his thrusts. "You feel so good inside me," he moaned.

Sean grunted in reply, his hands squeezing Moby's ass. With a loud growl, Sean's rhythm faltered as he buried himself deep. Moby held his lover as Sean's body jerked with the power of his climax.

Never had he yearned to feel the warmth of a man's cum inside of him, but to his surprise, Moby wished the heat shooting into the condom filled him instead. It didn't take a college degree to figure out why. Sean wasn't a fling as far as Moby was concerned. Maybe his years of dreaming for the right man to come along had finally paid off.

## Chapter Five

"You feel like a little shopping today?" Moby asked his mom.

"For what?" she asked.

"I want to pick up a few things for the people at work." He didn't mention getting two gifts for Sean or the birthday party he'd already started to plan in his head.

"Why would you waste your money?"

Moby took a deep breath. He didn't blame his mom for her beliefs any longer. Although it had taken a while to understand, he realised his mom's thoughts and feelings were basically whatever his father had drummed into her. In many ways, his mom was still incredibly naïve when it came to the world around her.

"Well, because it makes me feel good to give someone a gift. We both know I'm not comfortable telling people how I feel about them, so giving them a present at Christmas is my way of telling them what I can't."

Virginia said nothing for several moments before nodding. "I'll get my purse. There are a few things I'd like to get if we have the money."

"We do," he assured her. "I'm going to let Jilly out," he told her as she left the room.

"Ready to go out, baby girl?" Moby scratched the Rottweiler behind the ears before opening the back door. As Jilly took care of her business, he pulled a slip of paper from his coat pocket. He'd gone online and looked up O'Brien bars in Boston, coming up with several. Moby had no doubt at least one of them was owned by someone in Sean's family.

Before he could decide what to do with the information, Jilly ran back to the door. "Cold out here, isn't it, girl?"

He stopped Jilly just inside the door and wiped her feet on an old towel, making sure to get at the snow packed between her toes before letting her go. Jilly shook the melted snow from her fur, sending a spray of water droplets onto the kitchen floor.

"Now you're just trying to get me into trouble." Moby knelt on the floor to mop up the mess before his mom saw it. He heard his mom come into the room just as he finished. Looking up he was amused to see the slight grin on his mom's face.

"I'm glad I'm not the only one she does that to," Virginia said before turning to walk out of the room.

Moby shook his head as he got to his feet. If he hadn't already been riding high from the previous evening with Sean, his mom's acceptance of Jilly would have done it.

They left Jilly sleeping in her bed beside the heating vent and drove to the local Walmart. Moby couldn't get over the number of cars in the parking lot. It had been a few years since he'd cared enough about someone to brave the crowds to buy a gift. He pulled up in front and let his mom out of the car before finding a parking spot towards the back of the lot.

By the time he reached the automatic sliding doors, his mom already had a cart with her large purse nestled safely in the front of the basket. They slowly worked their way through the crowd. Moby stopped at the jewellery section and picked up a pair of fun but inexpensive earrings for Kitty.

"I don't suppose you're buying these for a girl you're sweet on, are you?" Virginia asked.

"Nope," Moby answered. "I think we both know that'll never happen. Kitty's just a friend."

"Do I have the right to ask who you spent the night with?"

Moby hadn't brought it up because he didn't want to make his mom uncomfortable, but since she'd asked. "Sean O'Brien."

"O'Brien?" Virginia's head tilted to the side. "Does he own the pub?"

"Yep. And, yes, before you ask, he's Irish through and through." He waited for his mom to respond. Bigotry had run rampant in his house growing up.

"Well I would assume so with a name like that," Virginia said. She glanced around. "I want you to look at some sweaters."

"I don't wear sweaters," Moby reminded her.

"Well of course not. You don't have any." Without another word, she pushed the cart towards the men's section.

By the time Moby caught up to her, she had a bulky, cable-knit sweater in her hand. Just looking at it made Moby sweat. It was obvious he wouldn't be able to sway her in her decision of a Christmas gift, so Moby quickly looked around for a suitable alternative.

He found a dark green V-neck in a soft material. "I like this one," he announced.

Virginia glanced over her shoulder before eventually turning around. "It doesn't look very warm."

"Yeah, but it'll be thin enough for me to wear to work." He held the sweater in front of his chest. "Besides, it'll bring out the colour in my eyes."

Virginia smiled. "Yes, it does do that."

Moby placed the sweater into the cart. "I love it, Mom." He kissed her cheek, surprised by the blush that crept up her neck.

"I think Jilly could use some kind of coat." As soon as she said it, his mom tried to hide her caring for the large pet. "I can't have her ruining my house with wet hair when she comes inside."

Trying to cover a grin, Moby nodded. "Okay. But first there are a couple of things I need to pick up." After their shared shower, Moby had given Sean a hard time about not having a bathrobe. Sean had explained he didn't have time to linger in a robe after showering so he'd never had one.

It was important to him to teach Sean there was more to life than work. He wanted to experience a lazy Sunday with the man who had given him so much without even knowing it. He headed towards the sleepwear section with a smile on his face. No matter what, he was determined to make sure Sean had the kind of Christmas he'd always deserved.

\* \* \* \*

Sean studied the near-empty room and shook his head. Thursday evening and only a handful of people had dared to brave the storm raging outside. The three tables with customers were almost finished with their food and would soon head out. Although he didn't have Jay's culinary skills, Sean had flipped a hamburger or two in his life.

He pushed through the swinging door to find Jay wiping down the grill. "Why don't you go on home?"

"It's only seven-thirty. What if someone else comes in?"

"Only a fool would venture out into this kind of weather. Have you seen it outside in the last hour?"

Jay glanced around the kitchen. "Nope. My boss isn't nice enough to provide me with a window office."

With a chuckle, Sean turned to head back to the bar. "Get your smart ass home before the doors are blocked with snow and you're here until the Spring thaw."

Entering the pub, Sean noticed only one table of patrons remained. He motioned to Kitty and waited.

"What's up?" Kitty asked.

"Go on home. I'll bus the tables."

"You don't have to tell me twice," Kitty said, rushing in the direction of the time clock.

Once the pub cleared, Sean retrieved a large plastic tub from the kitchen and began clearing the tables. He turned off the stereo that piped in cheerful Christmas music, and carried the dirty dishes to the kitchen.

As he loaded the dishwasher, his thoughts strayed to Moby. He couldn't help but smile. It had been a long time since he felt the excitement of a new lover. Unlike his relationship with Ryan, being with Moby was easy, almost too easy. Although Ryan was incredibly sweet, keeping him happy had been a lot of work.

It was different with Moby. The man was gorgeous, there was absolutely no disputing that fact, but Moby seemed so appreciative of each gentle touch Sean bestowed. It made showing affection even more fulfilling when you were with such a willing recipient.

Sean closed the dishwasher and turned it on before pulling the phone out of his pocket. He walked towards the sheet of paper tacked up beside the time clock and found Moby's number. With only one day off a week, would Moby resent the call? *Only one way to find out.*

The phone rang three times before being picked up.

"Hey," Moby answered, his voice sounded warm and interested which was a good sign.

"Enough snow for you?" Sean asked.

"More than enough. I tried to head your way, but got as far as the highway and had to turn back."

Sean laughed. "I told Jay earlier that only a fool would venture out in this weather, guess I was right."

Moby returned the laugh. "Yeah, well that's what happens when I let my dick take the lead. Too bad though because I've been thinking about you all day."

"Yeah?" Sean liked the sound of that.

"Oh, yeah. See, if you had a snowcat you could come and take me back to your bed for the night. We could *ride* out the storm together."

Sean pressed the heel of his hand against the hardening cock trapped by his jeans. "If I knew where to buy one this time of night, I might just spend a shitload of money doing just that."

"Horny?" Moby asked.

"Gettin' there," Sean answered honestly. "I'm standing in an empty bar, wishing you were here."

"I could always try again?"

Sean wondered if it was his horniness that drew Moby to risk life and limb or his desire to be needed. He'd given a lot of thought to the tenderness Moby had reacted so strongly to the previous night. Throughout the day, Sean had become more convinced he wanted to be the one to show Moby the attention he'd obviously never experienced.

"As hard as I am, I wouldn't risk your safety for anything," Sean admitted. "It's become pretty damn important to me that you're still around tomorrow."

"Oh, no worries there. I plan on sticking around until you're tired of me."

Sean bit his tongue. His immediate reaction was to assure Moby that wouldn't happen, but it was still too early to show his hand. With his luck, he'd scare Moby away if he started talking about the future. Jumping into a new relationship with gusto had always been a problem. It didn't take a psychologist to tell Sean why. Affection of any kind had been a rarity in his youth. Although he'd never been mistreated by his father, he'd been kept at arm's length.

Moby cleared his throat. "You still there?"

*Shit. Play it cool.* "I think I'm gonna go ahead and close up for the night. I've got some bookkeeping to do anyway."

"All right. You sure everything's okay?" Moby asked.

"Yeah." Sean wondered how honest he could be. "I tend to attach myself pretty early on in a relationship. So far my track record with that way of doing things is shit. Guess I just want this one to be different."

"So, what're you trying to say? You want to cool things between us?"

"No," Sean was quick to answer. He sighed and rubbed his forehead. "I just want this one to work. I wanna do it right."

"Okay."

"I've been thinking about asking Smitty if he wants to work a couple nights a week for me. I'd really like a chance to spend quality time with you." Sean hadn't realised he'd made a final decision until the words were out of his mouth.

"I'd love that. My mom asked about you earlier. I think she might even be ready to have you over for dinner one evening."

Spending time with Moby's mother scared him to death, but he'd learned his lesson with Ryan's mom. It was important to make nice. Like a lovesick teenager, he'd already committed Moby's schedule to memory. "Sunday? I can call Smitty in the morning and ask if he's available. I know you work a half-shift, but you should be out of here by four."

"Sunday would be perfect."

"Great," Sean agreed, trying to sound positive. "Hopefully the crap outside will stop, and they'll get the roads cleared by tomorrow evening."

Moby chuckled. "Maybe you can spend the rest of the evening looking into that snowcat idea."

"Right after I pay all the bills. I'm sure I'll have plenty left over for a snowcat."

Moby laughed harder. "A man can dream."

\* \* \* \*

Moby hung up the phone and stared out of the kitchen window to the yard beyond. *God, I miss the desert.* It wouldn't be as bad if he lived in CattleValley. Not solely because of Sean either. The best thing about working in an all-male revue was being surrounded by quite a few like-minded men.

He heard his mom come out of the bathroom and sighed. She was trying, Moby had to give her credit, but would she ever be self-sufficient enough to live on her own?

"Did I hear the phone?" Virginia asked.

Moby glanced over his shoulder to find his mom dressed for bed in her nightgown and robe. "Sean called." He didn't want to tell his mom about his conversation. Sean had opened up to him, and Moby took that trust to heart. "Evidently the snow in CattleValley is as bad as it is here."

"Well of course it is." Virginia filled the glass she kept beside the sink with water and took her pills.

"Would you mind if Sean came to dinner on Sunday?" He held his breath, hoping for a positive response.

"I guess I could make my fried chicken you like so much. Your friend does eat meat, doesn't he?" she asked, one greying eyebrow raised.

"Yes, Mom, Sean's a meat eater." Moby walked over and kissed her cheek. "Thanks. I'm sure he'd love your fried chicken."

Virginia stepped away from him, but Moby could tell she was pleased at the loving gesture. "I'm going to bed," she proclaimed without looking back.

Moby glanced at the clock and shook his head. It was only eight. No wonder his mom got up at the crack of dawn. He opened the refrigerator and pulled out a beer before turning off the kitchen light.

Entering the living room he smiled at the picture Jilly made. Curled up on the couch, Jilly's head rested on the large down doggy-coat his mom had insisted on buying. Instead of waiting for Christmas morning, Moby's mom had given the gift to the Rottweiler as soon as they'd returned home. She'd argued that a dog didn't know what Christmas was so it didn't make sense to keep Jilly from being warm leading up to a day she wouldn't understand anyway. Moby had eventually given in. Looking at his beloved dog, he was glad he had. Jilly loved her new coat.

Moby pushed Jilly over enough to make a spot for himself on the couch. "You're so damn spoiled," he teased and scratched Jilly behind the ears.

Jilly lifted her head and yawned before settling back down on her coat.

Moby took a drink of his beer and turned on the television. Although it wasn't the way he'd hoped to spend his evening, he felt better after talking to Sean. He settled in for some quality time with his DVR and his best friend.

\* \* \* \*

Moby shook the snow from his hair as he stepped through the door of O'Brien's. It had been a slow drive, but the road had been cleared enough to make it possible. He glanced towards the bar and Sean's eyebrows drew together.

"Can I speak to you before you clock in?" Sean asked, scowling. "Jay? Can you keep an eye on the front for me? I'll just be a second."

"Sure thing, boss," Jay answered with a big grin on his face.

Moby followed Sean to the back of the kitchen. He was surprised when Sean stopped at the door leading to his apartment. "Is there something wrong?"

"Yeah, follow me," Sean said, taking the steps two at a time.

Moby did as instructed, wondering what had changed since their phone conversation the previous evening. Before he had a chance to ask, Sean turned and pulled him into his arms.

"I can't get you off my mind," Sean moaned, kissing Moby's neck. Sean's hard cock rubbed

against Moby's, setting Moby's body on fire.

"Ah, hell," Moby groaned. He reached down and unfastened Sean's jeans. "Fuck me," he growled.

Sean reached into his pocket before holding up a condom. "I was hoping you'd say that."

"Lube," Moby cautioned. He wasn't opposed to having Sean's cock buried inside him. As a matter of fact, he yearned for it, but a dry fuck had never appealed to him.

With a chuckle, Sean dug back into his pocket and produced a packet of lube. Moby recognised the brand from the vending machine in the men's restroom. "Good thinking," he said, unzipping and ridding himself of his jeans as fast as he could.

Moby started towards the bedroom but was stopped and swung around to face Sean. With a feral look in his eyes, Sean pushed Moby against the wall.

"Where are you going?" Sean asked, reaching behind Moby's balls to brush over his hole.

Moby's eyes closed as Sean plunged one long finger deep into his body. "I'm fucking you right here, right now," Sean informed Moby. He removed his finger and spun Moby to face the wall. "Spread 'em."

With his feet apart and his hands braced solidly against the wall, Moby stuck his ass out as far as it would go. "Well, what're you waiting for?"

Sean handed the packet of lube to Moby. "Hold this for me, sweetheart."

Moby took the offered slick and waited for Sean to sheath himself.

"Okay," Sean said, holding up three fingers.

After squeezing the contents of the packet onto Sean's fingers, he tossed the trash to the floor and braced himself once again. It was obvious their coupling would be a quick one. Not only were both of them incredibly horny, but they needed to get back downstairs. Sean's willingness to take time out of their work schedule spoke volumes as far as Moby was concerned.

Sean fingered Moby's hole for a few short moments before pressing the head of his cock to the opening. "Tell me if it's too much too soon."

"Just do it already," Moby answered impatiently.

Despite his taunt, Sean took his time easing his way inside Moby. "Christ!" Moby howled at the burn of intrusion. When Sean paused and started to pull out, Moby slammed his hand against the wall. "Don't you dare. Just fuck me."

In one powerful thrust, Sean buried his cock as deep as it would go. "I don't take orders well," Sean said, slapping Moby's ass.

Moby moaned at the sting. "And I don't like to be teased," he fired back.

"Fine, then you'd better hold on." Sean grabbed Moby's hips. He withdrew his cock before slamming it back in to the hilt. "Fuck, you feel good."

"Uh huh," Moby managed to get out as Sean repeated the action, harder than before.

"I dreamt of you. In my mind, you slept with me, showered with me and shared your life with me." Sean babbled as he continued to fuck Moby harder and faster than ever before.

Moby wondered if Sean realised what he was divulging. He kept his mouth shut and willed his shaking legs to hold him. When one of Sean's hands wrapped around Moby's cock, he knew he was lost.

"This is mine," Sean growled, pumping Moby's dick. "As long as you agree to be with me, no sharing, not even a little."

"No," Moby agreed, wiping his forehead on his arm. "Nobody else," he panted. Soon his mind shut down and his body's needs took over. Moby began pushing back, impaling himself on Sean's thick cock.

It was Sean's thumb pressing against the slit on Moby's cockhead that hurled him over the edge. There was no thought, no apprehension, just pure animal instinct as he shot his seed onto the floor at his feet.

The intensity of his release threatened to turn his legs to jelly. Thankfully Sean's strong forearm was there to curl around Moby's waist and hold him up.

"Stay with me," Sean gasped as he delivered a quick succession of thrusts. The final jerk of Sean's hips lifted Moby's feet from the ground.

Afraid of meeting the wall with his face, Moby leant back against Sean and grabbed his lover behind the neck. The two men crumpled to the floor with Sean still buried inside Moby.

Moby was the first to recover, his gaze seeking out the watch on Sean's wrist. He was surprised to find only seventeen minutes had elapsed since arriving at O'Brien's. It seemed even a quickie with Sean left a lasting impression.

\* \* \* \*

On break, Moby ducked into the kitchen for a word with Jay. "So, you and Erico are for sure coming to Sean's party, right?"

Jay closed the walk-in freezer and locked the door. "Wouldn't miss it, although Erico made a good suggestion. He thinks you should have it at The Canoe. That way, not only will Sean be completely surprised, but he won't feel obligated to clean up the mess afterwards."

It only took a second for Moby to mull over the offer. "I'd appreciate that. Should I call Erico and officially ask him?"

"Naw. I'll seal the deal when I get home tonight," Jay said with a wink.

"Thanks." Moby tapped his finger on the counter. "I called his dad."

Jay stopped walking and turned to face Moby. "You did what?"

Moby nodded. "I'm hoping it wasn't the dumbest thing I've ever done, but I thought it was important to let Devlin know that Sean had people here who care about him. From what I understand, the O'Brien family never celebrated Sean's birthday or Christmas. I want Sean to have both this year whether his dad comes or not."

"What did Devlin say?" Jay asked.

"He said he'd see what he could do, but he didn't come off as overly excited by the prospect of travelling to Wyoming." Moby shrugged. "We'll see. I've done all I can do. The ball's in his court now."



## Chapter Six

Sunday evening, Moby made it home from work about an hour before Sean was due to arrive. After a quick shower and change of clothes, he ventured into the kitchen to check on his mom. "Smells good."

Virginia barely glanced up from the table. "I wish I had a set of china. Do you think your friend will mind eating off the everyday dishes?"

Moby studied the table. Despite the well-used plates, his mom had done an incredible job. Actually, he tried to remember a time when she'd ever dressed a table for dinner. "I think it's beautiful, Mom."

Finally looking up from the table, Virginia smiled. "Thank you. I've been watching too many of those decorating shows on cable, I guess."

Moby shook his head and put an arm around his mom's thin shoulders, giving her a slight hug. He wondered what his childhood would've been like if he'd had the woman at his side for a mother and not the brow-beaten wife of Bill Haines. "From the looks of this table, I'd say your time watching TV hasn't been wasted."

Jilly started to bark, signalling Sean's arrival. He squeezed his mom's shoulder once more before releasing her. "I'll keep Sean in the living room until you're ready if that's okay. If you need any help just holler."

"Go and entertain your guest. Dinner should be ready within the next half hour."

Moby entered the living room and snapped his fingers at the barking dog. "Sit, Jilly."

With a whine of annoyance, Jilly plopped her hind end down on the carpeted floor. Moby grinned. "Good girl."

The doorbell rang just as Moby twisted the knob. With one pull, his night became even brighter. Sean grinned and Moby beckoned him inside. After shutting the door against the cold, Moby glanced over his shoulder and planted a brief but deep kiss on the man he couldn't get out of his mind.

"Mmm," Sean moaned when the kiss broke. "That's a nice greeting."

Moby smiled and grabbed the front of Sean's coat, pulling him closer once more. "If we were alone, I would've opened the door naked," he whispered against Sean's lips before delving in for another kiss.

Sean's thigh seemed to automatically insinuate itself between Moby's legs, giving Moby's erection something to rub against. As the kiss continued, Moby unfastened Sean's coat to reach the man's chest buried beneath a thick layer of down. Damn, he wanted nothing more than to strip the man and lead him to the bedroom. He was so fucking turned on, he found himself riding Sean's muscled thigh with enthusiasm.

A noise from the kitchen eventually broke the spell of the moment and Moby untangled his tongue from Sean's and pulled back. He shook his head and grinned. "We'd better be careful or my mom'll dump me out into the street again."

Sean stilled in the process of shedding his coat. "I thought your dad was the one who did that."

Moby bit his bottom lip and held his hand out for Sean's coat. "You're right. I used to believe it was both my parents, but the more I get to know Mom, the more I realise she had very little say in

anything that went on in this house.”

With an understanding expression on his handsome face, Sean reached out and cupped Moby's cheek. “It sounds like things are starting to change between you and your mom. That's good. You should take advantage of the time you have left with her.”

Moby leant in to the touch. He hoped Sean felt the same way about his own family. The previous day's phone conversation with Devlin O'Brien had given Moby hope. Although he refused to commit himself fully to the idea of travelling to Wyoming, Devlin did tell Moby he was looking into flights.

Moby hung Sean's coat in the closet before gesturing to the sofa. He'd forgotten all about Jilly, who still sat patiently waiting to be acknowledged by their guest. Moby scratched the back of Jilly's ear as he passed by her. “Okay, baby girl. You can say hello to Sean.”

Jilly rose immediately and stuck her nose in Sean's crotch. Sean's eyes rounded as he tried to brush the dog's attention from the erection pressing against his jeans. Moby sat on the couch and chuckled at Sean's obvious discomfort. “She's a girl who knows what she likes. I can't really yell at her when I'd be doing the same thing if my mom wasn't in the other room.”

“Yeah, well, your nose is one thing, but I've never had a female anything so near my cock,” Sean said, finally breaking free of Jilly. “I should go in and say hi to Virginia.”

Moby shook his head and reached for Sean's hand. “She knows you're here. She told me to entertain you while she finished dinner.”

“But isn't it kind of rude not to at least say hello?” Sean asked.

“Sean says hello, Mom!” Moby shouted.

“It's good to have you here. Make yourself comfortable,” Virginia answered.

“See?” With a wide smile, Moby pulled Sean onto the couch. He couldn't resist sliding his hand across the front of Sean's jeans.

Sean's eyebrows shot up and he moved Moby's hand to his thigh. “Don't get me in trouble.”

Moby turned on the television before curling himself against Sean's side. He pressed his lips to the side of Sean's neck and peppered several kisses to the lightly freckled skin. “I wish we were alone.”

“Yeah? What would you do?” Sean asked with a devilish glint in his eyes.

“I'd pull that hard cock out of your pants, grease it up and straddle your lap. Then I'd slowly lower myself down its length, relishing the burn as it filled my ass.”

Sean moaned and reached down to adjust his erection. “You're killing me. Do you really want me to show up at your mom's dinner table with cum-soaked jeans?”

Moby's lips travelled back up Sean's neck to whisper in his ear. “You make me want you more than anyone I've ever known. Just a glance across the pub from you and I wanna strip down and present my ass for your enjoyment.” Since fucking before his shift several days earlier, Moby had thought of little else. What would it be like to have a man like Sean around all the time? Would he ever want to get out of bed? Moby doubted it. Even the smell of the man's skin made Moby yearn for something he'd never had the nerve to hope for.

Sean turned his head and caught Moby's lower lip between his teeth. The bite was erotic as hell while still being playful. “Can you follow me back to my place after dinner, or will that cause problems for you?”

Moby wasn't sure how to answer. “I don't know. I mean, I guess we can see how dinner goes, but I'm not sure I care how my mom feels about it anyway.”

Sean shook his head. “I won't be the one to come between the two of you. I've learned that

lesson the hard way.”

“Yeah, well I’ve had a lot of men in my bed, but you’re the first I want to wake up with every morning. I take care of Mom because it’s the right thing to do, but you’re the one who makes me happy. I won’t give that up for her.”

“Supper’s ready,” Virginia said from the doorway.

Moby stilled, wondering if she’d heard what he’d said. Did it matter? Despite the harsh sound of it, he’d meant every word. “Thanks, Mom.” He unwound his arms from around Sean’s neck. “Hope you’re hungry. My mom makes the best fried chicken in the state.”

Sean chuckled and stood. “I won’t tell Jay you said that.”

Moby shrugged and got to his feet. “Don’t worry about it. I’ve already told him.”

\* \* \* \*

Sean wiped his mouth and set his napkin on the table. “Mmm mmm mmm. Thank you for the fabulous dinner, Mrs. Haines. Moby was right. That’s the best fried chicken I’ve ever eaten.”

Virginia blushed. “You’re welcome. I may not be able to do much, but cooking’s always been something I’ve excelled at.”

“Well, if you’re ever looking for a part-time job, O’Brien’s could use you in the kitchen. As it is, we don’t serve food on Sunday anymore and only easy munchies after seven on two other evenings during the week.”

Sean didn’t miss the look that passed between Moby and Virginia. Although Virginia had been incredibly polite, maybe she still didn’t approve of her son’s gay lifestyle. If that was the case, there was probably no way the woman would feel comfortable working at a pub in CattleValley.”

“That’s a generous offer,” Moby said.

“Yes it is,” Virginia answered.

Sean wasn’t able to read her expression because he didn’t know her well enough, but he could tell something bothered her about the offer. With the sudden uneasiness at the table, Sean looked for a way out. “Why don’t the two of you go on into the living room and let me clean up.”

Moby shook his head and stood. “You’re our guest. I’ll do it.”

Sean wanted to argue, but realised Moby had taken his cue from his mother. He cleared his throat and nodded. “That’s nice. Thank you.”

Virginia started to push her chair back, but Sean reached her first and helped her to her feet. She looked up at him with a surprised expression. “Thank you.”

Sean shrugged. “You’re welcome. Would you like to join me in the living room?”

Virginia nodded and took the offered elbow, but glanced back at Moby. What the hell was going on? Sean couldn’t put his finger on it, but there seemed to be an entire conversation going on between the two of them that Sean couldn’t hear. Before leaving the room, Sean turned to look at Moby once more. Moby grinned and winked. Whether the action was meant to flirt or put him at ease, Sean wasn’t sure.

Virginia grabbed the remote control from the coffee table and sat in a recliner. The chair was so big it seemed to swallow the petite woman in its cushions. “Do you like *House Hunters*?”

“Excuse me?” Sean asked, taking a seat on the couch beside Jilly.

Virginia changed the channel and gestured to the TV. "It's one of my favourite shows. It follows people around as they look for a new house to buy."

Sean nodded. "I haven't seen it before, but then I'm usually working."

Virginia's attention drifted from the television screen to Sean. "Did you mean what you said about offering me a job?"

"Sure. I wouldn't have said anything if I didn't mean it. Are you interested?"

Virginia worried her chin with her frail-looking fingers. "I've never had a job before. I'm not sure I'd know what to do."

Sean knew about a little of Virginia's life with her husband, but it wasn't his place to say anything. "Oh, I have a feeling you've worked for years, you just haven't been paid for it. I can't offer as much money as some of the restaurants around, but at O'Brien's, the cook also gets a cut of the tips, so you should come out all right."

Virginia was quiet for several moments. "I heard what William said to you earlier."

After an internal sigh, Sean braced himself for the tirade he knew was coming.

"I can't lose my son, not again. It nearly killed me the first time. I won't survive it again. I don't think I ever hated Bill more than the day William walked out of this house. If being with you makes my son happy, it makes me happy. I need you to tell him that."

"No need," Moby said from the doorway. "I'm right here."

Virginia sat up straighter in the chair. "I didn't see you there."

"Yeah, well, there seems to be a lot of that going around." Moby came into the room and sat beside Sean.

Sean put a hand on Moby's thigh for support when he noticed the moisture in Moby's eyes.

"Did you really hate Dad?" Moby asked.

"Yes," Virginia admitted. "I may go to hell for saying this, but I was glad he died because I knew there was no other way out for me."

"That's not true, Mom. You could've called me. I would've done anything to help you." Moby slid off the couch and knelt beside Virginia's chair.

Sean realised mother and son needed to be alone. He rose and put a hand on Moby's shoulder. "I'm going to let myself out so the two of you can talk."

Moby rose and whispered something in his mother's ear. After her reassuring nod, he turned to Sean. "I'll walk you to your car."

Before heading to the door, Sean addressed Virginia. "Thank you again for dinner, and think about my offer."

"I will, and come back anytime," Virginia answered.

Moby stepped into a pair of boots beside the front door before opening the closet. He passed Sean his coat before shrugging into his own.

"You don't have to walk me out," Sean said. "No sense in both of us freezing."

Moby shook his head and smiled. "I want to."

Bundled up, Sean led the way out of the house. Moby closed the front door and pulled Sean into his arms before he had a chance to reach the porch steps. "I have no idea what's happened this evening, but I feel like I'm on the edge of something, and I need to figure out what it is."

Sean brushed his lips against Moby's. "You don't have to explain anything to me. Just promise

that you'll call me later if you need to talk."

Moby nodded and buried his face against Sean's neck, giving the skin a kiss before pulling away. "Thank you."

"Thank me by working things out with your mom." Sean couldn't believe how strongly he felt regarding Moby's relationship with Virginia. It only took a few hours to see how different the two were from Ryan and his mother.

He offered one last wave to Moby as he pulled out of the driveway. It hit him about halfway home. He more than cared for the man. Dammit, he didn't know how it happened, but Moby had worked his way under Sean's skin straight to his heart. The prospect of being in love both frightened and thrilled him.

The further he travelled towards home, the less it felt like a home. Instead of returning to a pub, he wished he'd have stayed at Moby's house. Pulling as far off the road as he could, Sean gripped the steering wheel. He needed to get himself under control. There was simply no way he could love Moby after such a short time together. Maybe he was once again transferring his need for a real family to a lover. Had he offered Virginia a job to be closer to the woman? Was he also trying to replace the mother he never had a chance to know? Whatever the reasons, he had more to figure out before he'd confess his feelings to Moby.

\* \* \* \*

It was well after closing time when Moby arrived at the pub. He parked in the alley outside the stairs leading to Sean's second-floor apartment. Wiping his eyes once again, he pulled out his phone and called the one person he needed most.

Sean answered after several rings. "Moby?"

"I'm in the alley. Can I come up?"

"Of course." The bedding rustled in the background as Sean obviously threw back the covers. "Let me throw on a pair of sweats."

Moby almost told Sean not to bother, but he was after comfort and understanding not sex. "I'll meet you at the back door."

"Don't hang up. Tell me what's going on?" Sean asked.

"I needed to get out of the house for a while and the only place I wanted to be was with you," Moby admitted. "I hope you don't mind?"

The door opened and a bare-chested, sleep-tousled Sean stood before him with open arms. Moby didn't waste a second. His emotions were raw and he no longer had the strength to hide them. He immediately shed his coat and threw it to the floor as he stepped into the apartment. The moment the door shut behind him, Moby grabbed onto Sean as though the man were an anchor in a storm.

Moby buried his face against Sean's shoulder.

"What happened?" Sean asked.

It wasn't until Moby heard the echo of Sean's voice from the phone in his hand that he realised he hadn't ended the call. He closed his phone and dropped it on top of his coat. Sean's question hadn't been forgotten, and Moby knew he'd unload everything on his lover's shoulders before the night was over, but first he just needed Sean's strength.

Sean gently pulled away enough to lead Moby towards the bedroom. "You look exhausted." He helped Moby undress and get under the covers before joining him.

It wasn't until Moby was safely in Sean's arms that he spoke. "Bill Haines wasn't my biological father."

"What?" Sean tilted Moby's chin up.

Moby stared into Sean's green eyes. "I didn't know until a few hours ago. Mom finally confessed to me why he had so much control over her." Moby took a deep breath. The pain in his mother's eyes as she'd broken down and told him the truth would haunt him for a long time. "She lived with that fucker all those years because he agreed to raise a child that wasn't his."

"I'm sure she did what she felt was right," Sean said.

Moby shook his head. "Maybe so. Don't get me wrong, I'm not angry with her. I think she felt she had little choice after my real dad ran off. I just feel guilty. It's because of me she suffered for so many years."

"No." Sean scooted down until he was eye level with Moby. "Don't put that on yourself. She could've left when Bill threw you out. At that point, she *chose* to stay."

"Only because she didn't know how to take care of herself by then," Moby tried to argue.

"I'm not going to deny that, but it was still her choice. I guess what I'm trying to say is you're only responsible for your life and your mistakes, not Virginia's. Those are hers to deal with."

Moby nodded. "She basically said the same thing." He brushed a kiss across Sean's lips. "She also said if you make me happy, I shouldn't let her old-fashioned ideas stand in the way."

Sean smiled. "Does this mean you'll spend the night more often?"

Moby propped his head up with his hand and looked down at Sean. "Were you serious about giving my mom a part-time job?"

Sean didn't answer right away but eventually nodded. "Yeah. Is that okay with you?"

"Okay? It's more than okay. It'll not only bring more money into the house, but I think it'll be good for her." Moby circled Sean's lips with the tip of his finger. "We discussed selling the house and moving to CattleValley, but I don't think she's quite ready to embrace my lifestyle to that extent yet. I'm hoping if she gets to know more people here, she'll change her mind."

Sean threaded his fingers through Moby's hair to rest on the back of his neck. "Let me know if you decide to make the move, and I'll do everything I can to help get you here."

"Yeah?" Moby grinned and let Sean pull his head down for a kiss. He accepted the warm tongue invading his mouth with pleasure. Although he hadn't come over for sex, his body was quickly heating up. He slid his body on top of Sean's and was pleased to find the man already hard.

As the kiss continued, Moby began to rub his cock against Sean's in a slow dance of passion. With each swivel of his hips, he felt the brush of Sean's pubic hair rub against the sensitive skin of his cock.

Sean's hands squeezed Moby's ass, directing him without words to move faster. Moby was happy to oblige and began thrusting and grinding with one goal in mind. He broke the kiss and stared down at Sean. "I'm gonna make a mess of you and your bed."

Sean moaned. "I've got a shower and more sheets, coat me with everything you have."

The thought of smearing his cum into Sean's skin set him off almost immediately. His body jerked as the first strand of seed shot between them, making each movement easier.

"Fuck," Sean howled as his warmth joined Moby's. He rode out his climax with growled words of need in Moby's ear. "Can't get enough of you. Always need you. Forever."

Moby focused on the last word, playing it in a loop over and over in his mind. Could it actually be possible? He was an ex-stripper used to going from man to man for not only his living but also his

sexual needs. Would a man as solid and honest as Sean really want him for the long haul? Moby didn't ask the question because he was afraid of the answer. A lot of men said things in the heat of the moment that seemed to slip their minds as soon as they were out of bed. He didn't want to think Sean was like the other men he'd been with, but other than a few words here and there, Sean had never talked seriously about their future together. Sure, Sean didn't like him flirting with the customers, and Moby had tried to watch himself because of it, but was that jealousy on Sean's part or actual feelings? Moby had no way of knowing, nothing to base an educated opinion on.

After several moments spent catching their breaths, Sean's hands began to rub against Moby's ass again. "Will you stay?"

"For as long as you want me here," Moby whispered. He began to wiggle his way down Sean's body, licking the lightly freckled skin as he went. When he reached Sean's nipples, he gave both the attention they deserved. Although small in diameter, they hardened at the first touch of Moby's tongue.

"Don't tempt me," Sean said as he arched his back.

Moby took one of the small pebbles between his teeth and bit down hard enough to elicit a loud moan from Sean but not enough to draw blood. Relaxing his jaw, Moby smiled up at Sean. "I'll continue to tempt you forever if that's what it takes."

Sean made a noise deep in his chest that Moby wasn't sure how to decipher. "Is that what you really want?" Sean finally asked.

"To tempt you? Yeah." Moby scooted further down Sean's body and began lapping at their combined cum stuck to Sean's stomach.

"No, I meant the forever part," Sean clarified. "Because I'm starting to really fall for you, and I need to know what you're thinking."

Moby pushed himself up and sat back on his heels. "No one's ever..." Moby shook his head. "I'm not the kind of guy men fall in love with."

"Because you can't stay with them long enough to let it happen?" Sean asked.

Moby shook his head again. "No. It's usually the other way around. Men want me while they're on vacation or away from home on a business trip but just for sex."

Sean reached up and cupped Moby's cheek. "Do you want to be with me for more than sex?"

"Yes," Moby answered easily. "When you look at me, I feel...important. Sex has never made me feel that way." The surprised look in Sean's eyes made Moby chuckle. "I'm not saying sex isn't fucking awesome. I think we both know how much I love that dick of yours up my ass. It's just never made me feel...complete. I thought there was something wrong with me, but I've come to realise it just wasn't enough."

Moby covered Sean's hand with his own. "Whether it's too soon for you to hear it or not, I've fallen in love with you."

Sean pulled Moby down into his arms. "I'm right there with you. I still have some issues to work out on my own, but I don't doubt my feelings for you."

Moby opened his mouth for Sean's kiss. He didn't know what issues Sean needed to work out, but he would do everything he could to help him along the way. As he sucked Sean's tongue into his mouth, Moby prayed Sean would still feel the same way about him in the cold light of day.

## Chapter Seven

With a fuzzy Santa hat perched on his head, Moby wove his way through the heavy Christmas Eve crowd. At least most of the customers had come straight from the annual Cattle Valley Christmas party at the church and weren't hungry. It was a damn good thing. Although it was already the third time his mom had filled in for Jay in the last week, Moby doubted she'd be up to cooking for the crowd presently packed inside O'Brien's.

He reached the long table of folks from the Back Breaker ranch and set four pitchers of beer at equal distances down the centre of the table. "You need anything else?" he asked Shep.

"Thanks. This'll do for now."

Moby was on his way back to the bar when Guy Hoisington waved him down. *Shit*. Moby had worked hard not to flirt with his customers, but Guy's smooth way of talking always managed to suck him in.

Guy's million dollar smile met Moby when he arrived at the table. "Merry Christmas," Guy said.

Moby didn't know the other four men at the table but from their looks, he assumed they were either fellow skiers or male models. "Merry Christmas. What can I get ya?"

Guy's hand landed on the small of Moby's back, slowly making its way to Moby's ass. "I need something to keep me warm."

Moby reached behind him and pushed Guy's hand off his ass. "Unless you wanna take Sean on, I'd suggest you keep your hands to yourself," he whispered in Guy's ear.

Guy looked towards the bar. "You with him?"

"Yeah," Moby answered, noticing the foot massaging Guy's cock from under the table.

"Like exclusively?" Guy prodded.

"Yeah." Moby didn't feel he owed Guy anymore explanations. "So, what'll you have?"

Guy crooked his finger until Moby leant down. The position drew Moby's attention to the two feet, wearing different socks, rubbing against Guy's cock. "I'll have you as soon as Sean's finished."

For the first time in his life, Moby felt truly insulted by a customer. In the past, he'd been more than flattered by Guy's attentions but he suddenly realised he was nothing more than another conquest to the man.

Moby stood and looked at the two owners of the feet presently massaging Guy's groin. The men didn't seem to mind the way Guy flirted with Moby. How could he have ever been remotely attracted to a man like Guy?

"I'll send Kitty over to take your order." Moby didn't give Guy a chance to protest. He walked to the bar, shaking his head. Sean was busy filling orders and didn't see Moby approach, so he went behind the bar and whispered in his lover's ear. "I'm not waiting on that fucker anymore."

Sean paused in the act of pouring a glass of wine. His eyes narrowed as he stared across the room. "Who?"

"Guy." Although he wanted to tell Sean what the asshole had said to him, Moby didn't want a fight to break out on Christmas Eve. "Don't worry. I took care of it. I'm just telling you not to expect me to wait on him anymore."



"Why the fuck's he here in the first place when there's a damn bar in that ski lodge of his?" Sean finished pouring the glass and set it in front of Nate with such force Moby was surprised it didn't break.

"Something wrong?" Rio asked from his position beside Nate.

"Yeah," Sean said. "Tell me why the hell Guy doesn't hang out and harass the waiters at the Grizzly Bar."

Rio slid his beer to the side and leant over the bar. "Because Ezra threatened to cut off his balls if he lost another employee because of the way Guy talks to them."

Moby couldn't help but laugh at the picture the scenario created in his mind.

Rio shook his head. "It's not funny. Since retiring for good and coming out of the closet, Guy seems to have a one-track mind when it comes to sex. He thinks he's safe here and no one's gonna go all tabloid on him, but he needs to be careful."

Sean motioned for Kitty.

"Yeah, boss?"

"Take care of Guy's table until I have a chance to talk to him," Sean informed her.

With a nod, Kitty strode off in Guy's direction.

Sean gestured towards the men's room. "Can I have a word with you?"

By the gruff sound of Sean's voice, Moby had an idea of what his boss wanted. On the days when Jay worked the kitchen, Sean would just take Moby upstairs to work off some tension, but with Moby's mom in the kitchen, they tried to be more discreet about playing at work.

Moby followed Sean across the bar and into the restroom. As soon as he was in the dimly lit room, Moby hung the closed sign on the outside of the door and locked it. Before he was able to turn around, Sean had him pressed against the door.

Sean's hands fumbled under the half-apron Moby had started wearing and began to unzip his jeans. "What did Guy say to you?"

With his jeans around his ankles, Moby spread his legs as far apart as possible and stuck his ass out. "That he wanted me when you were finished," he confessed. Although he wasn't used to a jealous lover, Moby was quickly becoming addicted to it. He loved that Sean felt the need to remind him constantly whom he belonged to.

"Stay right there," Sean ordered with a nip to the back of Moby's neck.

Moby heard Sean feeding money into the small vending machine attached to the wall and reached down to wrap his hands around his cock. "You'd better hurry. We're busier than usual tonight."

Sean grunted as his lubed finger started slicking Moby's hole. "They can all get the fuck out as far as I'm concerned. I don't like the thought of you being propositioned right under my nose."

With the amount of fucking they'd done recently, it took no time to get Moby stretched and ready to receive Sean's sheathed cock. "I'm yours, remember? No amount of propositioning is gonna persuade me to give up what I've got."

Sean's cock entered Moby in one smooth thrust. "Mine," Sean reiterated. "Always."

"Yeah," Moby agreed, moving one of Sean's hands down to his cock. Hearing Sean say those two words sent Moby's lust into overdrive. He turned his head around as much as possible. "Mark me as yours," he demanded.

With a feral look in his eyes and the hard snapping of his hips as he pumped in and out of Moby's ass, Sean latched on to Moby's neck.

Moby groaned when he felt the blood rising to the skin. "Bite me."

When Sean's teeth sank into his flesh, Moby came. They never bit each other hard enough to draw blood, and never above their shirt collars, but Moby wanted everyone in the pub to know that he belonged to Sean.

Sean released his hold on Moby's neck and hummed against the sensitive bite mark. "You sexy motherfucker," he crooned, pounding harder into Moby's ass.

Moby lifted Sean's cum covered hand and began to lick it clean. "You want some?" he asked over his shoulder.

Sean pulled his hand from Moby's grasp and ran it through the short thatch of dark pubic hair surrounding Moby's cock. With more of Moby's cum gathered on his fingers, Sean slowly shoved them into his mouth. A few moments after the taste of Moby's climax hit his tongue, Sean's body jerked with his own orgasm.

Moby still hoped there would come a time when he could feel Sean's seed filling him instead of a rubber. They'd only discussed it a few times and each time decided to see how things went between them before taking the steps needed to bareback.

When Sean stumbled backwards to remove the condom, Moby turned around to face his lover. He could see his own reflection in the mirror beside Sean and touched the deep hickey on the side of his neck. With his short hair, there was no way anyone would be able to miss it.

"Sorry about that," Sean apologised, tossing the tied condom into the trash.

"I like it." The more Moby rubbed the bruise, the more excited he became. With his jeans still around his ankles, and his hair sticking up, he looked like he'd been truly good and fucked. "As a matter-of-fact, I think a matching one on the other side would be nice."

Sean chuckled and wet a paper towel. He stared into Moby's eyes as he began gently cleaning Moby's ass. "Maybe later. I don't want anyone out there to think I've been beating the shit out of you."

"Do you really care what anyone else thinks about us?" Moby asked, pulling up his jeans.

Tossing the towel towards the trashcan, Sean shook his head. "Not a bit, but if they think I'm mistreating you, someone'll come along and try and rescue you from me."

"I won't let them," Moby said before accepting Sean's tongue. He jumped when someone pounded on the door.

"You're getting backed up out here," Rio called through the door.

Moby grinned. "Later." He licked Sean's bottom lip. "You're still planning on coming to spend the night with us, aren't you?"

Sean shrugged. "Wouldn't you rather just stay here with me?"

"Yeah, but I've got to take Mom home. I figured it would be easier for you to just pack a bag and spend the night since you've already agreed to be with us on Christmas morning anyway."

"You're right. That does make sense, but are you sure your mom is okay with it?"

Moby chuckled. "She's already changed the sheets in the guestroom, but she doesn't have to know we'll both be sleeping in it."

"You just keep trying to get me into trouble."

Moby reached for the lock on the door. "I guess I don't have to visit you if it makes you uncomfortable."

Sean put his hand towards the top of the door to keep Moby from opening it. "I didn't say that. You'll just have to keep your moans to a minimum."

"Speak for yourself," Moby shot back with a wink.

\* \* \* \*

Leaning with his forearms resting on the bar, Sean tracked Moby as he flitted from table to table taking orders.

"You've got it bad," Rio said.

"Yeah, I do," Sean confessed. He looked at his friend. "Do you think I'm making a mistake?"

Rio glanced over his shoulder just in time to see Moby stop what he was doing and smile at Sean. "Doesn't look like it. I'd say he's as goofy for you as you are for him." Rio turned to study Sean once again. "Enjoy it. New love is the best feeling in the world."

Sean glanced towards the end of the bar where Nate was holding court with several of the council members. "Are you saying it'll change so enjoy it while it lasts?"

Rio finished off his beer and slid his glass towards Sean as he got to his feet. He chuckled and shook his head. "I'm not travelling down that road with you tonight, buddy. I've got to get Nate home before Santa Claus gets off shift and wants to slip down his chimney."

Sean laughed. "You sick fucker."

Rio shrugged. "Have a good Christmas, Sean."

"I will. You have the same." Sean picked up Rio's glass and set it in the sink. A throat cleared and Sean glanced up. "Can I help...Dad? What're you doing here?" Sean's heart started to beat a mile a minute. He hadn't seen his father since selling his pub in Boston and moving to CattleValley.

"Sean," Devlin greeted with a nod of his head. "How've you been?"

"Fine." Sean tried to shake off his surprised stupor. He spotted Moby walking towards the bar and panic started to set in. "What're you doing here, Dad?"

"Had some time off so I thought I'd check out the newest of the O'Brien Pubs."

"Mr. O'Brien?" Moby asked, stepping up beside Sean's dad.

"Yes," Devlin answered.

Before Moby had a chance to do it, Sean decided to introduce him. "This is Moby Haines. He works for me."

Devlin stuck out his hand and shook Moby's. "Nice to meet you."

Sean didn't like the attention his dad was paying Moby. The two men seemed to be communicating without words and the handshake was going on too long. "Moby," he said, getting his lover's attention. "I think table six needs a refill."

Moby opened his mouth to say something but snapped it shut before anything came out. It was easy for Sean to see the hurt in Moby's green eyes at the curt dismissal. Sean knew he'd have to explain his reaction to his dad's presence, but Moby should know by now there were certain O'Brien rules he was expected to follow, the number one rule being not to get involved with employees.

Devlin turned to study the pub. "Nice place. How's business?"

"Good," Sean answered. He still couldn't wrap his mind around the fact that his father was standing in front of him. "How long're you here for?"

Devlin moved to take a seat at the bar. "Few days. I probably should've called first, but I didn't want you to tell me not to come."

Sean immediately went on the offensive. "Why would you say that?"

"Why wouldn't I? It's not like you've ever invited any of us here before."

Staring at his father, Sean realised how different the two of them looked. With dark blond hair, rounded facial features and brown eyes, Devlin O'Brien looked like all the other O'Brien's, including Sean's brothers. Sean had been told by more than one family friend that he resembled his mother remarkably, but Sean had never paid much attention. There were no pictures of his mom in the house, and since no one in his family spoke about her, Sean had never felt a connection to the woman he'd never known.

"I didn't think you'd come," Sean confessed. "Guess it was easier not to invite you than to have you turn me down."

Devlin pointed towards the tap of Guinness. "Build me one, would ya?"

Sean picked up a glass and slowly went to work. He wondered if his dad was actually thirsty or if it was some sort of stupid way to test his skills as a bartender. Sean didn't need his dad's approval. He knew for a fact he was damn good at what he did. When he'd finished, he slid the glass towards his dad. "There you go."

"You don't like me much, do you?" Devlin asked, holding the glass of Guinness up to the light before taking a sip.

"I don't really know you enough to answer that," Sean replied.

"I suppose that's my fault," Devlin mumbled. He slapped his palm on the bar, making Sean flinch. "Well, that's what I'm here to change."

Sean wanted to tell his dad not to bother. He'd given up on his family years ago. Instead he turned his attention to the room. Moby was looking right at him, but as soon as they made eye contact, Moby lowered his head and continued to clear one of the tables.

He had to get his dad upstairs so he could talk to Moby about the Christmas plans they'd made. Sean returned his attention to his dad. "When you're finished, why don't you go on to my apartment upstairs? I'm sure you're tired after your flight."

Devlin's eyes narrowed slightly but nodded. "I'm not interrupting your plans am I?"

"Kind of, but I'll take care of it." Sean hoped he could anyway.

\* \* \* \*

By the time Moby cleared the last table; his mom had her coat on and was waiting by the door. He felt awful about keeping her up so late, but it seemed most of the single men and women in town hadn't wanted to return to their empty houses. Who could blame them?

After Sean had informed him he wouldn't be able to spend Christmas morning with them after all, Moby shut down. He should've known better than to get his hopes up. Evidently he was good enough to fuck, but not enough to introduce to Sean's father. Sean's explanation of O'Brien rules meant absolutely nothing to Moby. Well, except for the fact they seemed to mean more to Sean than he did.

He carried the tub of dirty dishes into the kitchen and set them on the counter. Fuck Sean if he thought Moby was going to stay long enough to wash them. He strode to the time clock and punched his card before grabbing his coat.

Before he could get out of the kitchen, Sean blocked his path. "Get out of my way," Moby ordered, trying to go around.

"Please. Don't do this. You know my dad's arrival was a complete surprise to me."

"Yeah, I know that. That's why I asked you to invite him to spend Christmas with us. But then you informed me it wouldn't work because a boss wouldn't normally spend such an important holiday with one of his employees."

Sean started to reach out for Moby, but Moby shot his hands up and stepped back. "Don't."

"He'll be gone in a few days. It's just..." Sean shook his head. "It's the first time he's really showed any interest. He said he came here to get to know me."

"Really? Yet instead of letting him get to know the real you, you think it's better to just lie to him?" Moby sighed and zipped his coat. Earlier, Sean had hurt his feelings, but now Moby was fucking pissed. "The O'Brien Way of doing things sucks but have no fear. I'm sure those stupid rules will be around long enough to keep you company in your old age."

Moby started to walk off, but Sean grabbed his upper arm and spun him around. "Don't you walk off after a statement like that. You knew the rules before we started this."

"What? I thought the rule was no one was allowed to touch me besides you. Isn't that why I've been losing out on about fifty extra bucks in tips every damn night?"

"Well excuse me for asking you not to whore yourself in my pub!"

Moby's hands started to shake with rage. "Take. Your. Hand. Off. Me," he said, emphasising each word.

Sean released his hold and stepped back. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

"You're right," Moby agreed as he pushed through the swinging door. "Are you ready, Mom?"

\* \* \* \*

"Fuck!" Sean yelled, turning to sweep the tub of dishes from the counter. As plates broke and glasses shattered, Sean couldn't give a shit about any of it. *What did I just do?*

The door to the apartment opened and Devlin stepped into the room. Taking in the mess, he looked at Sean as if he'd gone crazy. "What the hell's going on down here?"

Sean charged towards his father. "You!" he yelled, pointing his finger. "This is all your fault!"

Devlin's dark blond eyebrows shot up. "*Me?* What the hell did I do?"

Sean stopped just short of barrelling into his dad. "What didn't you do? You show up on Christmas Eve not caring if I've already made plans...you...you have all these stupid O'Brien rules that you expect me to follow even though I know the best thing for me is to follow my heart instead." Sean growled and ran his fingers through his hair. "But if I don't do things the O'Brien Way, I know I'll once again disappoint you."

Sean felt his anger give way to understanding. He looked at his dad with tears swimming in his eyes. "I don't think I care anymore if you approve of me or not. I'm in love with Moby. I know you won't approve because he works for me, but..."

"Stop right there," Devlin said in a hushed tone.

Sean immediately shut up. He knew from years of experience that his dad never yelled when he was angry. Devlin O'Brien was one of those men who became quieter the angrier he got.

"First of all, I didn't just show up here. I was invited," Devlin began.

*Invited?* Before he could ask, his father continued ticking things off on his fingers.

"Secondly, you no longer live under my roof so O'Brien rules don't apply to you anymore unless

you *want* them to.” Devlin shook his head. “And where the hell did you come up with the rule about not dating people who work for you? I’ve never, *ever*, said that.”

“Yes you have,” Sean tried to argue. “Remember Kate, that waitress who worked for you for six years? I thought she’d be perfect for you, but you told me point blank that dating her was against the rule.”

Devlin’s expression changed to one of confusion. “Dating Kate had nothing to do with the rules of business. When I told you that, I was referring to my own personal rule. As far as I’m concerned, I’m still married to your mother, who, by the way, was working for me when we started dating.”

Devlin reached out and placed a hand on Sean’s shoulder. “When you spend your life running a pub, how do you expect to find love anywhere else?”

Sean collapsed onto a stool in the corner of the kitchen as the tears started to freely flow down his face. “I don’t understand. If you’re still in love with my mother, why don’t you talk about her? Why have I never seen a picture of her in our house?” Sean swiped at his cheeks with the back of his hand. “Do you hate me that much because I took her away from you?”

Devlin dropped his head and stared at the floor for several moments. Sean was surprised when he noticed his dad wiping at his eyes. “I’m not proud of the way I’ve handled things where you’re concerned.” Devlin straightened to face Sean. “Hate isn’t the right word. I’ve never hated you. How could I?”

“Then why, Dad? Why didn’t you love me?”

Devlin walked towards the swinging door. “Let’s have a drink, and I’ll tell you a story.”

\* \* \* \*

With a pot of whisky-laden coffee between them, Devlin began. “I lost my heart the day Evie walked into the pub looking for a job. I hired her on the spot even though she had absolutely no experience.” The corner of Devlin’s mouth turned up, obviously remembering a happier time.

“Within six months we were married, and soon after that Evie became pregnant with Nial. It wasn’t an easy pregnancy and the doctor told her it would be better if she didn’t have more children.” Devlin chuckled and shook his head. “But my Evie was a stubborn woman. Growing up as an only child, she wanted nothing more than a houseful of children. So, despite the doctor’s warning, she went on to have Padrig and Fin. I thought three would be enough and by then her body was so frail that I told her I was going to have a vasectomy. We had a huge fight over it, and just like always, Evie got her way and soon became pregnant with you.”

Sean noticed something missing from his dad’s explanation of events. “Didn’t you want kids?”

Devlin shrugged. “Evie was all I needed to make me happy, but I soon realised I wasn’t enough to return that happiness to her. She needed children, so I had little choice but to make her dreams come true.”

Without coming out and saying it, Devlin had just informed Sean he’d never really wanted the four sons he ended up with. Why it came as a surprise to Sean he didn’t know. Hadn’t it been obvious all along? “So, because you blamed me for her death, you decided to keep her from me?”

Devlin shook his head. “It wasn’t something I set out to do. When Evie was taken from me, I shut down. Not just with you in particular but with everyone. I know it’s not your fault but every time I look at you, I see her, and I’m reminded why she’s not here with me anymore.”

“And Padrig, Fin and Nial? Do they feel the same way about me?” Sean asked, his throat raw

from swallowing the emotions that were trying to force their way to the surface.

"You have to remember they were still pretty young. Nial was the oldest at the time and he wasn't even ten yet. All they knew was that a baby was brought home instead of their mother." Devlin closed his eyes and nodded his head. "And their father couldn't bear to be in the same room with you without breaking down."

Sean took a deep breath. "I wish you'd have given me up for adoption if that's the way you felt."

Devlin nodded again. "And in hindsight, I probably should have."

Sean's head snapped back as if his father had delivered a blow. It was one thing to believe your father never loved you. It was another to actually hear it. "So why are you here now, Dad?"

"Because I got a phone call asking me to come for your birthday. I wasn't planning on coming, but the guilt started to eat at me, so here I am."

"Moby called you?"

"Yes. He didn't tell me the two of you were together, but I could tell by the way he spoke about you that he cared a great deal. When you introduced us earlier, and I saw the hurt in his eyes, I knew. I went upstairs hoping you'd do something to take that hurt away, but I guess it didn't happen."

"No, it didn't," Sean mumbled. He'd driven away the one person on earth who truly loved him for a man so eaten with grief that he was nothing but a hollow shell. Sean looked up from the spot on the table he'd been eyeing and stared at his father. "I'm sorry you came all this way, but I've been invited to celebrate my first real Christmas with a family who truly cares for me. You can come if you want, or you can stay here, doesn't matter to me."

Sean sucked in a breath at the realisation that it really *didn't* matter to him. Nothing about the O'Briens' mattered, not their rules, not their approval, hell, not even them. He had a family right where he was and in the short time he'd known them, they'd given him more love than he'd ever thought he deserved.

Devlin finished off his coffee and stood. "I'll probably head on back to Boston in the morning if I can get a flight. I know you don't believe this now, but I really am sorry for everything you've been through." He squeezed Sean's shoulder before disappearing into the kitchen.

Sean waited until he heard the apartment door close before carrying his cup and the coffeepot into the kitchen. Staring at the mess he'd made on the floor, Sean knew it wasn't the biggest mess he needed to clean up. He walked away from the kitchen without a backwards glance. Some things were simply more important than a job.

## Chapter Eight

Sean jumped at the knock to the driver's window. He pushed the sleeping bag he'd brought along away from his face and turned to see Virginia staring at him. He switched on the ignition and rolled down his window.

"Are you coming in or just planning to sleep in my driveway all day?" Virginia asked.

"Not sure if I'm welcome," Sean replied.

Virginia shook her head. "Well I'm not sure either, but you're definitely not going to find out sitting out here."

"Is William awake?" Sean asked.

Virginia shook her head. "He told me before he went to bed not to wake him. Said he wanted nothing to do with Christmas this year."

"That's my fault."

"Yes, it is. Now're you going to do something about it or not?" With those words, Virginia turned and walked back towards the porch.

Sean untangled himself from the sleeping bag and turned off the engine. He grabbed a small sack of envelopes and followed Virginia into the house. Jilly lifted her head from the sofa. *Shit*. Was it his imagination or did the dog look like she was scowling at him? Moby had mentioned to Sean a time or two what a good listener his dog was. Had Moby really told Jilly what an ass Sean had been? He pointed towards the dog. "I'll make up with you in a few minutes. First there's someone else who needs an apology."

Virginia took the gifts and set them beside the tree while Sean took off his boots and coat. "Down the hall. I'll start breakfast," she said before disappearing into the kitchen.

After a quick stop in the bathroom, Sean crept his way towards Moby's room. He opened the door and stepped inside as quietly as possible. The early morning sun bathed Moby in a golden light. The picture would've been perfect if it hadn't been for the closed, swollen eyes on Moby's handsome face.

It gutted Sean to see the proof of just how much he'd hurt the man he loved. Taking a big chance, Sean removed his jeans and socks and slid into bed beside Moby. He didn't reach for Moby right away. What if no matter what he said or did he'd damaged their relationship beyond repair?

The decision was taken out of his hands when Moby rolled over and snuggled against Sean's chest in his sleep. Sean let his arms settle around Moby. "I love you," he whispered, kissing the top of Moby's head.

Moby's cheek rubbed against Sean's flannel shirt. Although the moment felt perfect, Sean knew his lover was still asleep. "Wake up, sweetheart. I have a few things I need to tell you."

Moby's arm tightened around Sean's waist briefly before his entire body went rigid. He sat straight up and blinked several times before staring down at Sean. "What're you doing here?"

"Praying that you'll give me another chance," Sean answered. "I love you more than anyone on earth, and I want to spend the rest of my life proving it to you."

Moby's face contorted in confusion. "Why're you telling me this now? Is it because you think it's what I want to hear?"



Sean sat up to face Moby, settling the covers around his waist. "Remember those issues I told you I need to figure out?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I realised I was an asshole to even worry about them. I enjoy owning my own place, but I'm not in love with the pub. I thought I was. I'd actually done a damn good job of convincing myself that if it came down to it, I didn't need anything but that place." Sean reached out and put his hand on Moby's blanket-covered leg. "I couldn't have been more wrong. It's you I need, not stupid rules. From now on, *The O'Brien Way* of doing things is whatever I determine, not what was handed down by my father."

"So I guess that means you spoke to him?" Moby said.

"Yeah. And to be honest, I'm not sure I care to do it again anytime soon. It might sound selfish to you, but at this point in my life, I don't think he deserves another chance to get to know me."

Moby's eyes filled with tears. "I'm sorry that I asked him to come. I wasn't trying to hurt you."

"I know, and despite how things turned out, I'm glad you did what you did. It was about damn time I woke up to who he really was and is. He'll never change because he has no desire to, but I refuse to travel down that path with him. It's time I start living my life for me instead of always trying to gain his approval."

Moby leant forward and wrapped his arms around Sean. "It sounds like your night was even harder than mine."

Sean shook his head. "That's not true. I don't think my dad has the power to hurt me like I did you. I'll never be able to forgive myself for what I said and did to you."

Moby moved to straddle Sean's lap. "I forgive you. Now shut up and kiss me."

Sean moved his hands to Moby's ass and squeezed as he took his lover's mouth in a deep kiss. Moby may have forgiven him, but Sean knew he was far from forgiving himself. He took the kiss deeper as his hands separated the cheeks of Moby's ass and began to circle the puckered skin of his hole.

With a moan, Moby pulled out of the kiss and climbed off Sean's lap. "I have something for you," he said, opening the bedside drawer. He came back with a box of condoms and a new bottle of lube wrapped in a large red ribbon. "Don't worry. This isn't your only present," he said, handing them over.

"You're the only present I need."

"Really? Because you've already got me, so I guess I'll take the others back tomorrow," Moby said with a chuckle.

Sean held up the bottle of lube. "What about this? Can I keep this?"

Moby crawled back onto Sean's lap and nodded. "You can do more than keep it, you can use it. Now," he added.

Within moments, Sean had the bottle opened and his fingers coated in lube. After readjusting Moby, Sean pushed two fingers slowly inside him. His gaze went to the large bruise on the side of Moby's neck as he continued to slide his fingers in and out of Moby's warmth. "There's something else I promised you for Christmas," he said before taking the skin of Moby's neck into his mouth.

Moby tilted his head to give Sean better access as he began to ride three of Sean's fingers.

"Breakfast is ready," Virginia called through the closed door.

Moby's head jerked towards the door. Unprepared for the quick movement, Sean didn't release his hold on Moby's skin soon enough. "Ow!" Moby cried, his hand going to his neck.

"Sorry," Sean apologised.

Moby grinned and leant in for a quick kiss. "Are you sure you're not a vampire?"

"Promise." Sean removed his fingers from Moby's ass and wiped them on the sheets. "I forgot to tell you your mom was making breakfast."

Moby scrambled off the bed and grabbed his jeans from the floor. "I wanted to give her her present before breakfast."

"I'm sure it can wait until afterwards," Sean said, confused by Moby's sudden rush to get out of the bedroom.

"Yeah, but it won't be the same." Moby pulled on a T-shirt and bent over to give Sean another quick kiss. "Get dressed," he said before grabbing a large box from the corner of the room and racing out of the door.

Sean crawled off the bed and reached for his jeans. Was Moby's excitement normal for Christmas morning? He thought of the gifts he'd purchased for Moby and his mother and began to second guess his choices. Sean had gone for practical but surely Moby wouldn't be so excited to give his mom a practical gift. "Well, shit."

\* \* \* \*

Moby set the unwrapped box on the kitchen floor and kissed his mom on the cheek. "Merry Christmas, Mom."

Virginia grinned. "I see Sean managed to climb his way out of the hole he dug himself into last night."

"Yep. Now, I need you to go into the living room and stay there until I call you in." He took his mom by the shoulder and gently prodded her out of the room.

"But breakfast is going to get cold," she tried to argue.

"No it won't. I'll be quick." As soon as his mom was gone, Moby opened the box and began to unpack the set of china he'd found at a second-hand shop in town. Although it wasn't new, it was still in great shape and at a price he could afford. He quickly washed three each of the dinner and bread plates before reaching for the large platter at the bottom of the box.

Sean came wandering into the kitchen, almost tripping over Jilly. "Can I help you with something?"

"Yes," Moby answered in relief and held out the china "You can take those old dishes off the table and replace them with these." He snapped his fingers at Jilly. "Go lay down."

Jilly dutifully rose to her feet and laid back down in her special corner of the room. Moby strode towards the table and quickly removed the serving dishes. After transferring the food, he stepped back and eyed the table, cringeing when he noticed a small chip on one of the bowls. He reached back and turned the bowl until the defect wasn't as noticeable and smiled. "Okay, Mom."

Virginia stepped into the room and gasped. "What have you done?" she asked as her hand came up to cover her mouth.

"Merry Christmas," Moby said. He was proud of himself for finally getting his mom the perfect present.

Virginia dropped into her chair and ran her hand over the delicate yellow rose pattern that rimmed the dinner plate. "I've never seen anything more beautiful."

"Someday I'll be able to buy you a new set, but until then, I hope this works."

Virginia looked up at Moby with tears in her eyes. "Don't you dare try to replace these. New or not, they mean more to me than anything else you could ever replace them with."

Moby smiled and bent to kiss his mom's cheek. "I'm glad you like them." He took a seat and looked up at Sean who was still standing silently by the table. "Something wrong?"

Sean shifted from foot to foot before finally leaving the room. Moby was about to go after the man he loved when Sean came back into the room, carrying a sack. "I have to apologise for the presents I brought. They aren't like yours."

Moby stood and crossed to Sean. He wrapped his arms around the sad-looking man and kissed him. "Never apologise for a gift. The important thing is that you cared enough to get them in the first place." He kissed Sean again. "Besides, you're the best gift I've ever received."

Sean grinned and held up the sack. "Glad you think so because I'm afraid you're going to be sorely disappointed in my shopping skills."

Moby held out his hand. "Okay, give me my present so you can enjoy your breakfast without worrying so damn much."

With a resigned sigh, Sean reached into the sack and pulled out an envelope. "This one's for you."

Moby went back to sit in his chair and opened his gift. He pulled out a sheet of paper with Gill's Garage printed at the top.

"It's a gift certificate. I noticed the other day that your tires were getting pretty bald. I thought maybe it would be safer for you to drive back and forth to work if you had a new set," Sean explained.

Moby had to take a deep breath before he could respond. He reached across the table for Sean's hand. "You were so wrong."

"I was?" Sean looked worried.

Moby nodded. "This is an incredible gift."

"You really think so?" Sean's frown disappeared.

"Yep, I really do."

Sean smiled for the first time since leaving the bedroom. "Cool." He dug back into the bag and came out with another envelope and handed it to Virginia. "I hope I'm not overstepping anything by giving you this. It's kind of another IOU like William's."

Virginia chuckled. "You can call him Moby in front of me."

"You know?" Moby asked.

"Why they call you that? No, but I've figured out you like it better than sharing Bill's name," she explained, easing open the envelope.

Moby crossed his arms and grinned. His mom's acceptance was growing at an incredible rate. With each day, she opened her world to views outside those of her husband.

Virginia pulled a key out of the envelope and looked at Sean. "What's this?"

Sean cleared his throat and glanced at Moby before answering Virginia's question. "I leased Logan's Cycle Shop. Since their business took off and they built that new building across town, this one's been sitting empty."

"You want me to open a motorcycle shop?" Virginia asked, clearly puzzled.

Sean chuckled and shook his head. "If you walk out the back door of O'Brien's, it's right across the alley. I thought maybe Moby and I could fix it up into like a small house or something. That way when you finish your shift, you can go home and not have to wait for Moby to clock out. Of course I'm

not saying you have to move or take it or anything. I just thought...you know...with the way things are going with Moby and I..."

Moby jumped in to rescue Sean once it became obvious the man was getting flustered. "Are you saying you want the two of us closer to you?"

"Yeah." Sean exhaled. "There's even a patch of grass behind it. I talked to Gill and he said we could fence it for Jilly."

Moby's heart melted. Although Sean hadn't come right out and said it, Moby knew he was paving the way to moving Moby's family within arm's reach. Moby glanced at his mother. Although they'd discussed selling the house and moving to CattleValley he wasn't sure if she was quite ready to make the jump. "What do you think, Mom?"

Virginia nodded. "I'm agreeable as long as we use any profit from the sale of the house to do the remodelling." She turned understanding eyes on Sean. "Thank you for caring enough about my son to do this."

"It's not just Moby I care about." Sean stood and walked around the table to lift Virginia's hand for a kiss. "I've never had a mom. I enjoy watching the two of you interact."

Virginia reached up and pulled Sean's head down for a kiss on the cheek. "You have a mom now."

Moby's eyes rounded. "Uhhh, Mom? That would make Sean and me brothers. Which is kinda gross."

Virginia and Sean both stared at Moby for a second before breaking out into laughter. Moby joined in and soon the fight with Sean was forgotten.

\* \* \* \*

Sean couldn't wipe the smile from his face as he finished washing the breakfast dishes. He heard the crinkle of Christmas wrapping as Moby cleaned the used paper from the living room floor. All of it, watching Moby unwrap gifts like a kid, sitting beside the small tree, eating breakfast with two people he cared so much about, combined to make it the best Christmas Sean could've hoped for.

"You know you look ridiculous, right?" Moby asked, coming up behind him.

Sean looked down at his new bright red robe. He hadn't cared that he was fully dressed, he wanted the gift as close to him as he could get it without scaring Virginia. "It's keeping me nice and warm."

Moby wrapped his arms around Sean's stomach and kissed the back of his neck. "I'll keep you warm."

Sean dried his hands and turned to embrace the man he loved. "Does that mean you'll always be there when I step out of the shower?"

"If you want me to be," Moby answered.

"Oh, I want, believe me." Sean ran his tongue over the fresh bruise on Moby's neck.

"I have one more present for you."

Sean gave one last kiss to the hickey and pulled back to look into Moby's green eyes. "You've given me Christmas. What else could there possibly be?"

"Dinner for the three of us at *The Canoe*. I know you don't normally go there, but Mom's never been and I thought..."

Sean shut Moby up with a kiss. He swirled his tongue around Moby's mouth, tasting coffee and syrup. After everything Moby and Virginia had given him, he wouldn't deny either of them a damn thing. "What time should we leave?"

"Reservations are for seven, but I thought we could leave early. Maybe spend some time in that big bed of yours? Mom said something about baking pies this afternoon so I'm sure we could talk her into doing that at O'Brien's."

Mention of the pub brought back the events of the previous night. "First I'll need to clean up the mess I made."

"What mess?" Moby asked, peppering kisses to Sean's neck.

The feel of Moby's hard cock pressed against him made Sean even more ashamed of his actions. "I kinda lost it after you left. There are broken dishes and food scraps all over the kitchen." He cupped the back of Moby's neck and tilted his head up until they were once again eye to eye. "I was wrong to say what I did to you. I knew it even as it came out of my mouth. All my life I've seen waiters and waitresses mauled by customers. I used to get so damn mad at my dad for allowing it to happen, but I've figured out what he must've always known. Good wait staff know when to tell their customers to back off."

Moby nodded.

"I won't say I like seeing other men touch you, but I know you're good at your job, so I'll try not to let it get to me."

Moby rimmed Sean's lips with his tongue. "You just keep marking me, and I'll guarantee those guys will get the idea that I'm already taken."

"Oh, I can do better than that. I see men and women making out all day long. So I'm not going to deprive myself of your lips any longer. If I want to kiss you, by God, I'm going to, no matter who's around."

"I like the sound of that," Moby agreed.

\* \* \* \*

"Sorry about the mess," Sean said, holding the kitchen door open for Virginia.

"What mess?" she asked.

"Huh?" Sean walked into the kitchen and was greeted by a spotless room. A large gift wrapped box sat on the prep island. He realised it had to have been the work of his father. The gesture of kindness after everything he'd said to the man genuinely touched him. It also made him feel about two feet tall.

Sean glanced over his shoulder at Moby and Virginia, who were standing quietly just inside the door. "My dad must've done it before he left."

Moby pointed towards the present wrapped in birthday paper. "You should open it."

The way he said it caused Sean to ask, "Do you know what it is?"

"I think so." Moby moved to Sean's side and kissed him. "I'm gonna run over with Mom to see her new place." He squeezed Sean's hand. "Take all the time you need."

"You don't have to leave," Sean tried to argue.

Moby shook his head. "This isn't about me. It's between you and your dad. I'll be around if you need me."

With those words, Moby ushered Virginia from the room. Sean was left staring at the first birthday gift his father had ever given him. It took him several minutes to gather the courage to approach the box.

Taped to the lid was an envelope with his name printed on it. After sliding Jay's stool over to the island, Sean took a deep breath and opened the envelope. It was a single page letter written in his father's handwriting.

*Sean,*

*As you must know by now, I was able to book an early flight, but before I go, there are a few things I feel I need to tell you. Let me start off by saying how incredibly proud of you I am. You've grown into a good man despite my mistakes, and I can only believe your mother's spirit had something to do with that.*

*I hope you were able to patch things up with your young man. Please don't be angry with him for contacting me. I'm so very glad he did. He asked me to provide you with some of the items in the enclosed box. I guess I never realised how much I had deprived you of, until he explained your need to get to know your mother, even after all these years.*

*I've enclosed copies of photographs and a few other personal items that I thought would mean something to you. They are yours to keep. I believe she would have wanted you to have them.*

*I hope one day you can forgive me, but I know we're nowhere near that point yet. My biggest hope for you is that you've found in Moby what I lost so many years ago. Spend each day thankful and each night warm in each other's arms.*

*I know I've never told you, but I do love you.*

*Take care of yourself and those you love,*

*Dad*

Sean wiped his face and set the letter on the counter before opening the box. The first item he pulled out was an old baby book. His. Sean hadn't remembered ever seeing it before and he seriously doubted there was anything inside, but it was still nice of his dad to send it. He opened the cover and was surprised to find a picture of a pregnant woman. Underneath the picture, in fancy cursive writing it said, 'Evie at 7 months'.

Sean traced the swell of his mother's stomach before focusing on green eyes so much like his own. The heavy dark circles underneath his mom's eyes were the first sign that her health wasn't unaffected by the pregnancy. He tried to put himself in his dad's shoes for a moment. What would it feel like to watch the person you loved getting weaker and weaker before your eyes? Sean suspected he would begin to resent the cause of the failing health just as his dad so obviously had. Sean swallowed the sob that threatened to erupt.

He continued to flip through the first couple of pages. It was obvious his mom was excited about his upcoming birth. Despite the way she had to have felt physically, her writing showed no signs of being anything but happy. When he reached the section about his birth, Sean wasn't surprised to find the rest of the book blank.

Setting the book on the counter, he pulled out a stack of photographs. Although he didn't know the woman in the pictures, each one made him smile. He was sure it had something to do with the joy radiating from the incredibly beautiful woman. There were several snapshots of his mom and brothers laughing while playing in a large pile of colourful leaves. His brothers looked like strangers to him. Their faces were still basically the same but he couldn't remember ever seeing them so...happy.

Sean set the pictures down without looking through the rest of them. He had no doubt some families drew closer after a tragedy like his had suffered, but surely there were others, like his own,

that never recovered after such a death. He suddenly understood why his family hadn't celebrated Christmas or his birthday. Sure it would've been nice if his family had been happy about the day he was born, but through the pictures, he was able to understand it was a yearly reminder of the worst day of their lives.

Sean reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He tried to call his dad, but it went straight to voicemail. "Hi, Dad. Ummm, I wanted to apologise for the way things happened last night, and to tell you that I think I understand a little more now. Uhh, anyway, give me a call if you want. And despite everything, I'm really glad you came."

Sean hung up and thought briefly about calling his brothers. In the end, he decided to wait. Maybe a call on New Year's Day would be more appropriate. Sean stuck the phone back into his pocket and went in search of the man he loved.

## Chapter Nine

After an intense session of lovemaking, Sean left a dozing Moby to run downstairs to check on Virginia. "How're you..." He skidded to a halt when he realised what Virginia had been up to. A partially decorated birthday cake sat in the centre of the counter.

"Shoo," Virginia said, gesturing wildly with her pastry bag.

"Is that for me?" Sean asked, venturing further into the room.

"Yes, but you're not supposed to see it until it's finished."

Over Virginia's protests, Sean crossed the kitchen and hugged her. "It's the starting it that matters more to me than the finished product." He kissed her cheek. "It's my first one."

"But not your last, not while I'm still around," she told him. "Now get out of here."

With a smile firmly planted on his face, Sean ran back upstairs. He threw off his sweats and T-shirt on the way to the bedroom, ready for round two.

Still sprawled naked on the bed, Moby was sound asleep. Sean couldn't help but pat himself on the back for wearing his lover out with their earlier romp. He crept towards the bed, and the big flaccid cock resting against Moby's thigh. Sean licked his lips as he gently sat on the edge of the mattress. Although Moby's cock was quite a sight to behold when it was hard, there was something about the gorgeous specimen soft that turned Sean on every time.

Moby had told Sean on more than one occasion how odd he was for preferring a limp piece of meat when he could have something big and hard with a single touch. Sean didn't care what Moby said. For Sean, the softness of Moby's flaccid cock in his mouth won out every time.

Bracing his hands on either side of Moby's hips, Sean bent to take the prize into his mouth. It only worked when Moby was sleeping because it seemed the man was constantly hard while awake. He swirled his tongue around the silky-soft skin of the head before sucking as much as he could into his mouth. Even soft, Sean's minimal experience giving blowjobs showed.

Although he'd given them a time or two with other lovers, they'd always been nothing more than a way to get his partner hard. It was different with Moby. Everything was different with Moby, he realised.

The longer he suckled the soft cock the harder it became. When he felt Moby's fingers in his hair, Sean knew his time was almost up. He was forced to back off Moby's length as it started to grow to full hardness. With just the head in his mouth, Sean turned his head enough to stare into Moby's eyes.

The look he received in return was almost feral. Sean knew being a bottom didn't come naturally to Moby, but Sean hadn't yet felt comfortable taking the passive role. As he continued to lave the crown, he knew it was the right time.

Releasing Moby's cock completely, Sean sat up and reached for the condoms on the bedside table. "I want you to fuck me," he said, ripping open the package.

Moby's eyelids drooped even further. "I've been hoping to hear that." He reached over and grabbed the bottle of lube.

Sean gave Moby's cock several good strokes before rolling the condom down its impressive length. "Sorry it's taken me so long."

"I have a feeling you'll be worth the wait."



With the condom in place, Sean turned his attention to the rest of Moby's body. No sculpture had ever been able to create a masterpiece as perfect as the body under him. Sean licked his way up Moby's muscled torso, stopping at each dip and ridge to worship. Meeting his lover's lips, he delved inside to taste the man of his dreams.

Moby's slicked fingers began to rim Sean's asshole as the kiss heated. Moby introduced a fingertip but didn't go any further. After several moments, Sean broke the kiss. "You're gonna have to do a hell of a lot more stretching than that if you expect me to take you."

"I'm in no hurry. We don't have to be anywhere for another two hours." Moby kissed Sean again. "Tell me what you like."

"I like the feel of that finger. I just wish I had more of it," Sean admitted.

With a deep chuckle, Moby pushed further into Sean. "How does that feel?" he asked, sliding in and out of Sean's ass.

The hairs on the back of Sean's neck prickled at the pleasure of the invasion. "Mmmm, more."

Just as slowly as he'd done the first time, Moby introduced another finger into Sean's hole. "Still with me?"

Sean expected there to be more pain than there was. It had been nearly four years since he'd last experienced the sensation of being stretched. Whether it was Moby's skill as a lover or Sean's overwhelming desire for the man, he didn't know, but whatever it was, he needed more, and fast. "Another," he begged.

"Ooh, a daredevil, I see." Moby added a third finger, taking the time to rub against Sean's prostate.

Sean's body bucked at the touch. "Fuck. I need you."

Moby continued to stretch Sean for several moments before he pulled out. "Roll over onto your stomach."

Sean wanted to argue the position, but he knew as well as Moby it would be easier for him to take Moby's length if he were on his knees with his ass in the air. With a groan of acceptance, Sean arranged himself on the bed.

"You don't have to sound like you're being punished," Moby said with a chuckle as he applied more lube to Sean's hole.

"Can't help it. I just like holding you when we make love," Sean said, defending himself.

Moby caressed Sean's hip. "Next time. I promise."

Sean nodded and tried to relax his body as he felt the first kiss of Moby's sheathed cock-head against his stretched hole. Moby slowly pushed his crown past the ring of outer muscles. Sean hissed at the burn.

"Relax," Moby soothed.

"I'm trying," Sean said between clenched jaws. Dammit, it felt like he was being split in two as his body stretched to accept more and more of Moby's cock. When he felt like his body couldn't take any more, he glanced over his shoulder. "Is that all of it?"

Moby bit his bottom lip and shook his head. "No, but I can stop there if you want me to."

Sean wanted to save face and turn down Moby's offer, but he also wanted the experience to be a pleasant one. "That might be best. At least for now," he added.

Moby ran his hand down Sean's spine several times before withdrawing a few inches of his cock. As he slowly pushed back inside, Moby seemed to make a point of not going as deep. He continued the process several times before Sean's body finally became accustomed to the over-sized

girth.

"Feels better," Sean informed Moby, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

With a shake of his head, Moby started to pull out. "We don't have to do this now."

Sean reached back and grabbed Moby's ass, holding him in place. "Don't stop."

Moby leant down and kissed Sean's shoulder blade. "It's killing me to know I'm hurting you."

Sean gave the muscled cheek a squeeze. "I told you it was better, and I meant it. I just needed to get used to it. Don't make me feel like a complete loser for being unable to take my lover's cock. Now just fuck me already."

Moby's head popped up from its resting place on Sean's back. He sat up once again and eased inside. "That okay?"

"Yeah," Sean told the truth. Although it still burned a little, the pleasure was definitely coming through the pain.

Moby rocked back and then in again. "Now?"

"Yessss," Sean hissed. "Are you going to ask me that every time?"

"Nope, because I'm as far in as I can go," Moby announced, staring down between them.

Joy filled Sean at the announcement. "I guess you fit after all."

"Looks like it," Moby chuckled.

Sean gripped the sheets in his fists as Moby began to fuck him. With each thrust of his hips, Moby's cock rubbed against Sean's prostate, eliciting a deep moan of pure pleasure from Sean's lips.

When Moby's hand reached under to encircle Sean's cock, Sean knew he'd died and gone to heaven. "So good," he mumbled, burying his face in the pillow.

"Are you going to be able to come with my dick shoved so far up your ass?" Moby asked.

Sean answered by filling Moby's hand and splattering a good portion of the sheet. He was positive Virginia had to have heard his howl as he let loose. If she hadn't heard him, she surely heard her son as he cried Sean's name to the ceiling.

Moby released Sean's cock and collapsed on top of him. "Timeout," he panted.

Sean's lips twitched into a grin. Evidently it didn't matter who did the fucking. Either way Moby collapsed into a pile of goo right afterwards. Sean didn't mind a damn bit. He loved the weight of Moby's body against him. He started to protest when he felt Moby pull out and away from him but realised his lover was removing the filled condom.

"Nap," Sean said, rolling to his side.

Moby glanced at the clock. "Maybe a short one," he agreed, wrapping himself around Sean.

As Sean drifted to sleep he wished Moby had made the reservations at the Canoe for the next day. He'd enjoy nothing more than lying in bed for the rest of the night.

\* \* \* \*

Moby laughed as he came up behind Sean on their way to the restaurant. "Sore?"

Sean's eyebrow rose. "You know I am, smartass."

“Yeah, well everyone else is going to know, too, unless you stop walking like a damn cowboy.” Moby thought of the roomful of people waiting for them inside.

Sean immediately tried to adjust his gait, but whether it was because he actually knew the reason or not, Moby could still tell Sean was walking with a sore ass.

By the time they'd arrived downstairs after their nap, there'd been a note on the counter from his mom. She told them she was going to head on down to the restaurant before they gave their reservations away. Sean had felt guilty and said as much, but Moby told him not to worry about it. Actually, the whole thing had already been planned. Rio had stopped by the pub to pick up Moby's mom and the cake.

Moby ran up the steps ahead of Sean. “Here, let me get the door for you, old man.”

“Fuck you,” Sean chuckled.

Erico was right inside the door to greet them. “It's about time you got here. Virginia's already on her second cocktail.”

Moby knew it was a lie. His mom never drank, but he doubted Sean knew that yet. “My fault,” he apologised.

Erico gestured towards the dining room. “Right this way.”

Entering the large formal dining room, Sean's head moved from side to side. “I don't see her.”

“I have the three of you in the back,” Erico explained.

As they neared the set of French doors leading to the private dining room, Moby spotted Nate, grinning like a fool. He only hoped Sean hadn't seen him.

With a flourish, Erico opened both doors and stepped aside. The entire room of Sean's friends jumped up to yell, “Happy Birthday!”

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## About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles between being a full-time mother and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find Carol either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favourite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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