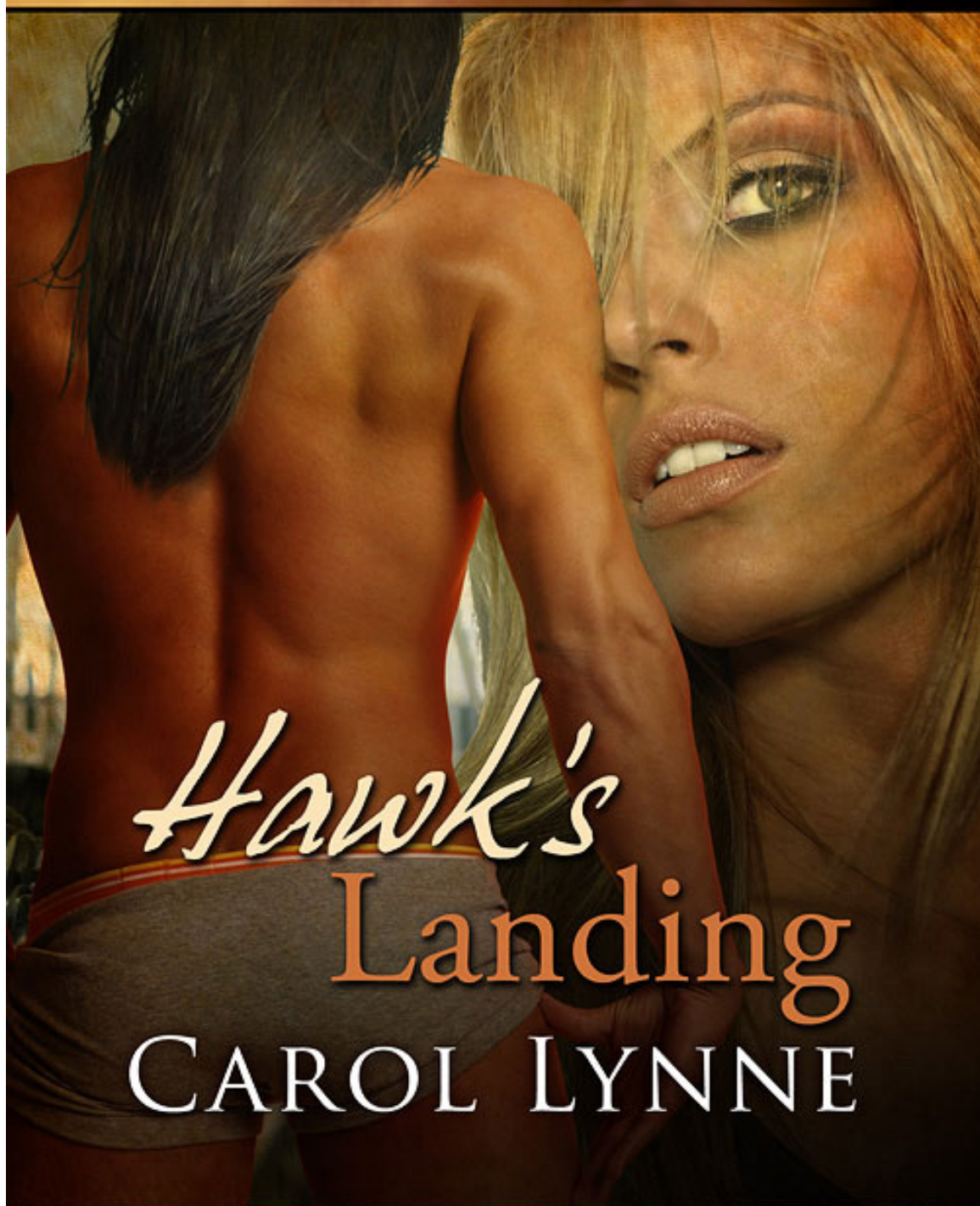




CATTLE
VALLEY



Hawk's
Landing
CAROL LYNNE

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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Hawk's Landing

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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

HAWK'S LANDING

Carol Lynne

Author's Note

I have no doubt there are readers who will feel a bit cheated by this story because I didn't go into why Kit is who she is. Who is it for anyone to question another's choice? Kit is who she is. We all love gay erotic romance, but I don't believe we expect an author to justify why a man is gay. For me, the purpose of this story is to allow Kit to be who she is without apologizing or trying to dissect her psyche. I wanted Kit to have a man who would respect and love her. In that, I feel I've given Kit the happily-ever-after she would've written for herself if she could have. I hope you will fall in love with Kit. I know I did.

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Chapter One

Stretching the morning kinks out of his back, Gabe Hawkins stared out of the second-floor window of the Apple Valley Inn Bed and Breakfast. He groaned at the falling snow. What the hell had convinced him to ride his Harley from Malibu?

He'd arrived late the previous night nearly frozen to death. Thankfully, he'd already made arrangements at the B&B or else he would've been screwed. According to Addie, the sweet little proprietor of the Inn, the only other place to stay in Cattle Valley was the ski lodge.

Hawk put his hands on his hips and twisted his upper torso from side to side. Whether it was the long ride or the nerves crawling up his spine at the thought of meeting his son, he wasn't sure, but his muscles were as tight as hell. After pulling on his last pair of clean jeans, Hawk grabbed a T-shirt and shoved his feet into his boots.

Before leaving the room he gave himself a quick once-over in the mirror. He'd taken a nice hot shower before he'd bedded down for the night, but he'd gone to bed with his hair still wet. Grabbing his brush out of his dop kit, Hawk tried to tame his shoulder-length hair. Giving up, he reached for the small black elastic band he'd worn the night before and pulled his hair into a low ponytail.

Walking down the steps, he heard singing coming from the kitchen. "Hello?" he called to announce his presence as he walked down the hall towards the back of the Inn.

"Mr. Hawkins?" Addie appeared in the doorway, drying her hands on a faded red dishtowel. "Good morning."

"Morning, Ma'am."

"Can I make you something for breakfast?" Addie asked, her hand rubbing the side of her very pregnant stomach.

It was a simple gesture but one that reminded Hawk why he'd come to town. "No thanks. I was wondering if this town had somewhere I could work out?"

"Sure. There's The Gym. It's only about six blocks north of here. The first building when you get to the industrial park."

"Thanks. That was easy enough. How about a laundromat?"

"No need. We've got two washers and dryers right through those doors. Feel free to use them."

Hawk wasn't used to such honest hospitality. He'd stayed in the most expensive hotels in the world and had still had to pay for laundry service. "I can pay," he said out of guilt.

Addie laughed. "I do loads every day. I doubt another one is going to break the bank. As a matter-of-fact, if you bring your dirty clothes down I'll get them done while you're out."

"Thank you, but that's not necessary. I'll do them later if that's okay?" As pregnant as Addie appeared, Hawk hated the thought of her doing extra chores when he was perfectly capable of doing them himself.

Addie smiled. "I've seen underwear before, you know. Why are men so sensitive about that?"

It was Hawk's turn to chuckle. "Didn't bring any with me, so that's not the problem. I could be here a while if things work out, and overstaying my welcome isn't on the agenda."

The blush that began to work up Addie's face caught Hawk's attention. "Forgive me if I embarrassed you. I guess that's probably too much information, huh?"

Addie waved away Hawk's apology. "You didn't. It's these damn hormones. It's nice to talk to a straight-shooter. I think we'll get along fine."

"Well, I'd better find that gym before my muscles start seizing up on me again. Thanks again." He'd started out of the kitchen when Addie called after him.

"Supper's on the table at six if you're interested. Right now you're our only guest so it'll be something simple. Mel asked for meatloaf if that's okay with you?"

Hawk stopped in the doorway and glanced over his shoulder. "Meatloaf sounds good. I appreciate the invitation."

He stopped just inside the front door and put on his heavy, black leather coat before picking up his helmet from the nearby table. He really could kick himself for riding the bike instead of driving one of his cars. Maybe he could find something used in Sheridan that would get him around while he was in Cattle Valley.

As he opened the door, a blast of wind hit Hawk in the face. Yeah, he definitely needed something else to drive.

* * * *

Kit Bromely tossed her purse behind the juice counter before going to the back to clock in. She spotted Mario wiping down machines and smiled. The man had been so nice to her since she'd started working at The Gym. "Good morning."

Mario glanced up from the black vinyl bench he was cleaning. "I hope so," he said with a smile on his face. "You're in a good mood today."

Kit shrugged. "Why wouldn't I be? I have a place to live and a job I enjoy. What else does a person need?"

"I can think of a few things." Mario chuckled and moved his eyebrows up and down.

Refusing to travel down that road, Kit shook her head. "Men are trouble, at least the ones I seem to be attracted to."

"Then you just haven't met the right one, but don't worry, you will. Cattle Valley's full of nice, eligible men."

Kit sighed. "If only it were that easy..." she said over her shoulder as she continued through the large workout room. After clocking in, she went into the employee restroom to wash her hands.

Although Rio had told her to wear whatever she wanted to work, Kit had decided to err on the side of caution and go with jeans, sneakers and T-shirts as her normal uniform of choice. Sure, the jeans were low-rise and the T-shirts tight, but at least she tried. More than anything Kit wanted a friend. She wasn't greedy — one would do.

Before leaving the restroom, Kit fluffed her long, blonde hair, which was in dire need of a cut. She needed to find a stylist. Although she'd been in town for over four months, she rarely ventured anywhere but home, work and the grocery store. It was just easier than suffering the stares she often received. Even in a town as friendly as Cattle Valley, there were still people who didn't understand her.

Joining Mario at the juice bar, Kit pulled a bottle of water out of the fridge. "Slow," she commented.

Mario nodded as he finished drinking a glass of orange juice. "Mondays typically are. Which is why I'm going to get my workout in early."

He started to wash his glass, but Kit waved the effort off. "I'll take care of it."

"Thanks."

Kit rinsed Mario's glass and opened the dishwasher. Shit, she'd forgotten to empty the damn thing the previous night. With a sigh, she set Mario's glass in the sink before starting

the neglected chore. She heard the front door open and glanced up. Goosebumps immediately broke out on her skin at the sight of the tall, broad shouldered man who'd just stepped inside. "Can I help you?" *Please, God, let me be the one to help you.*

After taking off his motorcycle helmet, the handsome man shook out his mane of black hair as he walked towards her. Kit swallowed around the lump in her throat. Rarely did she have trouble controlling her body. Few men turned her on enough to warrant the hurt that usually came with the inevitable rejection, but that didn't seem to be the case with Mr Tall Dark and Sexy.

"I was hoping to speak to someone about a day pass? I'm not sure how long I'll be in town, but I'd like a place to work out while I'm here." Mr Sexy set his helmet on the bar.

"Ummm..." Kit was at a complete loss for words as she stared into Mr Sexy's light green eyes. "I'm new, but I can find out," she finally managed to say. She gathered her courage and held out her hand. "I'm Kit, by the way."

"Hawk," Mr Sexy replied. Instead of shaking Kit's hand, Hawk lifted it to his lips and kissed it.

Oh fuck, she was in trouble. Kit gave Hawk her best smile. "Can you wait here while I find out?"

"Of course."

Kit brushed the front of her jeans, hoping she wasn't about to embarrass herself with her body's reaction to the new arrival. She hurried out from behind the juice bar and quickly found Mario doing his morning routine. "Do we have day passes?"

Mario glanced up. "You mean like a trial membership?"

Kit shook her head. "He said he didn't know how long he'd be in town and wants to work out while he's here, so I don't think he has any intention of joining."

"After what happened when Jack tried to join, I'd call Rio to be on the safe side," Mario told her.

"Okay." Kit returned to the juice counter where she'd left her phone. "Sorry. My manager wants me to call the owner," she explained, pulling her purse out from under the counter.

"Sorry to be a problem," Hawk said.

"No problem at all. I'm just too new here to give you an answer, which is probably my own fault." She knew she was starting to ramble, something she often did when nervous.

What was it about Hawk that affected her so much? She hit the third number in her contact list and turned slightly away from Hawk.

"Rio."

"Good morning," she greeted her boss.

"Hey, Kit, everything okay?" Rio asked.

"I have a gentleman here..."

"Gabe Hawkins," Hawk supplied before Kit could continue.

"...Gabe Hawkins, who would like to know if we have day passes. He isn't sure how long he'll be in town." Kit smiled at Hawk, aware he was listening to every word.

Rio was quiet for several moments before answering. "Twenty bucks a day. If he's not planning to join, he can pay a premium."

Kit couldn't believe Rio was planning to charge so much. She wondered if Hawk would be offended when she told him the amount. "Okay."

"I'll be in by noon," Rio said before hanging up.

Kit held the phone to her ear for several seconds, trying to figure out how to break the news to Hawk. Lowering the phone, she turned to face Mr Sexy and caught him looking at her tits. It wasn't the fact he was looking that bothered her, it was the way he did it. Most men and women who stared at her C-cup breasts did so out of curiosity. Some were even rude enough to come right out and ask if she'd had augmentation or if they were prosthetics. Hawk was different. There was no curiosity in those gorgeous green eyes—instead what she saw was desire.

Once again, her body began to respond. She set her phone on the counter. "Day rates are steep," she came right out and said.

"How steep?" Hawk asked, finally lifting his gaze from her breasts to her face.

"Twenty a day," she stated.

Hawk grinned, and Kit knew it was the sexiest thing she'd ever seen in her life. "Screw the new guy in town, huh?"

Kit shrugged. "Sorry."

Hawk shrugged in return. "Not your fault." He leaned his forearms on the bar, putting himself even closer. "Do you work every day?"

Kit licked her lips, tasting the dab of lip gloss she'd put on before work. "I'm off Wednesdays. We're closed Sundays."

"Good. Now I know which day to save my money." He smiled again. "Is there something I should fill out?"

So lost was she in Hawk's eyes, it took Kit several moments to respond. "Oh, yes." Kit pulled open one of the cabinet drawers and retrieved a membership application and a pen. She wrote *Daily Pass App* at the top. After sliding it across the bar, she held out the pen.

"Thanks." Hawk's hand closed over the pen, trapping several of Kit's fingers under his in the process. He slowly pulled the pen out of her hand with a heated smile.

With her heart beating a-mile-a-minute, Kit knew she needed to get away or run the risk of making a fool of herself. Men like Mr Sexy didn't go for people like Kit. They may dabble for a night or two, but they always ended up leaving her in the dust. "I'll go tell Mario you've signed up. A tour is required for all new members."

"Can't you do it?" Hawk asked.

Biting her lip, Kit shook her head. "I'm not trained on the equipment. I'm just the receptionist and juice bar girl."

"I have a feeling you're a helluva lot more than that," Hawk said, his voice dropping even lower.

Run! Her brain told her as her body begged her to stay. "Thank you." She backed up until she'd cleared the end of the bar. "I'll...uh...go get Mario."

She heard Hawk's deep chuckle as she practically ran from the room. She caught up with her boss as he was headed to the locker room. "Would you mind giving him a tour?" she asked Mario.

Mario wiped the sweat from his bare chest with the towel in his hand. "I'm about to shower. You can do it. I think you've been here long enough to know the basic rules. If he's interested in a day pass, I'm sure he already knows how to use the equipment."

Kit shifted from foot to foot. "I really don't think that's a good idea. He makes me uncomfortable. Would you please do it?"

Mario's brow furrowed. "What's going on? Did he say something to you?"

Her heart melted at the concerned expression on her boss' face. "No. Nothing like that." She wondered how much to divulge to her new friend. "He makes me...want things. Things I can't have, and it'd be better to just stay away from him."

Mario crossed his arms. "Why can't you have them?"

Instead of going into her past relationship failures, she simply shook her head. "I could count off the reasons, but right now Hawk's waiting to start his workout."

Mario grabbed the T-shirt that was draped over his shoulder. "Fine, but we're not finished with this conversation."

Yes we are, Kit said to herself as Mario walked off.

* * * *

After two hours in the gym and a long, hot shower, Hawk made his way out to the parking lot. He wiped the snow off the seat of his bike and settled his helmet on his head. His back wasn't nearly as stiff after the workout, but being around the cute little thing with the amazing tits had made something else stiff as hell.

He'd spent the majority of his time in the gym trying to catch glimpses of Kit. Rarely, if ever, had his body responded to a man or woman the way it had to Kit. He'd briefly wondered if it had something to do with the fact that Kit appeared to be both sexes wrapped in one deliciously sexy package. From the moment he'd laid eyes on the thin blonde, all he could think about were those soft-looking lips, smoky hazel eyes and perfectly rounded breasts.

Hawk started up his bike. The motor's vibration did nothing to minimise the erection trapped behind the fly of his jeans. Maybe getting his fucking head back on the reason he was in town, along with the stupidly cold temperature, would cool his ardour.

He flew out of the parking lot and headed towards his first meeting with Bo and Rance. The closer he got to the diner where they had agreed to meet, the more nervous Hawk became. He was still more than hurt that the two men refused to bring his biological son with them, but he probably would've been just as protective had he been given the chance to raise Joey.

Hawk prayed they'd be able to come to an agreement without getting lawyers involved. Although he hadn't a doubt he could win custody of the boy, putting all concerned through a lengthy court battle was the last thing he wanted.

Reaching the diner, he managed to find a narrow space left by some jackass who didn't know how to park, and turned off his bike. With his helmet tucked under his arm, Hawk

entered the diner and looked around. It was only ten, too early for the lunch crowd, but there were more than a handful of men and women enjoying coffee and a late breakfast.

A woman came towards him with a casual smile on her face. "Just one?"

"No. I'm supposed to be with Bo and Rance. Can you tell me if they're here yet?"

The woman put her hand on her hip. "Depends. Are you the one who put that scowl on my sweet Bo's face?"

"Probably," he admitted. He knew going in he'd be seen as the bad guy, so the question hadn't surprised him.

"I got it, Deb," a man said, approaching the front of the diner. He stopped in front of Hawk and tipped his black Stetson. "You must be Hawk."

"Yeah. And you are?"

"Rance." He gestured towards the back of the diner. "We're back there." Rance turned and walked away.

Hawk had little choice but to follow. He'd hoped to break the ice between them right away, but from the expression on Rance's face, the man wasn't going to be easy to crack. As he reached the table, it was pretty damn clear to see Bo wouldn't be any easier. He held out his hand. Despite Bo's stony stare, Hawk tried to remember how much the man had done for Joey. "Nice to meet you."

Bo looked from Hawk's hand to Rance before accepting the handshake. "Have a seat."

Hawk sat across the table from the two men, feeling very much like he was being put in front of a firing squad. Maybe if he started things, the conversation would be easier. Before Hawk had a chance to say anything, Rance started in on him.

"I don't know where the hell you've been for the last two and a half years, but if you think you're just going to ride into town and take our boy, you're sadly mistaken."

"Whoa." Hawk reared back and held up his hands. "I never said anything about taking Joey from you. And I'm sorry I wasn't here before, but I just learned a month ago of Joey's existence."

"Lynda and Jim had no right to tell you," Bo mumbled. He clenched his fists where they rested on the table. "Jan was my wife, dammit!"

Hawk nodded. It was important he let Bo have his say. Admitting he barely knew Jan wouldn't have helped the situation one bit. The only reason he'd even gone to Sunrise Gardens to seek her out was because he'd been back in Winnipeg on business.

When he'd asked about Jan at the commune gate, Hawk had been taken to see a man named Jim. It was Jim and his wife Lynda who had informed him of Jan's death. Their third partner, Neil, had told Hawk about Joey on his way out of the commune. He'd passed Hawk Bo's address and told him he should be allowed a chance to get to know his son.

It had taken several weeks to come to grips with the news. He'd been without a family since his father had died almost thirteen years earlier. Hawk was used to a solitary existence, grabbing life as it happened and moving on. Years of working twelve to fifteen-hour days meant when he stopped long enough to party, he did it right. Unfortunately, he'd met Jan on one of those wild weekends.

"Have you heard a fuckin' word I've said?" Bo asked. His voice was barely above a whisper, but the anger was right there in his face.

"I heard you. Guess I just don't know what to say. I didn't know she was your wife. I don't expect you to believe me but it's the truth." Hawk sighed and laid his palms on the table. "Look, all I'm after is a chance to get to know him."

"Why?"

It was a question he'd asked himself for weeks. He drew his hands back and tucked them in his lap. "I have no family left. It's just me. Maybe the idea that I may not be totally alone holds appeal."

Bo and Rance exchanged glances. "We'll be in touch," Bo said, sliding out of the booth.

"That's it?" Hawk asked. "I just rode nine hundred and fifty miles. Do you expect me to just turn around and go home?"

Rance stopped and glanced over his shoulder. "Joey likes Kyle's cinnamon rolls for breakfast on Saturday mornings. I reckon we'll be back in town then."

"Who's Kyle?" Hawk asked.

"Brynn's Bakery," Rance added before following Bo out of the diner.

After the two men left, Hawk buried his face in his hands. A bakery. He was expected to meet his son for the first time in a damn bakery? Hawk pulled out his wallet and tossed several bills onto the table. It was shaping up to be a long week.

Chapter Two

"Do you have plans tonight?" Rio asked, joining Kit in the laundry room.

"Funny guy," she replied, adding a newly-folded towel to the stack.

"Well you should, but in this case I'm glad you're a hermit. Smitty called. He can't make it in for his shift."

"I can cover it," she offered. Although she'd miss one of her favourite television shows, the overtime would come in handy.

"Great."

When Rio continued to stand there staring at her, Kit started to get paranoid. "Is there something else?"

"Yeah. I want you to come out tomorrow night with us. It's Taco Tuesday at O'Brien's."

"I've heard," she mumbled.

"But you've never been?"

"I went to O'Brien's once, but not for the taco thing." She shook her head. "It wasn't an experience I care to repeat."

Rio's brows drew together. "Why's that?"

Did she dare tell him about the asshole who'd asked if she still had a penis? Why some people thought it was okay to ask personal questions about her genitalia, Kit would never understand. The stares were bad enough, but it was the rude questions that she couldn't stand. "Let's just say not everyone in Cattle Valley is as accepting as you and Mario."

"Do you have a name?"

"What?" Of course she had a name, Kit James Bromely. It was the same name given to her at birth.

"Who's the guy who gave you a hard time?"

Kit grinned. "Are you gonna go beat him up for me?" Although she said it in a teasing fashion, Kit was deeply moved by the gesture.

"Maybe, or I could just have Ryan arrest him." Rio laid a hand on Kit's shoulder. "We don't have many transgender residents in town, but I can tell you it won't get any easier for

you by holing up in your apartment. I was uneasy at first, and I'm willing to admit that, but you're someone special that people need to get to know."

Kit added another neatly-folded towel to the stack. "I understand what you're saying, I really do. Unfortunately, my skin isn't as thick as it needs to be to take that kind of leap. For the first time in a long time, I'm finally comfortable with myself, and..." She gestured to the room around her. "I'm comfortable here. That's enough for now."

"Bullshit. Why'd you come here if it wasn't to be accepted for who you are? Can you imagine the kind of looks Ryan, Nate and I would get in the outside world? Cattle Valley was established for just that reason. No one should be made to feel like they don't fit in here."

"Someday," she offered.

Rio shook his head. "It would mean the world to me if you'd join my family at our table tomorrow night. Ryan and Nate still haven't had a chance to get to know you." Rio put his hands together. "Do it for me? Please?"

Kit rolled her eyes. Rio had the begging puppy look down to perfection. "I'll think about it. That's all I can promise."

"Deal."

* * * *

"Hey, Mom," Kit said into the phone.

"Hey, baby. How was work?" Patty Bromely asked.

"One of the guy's called in so I'm still here." She rested her chin on her fist. "How's Rascal?" She smiled, thinking about the long-haired stray cat that had shown up on their doorstep two years before she'd left home.

"Okay. He still whines at your bedroom door from time to time."

Kit squeezed her eyes shut. God, she missed home. "Maybe I can come for a visit once I earn enough vacation time?"

When her mom didn't say anything in return, Kit knew the answer. "Or maybe not," she added.

"Baby, you know if it was just me I'd welcome you with open arms, but this town..."

"Yeah. I know." Kit's hand automatically went to her forehead. She fingered the scar at her hairline, remembering the beating she had received days before she'd left Bartlett, Arkansas. "Would you come up here if I bought you a ticket?" she asked.

"We're pretty busy at work, but maybe I can get some time off later in the summer," Patty said.

Kit bit her tongue. Her mom had worked at the local chicken processing plant for over twenty years. The woman had plenty of vacation time due. "That's months away. I miss you now."

"I miss you, too, baby. Maybe I can get Janice to drive up there with me. The two of us haven't gone anywhere together since we were children."

Kit didn't know her Aunt Janice well, but she was sure Matt would enjoy seeing his mom. "Good idea. You should call her and ask."

"I might just do that," Patty agreed.

A headlight outside the large front window drew her attention away from the conversation. "Well, I need to get back to work. I'll call you later this week."

"I'll be here," Patty chuckled. "Take care of yourself."

"I will. Love you, Mom."

"Love you, too."

Kit hung up her phone and set it on the counter just as a grumpy-looking Hawk strode into the gym.

He stopped when he saw her. "You're still working?"

Kit glanced at the clock. "Yep, for another two hours. I'm filling in for a guy."

Hawk gestured to the equipment room. "I thought I'd come by and work out some of my aggression. You mind?"

She shook her head. "Not at all." Although she'd only spoken to Hawk for a few minutes earlier in the day, it was easy to tell something was bothering him. "You okay?" she surprised herself by asking.

"No, but nothing a few rounds with a punching bag won't help."

Kit never understood the desire to hit something as a way of taking out aggression. "Well I'll be around if you need anything."

"Thanks." Hawk started to walk towards the locker room but stopped and turned around. "Do you have any training tape?"

"I'm sure we do somewhere. I'll find it while you get dressed." She watched Hawk walk away until he disappeared into the locker room. "Mmm, mmm, mmm." Damn. With a dramatic sigh, Kit went in search of the athletic tape.

After rummaging around in the storeroom, Kit was forced to call Mario at home, something she hated to do. She paced back and forth in front of the time clock for at least five minutes before she finally broke down and picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi, it's Kit. Sorry to bother you, but Hawk's here and he wants to box, which means he needs some tape, and I don't even know if we have any and even if we do, do we let members use it, and I don't even know if Rio would consider him a member since he's the day pass guy." By the time she finished the rambling sentence she was nearly hyperventilating.

"Take a breath, Kit."

"Sorry," she apologised. "I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Uhhh, could it have something to do with the six-foot-five hunk of muscle who's probably alone with you in the building?"

Kit collapsed on a chair in the corner of the employees' break room. "I don't know, maybe. I just hate it when I look stupid, and I know I should have some clue where the damn tape is kept."

Mario laughed. "God, you're cute."

"I'm not *cute*. Will you please just tell me where the tape is so I can give it to Hawk and he can get outta here?" she asked.

"There's a small black box hanging on the wall next to the bags. It should have everything Hawk needs," Mario explained.

Now that she was calmer, Kit felt like a complete fool. "Sorry," she mumbled. "I tend to get over-excited when I'm nervous."

"Don't apologise. Are you sure you're okay being alone with him?"

Kit let out a very unladylike snort. "I could only dream of a man like that hitting on me."

"Don't do that. Don't put yourself down. I meant it when I said you were cute, whether you want to hear it or not. And if I wasn't so damn in love with Asa, I'd definitely be on your tail."

Kit grinned. She knew gay men weren't attracted to her for long. Sure, they enjoyed a blowjob or even a quick fuck, but they weren't attracted to men who chose to live as women any more than they would be attracted to a natural-born woman. She'd found out that little tidbit the hard way.

"You're too sweet, you know that?"

"That's what Asa tells me." Mario chuckled. "Ouch. Keep your hands to yourself for two more seconds."

Kit assumed Asa must've come into the room. "I'll see you in the morning."

"After Hawk leaves you can go ahead and close up for the night," Mario informed her.

"With pleasure." She hung the phone back up on the wall before going in search of Hawk.

"I can do this," she whispered under her breath as she walked back into the exercise room. Hawk was on the treadmill, running at full speed. Kit leaned against one of the elliptical trainers and swallowed around the lump in her throat. Hawk had already worked up a sweat.

It wasn't until Kit looked past the man's incredible body to his face in the mirror that she noticed his eyes on her. Kit immediately straightened and approached the treadmill. "Sorry it took me so long. I had to call Mario."

Hawk stopped the machine and climbed off. He reached for a nearby towel and wiped his neck, face and arms. "Don't worry about it. I needed the run."

When his gaze zeroed in on Kit's breasts, she didn't need to look down to know her nipples were erect. She knew some people had difficulty getting the sensation back in their breasts after augmentation, but Kit's were more sensitive than ever. Turning away, she gestured towards the corner of the room where the heavy bag and speedball were located. "Mario said you should find everything you need in the black box."

Kit felt Hawk's body heat at her back. "I appreciate it," he said, his lips dangerously close to her ear.

Kit's eyes drifted shut. It would be so easy to fall into the man's arms for the night, but she didn't know enough about him. It was that awkward moment she'd always hated. She'd never figured out whether it was better to come out and tell a potential partner, before anything happened, that she still had a penis or to wait and let them discover it for themselves.

Hawk brushed by her and walked towards the corner of the room, eliminating either option. "Would you mind bringing me a bottle of water?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Not at all." She turned and practically ran to the cooler. She felt like crawling into the large, double-door refrigerator to soothe her heated body. What the hell was wrong with her? Never in her twenty-three years had she considered herself a slut, but a few hours around Hawk and she was definitely starting to think like one.

"Hand him the water and leave," she told herself. Plan in mind, Kit carried the bottle into the exercise room.

Hawk was taping his hands, but glanced up as she set the water down. "Thank you. I didn't realise you had a makiwara."

"Excuse me?" Kit wasn't sure whether to be offended or not.

Hawk gestured to the padded rectangle mounted on the wall. "It's used in traditional martial arts training. A lot of gyms don't have them."

"Nate, one of the owners, is heavily into martial arts from what I understand." When Hawk said nothing further, Kit started out of the room.

"Kit?"

"Yes?" She took a deep breath and turned around.

"Do you know Bo Lawson or Rance Benning?"

Kit tried to recall the names. "No, do they live here?"

"Yeah, on a ranch outside town."

"I haven't lived here long, sorry. Is that who you came to town to see?" She wondered what Hawk's relationship was with the two men. It wasn't until she'd heard about her cousin Matt hooking up with Isaac and Sam that she'd even known ménage relationships existed outside a one-night type of thing. After meeting Rio and hearing about Nate and Ryan, she had realised ménage relationships must be fairly normal in Cattle Valley.

"No, not really," Hawk answered. "Unfortunately, I have to go through them to see my...the person I came to see." Hawk stepped up to the makiwara and delivered several fast punches.

Hawk seemed to be in his own world, so after a few seconds, Kit turned and left the room. She wasn't sure whose face was behind the blows Hawk delivered to the mak-thingy, but she definitely wouldn't want to be the one to make him angry.

* * * *

By the time Hawk had worked the majority of his frustration out of his system, the tape wrapped around his hands was tinged red with blood. He unwrapped his hands and winced at the split skin on three of his knuckles.

With the adrenaline still coursing through his veins, Hawk couldn't feel the injuries, but he knew he'd hurt in the morning. It was his own damn fault. For the last several years he'd worked hard to get his temper under control. He'd never been proud of himself for flying off the handle at every little thing. It wasn't until the last argument he'd had with his father that Hawk had understood where his anger had come from and decided to do something about it.

With the help of therapy and martial arts training, Hawk had begun to think he had the problem licked, but one full day in Cattle Valley and it had come back full force. Hawk grabbed his towel and headed for the locker room. He'd no doubt scared Kit with his maniacal jabs and grunts.

Hawk wasn't sure how long he'd stood under the hot spray of the shower, but by the time he dressed, his mood had improved somewhat. He stuffed his sweaty clothes into his bag and walked towards the juice counter.

Kit was dusting the shelves with her back to Hawk when he entered the room. He took a few moments to enjoy the cute little ass in a pair of tight jeans before making his presence known. "I hate to bother you again, but do you have any bandages? I doubt the pharmacy is open this late."

Kit turned around and pulled her shirt down from where it had worked itself up during her cleaning. The movement drew attention to those breasts Hawk couldn't seem to get enough of looking at. Not too big and not too small, Kit's breasts were breathtaking. Hawk's favourite part of a woman had always been her tits. There was something about them that fascinated him to the point of distraction. It was obvious Kit's were implants, but that didn't make a damn bit of difference to Hawk.

He may not know what Kit had down below, but what he saw up top was enough to make him more than interested in the transgender woman.

"Did you hurt yourself?" Kit asked, moving towards Hawk.

He held up his hands. "Guess I got carried away. They're not too bad, but I didn't pack any bandages in my suitcase."

Kit went behind the juice counter and retrieved a white box marked with a big red cross on the lid.

Hawk neared the bar and waited to be handed the much-appreciated supplies. As Kit dug in the box, Hawk had a chance to study her hands. He stared at Kit's long, thin fingers and wondered what they'd feel like wrapped around his cock. In any other town, Hawk would've acted on his desires right then and there, but he knew whatever he did in Cattle Valley could have a direct impact on his ability to get to know his son.

"Give me your hand," Kit said, coming around the bar to sit on the stool next to him. She held up an alcohol pad and smiled.

Hawk wanted to decline the offer, but couldn't bring himself to do it. He held his hand out and was more than pleased when Kit rested his palm on her thigh.

"You probably should've worn gloves." She dabbed the first cut with the pad and blew on the area.

Hawk's hard cock pressed against the fly of his jeans. "You don't use gloves with the makiwara. Part of the art is conditioning your hands to withstand the blows. Obviously, I've let my conditioning slide lately."

Kit reached across the bar for one of the bandages. "Was it worth it?"

Hawk's hand remained on Kit's thigh, his thumb brushing back and forth across the denim. "Better the makiwara than someone in a bar," he said.

Kit unwrapped and applied the bandages. When she was finished, she squeezed Hawk's wrists. "All done."

Hawk knew it was his cue to release his hold on Kit's thigh, but that was the last thing he wanted to do. Kit's breath smelt of something sweet, fruity. He wondered if her tongue still held the flavour of whatever she'd recently eaten. Taking his attention away from her mouth, Hawk glanced down and detected a slight bulge in the front of Kit's jeans. How fast would he be able to slide her zipper down and swallow the interested cock down his throat? "I should probably go before I get myself into trouble."

Kit's spine seemed to stiffen as she scrambled off the stool. "Yeah," she agreed.

Hawk picked up his bag and strode towards the door. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure," Kit answered, squaring her shoulders.

Asking her out was on the tip of his tongue, but once again common sense prevailed. "Is there a place to get a drink around here?"

"O'Brien's on Main Street."

"Thanks." He tapped the edge of the door after opening it. "Make sure you lock up after me. It's a little late for you to be here by yourself."

Kit let out a very unladylike snort. "Honey, I don't have anything anyone in this town wants."

Staring back into those big hazel eyes, it was easy to see the sadness he hadn't noticed before. "Don't be so sure about that."

* * * *

Hawk sighed after taking a sip of the Crown and Coke. "Damn, that's what I needed."

The bartender chuckled without turning away from the baseball game on the television. "Hard day?"

"Something like that," he answered.

"New in town?"

"Just visiting. The name's Hawk," he introduced himself.

"Sean," the bartender replied. "This is my place."

"Nice to meet you." Hawk glanced around the bar. "Kinda slow in here."

Sean shrugged. "Monday night. After football season it gets pretty dead. Come back tomorrow and you'll have to fight for a table."

"What's tomorrow?"

"Taco Tuesday. It's become a tradition for a lot of folks to come in for dinner and stay for a few beers. It's also our dart league night."

Hawk immediately wondered if Bo and Rance considered it a tradition. "Do Bo and Rance come in?"

"Sometimes. They usually take turns with Shep and Jeremy."

Two names he didn't recognise. "Who're they?"

"They own the Back Breaker where Rance and Bo live. Although I've told Bo he's welcome to bring his son in for dinner, Bo doesn't feel right about it, so every other week, Shep and Jeremy stay home with the kid."

Hawk nodded and took another sip of his drink. Hearing Joey referred to as Bo's son stung, but what else did he expect? "What about Kit?"

"Who?"

"Kit. The pretty little thing with the long blonde hair and big hazel eyes."

"Oh. Yeah, I think I've seen him around town. As far as I know, he's never come in though."

"Her," Hawk corrected.

"Excuse me?" Sean turned his attention away from the game and looked at Hawk.

"You obviously don't have many transgender people in town. I'm sure Kit would appreciate it if you thought about and referred to her as a 'she'."

"Sorry. I didn't mean to offend anyone. You're right, though, we don't have many transgendered men or women come in here. I'm sure there are a few in town but they must stick to themselves."

What a shame, Hawk thought. Being bisexual, he knew there was an unspoken rift between gays and transgenders, but he'd never understood it. Despite Cattle Valley's apparently utopian way of life for the GLBT community, it seemed the town was lacking some understanding in regards to the 'T' portion of the moniker.

Hawk finished his drink and slapped a ten on the bar. "Thanks for the drink."

"Come back anytime," Sean said with a smile.

Before he made it out of the bar, a man approached him. "Hey, leaving so soon? I was just heading over."

"Sorry. It's been a long day," Hawk apologised to the handsome man.

"Name's Brent. I'm new in town and thought maybe you'd be interested in showing me around." Brent licked his lips and leaned in to whisper in Hawk's ear. "Starting with your place."

Although Hawk's body still thrummed from his earlier contact with Kit, he knew he couldn't do it. "Sorry. I'm just here for a visit, but I'm sure you'll find someone around to take you up on your offer."

"I like visitors," Brent said, touching the ends of Hawk's long hair.

Hawk stepped away from the man and shook his head. The man deserved to have his ass kicked. "Not interested, pal." He left the bar and walked out into the cold night air. Breathing deeply, he reined in his anger.

He grabbed the helmet off the handlebars and climbed onto his bike. First thing in the morning, he needed to call his therapist. If he didn't get his anger under control he'd be tossed out of Cattle Valley in a heartbeat, and Hawk had too much to lose to let that happen.

Chapter Three

Hawk was on his way down to breakfast when his phone rang. One look at the caller ID and he groaned. "Hawkins," he answered.

"I've left you four messages," Jason growled.

"And I listened to them," Hawk replied. Jason Stewart was the new CEO of Hawkins Enterprises, and a major pain in Hawk's ass.

"We need to make a decision on the Beacon merger."

"So make it." Hawk leaned against the wall at the top of the stairs. "I put you in charge for a reason. If you can't make the important decisions, you're not much good to me."

He was met by silence on the other end of the phone. Hawk rolled his eyes. He hated babysitting as much as he hated sitting behind a desk. "Look. I trust your judgement. The team's done a damn good job of gathering the information you need. Trust your instincts."

"And when the Beacon stores go belly-up, I'll be the one who goes down with the ship. Am I right?"

"I don't know where you got the idea that there were guarantees in business, but it's all a big crap shoot. You make decisions based on the numbers and your gut. Not every acquisition is going to show a profit. On the bright side, even if we lose money on the Beacon stores, we write it off."

"So you're telling me it's entirely my decision?" Jason asked.

"Well, you need to listen to the advisors on your team, but, yeah. My father and grandfather made Hawkins their entire life. I don't plan to make the same mistake. I'll be forty next month and have absolutely nothing to show for my life except big houses and fast cars. All of which leave me rather cold at the moment."

"Have you seen Joey yet?" Jason asked, his tone softening.

Hawk smiled. Although Jason was a major pain in the ass, he was also the closest thing to a friend he'd ever had. "No. I met with Bo and Rance yesterday, though. They agreed to let me meet Joey on Saturday."

"You're being unusually patient."

"Yes, well, I don't think I've ever had anything as important as this happen before. Believe me, it's not easy. I got so worked up last night I had a drink."

"Just one?" Jason asked.

"Yes, Father, just one."

"Bite your tongue," Jason said with a chuckle.

"Breakfast is on the table," Addie said from the bottom of the steps.

"I'll be right there," Hawk told her. He returned his attention to the phone call. "Just do whatever your gut's telling you to do. I trust you."

"Thanks. Hopefully things will get easier the more I settle in. Guess I just had an attack of nerves."

"That's understandable. I'm not too old to remember the first time I had to make decisions on my own." The Hawkins family had made and lost fortunes several times over the years. It went with the business they were in. "Gotta go."

"I know. Take care of yourself, and if you need a shoulder..."

"Yeah, I know." Hawk smiled. "Go get 'em, tiger."

Jason was still chuckling when he hung up. Hawk slipped the phone into his pocket and joined Mel and Addie for breakfast. "Morning, ladies."

"Sorry to interrupt your call," Addie said, passing Hawk a plate of bacon.

"Just business, nothing serious," he replied.

"What business are you in?" Mel asked.

"Acquisitions, mostly. We buy businesses that aren't faring well, reorganise them and sell them for a profit." Hawk shrugged. "Boring stuff." He didn't mention his ownership of the empire his family had built. It wasn't that he wanted to hide his financial status, but he no longer wanted his success to define who he was.

He took two fluffy biscuits from the platter and divided them in half. "Would you pass me the gravy, please?"

Mel slid the big bowl of sausage gravy towards Hawk. "Mind if I ask what happened to your hands?"

"Nothing sinister, I assure you. I boxed at The Gym last night after dinner."

"I've got some clean bandages if you need them," Addie said.

"Thanks. I appreciate that."

They ate the remainder of their breakfast talking about the town and the weather. Hawk didn't ask if they knew Bo or Rance. He figured he'd done enough asking around about them.

After finishing his meal, he sat back and rubbed his stomach. "Those are the best damn biscuits and gravy I've ever eaten. I'd ask you to marry me, but I have a feeling I'd have a fight on my hands."

"Damn straight," Mel said with a grin. She reached out and laid a hand on Addie's expanding stomach. "You haven't asked."

"Asked what?" Hawk pushed his plate towards the centre of the table and leaned on his forearms.

"Who the father is?" Mel replied. "Most people do within a few minutes of meeting us."

Hawk shrugged. "I guess I didn't figure it mattered. The who and the how isn't as important as the end result in some cases."

"I like you," Addie said.

"My brother, Morgan, donated some of his DNA to the cause," Mel said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"That's great. Sounds like he loves you both very much." Hawk stood and picked up his plate.

"I'll get that," Addie was quick to say.

"No offence, but I noticed your ankles are pretty swollen this morning. Why don't you let me get the dishes this once?"

Addie opened her mouth to answer, but Mel quickly covered it with her hand. "We'd appreciate that very much," Mel said.

"Just rinse them and put them in the dishwasher, if you would, and be careful with your hand," Addie said as soon as her mouth was freed.

"Will do." Hawk began stacking the plates. It wasn't often that he did his own dishes, but he wasn't so pampered that he didn't know how.

* * * *

Kit climbed out of her beaten-up 1998 Toyota and raced up the stairs to her garage apartment. After deliberating all day, she'd decided to take Rio up on his offer to accompany him, Ryan and Nate to O'Brien's.

When Rio had suggested they go directly from The Gym, Kit had been mortified. Not only had she sweated earlier in the day, but jeans and a T-shirt wouldn't do for a night out with friends. Besides, if she was lucky, perhaps Hawk would show up.

After a quick shower, Kit stood in front of her closet and groaned. Nothing looked right. Although she didn't want to wear jeans, most of her skirts were too short. They'd been fine for her job in Little Rock, but she wanted to make a good impression on Rio's family. She reached in and chose a mid-thigh denim skirt and red V-necked sweater.

She laid the clothes on the bed, pleased with her choice. As she smoothed lotion onto her legs, Kit thought once again about how lucky she was to have the lean, petite frame she'd been born with. When she was a child, all the other boys in her class had been bigger and stronger. Kit had never been picked anything but last for recess games. Kit, the boy with the skinny body and big eyes, had always been an outcast. It didn't matter how hard the little boy tried to fit in, it had never happened.

Until the age of fourteen, life had felt like one long, never-ending acting job. Being called a sissy wasn't as hurtful as pretending day in and day out that he wanted to do the same things the other boys did.

Thankfully, Kit's mom was both open-minded and extremely understanding. Being the son of a single mother, Kit had finally gone to his mom for help when thoughts of suicide had started to take root. He'd explained his unnatural desires for boys and dresses to his mom and waited for her to condemn him. Instead, Patty had surprised Kit by telling him she already knew he was gay.

Kit's desire to wear women's clothing had thrown her off balance at first, but soon she had come to accept that part of her son as well. It was Patty who had bought Kit his first dress, with strict instructions to wear it only in the safety of their home. The first day Kit had openly walked around the house as a she had felt like the first day of her life. Finally, after a lifetime of trying to deny who she was and what she wanted out of life, Kit was free.

Unfortunately, in a town the size of Bartlett, Arkansas, Kit was only allowed to be herself behind closed doors. It was hard to contain who she really was, but for the next five years, Kit did just that. Everything in Bartlett changed the day one of the boys from school

happened to see Kit through an open window. Home alone, Kit was dressed comfortably in a long skirt and blouse. She was unaware of the phone call immediately made and the group of high school boys and girls gathering outside her house.

The following day, Kit could tell something was about to happen. Stares followed her all day as she tried to concentrate on the year-ending exams that would allow her the grades to graduate. It was hard, but by the time she left school, Kit felt comfortable with the way the tests she had taken had gone.

Her walk home started uneventfully, but when she took the path down the alley—the same path she always took—a group of boys wearing stocking masks jumped out from behind a detached garage. They were on Kit before she understood what was happening.

Although the memories of the beating she'd taken were still fuzzy, Kit would always remember the expression on her mom's face once Kit was able to crawl home.

Kit shook her head. "Damn it," she cursed herself for the unhappy thoughts. Life in Bartlett was a long time ago. She had a new life now, in a new town. Her life might not be perfect, but at least she didn't have to hide who she was anymore.

Kit dressed quickly before expertly applying her makeup. She didn't overdo the eyeliner, which she'd had a tendency to do in her earlier years. Instead she stepped back and stared at her reflection, completely happy with the finished result.

A black pair of knee-high boots finished the ensemble to perfection. She smiled as she gathered her coat and purse. Lately, feeling pretty was a rare occasion for Kit, but she left the house feeling good about herself for the first time in a long time.

* * * *

Waiting around town for the chance to see his son was driving Hawk crazy. He'd picked up the phone to call his lawyer more than once as the day dragged on. Parking his Harley outside O'Brien's, Hawk took a deep breath. Although his mood was sour, he needed to get his emotions under control.

If Bo and Rance were inside, perhaps they'd give him a chance to convince them he wasn't the bad guy in the situation. He wanted nothing more than to be a part of Joey's life. After their initial meeting at the diner, Hawk couldn't believe he'd just sat there and agreed to wait another five days before being introduced to Joey. He'd been so damn afraid of

pushing Bo and Rance too far that he'd come away from the meeting kicking his own ass for buckling to their whims.

Entering the noisy pub, Hawk took off his helmet and tucked it under his arm. He scanned the dimly-lit room for Bo and Rance, to no avail. "Fuck," he mumbled to himself.

The only bright spot in the entire place was Kit, who waved to him from across the room. He started towards her, leery of the large guy sitting next to her, but was met before he reached the table by a heavily tattooed man in a tan police uniform shirt.

"Can I help you?" the guy asked.

Hawk shook his head. He didn't care for the narrowed gaze the man gave him. "Just thought I'd say 'hi' to a friend."

"And who might that be?"

Hawk sighed. "Have I done something to piss you off, Mr...?"

"Ryan Blackfeather, *Sheriff* Blackfeather. I'm a friend of Bo and Rance, so I know why you're here."

"Do you really? Because I've got no beef with them. I told them yesterday I wasn't here to take Joey away from them," he tried to explain.

"Then why are you here?" Ryan asked.

What an asshole. "I'd like to meet my son. Are you honestly trying to intimidate me enough to make me leave town? Can you stand there and tell me you wouldn't do the same if you found out you had fathered a child?"

"If I had fathered a kid, I sure as hell wouldn't have disappeared for the first two years of his life," Ryan tried to argue.

Hawk was two seconds away from losing his temper. He was all for protective friends but this jackwad took the cake. Although Ryan was only a couple of inches shorter than Hawk, the last thing he needed was to throw a punch at the town sheriff. "Look, I didn't leave, Jan did. We had a nice weekend and she left. Hell, I didn't even know she was pregnant. As soon as I found out, I sent word to Bo and Rance that I was coming to town to meet the boy. I don't know what else you expected me to do, but in my opinion, I'm being damn nice about all this bullshit."

"That boy is the centre of their universe. What kind of a friend would I be if I didn't try to protect them?"

Hawk wanted to yell back at Ryan, but the words stuck in his throat. Whether it was the honest concern in the Sheriff's dark eyes or the way Kit rushed forward to stand between them, Hawk didn't know. "I just want a chance to know the one person on earth who shares my blood. Is that such a terrible thing?"

With watery hazel eyes, Kit smiled up at Hawk before turning around to face Ryan. "I think your dinner's on the table."

Ryan glanced down at Kit and stepped back. "You coming?" he asked Kit.

"I think Hawk could use a friend." She glanced over her shoulder at Hawk. "Mind if I join you for dinner?"

"I'd be honoured." Hawk answered.

Ryan leant down and whispered something in Kit's ear before joining a small group of men. "You're not going to be in trouble, are you?" Hawk asked Kit.

"No. He just told me if I didn't come back over, Rio would end up eating my tacos." She turned around and smiled up at Hawk.

"Is that all he said?" Hawk didn't for a second believe Ryan hadn't warned Kit about him.

"He said to holler if I needed anything." Kit gestured towards an empty booth along the back wall. "You hungry?"

With Ryan gone and Kit's low-cut sweater displaying an ample amount of skin, Hawk became hungry for something other than food. "I could use a beer to settle down first." He followed Kit over to the table, trying like hell to keep his eyes off her ass.

Hawk waited while she slid into the booth. "Mind if I sit next to you?"

Kit looked honestly surprised at the request. "Uhh, sure," she said and scooted closer to the wall.

Hawk took a seat beside her and rested his hands on the table. "Thanks for coming to my rescue. I get that the guy was trying to protect his friends, but he was being an asshole."

A handsome waiter stepped up to the table, order pad in hand. "What can I get you?"

Kit glanced up at the waiter. "I'd like three tacos, an order of chips and salsa and the biggest, coldest Bud Light you have." She bumped against Hawk's side. "What about you?"

"I'll have a Heineken, if you have it, and six tacos to start with," Hawk ordered.

"Coming right up."

"I think it's great what you're doing, by the way," Kit said as soon as the waiter left.

Hawk shook his head. "Why does everyone seem to find it so hard to understand that I'd like a chance to know my son?"

Kit reached for Hawk's hand where it rested on the table. "Some of us had fathers who left without a second thought."

"Your dad left you?" Hawk couldn't imagine. He may not have received warm fuzzies from his dad, but at least he always knew how to get in touch with him should the need arise.

Kit reached for the offered glass of beer. "Thank you," she told the waiter. She took a healthy swig before answering. "My parents weren't married. I knew who my dad was, but he never acknowledged me." She shrugged. "It never bothered me unless I saw him at parents' night at school or something. His kids were all around my age, so I guess Mom didn't mean much to him when he knocked her up."

"That's rough." Hawk threaded his fingers through Kit's. "My mom died when I was five." Kit squeezed Hawk's hand before releasing it and lifting her beer from the table.

"My mom's the best. I can't imagine what my life would've been like without her," Kit said.

Although he barely knew Kit and knew absolutely nothing about her mother, hearing Kit had some sort of support growing up warmed him. "That's nice." He took a sip of his beer. "So where'd you grow up?"

Kit began pulling the label off her bottle. "A dinky town in Arkansas, Bartlett. That's where my mom still lives. It's the reason I don't get to see her often."

"Yeah, it's hard to find time to get back home sometimes." Hawk longed to feel Kit's hand in his once more, but didn't want to push.

"It's not that." Kit bit her bottom lip and brushed the hair behind her shoulders. "Small towns don't really accept people like me."

Hawk could only imagine what Kit had gone through growing up. He committed the name of the town to memory—why, he wasn't sure, but for some reason it seemed important. "Do you think you'll get your mom to move to Cattle Valley?"

"No. The house I grew up in belonged to my grandparents, so it's paid for. My mom quit high school her senior year, so she's pretty lucky to have worked her way up at the plant." Kit shrugged. "Plus she likes it there. I think some people get comfortable with what they know, and don't dream of any other life."

"That's true." Hawk thought of his maternal grandparents. Although their daughter had married into a very wealthy family, George and Inez Woods had lived in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in the same ramshackle house they'd bought when they married, until the day they died. Hawk's mother, June, had tried on a number of occasions to move them into one of the newer homes in Tahlequah, but Hawk's grandparents wouldn't hear of it. "My grandparents on my mother's side were like that."

"Where did you grow up?" Kit asked.

Before Hawk had a chance to answer, their food arrived. "Wow." The plate placed in front of him was loaded with not only tacos, but enough beans and rice to feed an army.

The waiter chuckled. "Yeah, Jay doesn't want anyone to leave hungry."

"No chance of that," Hawk replied.

"Can I get the two of you another beer?"

Hawk finished off his Heineken and handed the empty green bottle to the waiter. "Thanks." He turned to Kit. "Would you care for another?"

"Actually, I think I'd rather have a Diet Coke with my dinner," she answered.

"Coming right up."

"Where were we?" Hawk asked once they were alone.

"I'd asked you where you were from."

"Oh, yeah. I was born in Dallas, but we moved to California when I was around three." Hawk didn't go into details. Who he was as a person had nothing to do with the wealthy neighbourhoods he'd grown up in.

Kit grinned and bumped her shoulder against Hawk's side. "I never would've pictured you as a surfer boy."

Hawk used the opportunity to put his arm around Kit and give her a quick hug. "Nope, no surfing allowed in my house. Dad worked hard and expected the same from me." He kissed the top of Kit's head. "Although I did sneak away to boogie board a few times when he was out of town."

Kit gestured to Hawk's untouched dinner. "Better eat up before it gets cold."

Hawk picked up a taco and took a bite. "Mmm, it's good."

"That's what I've heard," Kit said before taking her first bite. She nodded her head in agreement.

They spent the next fifteen minutes eating and subtly touching legs, arms and hands against each other. It was the slowest build-up of lust Hawk had ever experienced, yet for some reason the unconventional foreplay excited him more than if Kit had climbed under the table and sucked him off. Not that he would turn down a blowjob from Kit's plump, perfectly-shaped lips.

Kit finished first and pushed her plate towards the centre of the table. "If you'll excuse me, I need to use the restroom."

Hawk wiped his mouth with his napkin and scooted out of the booth. The waiter, who had introduced himself as Moby, had been by their table several times. "Do you want another beer if Moby comes by?"

Kit's perfectly white teeth scraped against her bottom lip. "I'd better not, but I'd take another Diet Coke."

Hawk nodded before sitting down to finish his dinner. He couldn't help but watch Kit weave her way through the tables towards the restrooms. He also couldn't help noticing the odd looks a few of the patrons sent her way. The thought of Kit witnessing one of those derogatory expressions sent fire through his veins.

The moment Kit disappeared into the women's restroom, several men gestured towards the closed door and started to nudge each other and chuckle. Hawk couldn't help himself. He rose from the booth and crossed the room. "You fellas have a problem?"

* * * *

The moment she reached the restroom, Kit locked herself in one of the two stalls and leaned against the closed door. She clenched her shaking hands into fists and tried to get her body under control.

She took a deep breath. Of course she'd heard the snickers from the men and women in the bar as she'd passed by. Gay or straight, most people were uncomfortable around her. It wasn't something she liked, but she was definitely used to it. Although their reactions might have something to do with her current desire to escape the bar, Kit knew the real reason was the handsome man waiting for her at the table.

With every mutual attraction came a point when she had to decide whether to end things before they started or risk disappointment. Nine times out of ten she'd walk away

from an admirer before opening herself to the pain rejection caused. Did Hawk know she still had a penis?

A loud voice outside the restroom caught her attention. She couldn't hear what was being said, but she distinctly heard her name. Unlocking the stall door, Kit took a deep breath before exiting the restroom. She spotted Hawk immediately. His larger-than-average, muscled frame towered over a table of three men.

"It's okay," she rushed to say. Causing a scene wasn't what she'd planned for the evening.

"No, it's not," Sean, the pub owner, said, walking up to stand beside Hawk.

Kit braced herself to be tossed out of the bar along with Hawk, but was pleasantly surprised when Sean narrowed his eyes at the men sitting at the table. "I think it's time you boys went on home."

"We haven't finished our dinner," one of the men protested.

"Moby will get you a box. And next time you come to my place, you treat people with respect or don't bother coming at all."

Hawk reached towards Kit. "Come here."

It only took a moment for Kit to grasp his hand. Hawk tucked her against his side and kissed the top of her head. "You okay?"

"I didn't want this to happen," she admitted.

Sean turned to Kit. "I apologise if they said or did anything to make you uncomfortable."

Kit shook her head. "It's okay." *I'm used to it.*

Hawk didn't wait for the men to clear out before he escorted her back to the table. He released his hold on her, and Kit slid into the booth. "I'm sorry I lost my temper," Hawk said.

Hawk apologising for something that had happened because of her rattled Kit. "I'm the one who's sorry. I shouldn't have put you in that position. I'm used to the stares and comments, but you shouldn't have to be subjected to it."

Hawk cupped Kit's cheek and turned her face towards his. "I'm sitting here because I want to get to know you. I don't give a damn what people say about me, but I can't sit by and do nothing when bigoted assholes start in on someone I like." Hawk leaned in and kissed her, pushing his tongue past her lips and deep into her mouth. The kiss lasted several minutes with Kit giving back as much as she received. Hawk finally broke the kiss and

placed one more soft brush of his lips across her forehead. "Especially someone I like as much as you."

Kit held her breath. It was time. She stared into Hawk's green eyes, trying to put her thoughts into words. "You need to know something about me," she began.

Hawk smiled. "I want to know a lot of things about you, but if you're worried about what's between your legs, don't be. Sorry if this sounds crude, but I don't care what you have or don't have."

Swallowing around the firmly wedged lump of emotion in her throat, Kit reached out and took Hawk's hand. She lowered it to her lap and waited for him to acknowledge what was there.

A soft moan erupted from Hawk as he applied more pressure to the half-hard cock hidden beneath Kit's denim skirt. "Does this make you uncomfortable?" he asked, moving his hand down to rest on Kit's bare thigh just under the hem of her skirt.

Kit glanced down and noticed Hawk's cock pressing against his fly. She wanted to spread her legs and allow him entrance to anything and everything, but Rio's loud laughter penetrated her lust-fogged mind. "Yes and no. It's probably not something we should do here."

Hawk's hand moved further up Kit's thigh. "I don't suppose you'd invite me back to your place."

Kit's breathing picked up when the tip of Hawk's finger brushed the front of her bikini briefs. She glanced at Hawk's face, watching for signs of disgust, but all she saw was lust and acceptance. God, how long had it been since she'd felt completely comfortable with a partner? "My place is small, but you're welcome to follow me home," she whispered.

Hawk withdrew his hand and reached into his back pocket for his wallet. He tossed several bills on the table before standing up. "Let's get outta here."

Chapter Four

Kit parked to the side of the garage and got out. She waited for Hawk to pull up behind her car and practically drooled as she watched him climb off his motorcycle. Damn, she loved long legs on a man. "I'm just upstairs."

Hawk adjusted his cock in his jeans before taking off his helmet. "Nice place."

Nodding, Kit turned to start up the staircase that ran along the side of the garage. "It belongs to my cousin Matt and his partners Sam and Isaac."

Midway up the staircase, Hawk pressed himself against Kit's back. "You smell good." He kissed her neck and ran his hands up her sides, brushing her breasts in the process.

Kit grinned and tilted her head. Despite the cold night air blowing up her skirt, she turned and draped her arms over Hawk's shoulders, burying her fingers in his long, thick hair. "So do you," she said before pulling him in for a deep kiss.

Hawk moaned and lifted Kit off the step and into his arms, dropping the helmet. She immediately wrapped her bare legs around his waist and locked her ankles together behind his back. As the helmet rolled its way down the stairs, Hawk began carrying her up them. "Key?" he asked, breaking the kiss.

"Not locked," she answered, kissing her way down his neck.

Hawk opened the door and carried her inside. "You should always lock your door." He laid her on the sofa and followed her down.

Kit pushed Hawk's leather jacket off his shoulders. "And you should take better care of your helmet."

"I'm not worried about the helmet. It's as hard as my head. But I don't like the thought of someone being able to get to you so easily."

Kit stopped in the process of rucking up Hawk's T-shirt.

"Did I say something wrong?" Hawk asked.

Kit shook her head. "I've just never had anyone besides Momma care enough to say something like that to me." She quickly realised what she'd just said. "Not that...you know...you do or anything. It was just nice to hear."

Hawk brushed his cheek against Kit's. "I care." He kissed Kit's jaw. "You've got the softest skin," he mumbled between kisses. "Would it be in bad taste if I asked how that's possible?"

Kit tilted her head to the side, allowing Hawk access to more skin. "Very expensive and painful laser treatments. My grandma left a little money for me to go to college, but by the time I turned eighteen, the money would've only paid for maybe a year at the most."

Hawk's hands found their way under her sweater. "So you decided to spend it on hair removal," he surmised.

"Yep. Actually, it was my mom's idea, if you can believe it." Kit's voice shook as Hawk's hand cupped one of her breasts. "Worth every penny, in my opinion."

Hawk released the front closure of Kit's bra. "So are these," he said, squeezing Kit's left nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

"Thank you. I had to work a lot of hours to afford them."

Hawk lifted off Kit and sat back on his heels. "Then they deserve to be worshipped properly."

For some reason, a line that she once would've thought cheesy wasn't. There was something truly genuine about Hawk and the way he talked to her. Having a gorgeous man speak of his desire to explore her body thrilled Kit beyond belief.

It wasn't that her past lovers hadn't wanted to look at her body, but they had always seemed to be interested in the oddity of her assembly of parts, instead of her as a whole. Kit definitely didn't get that vibe from Hawk. She wanted his eyes on her, along with his hands.

Reaching down, Kit pulled her sweater over her head. Her open bra was the next to go. She lay back against the sofa cushions and draped her arms over the end of the couch. Although she was still wearing her denim skirt, her legs were spread apart, one foot on the floor while the other rested against the back of the couch. "Look all you want," she said.

Hawk licked his lips as he removed his T-shirt and unbuttoned the top of his jeans. "I've made love to plenty of men and women over the years, but I don't think anyone's ever had the effect on me that you do." His hands slowly worked their way up from her waist to her breasts. "What is it about you that has me in knots?"

"I'm different," she whispered. Kit held her breath, waiting for Hawk to come to the realisation all her past lovers eventually came to.

Hawk leant down and swiped the flat of his tongue across one hard nipple, eliciting a moan from Kit. "Don't sell yourself short," he said, moving to the other breast. "Sure, your body's a playground for someone like me, but it's more than that." He scraped the nipple with his teeth. "Maybe it's because you seem so genuine."

Kit couldn't help but snort. "Genuine? I don't think anyone, including my mom, has ever called me that. Hell, even my hair is dyed."

Hawk sat back once more before pulling Kit up and into his lap. Once they were skin to skin with Kit straddling his lap, Hawk stared into her eyes. "Being honest with yourself is the hardest thing a person can do. The alterations you may or may not have made have absolutely nothing to do with being genuine. You are who you are." Hawk adjusted Kit so the bulge in his jeans pressed against the crack of her ass. "I've no doubt there were times when you felt the entire world was against you for being what you felt was right for you, but you didn't let that stop you."

Kit's eyes began to burn. It was the first time in her life someone outside of her family had acknowledged how hard it was for her to go against the grain of society. Was it possible that she'd finally found a man who would accept her? She blinked away the tears before they had a chance to fall. "Thank you for saying that."

"I just wanted you to understand what being with you means to me. I'm not the kind of guy who lets himself get attached to people, but I'm beginning to think I've already crossed some kind of line where you're concerned." Hawk's black eyebrows drew together. "You're not a witch, are you?"

Kit laughed. "I've been accused of being a lot of things, but a witch was never one of them." She moved her hips back and forth, grinding down against Hawk's erection. Questions were on the tip of her tongue, but she kept her mouth shut. If the rest of the evening went well, perhaps she would gather enough courage to ask Hawk why he didn't get attached to people. From what she could tell, the man's heart was as big as anyone's she'd ever known.

Hawk's hand brushed the front of Kit's underwear. "Just touching you threatens my control," he mumbled.

Although he'd made the statement out loud, Kit couldn't help but wonder if he was talking to himself or her. There definitely seemed to be something bothering Hawk. "Would

you like to see the bedroom?" she finally asked, hoping to draw Hawk away from his thoughts.

"The bedroom? No. But I'd love to see you naked, spread out on your bed."

There it was. That spark in Hawk's green eyes that told Kit lust had once again replaced contemplation. She climbed off Hawk's lap. "Follow me." Turning around, Kit started towards the bedroom, unzipping her skirt as she went. Stopping beside the bed, Kit pushed her skirt and underwear off, making sure to give Hawk a good view of her ass. What was it about the man that made Kit want to tease him? Rarely was she so brazen with a lover.

Wearing nothing but her boots, Kit lay back on the bed and rested her heels on the edge of the mattress. She spread her legs, giving Hawk an unobstructed view of her hard cock. "Boots on or off?"

Hawk's hand disappeared down the front of his jeans. "Goddamn, you're sexy." He stroked his cock, allowing Kit only a glimpse of the glistening tip.

Mouth watering, Kit licked her lips and motioned him closer. "Let me taste you."

Hawk neared the bed. "I have to sit down to take these stupid boots off. Otherwise I'll end up falling on my ass."

Kit dropped her legs over the side of the bed and sat up. She gestured to the mattress between her spread thighs and grinned at Hawk. "Let me help you."

Removing his hand from his cock, Hawk lifted a foot to the bed. As Kit began to untie the heavy boots, Hawk reached down and ran his fingertips over her nipples. "I've always been a boob man," he said.

Kit held the boot by the heel and toe and waited for Hawk to slide his foot out. "Mine are sensitive, so play with them all you want."

The corner of Hawk's mouth lifted in a sexy grin. "Oh, I plan to do more than play with them, for as long as you'll let me." He pulled his foot out of the boot. Before lifting his other foot, Hawk bent over and captured Kit's right nipple between his lips.

Kit tossed the boot aside before burying her fingers in Hawk's hair, silently directing him to her left side. Arching her back, she moaned at the tender bites Hawk seemed fond of giving. Even if her breasts were bruised later, the feeling of his teeth just then made it well worth it.

Hawk suddenly pulled away. The expression on his face wasn't good as he took several steps away and turned his back on her. Kit bit her bottom lip. Had she done something?

Maybe Hawk was the kind of man who liked his women to take a backseat in bed. God, had she screwed everything up by acting like a slut?

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you." He ran his fingers through his hair, gathering the long black strands in a ponytail at the nape of his neck. "I never lose control. Never!"

Kit pulled her boots off before rising from the mattress. She walked over to Hawk and pressed herself against his back. Lovers had walked away before, but never for losing control of their lust. Applying light, open-mouth kisses to the bronzed skin, Kit wrapped her arms around Hawk's waist. "You didn't hurt me at all. Please don't be sorry."

Hawk lifted Kit's hands off his stomach and to his mouth. He kissed each finger before settling Kit's hands on his chest. "There's something about you that scares me."

Kit's eyes closed. She'd thought...hell, what did it matter. Stepping back, she pulled her hands away from his chest. "It's okay. I know the reality of being with someone like me is different from the fantasy."

Before she could get further away, Hawk grabbed her upper arm and span her around. With anger written in every gorgeous line of his face, Hawk stared down at her. "Don't do that. Not with me." He released his hold and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. "I want every single inch of you, and I think that's the problem."

With a heavy sigh, he took a step back and gestured to the wet patch on the front of his jeans where he'd obviously come. "I haven't done this since I was around fifteen."

Kit reached out to push Hawk's jeans off his hips. "Nothing to be ashamed of."

Hawk quickly backed away before Kit could finish her task. "Sorry, um, I need to go." He grabbed his boot and stuffed his foot into it. "The problem isn't you, so don't even start that pretty head of yours down that path. I just need to work a few things out," he mumbled, walking out of the bedroom as if the hounds of hell were nipping at his heels.

Kit took a deep breath. She glanced down at her nude body and shook her head. "We've scared off another one."

* * * *

Hawk grabbed his coat on his way out of the front door and dashed down the steps. He was so lost in thought and emotion he didn't even remember to search for his wayward

helmet. All he knew was that if he didn't get away from Kit, he'd end up making an even bigger fool of himself.

How he got back to the Bed and Breakfast, Hawk never knew. One minute he was pulling out of Kit's driveway and the next he was stepping up onto the porch of the Apple Valley Inn.

Quietly, Hawk entered the inn and collapsed on the first chair he found. *What the fuck am I doing?* It was at that moment he wished he had a real buddy. Sure, he could call Jason, but Jason was more of a friendly business associate, definitely not the kind of friend he could tell about Kit.

"Hawk?" Addie said from the top of the stairs.

"Yeah. Sorry if I woke you." He hurriedly took off his jacket and set it in his lap to cover the cum-stained denim.

Addie smiled as she descended the steps. "You didn't. I can't seem to get through a night anymore without getting up to sneak a snack. Don't tell Mel. I'm sure she's convinced my ass will never again fit into those skinny jeans she likes so much."

"With the gift you're giving her? I doubt Mel cares what size your ass is," he said.

Addie giggled. "Oh, men and lesbians always say things like that until about a year after the birth when the baby newness wears off. Then its nag, nag, nag. 'What happened to the woman I fell in love with?'" Addie gestured towards the kitchen. "Come on, I'll fix us both something."

With his stomach still in knots, Hawk knew there was no way he could eat. "I'm not hungry, but I'd be happy to join you."

Hawk settled himself on a kitchen chair and watched while Addie pulled half a gallon of vanilla ice cream out of the freezer.

She carried it, along with a bowl, spoon and knife to the table. "Slide me over that pan of brownies."

He did as asked and waited while Addie constructed a tower of brownie à la mode. He couldn't stop thinking of Kit's big hazel eyes staring at him just before he'd left. Damn, he shouldn't have run out on her like he had.

"You're staring," she practically growled.

Hawk shook his head. "Sorry. Lost in thought." He leaned on the table and propped his chin up with the heel of his hand. "Can I ask you something?"

"As long as it has nothing to do with how much weight I've gained," Addie answered.

Hawk smiled at Addie's one-track mind. "When you first met Mel, did you know she could be the one?"

Addie shifted uncomfortably in her chair. "That's probably not a good question to ask. I was with someone else when I first arrived in Cattle Valley."

"Fair enough."

"But yeah, I think I knew after that first day she helped me clean up this place that there was something there I didn't want to admit to myself."

"So what'd you do?" he asked.

"Pretended it wasn't there. Pushed her away, tried to pull her back, pushed her away again." Addie licked the back of her spoon. "Do you have someone you feel that way about?"

Hawk switched arms, changing to lean his jaw against his knuckles. "I met someone here in town. No matter what I do, I can't get her off my mind. She even came to my rescue when that asshole sheriff tried to pick a fight with me at O'Brien's."

"Ryan?"

"Yeah." Just thinking about the confrontation was enough to get his blood flowing.

"Ryan's one of the nicest men I've ever met. He and his partners have helped me tremendously since I've been in town."

"Maybe he just doesn't like the look of me then, because he was far from nice. Evidently he thinks I came here to kidnap my own child."

"Oh," Addie said with understanding in her voice. "Yeah, that's another thing about Ryan. He's incredibly protective of the people he cares about. Believe me, if you were on the other side of his protective instincts you'd be thrilled to have him in your corner."

Addie took another big bite of her late-night snack. "So who's this woman?"

"Kit Bromely. She's fairly new in town, so you might not have met her."

"Matt's cousin, right?" Addie nodded, answering her own question. "I've seen him at the grocery store."

"Her," Hawk automatically corrected.

"Sorry. I never know what to call transgender people."

"It's easy. You refer to them by whichever gender they identify themselves as."

"Please don't take this the wrong way. God, I can't even believe I'm saying it, but why her? With your looks, you could probably get anyone you wanted. I've even had a dream or two about you since you've been here." She giggled. "Don't tell Mel."

Hawk wasn't blind to the way the world treated transgender people, but he'd never understood it. "Kit's a beautiful woman," he started to argue.

"Yes, but if you want a woman, there are plenty out there just as beautiful." She stuck another spoonful of ice cream into her mouth. "So why her?" she asked around her food.

Hawk's temper was beginning to get the better of him. Addie's question was the same one he'd asked himself about a hundred times since he'd left Kit's apartment. "I can't explain it." He sighed. "Tonight was the first time I've really touched her, and I felt so at peace with myself it scared me."

"So you ran away," Addie surmised.

"Yeah, something like that," he confessed.

Addie scraped the bottom of the bowl to get the last bits of brownie and melted ice cream. "You're single, right?"

Hawk chuckled. "Yeah. I wouldn't have taken Kit back to her place if I wasn't."

"So...you're scared because you're afraid she might just be the one for you?"

"Right." It sounded stupid, even to his own ears. "I'm not the kind of guy who could settle down. I've lived my life travelling around the world. I'm rarely in one place for more than a week at a time. How could I possibly make a relationship work?"

"Why do you travel so much?" Addie rose and carried the bowl to the sink.

"Business. When I was a boy I followed my father around the world and since his death, it's been all business. That's what Hawkins men do. We make money."

"And does it feed your soul?" She dried the bowl before putting it back into the cabinet.

"Excuse me?"

"What do you do with all this money you're making?"

"Use it to make more," he stated in a matter-of-fact tone. He knew no other way of living.

Addie walked back to the table and rested her hands on Hawk's shoulders. She surprised him by kissing the top of his head. "It sounds like you've been searching for something elusive your entire life."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Was she making fun of him?

"You obviously work very hard and make lots of money, but then you turn around and work even harder to make even more money. When does it stop? When will you have enough to slow down and realise the only things in your life are pieces of green paper with dead presidents on them?"

Hawk had only recently begun to see what a cold and empty life he led. "That's why I want to meet my son."

Addie stepped to the side so she could face him once again. "And you should, but will seeing him a couple times a year be enough? It sounds to me like you're afraid Kit will get under your skin and try to change your life, but maybe it's a life in need of some changes."

Hawk looked away from Addie. "Maybe," he mumbled.

"I'm going back upstairs before Mel wakes up. If I over-spoke, I apologise. Sometimes I don't know when to keep my mouth shut."

"You didn't." Hawk glanced up as Addie disappeared through the doorway into the darkened dining room. Once again, a pair of big hazel eyes came to mind. Why was he making such a big deal out of his attraction to Kit? Hell, he wasn't even in love with her. *But I could fall very easily*, he reminded himself.

He looked at the clock on the microwave. The night was ticking away one second at a time. No, he corrected his thought process. *My life is ticking away one second at a time.*

* * * *

When Kit opened the door, Hawk immediately noticed her red-rimmed eyes. "Hawk?"

"Can I come in?" he asked. He wouldn't blame her if she slammed the door in his face. "Please," he added.

Kit stepped back and tied the belt of her robe more tightly around her. "What's going on?"

Hawk entered Kit's apartment and shut the door. "I came to apologise."

"Would you like some coffee?" Kit asked on the way to the small kitchen in the corner of the room.

Hawk followed. It was obvious Kit had been hurt by his earlier exit, and how could he blame her?

Gesturing to a chair in the tiny eating area, Kit turned her back on Hawk as she began to make a pot of coffee. "I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

Although Kit had clearly marked her boundaries when she'd shown him where to sit, Hawk couldn't help but want to touch her. "Again, I'm sorry for acting like an ass. I got spooked, but not for the reason you seem to think."

Kit switched on the coffee maker before turning to lean her back against the edge of the countertop. "Then explain it to me."

Hawk held out his hand. "I'll try if you'll come over here."

It took several seconds before Kit finally pushed off the counter and walked towards him. When she started to take the other chair at the small kitchen table, Hawk reached out and hauled her into his lap. "I need to touch you. That seems to be a common desire when I'm around you."

Biting her bottom lip, Kit rested her head against Hawk's shoulder. "I liked it when you touched me earlier, but then you ran."

"Yes, I did," he admitted. With an arm around her waist, Hawk rested his free hand on Kit's thigh. His thumb sought out the soft skin exposed by the opening in her robe. Drawing his thumb back and forth, Hawk tried to put his thoughts into words.

"Hawk?" Kit cupped Hawk's face in her hands, obviously searching for answers to Hawk's odd behaviour.

"I've already told you that I've fucked both men and women," he began.

"Yes."

Hawk rubbed Kit's back when it began to stiffen. He knew he was being unfair and rather cryptic, but it was hard to explain what he was trying so desperately to figure out for himself. "I've never found someone who, I felt, could fulfil my needs, both physically and emotionally." He moved his hand under the hem of the short robe, not going any further than Kit's upper thigh. "Although it seems to be pretty damn common in Cattle Valley for three people to try and make it work as a family, I've always known it wasn't a lifestyle I'd be comfortable with."

Hawk pulled Kit tighter against his chest. "I knew from an early age that I was attracted to both men and women. I love the femininity of a woman. There's nothing like holding a woman in my arms to make me feel at peace, but there's also a need for more at times.

Whether it's sucking a guy's cock or pounding into him as hard as I can, I like not having to be gentle all the time." Hawk shook his head. "I'm really fucking this up, aren't I?"

"No." Kit kissed the corner of Hawk's mouth. "I may not be made of steel, but I'm hardly made of glass. I wasn't lying earlier when I said you hadn't hurt me."

"See, that's just it though. For the first time I think I may have found someone who could be everything I've ever wanted."

"And that scares you?" Kit asked.

"Sure it does. I've never had anything to lose before, never had anyone to miss when I had to go out of town. What if I screw up my one chance at happiness?"

In lieu of a spoken answer, Kit reached down and untied her robe, revealing her breasts and cock to Hawk's view. "What if you walk away again before you even know if there's anything to worry about?"

Hawk took the obvious invitation and ran with it. He reached for Kit's half-hard cock and encircled it in his palm. "I guess I've always been the kind of person who tends to put the cart before the horse."

Kit stood, with Hawk's hand still on her cock, and smiled. "Let me be your horse for a while. I'll lead us to where we need to go."

Chapter Five

Naked and on his back, Hawk stared at the body straddling his lap. All his favourite parts were represented in this one amazing package. Despite what Addie had said earlier, Hawk knew he wasn't worthy of such a woman.

He ran his hands up Kit's ribcage to cup her breasts. The air in the bedroom was chilly, and Kit's skin reflected that. "Are you cold? We can pull the blankets back up."

Kit shook her head and reached down to scrape her short nails across Hawk's chest. "I can think of better ways to warm up." She wiggled her hips until she captured Hawk's cock between the cheeks of her ass.

Hawk moaned and began to knead Kit's breasts. "You're so fucking perfect."

Kit leaned over and scooted up until one of her nipples brushed Hawk's lips. "For the first time in my life, you almost make me believe those words."

Capturing Kit's breast with his mouth, Hawk began to suck the protruding nipple. He searched blindly for the lube Kit had set on the mattress earlier.

"Looking for this?" Kit asked, pushing the bottle into his hand.

Hawk grunted, not willing to release the suction on Kit's nipple. He poured lube into his hand, no doubt making a mess of the sheets, and smoothed his fingers down the crease of Kit's ass.

"Yes," Kit groaned when Hawk centred his attention on the puckered skin. He slowly inserted the tip of his middle finger before releasing Kit's breast. One glance at the protruding nipple and areola and Hawk knew he'd just given her a mammoth-sized hickey. Pleased, he moved to her other breast as Kit sank down on his finger.

Kit moved up and down on Hawk's finger for several moments before reaching back to grab Hawk's hand. "More."

Happy to oblige, Hawk positioned another finger at Kit's hole and waited for her body to accept it. Releasing Kit's nipple, he rubbed his face against the swinging breasts and reached for the condom also flung onto the bed by Kit. "Wanna fuck you."

"God, yes!" Kit helped Hawk find the foil packet that had worked its way off the bed. "Hallelujah and pass the salt."

Hawk chuckled. "What the hell does that mean?"

"Not sure, but my mom used to say it all the time." Kit climbed off Hawk's lap and opened the packet with her teeth. "You want me on top?" she asked, rolling the condom down Hawk's length.

"Absolutely." Hawk used the opportunity to give Kit's erection several firm strokes. "Did I tell you how much I like to suck cock?"

"No, but I'll remember that," Kit chuckled. Kit rose up and Hawk guided his cock to her stretched hole. She threw her head back as she sank down, impaling herself on Hawk's dick. "Amaaazing," she groaned, stretching out the word.

Hawk prepared to hold Kit's hips while he fucked up into her, but Kit took over immediately, riding Hawk's cock like a professional rodeo queen. With his hands left free, Hawk further explored two of his favourite things, Kit's breasts and cock.

The faster Kit rode him, the deeper Hawk fell for her. Emotions that had lain dormant for years threatened to overwhelm him. He'd travelled the world, fucked more people than he cared to think about, made more money than ten men could possibly spend in a lifetime, and this, this particular moment meant more to him than all those things combined.

Releasing his hold on Kit's cock, Hawk sat up and wrapped his arms around her thin waist, pulling her into a deep kiss. With each thrust of his tongue, he bound himself even more closely to the woman in his arms.

Kit was the first to break the kiss. She climbed off Hawk's lap and positioned herself on her forearms and knees, that sweet ass practically in his face. "Fuck me," Kit begged, looking at Hawk over her shoulder.

Hawk got to his knees and buried his cock to the hilt. "How hard?"

Kit reached back and held her ass open as far as it would go, allowing Hawk to sink deeper. "You just give me everything you've got, and I'll let you know if it gets to be too much."

Hawk pulled out to the tip before shoving in hard. It was the start of the kind of fucking he craved at times. Somewhere along the line, his head had been screwed with just enough to make him believe men were for fucking and women were for making love to. The two had always been vastly different in his mind, but with Kit, they slowly began to merge. Sure, he was fucking Kit like he would a man in a leather bar, but at the same time, he was staring

down at a goddess with long, blonde hair and the softest skin he'd ever had the pleasure of exploring.

Bending over, Hawk pressed himself against Kit's back. He wanted to feel all that magnificent skin. As he continued to thrust in and out of her, Hawk's hands roamed from Kit's swinging breasts to her bouncing cock. He encircled the long, thin erection with his hand and squeezed.

"Oh, God, oh, fuck. There. Right. There," Kit panted.

Kit's body shook as she came, covering Hawk's hand with warm seed. Hawk used his free arm to keep Kit from collapsing onto the bed while he pistoned in and out of her as fast as he could. It didn't take long for his balls to draw up, tight against his body.

"Oh, shit! Kit!" he howled as he plunged over the edge into pure bliss.

Hawk lowered Kit to the mattress, coming down to rest beside her. His breathing was laboured and his body coated with sweat, but he felt more alive than he ever had. He lay with Kit's back pressed against his chest and brushed the hair away from her forehead.

"Now can I start to panic?"

Kit rolled over to face Hawk. "It was pretty spectacular, wasn't it?"

"More than anything I've ever experienced." It brought up more issues he'd need to deal with.

"See what happens when you don't let your fear stand in the way of getting what you want?" Kit wrapped her arms around Hawk and kissed him.

He accepted Kit's tongue with enthusiasm as his hands skimmed down her back to land on her ass. Hawk had never considered himself a fearful man. He charged into business meetings with all the confidence of a man born to dominate a boardroom. So why had he shied away from Kit earlier? And why had he willingly given Bo and Rance the upper hand when it came to Joey? Legally, Hawk had every right in the world to see his son, so why was he so afraid of demanding the men comply with his wishes?

Kit broke the kiss. "Did I lose you somewhere along the way?"

Hawk reached between them and removed the condom. "Just trying to figure out how I can be such a hard-nosed bastard when it comes to business, but such a pussy when it comes to personal shit."

He rolled away from Kit and got off the bed. Walking into the bathroom, he tossed the condom in the trash can before grabbing one of the washcloths from the shelf above the

toilet. As he cleaned himself up, he stared at his reflection in the mirror. What would happen if he challenged Bo and Rance? Although he still had no intention of taking Joey away from the family he'd grown to love, Hawk believed he deserved more than to meet his son for the first time in a damn bakery.

After rinsing the washcloth, Hawk carried it back into the bedroom. Kit was on her back with the sheet pulled up to her waist. Hawk eagerly joined her under the sheet and reached over to clean her before tossing the cooling cloth onto the floor.

"What happens when you walk into a business meeting and things don't work out the way you want them to?" Kit asked.

On his side, with his head propped up on his palm, Hawk gazed down at Kit. "I move on to the next deal."

Kit smiled. "Do you lose money?"

"Sure," he answered. He ran his finger up and down Kit's torso from her flaccid cock to between her breasts. "But it's just money. I can usually make it up on the next deal."

"I think that's the difference. Business is a game of chance to you. Sure you may lose, but as you've said, it's only money. But risking something more personal, like your heart, scares you because you're afraid you won't be able to recoup that loss."

Hawk settled down, resting his head on the pillow next to Kit. Although he still had a few things to work out as far as his growing feelings for Kit were concerned, Hawk wanted to share his worries about Joey. "I want to meet my son so badly it's driving me crazy, but I'm so afraid of damaging him by fighting with Bo and Rance that I can't bring myself to challenge them."

"Why do you think it would damage him? He's young, right?"

"Joey's two and a half. I was five when my mom died, and I can clearly remember the custody battle between my Grandma and Grandpa Woods and my dad."

"Your grandparents sought custody?"

"Yeah. They felt my dad was too wrapped up in building an empire to care for a five-year-old. They were right, of course, but they didn't stand a chance going up against a man like my father. I never saw them again. They both died before I reached the age of eighteen."

"Is that the reason you're afraid of pushing for visitations with your son?"

"Yeah," Hawk sighed. "I resented my dad for taking away my Grandma and Grandpa Woods."

"But you're not trying to take away your son. You just want to have some kind of relationship with him." Kit captured Hawk's hand where it lay on her breast. "I wish my dad would've made an effort to see me. It's not about you fighting with Bo and Rance, it's about Joey knowing you at least fought to see him. Believe me, someday that'll be important to him."

When Hawk didn't say anything, Kit reached over him and turned off the bedside lamp, plunging the room into darkness. She settled back down and rested her head on Hawk's chest. "You'll figure it out," she whispered.

Hawk could see Kit's point. He also began to understand that if he backed down from what he truly wanted, he'd never be satisfied. Kissing the top of Kit's head, Hawk held her even tighter in his arms. He realised he'd never be able to leave Cattle Valley with his heart intact.

* * * *

With the phone pressed to his ear, Hawk paced his small room. He'd planned to put the call off until later in the day, but changed his mind when he started second-guessing his decision.

"Hello?" Bo answered.

"It's Hawk. I was hoping you had a few minutes to talk." Hawk stood in front of the window, looking out at the slowly melting snow.

"A few," Bo replied.

Hawk took a deep breath. "I know you're uncomfortable with me meeting Joey, but I don't feel right about doing it for the first time in a public place. So, I was wondering if you and Rance would bring Joey to the Apple Valley Inn for dinner this evening. I've already discussed it with Addie and Mel and they agreed to give us privacy."

He was met by silence.

Hawk gripped the phone tighter. "If you're still worried that I'll try to take him from you, please don't be. I just want to be part of the boy's life, which means the three of us need to learn to get along. And the only way I see that happening is if we get to know each other."

"I looked you up on the internet," Bo finally said. "So I know what kind of money you have. What's to say you won't change your mind after meeting Joey and try to gain full custody of him?"

"Because I'm giving you my word that I won't. If you read everything out there about me, you should know what I went through as a child. I have no desire to put Joey through something similar." Hawk held his breath, waiting for Bo's reaction.

"I'll have to talk it over with Rance."

"Okay. I understand that." Hawk pressed his hand against the cold glass of the window. The old place really did need a few repairs.

"I'll give him a call and let you know," Bo agreed.

"Thanks. Umm, there's one other thing," Hawk began.

"Yeah?"

"I've met someone who's very special to me, and I'd like to invite her to join us." If Hawk had any hope of building something with Kit, he needed to know it wasn't one more battle he'd have to fight with Bo and Rance.

"Like I said, I'll have to discuss it with Rance."

"Fair enough. Just give me a call as soon as the two of you come to a decision." He started to end the call, but he didn't want Bo to think he was rolling over once again. "I really do want to handle this without getting outside forces involved."

The grunt on the other end of the phone let Hawk know Bo understood. "I'll call ya," Bo said before hanging up.

* * * *

Kit was on her hands and knees, scrubbing the kitchen floor, when someone knocked on the door. "Just a minute," she called, getting to her feet. She stripped off the yellow rubber gloves and tossed them onto the counter.

Opening the front door, she was greeted by the handsome face of her cousin, Matt. "Busy?" Matt asked.

"Scrubbing the floor—please save me," she chuckled, stepping back and ushering Matt inside.

Matt looked around the room. "Playing Cinderella today?"

"What? Like you've never scrubbed a kitchen floor?" Kit rolled her eyes.

"Not on my hands and knees." Matt walked into the kitchen and opened the small closet that held the hot water heater. He withdrew a sponge mop and held it up. "Most people just use one of these."

"And most people only move the dirt around," Kit countered. "Is there a reason you're here or is it just to bust my balls?"

Matt looked surprised at the comment, but quickly covered his expression. "I heard a motorcycle come and go a couple of times last night and again this morning."

"I'm sorry if it woke you. Hawk's planning to go into Sheridan today to see about buying something more practical."

"It's not that. I just needed to make sure you were okay. I wanted to come over last night, but Sam and Isaac convinced me I was being paranoid. I know..." Matt shrugged. "Mom told me what happened before you left home."

"Hawk's not like that!" Kit yelled, jumping to her feet. "He's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

"Have you known him long? Because I've never heard you mention him before now."

"I've known him for a couple days." Kit wondered why she felt so defensive. Whatever it was, she didn't like it. Her feelings towards Hawk were her own and she didn't need to justify them to anyone.

"What do you know about him?"

"He came from California to meet his son, and he treats me better than anyone ever has. For the first time in my life I feel...accepted."

"I accept you," Matt replied.

"I know, but it's not the same." Kit hoped Matt would drop the subject. She was riding a high at the moment, and she'd hoped to continue to ride it until Hawk returned later in the evening.

"No, I guess it wouldn't be." Matt stood and walked towards the door. "Just do me a favour and be careful, and if you need anything I'm right across the yard."

"Thanks." Kit smiled, letting Matt know there were no hard feelings.

With a simple nod, Matt left the apartment.

Kit was on her way back to the kitchen when her phone rang. She unplugged it from the charger and was pleased to see the name Hawkins Enterprises on the display. "Hey," she answered.

"How's your day going?" Hawk asked.

"Good. I almost have my chores done for the day and it's not even noon yet. What about you?" Kit carried the phone over to the couch and flopped down, draping her legs over the armrest.

"I called Bo this morning."

"How did it go?" she asked, playing with the ends of her hair.

"Good, I guess. He and Rance agreed to bring Joey over to the B&B for dinner tonight. I want you to be there, too."

"Me?" Kit swung her legs to the floor and sat up. "Are you sure that's a good idea?" The last thing she wanted was to ruin Hawk's chance to get to know his son.

"I don't want to do it without you there, so, yeah, I think it's a good idea."

Kit rubbed her chest. Hawk's acceptance made her ache. "Do they know I'm coming?"

"Yeah. I told Bo I'd met someone very special to me, and I wanted to bring her."

"You said her?" Kit asked. Her entire body felt like it had been enveloped in a blanket of warmth. "What if they get there and see...I mean, what if they freak out when they meet me?"

"They'll show you the utmost respect or suffer the consequences," Hawk stated in a matter-of-fact way.

Kit sighed. "Everything you say makes me feel wanted and protected," she admitted.

"Good, because I'm just getting started." Hawk chuckled. "I'm in Sheridan, waiting for the dealership to detail the car I bought, but I'll be back in town shortly. Mind if I come by?"

"I'd love it." She looked down at the faded T-shirt she'd put on to do her cleaning.

"I just have one more question. What size do you wear?"

* * * *

"I still can't believe you bought me a dress," Kit said, coming out of the bedroom.

Hawk took one look at Kit in the fitted, dark-green jersey dress and shook his head. Although the top half of the dress fitted Kit's curves to perfection, the bottom half was full

enough to hide any bulges that might occur. He'd already learnt enough about Kit to know she didn't tuck her cock away in hopes of passing.

"Hawk?"

"You're lucky I only bought one. I've never had someone I wanted to buy things for, but everything in that store would look great on you." He stepped forward to stand in front of Kit. "You look incredible." He ran his palm over the swell of her dress to dip his fingers into her exposed cleavage.

"Is it too much for dinner with your son?" Kit asked, looking down at her chest while Hawk continued to explore.

Hawk sneaked his hand under the demi-cup bra and rubbed Kit's nipple. "Joey's two and a half. I don't think he'll notice. Besides, this dress was the tamest thing in the store. I want to take you back there. They had one that was so sheer on top nothing would've been left to the imagination."

Kit palmed the front of Hawk's jeans. "And you like the thought of other men looking at me?"

"Is it wrong for me to want to show you off? I'm proud to be with you, and, yeah, I like the thought of other men being jealous of what's mine." He could think of a few clubs he'd like to take Kit to. There was one in New York City that came to mind. Kit would have the attention of every man in the place. Hawk's cock hardened at the thought of exposing Kit to places where she'd be truly welcomed. They may be few and far between but they were out there.

"No one's ever been outwardly proud to be with me, so I don't even know what that would feel like," she whispered, eyes downcast.

Hawk released Kit's breast and tipped her chin up to meet his gaze. "You just haven't met the right sort of men."

"No," Kit said with a shake of her head. "I just hadn't met you."

Hawk pulled her against him, feeling Kit's hard cock against his thigh. He wanted to tell her what she already meant to him, but the magnitude of what he was about to do stopped him. Although he knew he wanted to spend years finding out everything there was to know about Kit, his life was complicated. Not only was he an hour away from meeting his son for the first time, but he was worried about what would come after.

Cattle Valley seemed like a great place, but Hawk wasn't sure the small town life was for him. He'd grown up travelling the world. Eating in the best restaurants was commonplace for him. Would he get restless living in such a small town? The last thing he wanted to do was to give Kit false hope that he could settle down in Cattle Valley.

"We should probably go. I told Addie we'd be there early to help," Hawk said, brushing a kiss across Kit's forehead. He stepped back and grabbed his leather coat.

"Does Addie know about me?" Kit asked.

"Yeah. Why do you ask?" Hawk picked Kit's long, wool coat up from the arm of the couch and held it open for her.

Sliding her arms into the sleeves, Kit glanced over her shoulder. "I've just found it's easier when people know about me before they meet me. That way I don't have to see that look of surprise in their eyes when they realise what I am."

Hawk wrapped his arms around Kit from behind and buried his face in her neck. He understood what Kit meant, but it hurt to hear. "You're Kit, my Kit, and I never want to put you in that kind of position."

"Don't take that burden upon yourself. I knew the first day I put on a dress and loved the way it made me feel that I was in for a life of misunderstanding. It didn't stop me. I am who I am, and the looks and giggles come with the territory, but if I can prevent them, it's easier."

"Addie and Mel are good people. You'll like them," Hawk tried to reassure her.

"I believe most people are good. Their reaction to me once they realise I was born a man has nothing to do with that. I think it's more out of discomfort that they react the way they do." Kit shrugged and turned in Hawk's arms to stare up at him. "I'm sure by the time I'm thirty even the giggles won't bother me, but it's taking a while for my shell to harden."

Hawk brushed Kit's hair away from her face. "I don't like the sound of that. Is it wrong to wish I could always be there to protect you from getting hurt?"

"Wrong? No. Unrealistic? Yes. But I like the thought of you always being there to make me feel better after it happens. As a matter of fact, I like that a lot." She pulled Hawk's head down for a deep kiss.

Hawk accepted Kit's tongue like he accepted everything about her, with enthusiasm. She'd been right. He wouldn't be able to always shield her from the harsher side of life, but what kind of lover would he be if he didn't at least try to pave a smoother path?

Chapter Six

Kit watched Hawk fuss with the table settings once again. She smiled as she went back into the kitchen. "He's so nervous. I think he's moved the water glasses three times."

Addie poured pineapple glaze over the ham and put it back into the oven. "It's not every day a man meets his son for the first time."

"I know, but I think it's cute. Hawk seems like such a tough guy, but seeing him worry about something as simple as the position of a fork or plate melts my heart."

"You really like him, don't you?" Addie asked. She stuck a fork into the boiling potatoes to check their readiness.

"He's every dream I've ever had," Kit admitted. "To be honest, I'm not sure how I'll handle it when he has to go back to California."

"If his son's here, he'll be back often, I'm sure."

"I suppose." Kit sat at the kitchen table. Watching Addie, it was obvious she enjoyed her work.

"You don't sound convinced."

Kit shrugged. "No, it's not that. I have no doubt he'll be back to see Joey. I guess I'm afraid of becoming nothing more than a convenience when he comes to town."

"Why would you think that?" Hawk asked from the doorway.

Addie handed Kit a bowl of ambrosia salad. "Would you put this on the table for me?"

Grateful for something to do, Kit carried the bowl towards the dining room. The moment she set the salad on the table she felt Hawk's arms wrap around her.

"I don't know where things will go between us, but don't ever allow someone to treat you as a convenience, even me. If I even start to make you feel that way, knock me upside the head with a baseball bat."

Kit grinned and leant back against Hawk. "I've never been good at sports."

The doorbell rang as Hawk was peppering kisses on Kit's neck. "I'm glad you're here with me," Hawk said.

"Glad you asked me," she replied.

* * * *

Hawk stood in the living room with an arm around Kit while Mel answered the door. Rance walked into the living room first, followed by Bo carrying a smiling toddler. Hawk's first look at his son brought tears to his eyes. He swallowed around the lump in his throat and gave Kit's waist a squeeze.

Although he barely remembered his mom, he'd seen enough pictures of her over the years to recognise the deep dimples on either side of Joey's mouth. He felt his chest tighten as Bo sat down and lowered Joey to the floor.

Hawk drew Kit forwards into the living room. "Thank you for coming." He gestured to Kit. "This is my girlfriend, Kit."

Bo glanced at Kit who had taken a seat on the chair in front of the fireplace. "Girlfriend?"

Hawk narrowed his eyes, warning Bo to watch his mouth. "Yes. You have a problem with that?"

Before Bo had a chance to answer, a loud noise drew Hawk's attention.

"No touching," Bo reprimanded Joey. He knelt on the floor and gathered the decorative balls that had been dumped onto the floor from the carved wooden basket on the table.

Joey's black eyebrows drew together and his arms crossed in front of his chest. "Toys."

"No," Bo said with a shake of his finger.

To defuse the situation, Hawk leaned over and whispered in Bo's ear. "I bought him something. Would it be okay if I gave it to him?"

Bo glanced up and stared at Hawk for several moments before finally agreeing. "All right."

"Kit, would you get that sack I put in the dining room?" Hawk asked.

"Sure."

As soon as Kit was out of the room, Hawk spoke to Bo in a voice he rarely used. "You will treat her with respect. Do you hear me?" he ground out between clenched teeth.

Bo appeared surprised. "What? I have no intention of disrespecting her. I was just surprised. You didn't say she was your girlfriend when you mentioned bringing her."

"Does it make a difference?" Hawk asked. Before Bo answered, Kit came back into the room. "We'll talk later."

Hawk took the gift bag from Kit. "Thanks, hon."

Kit smiled. "You're welcome."

Turning towards Joey, Hawk held out the sack. "Do you like presents?"

Joey's big brown eyes sparkled as he nodded his head with enthusiasm. Hawk couldn't take his eyes off those dimples. He handed the bag to Joey before glancing at Bo. "My mom had those exact dimples."

"Believe me, he uses 'em to his advantage," Bo chuckled.

Hawk returned his attention to Joey, who was struggling to remove the large toy dump truck from the sack. The boy's squeal of delight once he'd wrestled the toy free broke the remaining tension in the room. It was a good reminder of why it was so important to get along with Bo and Rance.

* * * *

Finished with dinner, Kit watched Joey. The boy had immediately eaten the small pieces of ham Rance had cut up for him, but there appeared to be a stand-off regarding the green beans.

"Wanna play truck," Joey said. He struggled to get out of the high chair, which was a bit too small for him.

Bo leaned towards Joey and gestured to the five beans still on the plate. "You can get up as soon as you finish your dinner. Vegetables make you strong."

"Don't wanna be strong," Joey pouted.

Kit moved her water glass to try and hide the green beans left on her own plate. A chuckle to her left let her know Hawk had seen what she'd done.

Hawk whispered in Kit's ear. "Don't you want to be big and strong?"

"I should've told Addie not to put green beans on my plate," she whispered back.

Hawk reached over and speared several beans with his fork. He put them in his mouth and hummed his approval. "They're good, Joey."

Joey didn't buy it. It seemed the stalemate would continue.

Bo turned his attention away from Joey towards Kit. "Are you from here or did you come in with Hawk from Malibu?"

Kit had noticed the glances Bo and Rance had aimed her way throughout dinner. Did they disapprove? Normally she wouldn't care what the two men thought, but this wasn't about her, it was about Hawk getting a chance to know and spend time with his son.

She took a drink of water before answering. "I moved to town about four months ago from Arkansas."

"Kit has a cousin that lives here, Matt Jeffries," Hawk added.

"I haven't seen you around," Rance said.

"I keep pretty close to home." Kit reached down and laid a hand on Hawk's thigh, searching for a bit of comfort.

Hawk threaded his fingers through Kit's, pressing their palms together. "I met Kit at The Gym, where she works."

"So it's new between the two of you," Rance commented.

"Yes." Hawk brought Kit's hand to his lips and kissed it. "But I don't plan to let her get away from me."

The statement made Kit feel better, but the momentary expression on Bo's face increased her unease.

"Do you plan to move to Cattle Valley?" Rance asked.

"I spoke with a realtor today and asked her to find a place either to rent or buy. I can't move here full time right now, but I hope to make it back at least one week a month." Hawk cleared his throat. "I'd like to take things a step at a time. Take things slow and get to know the three of you until you all feel comfortable enough to let me have him for a weekend each month."

Bo and Rance exchanged glances. "Can we have some kind of legal papers drawn up?" Rance asked. "Not that I doubt your word, but I think Bo and I would feel a lot better if we didn't have to worry you'll eventually go after full custody."

"Absolutely. If we can come up with an agreeable visitation schedule, I'll get my attorneys on it." Hawk squeezed Kit's hand.

She squeezed back, knowing what legally having rights to the boy would mean to Hawk. *There.* Once again Kit caught that strange expression on Bo's face when he looked at her. Before things went forward with the visitation negotiations, Kit knew she needed to talk to Bo. If she was a problem that was unacceptable to Bo, she knew she'd remove herself from the situation. Although her feelings for Hawk were growing by the minute, she refused to

come between Hawk and Joey. Hawk would only end up resenting her for it. "Bo? Would you like to help me bring out dessert? Addie said it was all ready for us in the kitchen."

Bo's brow wrinkled. "Sure."

Hawk leaned over and whispered in Kit's ear. "What's going on?"

Kit gave Hawk a kiss on the cheek. "We're just getting dessert. Play with your son."

She led the way into the kitchen. "Addie made cherry crunch." She set the baking dish on the large table along with bowls and spoons. "Would you care for ice cream on yours?"

"That sounds great," Bo answered.

Kit dished out portions of the dessert before pulling the ice cream from the freezer. "Can I ask you something?"

"Yeah." Bo took the scoop out of Kit's hand and began topping each helping of the crunch with ice cream.

"I can tell you don't approve of me," she began.

"What gave you that idea?" Bo asked.

"I've seen the way you look at me. And I just need you to know if it's a problem, I'll step back. Hawk needs to spend time with Joey, and he shouldn't be punished because of me."

Bo carried the scoop to the sink and rinsed the melting ice cream from it before placing it on the draining board. "I'll be honest. When Hawk first introduced you as his girlfriend it threw me. I know very little about Hawk except that he has quite a reputation for being a playboy. Rance and I have clung to that fact over the last few days, because we figured he wouldn't be hanging around town a lot. Now that he has someone in town he seems to care about, it scared me — nothing more."

Kit nodded. "Okay. And the looks all through dinner? What're those about?"

Bo's eyes rounded. "You saw those?"

"Of course I did."

"I apologise. I love Rance with all my heart, but you're incredibly beautiful. It's been a long time since someone's caught my eye the way you have. Makes me uneasy, I guess. But I'd think you get that reaction all the time."

"Hardly. Usually when people stare at me it's because they're either trying to figure out if I'm a man or a woman, or they're uncomfortable with my personal lifestyle."

"I think you're selling yourself short. I know if I didn't have Rance in my life, I'd try every trick I've ever learned to get your attention. I reckon I'm not the only one who has that reaction when they see you."

"Consider yourself lucky you have Rance then," Hawk said from the doorway, his jaw visibly ticking with anger.

Kit picked up two of the bowls and handed them to Bo. "Should I make up a smaller portion for Joey?"

"Yeah. But until he eats the rest of his dinner, he won't be able to have it," Bo said, clearly uncomfortable with what Hawk had overheard.

"I'm sure Addie has some sprinkles around here. I'll add a few of those as an extra incentive."

Bo smiled. "I'd appreciate that." He turned to walk out of the room, but stopped in front of Hawk on the way. "You're a lucky man, but I have a feeling you already know that."

Hawk nodded but said nothing until Bo left the room. "What was all that about?" he asked Kit once they were alone.

Kit found a small, plastic bowl in the cupboard and set it on the counter. She began opening other cupboards looking for the baking supplies. "I noticed him looking at me during dinner. I just needed to make sure I wouldn't damage your chance of getting to know Joey."

Hawk pressed himself against Kit's back. He reached over her head and grabbed a small bottle of multi-coloured sprinkles from the shelf. "Even if he had a problem with you, I wouldn't let it stop me from seeing you. Working out the situation peacefully is the best solution, but it'll be worked out regardless."

Kit pushed Hawk back far enough for her to turn around. Sandwiched between Hawk and the counter, Kit rested her hands on Hawk's muscled chest. "I'm not sure you know what you're taking on to be with me. Getting in the way of your success isn't an option for me."

Hawk framed Kit's face with his big hands. "I don't know who it was who made you feel that you're less than anyone else, but I'm going to do everything in my power to change that. You're who I want to be with, and I'll fight anyone who has a problem with that."

Kit's eyes drifted shut when Hawk kissed her. She accepted his tongue and his thigh as it insinuated itself between her legs. Despite their location, Kit couldn't help herself. She

began to rub her hardening cock against the solid muscles of Hawk's thigh, wanting nothing more than to pull up her skirt and beg to be fucked.

A throat cleared from the doorway, interrupting Kit's ride. "Sorry, but I think it's time we get Joey home," Rance said.

Embarrassed beyond belief, Kit stared up at Hawk. "I'm so sorry," she whispered.

"Don't be." He gave her a quick peck on the lips before turning around. "If you have a minute, I'd like to talk to you and Bo about seeing Joey again before I have to leave town."

"Okay," Rance agreed.

Hawk glanced over his shoulder on his way out of the kitchen. "You coming?"

"You go ahead. I'll clean up in here," Kit told him.

After Hawk and Rance left the room, Kit surveyed the mess left by the melting ice cream before getting to work.

* * * *

Hawk felt like he was riding on a cloud when he entered the kitchen after seeing their guests off. Kit was elbows-deep in sudsy water washing the dishes and for some reason the picture she made took his breath away. He knew it was chauvinistic to get off on the sight of the pretty little thing doing domestic chores, but, for him, seeing Kit washing dishes was a clear reminder of what could be if he played his cards right.

"Joey let me carry him to the door," he said, finding a clean dishcloth in the drawer.

"And how did that feel?" Kit asked with a smile.

"Right," he stated simply. He picked up one of the dinner plates and began drying it. "Just as right as this feels."

Kit chuckled. "I've always enjoyed doing dishes. I think it's the warmth of the water and smell of the soap."

"Naw, what feels right is standing here beside you doing them together. I like it. A lot," he added. He set the plate on the counter and picked up another. "Will you stay here with me tonight?"

"Will Addie and Mel mind?"

"Of course not. Besides, they're clear up in the attic apartment so you can make as much noise as you want." He bumped his hip against her.

Kit flicked a handful of suds at Hawk. "As I recall, you're the vocal one."

Although Hawk had never considered settling down with one person, he could definitely see building a future with Kit. He wanted to ask her if she'd consider going back to Malibu with him when it was time, but he honestly wasn't sure how the superficial people in his life would react, and hurting Kit was out of the question.

Hawk finished drying the plates and started on the silverware as Kit wiped down the counter. He watched her work, falling more in love with her as the seconds ticked by. No, there was no way he'd put Kit in a negative atmosphere. Perhaps it was time he made a complete break from the running of Hawkins Enterprises. Giving up control wasn't easy for a man like Hawk, but losing Kit because of the assholes he had to surround himself with wasn't an option.

* * * *

A week later, Hawk awoke to a soft set of lips around his cock. "Mmmm," he moaned, reaching down to brush Kit's hair out of her face. "Morning, beautiful."

Kit released the cock in her mouth. "If I have to say goodbye this morning, I thought I'd give you something to think about on the flight home."

Hawk had decided to fly home and leave his motorcycle and new sedan in Cattle Valley. He reached down and grabbed Kit under the arms before hauling her up on top of him. "You don't have to worry about that, with or without the blowjob." He ran his hands up and down Kit's body, from her ass to her shoulder blades. "Have you given any more thought to moving into the house?"

"Yes, but my answer hasn't changed. I don't want to be there without you, so I might as well stay where I am."

Hawk wrapped his arms around Kit and rolled them over. Staring down into those big hazel eyes, it took everything he had not to cancel his flight. For years he'd scoffed at people who claimed to be in love, but ten days with Kit and he no longer thought love was an impossible achievement, even for him.

He ground his morning wood against Kit's erection. "I don't want to leave you," he whispered.

"So don't." Kit wrapped her legs around Hawk's waist.

Hawk didn't immediately answer. What if he put his life on hold a while longer? His gut told him it would only make things harder. He'd already made the decision to start cleaning up his life in Malibu. The town he'd once loved, the house on the beach, none of it held appeal since he'd met Kit. "You could always come with me," he offered for the first time.

Kit stopped moving. "You don't mean that."

Hawk found that he did, in fact, mean it. "I'd love for you to go home with me. I just worry that it won't be easy for you. The weather in Malibu is fantastic, but the people can be snobs. I wanted to ask you last week."

"So why didn't you?" Kit asked, running her fingers across Hawk's ass.

"Because I'm afraid someone will say or do something to hurt your feelings, but now that I'm faced with leaving you, I can't seem to do it." He closed the distance and thrust his tongue into Kit's mouth. As they kissed, Hawk insinuated himself between Kit's legs. Pulling out of the erotic tongue-play, Hawk reached for a condom.

"I'm in love with you," Kit said, opening herself to Hawk's touch. "As long as I have you in my corner, I can deal with the small minds and big mouths of the world."

Hawk positioned the crown of his cock at Kit's hole and slowly entered her. "I'll always be in your corner," he said before sliding in to the hilt.

Kit held on as Hawk began to move in and out of her. What had she just agreed to? She had no business following Hawk to Malibu. Her job at The Gym meant the world to her, and so did her friends there.

Although the thought of sunning herself on the beach in nothing but a string bikini appealed to her, the stares and snickers she'd garner from passersby didn't. It was more than that, though. She was starting to feel comfortable in Cattle Valley, a first for her.

Hawk pulled out and repositioned Kit on her side. He spooned up behind her and pushed an arm under her, leaving his hand free to cup her breast. "I love you, too," he whispered in her ear before entering her from behind.

Kit hooked her forearm under her knee and lifted her leg, opening herself further to Hawk's hard and fast rhythm. She closed her eyes and let Hawk's words wash over her. Suddenly it was no longer about the immediate future. She had to consider the possibility that the two of them could build a life together.

When Hawk wrapped his hand around her cock, all thoughts of the future were pushed to the background as her body responded to Hawk's touch. Kit thrust her hips back and forth between Hawk's hand and cock, trying to decide which direction she loved more. "Harder," she cried.

Hawk buried himself to the hilt in one powerful thrust and squeezed the crown of her cock. The dual sensations rushed through Kit's body within an instant, sending her to the stars. She came in a rush, her body quaking with the force of her orgasm.

"Oh, fuck!" Hawk yelled as he came.

Kit released her leg and covered Hawk's hand where it rested on her lower stomach. When her breathing began to return to normal, and Hawk's cock slipped from her body, Kit rolled to her back. Staring up at the handsome face of the man she loved, she was no closer to making a decision. "Can you really see yourself living in Cattle Valley eventually?"

It took Hawk several moments to answer. "Full time?"

"Yes."

He removed the condom and tied it in a knot before tossing it into the trash can beside the bed. "I'm not going to lie, the slow pace worries me, but I'll do whatever I have to for you and Joey."

Kit was surprised by Hawk's answer. She'd never had someone give up so much as a seat on the bus for her, let alone an entire lifestyle. Hawk started to distract her by dipping a fingertip into the small patch of drying cum on her hip and using it to paint her nipples. She moaned when he leaned over and licked the cum from her breast, lapping it up like he couldn't get enough of her. "What happens if I go with you to Malibu and hate it?"

"We move. It's as simple as that. We can live anywhere on the planet. You pick a place, and I'll follow. As long as we're able to come back to Cattle Valley one week a month, I'd go anywhere with you." Hawk squeezed Kit's breast. "Where would you like to live?"

"Wherever you can be happiest," she said honestly. "I like it here, but visiting once a month would probably be enough as long as I had you with me the rest of the month, as well."

"So what exactly are you telling me? We start our lives together in Malibu and work our way around the globe from there?"

Kit had a sudden attack of doubt. "Only if you're sure. You know I'd be okay here while you go back to Malibu if that's what you want. You don't have to worry about me

hooking up with someone while you're gone or anything. I can do the one week a month thing for a while if you're not ready."

Hawk pressed his lips against Kit's, effectively shutting her up. He swept the interior of her mouth before drawing back. "I love you. That won't change if you decide to stay here, but I'd really like to come home to you every day."

"I guess we're going to Malibu then."

Chapter Seven

The laughter that met Hawk when he walked through the front door went a long way towards lowering his blood pressure. It had been a hell of a day, spent in a board room trying to hammer out the future of Hawkins Enterprises.

Hawk set his briefcase down and tried to determine where the laughter was coming from. "Kit?" he called out.

"Up here," Kit returned.

Pulling off his tie as he climbed the floating staircase, Hawk finally recognised the other voice in the house. What was Brac Riesling doing here? He knew his neighbour had become a close friend to Kit but that didn't explain why laughter was currently coming from the bedroom.

Hawk stepped into the bedroom and looked around. "You in here?"

"Back here," Kit called from the dressing room. "I'm giving Brac a makeover."

After throwing his coat and tie onto the bed, Hawk entered the spacious dressing room. Sitting in the chair in front of Kit was one of Hollywood's hottest soap stars. The fact that he had a celebrity in the house didn't faze Hawk, but the skin-tight dress, makeup and long, black wig did. "You have something to tell me, Brac?"

"Only that I have a whole new respect for Kit and what she goes through every day to look as gorgeous as she does," Brac answered without moving his lips as Kit applied dark red lipstick.

"Finished." Kit walked over to greet Hawk with a kiss. "Brac's auditioning tomorrow for a part in a movie. The director doesn't think Brac's pretty enough to play a drag queen. We're going to prove him wrong."

Brac looked up at Hawk for the first time. "What do you think?"

"I think it's a good thing *Pirates' Cove* is still doing well in the ratings," he replied honestly. "It's not that you're not pretty enough, because, damn, man, you're gorgeous, but your body's not built like a woman's."

Brac stood on shaky ankles and studied his reflection in the floor-to-ceiling mirror. The dress he'd obviously bought for the occasion stretched tight across his broad chest. Even with

the fake boobs he had stuffed in his bra, there was no mistaking the hard, masculine body underneath.

"Sorry, buddy," Hawk said. "There'll be other roles."

"Not opposite Gregory Moore." Brac sucked his stomach in and turned to the side. "I look fat."

"You're not fat," Kit reprimanded her friend.

"I know that, but I look it, don't I?" Brac asked Hawk.

"Like I told you, you've got a man's body. A body both women and men around the world drool over, I might add."

Brac kicked off the high heels before pulling off the wig to reveal his light brown mass of shoulder-length curls. Although Brac claimed the longer hair was necessary for his character on *Pirates' Cove*, Hawk knew the man shaped the character and not the other way around.

"I just wasted three hundred bucks," Brac said, drawing Hawk out of his thoughts.

Kit gasped. "Next time, let me take you shopping, hon. I could've found the same outfit for less than a hundred."

Hawk couldn't help but smile. Kit had been in California for over two months and still refused to shop on Rodeo Drive. Hell, at least she was no longer feeling bad about herself for allowing Hawk to support her. He'd been forced to play the Joey card, something he'd hated to do. Kit had eventually agreed that having the freedom to spend a week each month in Cattle Valley was worth it.

"Why don't you get out of that dress and let me take you both to dinner," Hawk offered.

Kit giggled and began to remove the soft yellow sundress.

Hawk grabbed her up in his arms and span her around. "No free shows for Brac."

"I've got money," Brac teased.

"Shut up." Hawk hitched Kit up higher until she could wrap her legs around his waist. "Where do you want to go?"

"Nowhere," Kit said, wriggling out of Hawk's arms. "I've got steaks in the fridge. Why don't we stick close to home and have dinner on the patio?" She left the dressing room without another word, leaving Hawk and Brac alone.

"What was that about?" Brac asked, referring to Kit's abrupt change of mood.

"She doesn't want you to be photographed with her again." Hawk shook his head. "Fucking paparazzi." Early in their friendship, Kit and Brac had made the mistake of going out for coffee together. The next week a photo had showed up in one of the gossip rags about Brac Riesling's new transgendered companion. Kit had been devastated, and Brac had received an earful from his agent regarding the picture.

"I told both of you I don't give a shit about that. It's not like I'm in the closet or anything." Brac turned around and gestured to the dress' zipper. "You mind?"

"You're the only real friend she's made out here, and she doesn't want to do anything to embarrass you," Hawk told Brac.

Brac let the dress fall to the floor. "Get the bra, too, would ya?"

Hawk unfastened the bra and watched the rubbery fake boobs fall to the floor. He'd had a few moments of jealousy when it came to Kit and Brac, but it had soon become apparent that Brac was attracted to muscular alpha males like himself.

"I should talk to her," Brac said. He slid on a pair of cargo shorts that looked like they were ten years old and pulled a black, faded Slayer T-shirt over his head.

One thing Hawk could say about Brac was that he was unpretentious. The man was on one of the hottest shows on TV and still drove a three-year-old Prius. Hawk stretched his arms over his head. "I'll grab a shower while the two of you talk."

Brac thumped Hawk on the shoulder. "Thanks, man."

* * * *

Once the steaks were marinating, Kit pulled out some of the vegetables she'd purchased at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market. She carried the bowl to the table and set about peeling the tough outer skin from the sweet potatoes first.

"Need help?" Brac asked, coming into the large open kitchen.

Kit gestured towards the small butternut squash. "You can grab a knife and peel that for me."

Brac pulled a paring knife out of the wooden block on the counter and joined Kit at the table. "You know I don't give a shit about what people say about me, right?"

Kit knew where the conversation was headed. "I don't want to talk about it."

"But we need to talk about it. If you think I'm going to hide my friendship with you behind closed doors just because there are assholes out there taking pictures of every move I make, you're wrong."

Other than Hawk, Brac was the best friend she'd ever had. Not once since their first meeting had Kit felt self-conscious about being herself. Brac had accepted her immediately, and she would never be able to thank him enough for that. "I care too much about you to sit back and watch those vultures pick you apart like they did before."

Brac removed the knife from Kit before holding her hand against his cheek. "You're the only person in California who treats me like Simon Hostetler and not Brac Riesling. I need that. I need you in my life."

Kit rolled her eyes and pulled her hand away. "You say that as if you don't love being treated like Brac Riesling."

The corner of Brac's mouth lifted in a devilish grin. "I won't deny it has its perks, but I damn near lost myself before you strolled into town."

Kit returned her attention to the vegetables. She rose from her chair and retrieved the cutting board before rejoining Brac. Truth was, she hated Malibu. Hell, she hated the whole area. The only bright spots were the man she loved and the man she'd befriended. "Sweetie, you can talk 'til you're blue in the face, but you won't change my mind. I'm perfectly happy to be your friend behind closed doors."

Hawk walked into the room fresh from the shower and stopped in the doorway. "Is it safe to come in?"

"Yeah, maybe you can talk some sense into her," Brac said.

"Not possible. My charm only gets me so far." Hawk walked over and bent to give the top of Kit's head a kiss. "Besides, she's as stubborn as she is pretty."

Kit tilted her head back. "If you're going to insult me, you should at least give me a proper kiss first."

Hawk sealed his lips over Kit's and tickled her tongue with his own. Breaking the kiss, he smiled down at her. "I wasn't insulting you, simply stating a fact."

Before the conversation could go any further, Brac's phone rang. He pulled it out of his pocket. "It's Hal. You mind if I take this in the other room?"

Kit waved him away. "Shoo."

Once Brac was out of the room, Kit stood and wrapped her arms around Hawk. "How was your day?"

"Long," he grumbled. He sat down in Kit's vacated chair and pulled her into his lap. "I told them I'm stepping down for good at the end of June."

"That's only three weeks away. Are you sure you're ready for that?" Kit asked, running her fingers through Hawk's drying hair.

"It's not fun anymore."

"Work's not supposed to be fun. That's why they call it work and not play," she reminded him.

Hawk's hand slid under the hem of Kit's dress. "I'd rather be here with you."

Kit spread her legs when Hawk tapped the skin of her inner thigh. "Keep an eye on the door," she warned, spreading her legs.

Hawk's fingers rubbed against the front of her underwear. "Brac doesn't care what people say about him, you know?"

"Maybe he doesn't, but I do." Although she'd loved the kind things Brac had said to the press about her, she hated that he'd been put in the position to defend their friendship in the first place. "He means a lot to me."

"I know." Hawk placed his hand on the back of Kit's neck and pulled her in for a kiss. "I'd be jealous if I didn't like the sonofabitch so much."

"You'll never have to worry about Brac. I'd never fall for someone with longer eyelashes than me."

"Good to know," Hawk said, giving Kit's cock a gentle squeeze through her underwear.

Brac walked back into the room, and Kit could tell immediately something was wrong. "Everything okay?"

Brac glanced down at the phone still in his hand and shook his head. "One of the extras on *Pirates' Cove* filed a sexual harassment complaint with the studio. He claims I told him if he didn't go out with me I'd have him fired."

"That's bullshit," Kit said. She pushed Hawk's hand away before getting to her feet. "The studio doesn't believe this guy, do they?"

Brac stuck the phone back into his pocket before enveloping Kit in a hug. "Damn, I love you. You didn't even blink before defending me."

"Look at you. Anyone with eyes should know you wouldn't have to blackmail someone into going out with you." Kit kissed Brac on the chin. "Not that you go out."

Releasing Kit, Brac walked over to the refrigerator and grabbed a beer. "The studio's taking the allegation seriously. According to Hal, they're going to film around me for a few days while they investigate the complaint."

"Can they do that?" Hawk asked.

"Some stupid clause in my contract says they can." Brac took a swig of his beer. "Fuckers."

Kit bit her lip. Although Brac was putting on a brave front, Kit knew what acting meant to him. She sat in Hawk's lap, once again seeking comfort only he could give. "Has the press gotten hold of it yet?"

"I don't know. Hal said he'd been on the phone with Ike all afternoon." Brac tossed the empty bottle into the recycle bin before pulling out another. "You mind?"

"Not at all, but are you sure getting drunk is the answer?" Hawk asked.

"I'm not looking for answers." Brac joined them at the table. "You leave Friday for Cattle Valley, don't you?"

"Yeah." Kit hated to leave Brac alone. "Maybe you should come with us. Might be the perfect time to get out of town for a few days."

"Maybe." Brac took several gulps of his beer. "First I need to find out who this asshole is who filed the complaint."

"You mean you don't know him?" Hawk asked.

"The name's not familiar, but there are a lot of extras on the set. I asked Hal to get me a picture of the guy. I want to see the face of the man trying to ruin my career."

"Surely the studio gets complaints like this all the time. Why do you think it would ruin your career?" Hawk asked.

"Because the guy claims to be straight. Hal thinks he filed the harassment form as the first step in a lawsuit. It's hard enough for an openly gay actor to get work in this town, but if the public believes I'm blackmailing straight men into sleeping with me..."

"Ouch." Kit reached over and threaded her fingers through Brac's, offering her support. She wished there was more she could do.

Brac gave Kit's hand a slight squeeze before releasing it. "Mind if I take a rain check on dinner?"

"Not at all." She glanced at the uncooked food. "But are you sure you want to be alone?"

"Who said anything about being alone?" Brac winked. "If I'm going to be hounded by the press, I might as well prove to them I don't need to resort to blackmail to get a piece of ass."

It was a very revealing statement. Kit had talked to Brac at length about his sex life, and she knew he didn't believe in random hook-ups. The fact that Brac was planning to go out with the intention of fucking a stranger scared her. Kit looked at Hawk. "Why don't we get on a plane tonight? The three of us could be in Cattle Valley by midnight."

"Running away isn't the answer," Brac said, finishing off his beer.

"Neither is fucking some stranger," Kit reminded him.

Brac leaned over and kissed Kit's forehead. "I'll go to Wyoming with you, but let me take care of a few things here first."

"Let him go," Hawk whispered in her ear.

Kit sighed, knowing she was outnumbered. "We leave Saturday morning."

* * * *

Kit was leaving the spa after a long day of pampering when a man stopped her. "You're that guy I saw on Entertainment World this morning."

"Excuse me?" Kit slung her purse over her shoulder, her good mood evaporating.

"You're one of Brac Riesling's men, aren't you?"

Kit swallowed. She hadn't turned on the television before she left the house, so she had no idea what the man was talking about. "Excuse me," she said, pushing by the man.

The moment she was in the car, Kit called Hawk.

"Hey, hon, I've been trying to call you," Hawk answered.

"What's going on?" Kit asked.

"The story broke, only it's not just the harassment allegations the press is having a field day with." Kit heard voices in the background. "Hang on," Hawk said.

Kit glanced around while she waited for Hawk to get back on the line. She noticed several photographers snapping her picture and immediately pulled away from the kerb after putting her phone on speaker. What the hell was going on?

"You still there?" Hawk asked.

"Why are there people trying to take my picture?" Kit asked, navigating traffic.

"I need you to meet me and Brac at the executive airstrip."

When her hands began to shake, Kit pulled to the side of the road. "Hawk, what's happened?"

"Evidently there was a photographer outside the house yesterday. They have pictures of everything, Brac in drag, me standing beside him while he was changing his clothes, the three of us in the kitchen. It's a fucking mess, and the only thing I can do is get the two of you the hell out of town."

Although their activities the previous evening were completely innocent, Kit could only imagine the stories the tabloids were conjuring up. "How's Brac?"

"Believe it or not, he's holding up pretty well. We're both worried about you, though. He's afraid you'll try to blame yourself again."

Kit took several deep breaths before getting the car back onto the road. She'd been through worse things but this was different. What was the point of living the life she wanted to live if it ruined the futures of the people she loved?

"We're pulling in to the airport now. We'll take off as soon as you get here," Hawk informed her.

"Tell Brac I'm sorry."

"I won't do that and neither will you. You've done nothing wrong."

Kit turned the corner. She wanted to argue but knew it wouldn't get her anywhere when Hawk was in protective mode. "I'll be there in about twenty minutes." She hung up and dialled someone she thought could help Brac.

"The Gym," Rio answered the phone.

"How's business?"

"Good. How're you doing, sweet thing?" Rio asked.

"Not good. I have a problem, and I'm hoping you can help," she began.

"I'd do anything for you, you know that."

Kit hadn't but it was nice to hear. "Is it possible to hide someone from the press in Cattle Valley?"

"Sure. After the grandstand collapse, the town closed ranks pretty damn fast. Why, what's going on?"

Kit filled Rio in on what had happened. By the time she pulled into the airport's parking lot, Rio had not only agreed to help her, but had promised to speak to Ryan about getting the sheriff's department involved if need be.

"Thanks," she said. "I owe you."

Rio laughed. "We're friends. You don't owe friends."

"I'll remember that." Kit hung up the phone and dropped it in her purse. She boarded the plane knowing she'd probably never step foot in California again.

* * * *

Hawk was the first one off the plane. True to his word, Rio was standing on the tarmac as the Citation X pulled to a stop on Asa Montgomery's private airstrip. Rio was joined by Ryan and a man Hawk didn't know. Although Ryan had become friendlier towards Hawk over the last couple of months, Hawk was under no illusion that he was there for him.

Kit joined Hawk at the bottom of the steps and smiled up at him. "The cavalry's here."

Hawk grunted. He hated that he hadn't been able to protect Kit against the hurtful and malicious paparazzi. With a hand at the small of Kit's back, he urged her out of the way so Brac could exit the plane.

Rio was the first to reach them. He held out a hand to Hawk for a solid shake before picking Kit up for a hug. "Glad you made it safely."

Kit slapped Rio's shoulder. "We make the same trip every month, dork."

Rio shook his head and set Kit back on her feet. "But it's the first time I've received a troubling phone call from you."

"He's been a bear to be around since Kit called," Ryan said, stepping forward to shake Hawk's hand.

Brac joined them and shook hands with Ryan and Rio. "I appreciate the welcome. Hopefully you're all wasting your time and no one will think to look for me here, but it's nice to know someone will be keeping an eye out."

Ryan stepped back and motioned for the grouchy-looking man to come forward. "This is Deputy Al Jessup. If you have any trouble while you're here, give him a call." Ryan passed Brac a slip of paper.

"Nice to meet you," Brac greeted, hand extended.

It took several moments, but Al Jessup eventually returned the gesture. The two men seemed to size each other up before eventually ending the handshake.

"Now that everyone's been introduced, let's get the three of you home. I imagine it's been a long day," Ryan said, leading the way to the small parking lot attached to the airstrip.

Hawk was joined by Kit and Brac in the back seat of Ryan's SUV. It was a tight fit, but it didn't make sense for two vehicles to go to the same location. Hawk waved to the deputy as he pulled out of the lot ahead of Ryan. "He's awfully quiet," Hawk remarked.

"Jessup's a good man to have on your side, but he's not one for small talk," Ryan said.

"Do you think Brac'll have any trouble in town?" Kit asked. "Hawk and I'll be going out to the Back Breaker Ranch in the morning to see Joey. We decided it would be better to try and shield him in case reporters show up. I'd feel better if Brac didn't have to barricade himself in the house while we're gone."

"Are you talking about townspeople or reporters?" Rio asked. "We may be out in the middle of nowhere, but *Pirates' Cove* is just as popular here as anywhere."

"Don't worry about it. I think Kit's worried I'll get mobbed if I try and walk down the street. Believe me, I could use some positive interaction right now."

"Then you should start at the firehouse. Those guys are obsessed with *Pirates' Cove*," Ryan said with a chuckle.

Hawk wrapped an arm around Kit and pulled her closer to his side. He'd spoken with Brac at length about the television reports, and Brac seemed more pissed off about the cameras invading Kit's privacy than his own. Hawk didn't blame Brac for worrying. Kit was known to internalise people's reactions towards her, and Hawk had no doubt the woman he loved was blaming herself for Brac's current round of problems.

No matter what it took, Hawk would never again put Kit into a position like the one they'd just escaped from.

Chapter Eight

Kit woke in Hawk's arms. She snuggled even closer to the hot-blooded man of her dreams and stared at the wall. Hawk hadn't even mentioned what the bad press could do to his business. She'd wanted to bring it up the night before, but Hawk had insisted they get some sleep.

She turned her head and buried her face against his chest. Breathing in the scent that was unique to Hawk, Kit began to worry. Since leaving home after graduation, she'd never once considered returning to her old way of life. But why should the ones she loved suffer so she could feel comfortable in her own skin? Maybe Hawk's love would be enough to make her happy?

"Stop thinking so hard," Hawk mumbled, his voice heavy with sleep.

Kit lifted her head and rested her chin on Hawk's chest. "How'd you know?"

"You breathe differently when you're stressed about something," he said, smiling down at her. "This wasn't your fault."

"So you keep saying, but it's my picture splashed all over the newsstands as the freak Brac's been caught with. I'm surprised you even want to be seen with me."

Hawk sat up so fast he almost succeeded in giving Kit whiplash. She started to speak but snapped her mouth shut at the expression on Hawk's face.

"Don't you *ever* say something like that to me again," he warned, pointing a finger down at her. "I've busted my ass to prove to you how much I love you for who you are." Hawk threw off the blanket and jumped out of bed, his face so red Kit worried he'd have a heart attack.

Hawk began to pace around the room, running his fingers through his hair. "I don't understand how you could ever question my desire to be with you. I don't give a flying fuck what anyone outside this bedroom thinks of our relationship." Hawk's anger seemed to deflate all at once. He stared at Kit with tears in his eyes. "I love you, and I need that to be enough for you."

"It is," Kit said, rising to her knees. "It's just...the last person who had to suffer because of me was my mom. And when I left home, I promised myself no one would ever go through what she went through because of the way I am."

"Who the hell's suffering?" Hawk asked, holding his arms out to gesture around him. "Because you being who you are makes me happier than I've ever been in my life."

Kit sank down to sit on her heels. "Really?"

Hawk sighed and walked over to sit on the bed beside her. He lovingly brushed the hair away from her face before palming her cheek. "You're everything I never knew I needed. And my life is so much fuller with you in it."

"I know Brac doesn't blame me, but do you think he'll change his mind if he loses his job?" she asked.

"No. He told me you were the only genuine friend he's found since moving to California." Hawk grinned. "Kinda pissed me off that he didn't include me in that statement, but I know there's a special something between the two of you." Hawk stretched out on the bed and pulled Kit down beside him. "As long as your friendship remains platonic, I can deal with another man loving you."

Kit reached down and fondled Hawk's balls. She loved the way Hawk automatically spread his legs for her touch. The two of them were a perfect match in and out of bed. "Would you be upset if I decided to stay here for a while after you have to go to California?"

Hawk began to trace invisible designs on Kit's breasts, travelling from one to the other. "I'm going back to put the house up for sale. I've been giving a lot of thought to it lately anyway."

Kit rolled on top of Hawk and sat up. "We've talked before about your love for the city. I think we both know you wouldn't be happy here full time."

"You're right, but as long as we have the freedom to travel when we want, I'll be fine. The important thing for me is keeping you safe and happy, and I think there's something about this town that gives you that sense of belonging that you didn't feel in Malibu."

Hawk's hands continued to pet and pinch Kit's breasts as he spoke. She doubted he even realised he was doing it. Kit slid her ass back and forth over Hawk's cock. A quick glance at the clock told her their time was running out. "We're due at the Back Breaker in two hours."

Hawk thrust his hips. "Is that a hint?"

Kit reached to the bedside table and dug a tube of lube out of the drawer. They'd dispensed with using condoms after a visit to Hawk's doctor in Malibu. She held the lube up and smiled. "I'll beg for it if you need me to."

Hawk pulled her against his chest and rolled them over. "Believe me, hon, you will never have to beg me to fuck you." He took the lube from Kit and coated his cock before dipping his fingers inside her hole.

Staring up into Hawk's gorgeous green eyes, Kit began to slowly stroke her cock. Gathering a drop of pre cum on her thumb, she lifted her hand to Hawk's mouth. Hawk captured the digit and sucked it into his mouth as he replaced his fingers with the head of his cock.

Kit removed her thumb and painted her nipple with Hawk's saliva while she continued to squeeze and pump her cock.

"Damn," Hawk grunted, burying himself to the root. He lifted Kit's legs and draped them over his shoulders before moving in for a kiss.

Kit eagerly sucked Hawk's tongue inside her mouth, needing every ounce of love and passion the man had to offer. There was no doubt in her mind the coming weeks would be hard to get through, but at least she finally believed she was with the man she'd always been destined to find.

Hawk broke the kiss and nibbled her bottom lip. "Love you," he whispered against her mouth.

Kit's eyes rolled back as he punctuated the sentiment with several hard drives into her body. Crying out Hawk's name, Kit encircled the base of her cock and applied pressure. If she came it would no doubt set Hawk off, and she wanted more. "Fuck me hard," she growled.

Hawk pulled out and tapped her hip with the palm of his hand. "Roll over."

With her ass in the air, Kit rested her cheek on the pillow and stared back at Hawk as he rammed into her once again. She loved that Hawk could be so gentle with her one moment and still feel he didn't need to hold back in bed.

"Oh, yessss," she cried, rising to rest on her forearms.

Hawk answered with several loud grunts as he continued to impale her. Their position caused his balls to slap against Kit's sac on each thrust, giving them both an added layer of enjoyment.

Releasing Kit's hips, Hawk moved to cup and squeeze her swinging breasts as he continued the assault on her ass. The room filled with the slapping sounds of flesh on flesh combined with the cries of pleasure from both of them.

"Need to come," she warned.

"Wait." Hawk thrust in twice more before shouting her name to the ceiling with the force of his orgasm.

Kit continued to pinch the base of her cock, hoping to last long enough for what she knew Hawk had in mind. The second he pulled out of her, she rolled to her back. Despite his panting, Hawk swallowed her cock moments before Kit erupted. Hawk swallowed several strands of seed before collapsing with his cheek resting on her lower stomach.

As they both struggled to get their breath, Kit played with the dark strands of Hawk's hair while he continued to touch the tip of his tongue to her sensitive cockhead.

"Nice wake-up call," Brac said from the hallway.

Kit started to giggle. She and Hawk had never been quiet lovers but they'd never had to worry about being overheard by a houseguest either. "Oops."

Hawk grunted in reply.

At least she knew the sounds of their lovemaking hadn't bothered Brac. He'd walked in on her and Hawk several times without batting an eye. Hawk was also comfortable enough around Brac to kiss and grope Kit on occasion with their friend in the same room.

"Maybe Brac'll be able to find a nice guy here in town," she said.

"No matchmaking," Hawk warned. "He's got enough problems right now without you trying to get him laid."

"Brac won't have a problem getting laid. I was talking about something more than sex." Kit's eyes drifted shut as Hawk got up and went into the en suite bathroom. Maybe if she found someone good for Brac he'd find a way to stick around Cattle Valley after the shitstorm with the press had died down.

* * * *

From the porch, Hawk watched Kit push Joey on his swing. "She's had a rough couple of days. It's nice to see her smile again," he commented to no one in particular.

"She's good with him," Bo said.

Hawk glanced at Bo, surprised by the admission. "Yeah, she is," he agreed.

Bo cleared his throat. "You two in it for the long haul?"

"Yes." Hawk narrowed his eyes, trying to figure out where the conversation was leading.

"That's good. Joey's got three fathers and a town full of uncles, but he doesn't really have a constant female in his life."

Before Hawk had a chance to say anything, Bo held his hand up to stop him. "I don't care whether she was born a female or not. In my eyes she is what she is, and Rance and I think Joey will be all the better for knowing her."

Hawk's gaze drifted back over to Kit, who was currently on the ground tickling Joey. There was something about the scene that caused a lump to form in his throat. "We're planning to make Cattle Valley our home base from now on. I was wondering if we could work out a different visitation schedule."

"What'd you have in mind?" Rance asked from his chair beside Bo.

"Maybe one evening during the week and every other weekend?" Hawk asked.

Bo and Rance exchanged looks before both nodding. "We figured that would be the case if you ever decided to move here full time. Unless something special comes up, we don't have a problem with it. We can even make time for you to see him on the holidays if you're in town."

Hawk was beyond happy with the arrangement. "I'm not sure what made you change your mind about me, but I thank you for giving me a chance."

"Simple, really. You're nothing like we thought you'd be. Guess we had an image of a rich playboy who didn't give a shit about anyone but himself coming to town to try and steal our boy from us, but you're not that guy at all."

Hawk grinned. "Although I never had any intentions of stealing Joey from you, the rest of it was pretty damn accurate when I came to town. Kit changed all that. She changed me."

Bo nodded in understanding as he reached for Rance's hand.

Kit carried Joey up the porch steps to sit beside Hawk on the swing. "I think our little punkin's worn out," she said with a soft kiss to the top of Joey's head.

Joey crawled out of Kit's lap to climb onto Hawk's. Sitting sideways, the child rested his head against Hawk and bounced his head several times against the man's muscled chest. "Kit's softer."

Hawk chuckled and stared down at Kit's breasts, framed nicely in the V-necked T-shirt she wore. "You're right." He glanced at Bo and caught him staring at Kit's breasts. "Even your daddy seems to understand that."

Rance growled under his breath and Hawk laughed.

"Stop trying to get me into trouble," Bo said.

With Joey sitting on his lap, Hawk couldn't say what he really wanted to. "You can look at Kit's pillows all you want as long as you don't try and fluff them."

The statement earned him an elbow in the ribs from Kit. "Hellooooo, sitting right here."

With a groan, Bo got to his feet. "I'm outta here before you put me in the doghouse." He bent over and gave Rance a quick kiss. "I'll be in the equipment shed if you need me."

After Bo left, Hawk turned his attention to Rance. "I didn't piss him off, did I?"

Rance waved Hawk's concern away. "Embarrassed him's more like it." He stood and reached for Joey. "Let me put this guy in bed for his nap. Otherwise he'll be a bear tonight at the barbeque."

"Barbeque?" Hawk asked, giving Joey one last kiss before he handed him off to Rance.

"At the EZ Does It. It's Ezra's birthday so Wyn decided he needed to have a party. Why don't the two of you come? It was just an open invitation kind of thing, so I know they won't mind."

"What do you think?" he asked Kit.

"As long as Brac can come along, I think it sounds fun."

Hawk couldn't resist giving her a quick kiss. He knew it wasn't easy for her to open herself to criticism. The fact that she was willing to take the chance and attend a party where she wouldn't know everyone spoke volumes in his opinion.

"We'll be there," he told Rance.

* * * *

Kit was finishing up her makeup when Hawk walked into the bathroom. "It's almost six," he said, pressing himself against Kit's back.

Eyeliner at the ready, Kit stared at him in the mirror. "Be careful or you'll make me poke my eye out."

Reaching around her, Hawk's hands began to unbutton the front of Kit's sundress, revealing her pale pink lace bra. "I'll keep my hands right here until you're done." He slipped his hands inside the cups of her bra and squeezed her breasts.

Kit clicked her tongue and set about lining her eyes. She was used to his hands on her breasts. Rarely were they together without him kissing, sucking or fondling them. "Is Brac ready?" She put the liner down and picked up the tube of mascara.

"Yeah, although I'm not sure he really wants to go."

Finished with her makeup, Kit leant back against the man she loved. "Mom called," she told him.

"Is everything okay?" He asked, rebuttoning the front of Kit's dress.

"Well, although she didn't tell me she'd read the tabloids, she did ask me if we were getting into the kind of relationship with Brac that Matt has with the doctors."

Hawk's hands paused momentarily. "I hope you told her no."

"Of course I did." Kit turned around and straightened the front of her dress. "You're the only man for me. You know that."

"Yeah, I do, but it feels good to hear you say it. Especially when there's an international sex symbol staying down the hall."

"Well, the sex symbol is getting damn hungry, so let's go if we're going," Brac said from the doorway.

Kit gave Hawk a kiss before slipping away from him. She walked into the bedroom and grabbed her rings off the bedside table. While Brac and Hawk were busy talking about how slow she was at getting ready, Kit pulled a condom out of the drawer and put it in her pocket. "Ready," she announced.

The ride to the EZ Does It was pleasant. Although it was a warm spring evening, Kit took a sweater in case the weather cooled once the sun went down. "Did you tell Jessup you were going to this thing?" Kit asked.

"No. Why, do you think there'll be trouble?" Brac asked from the back seat.

Kit smiled to herself. Although the two men had barely spoken to each other, she knew Jessup was Brac's type—all muscle, dark and brooding. She'd also noticed Brac's physical reaction to the big man when they'd shaken hands. She hadn't said anything to Hawk because she didn't want to admit that she'd noticed the hard cock trapped behind Brac's fly, but she had. "No, no trouble. I just thought it might be nice to get to know him."

When they arrived at the ranch, Hawk got out first. While he was busy getting the cooler of beer out of the trunk, Kit passed the condom to Brac. "Stick this in your wallet just in case."

Brac held up the condom and shook his head. "This isn't LA, Kit. The last thing I need is to start fucking around with the locals." He tried to hand the rubber back, but she crossed her arms and shook her head.

"Kit," Brac said in a warning voice. He shook the condom at her again.

"What're you two arguing about now?" Hawk said, joining them.

"Nothing." Kit grabbed Hawk's free hand. "Let's go make some new friends."

* * * *

Sitting at one of the picnic tables, Hawk took a swig of his beer and studied the surrounding area, looking for the woman he loved. "Has anyone seen Kit?"

"I think Ezra talked her into helping him feed a few of the orphaned calves," Wyn replied. He leaned towards Hawk and chuckled. "Ezra doesn't fool me. He was just looking for a way to get away from the crowd."

"Not much for parties?" Hawk asked.

"Not much for people in general. He's come a long way since we first met though." Wyn gestured towards the barn. "Here they come."

Hawk shook his head at the difference in size between Kit and Ezra. He glanced at Wyn. It would take a hell of a man to control a man of Ezra's size, but something told him Wyn did just fine in that department. "Have fun?" he asked when Kit and Ezra joined them.

"God, they're so cute," Kit replied, stealing a drink of Hawk's beer.

"She did a good job. I told her she could come out and feed with me anytime," Ezra said.

Hawk brushed some dirt off the front of Kit's dress, paying particular attention to a spot right over one of her nipples. He delighted in watching the nipple harden under his attention.

Laughing, Kit eventually slapped his hand away. "Stop it."

Hawk turned sideways on the bench and pulled Kit between his legs, taking the opportunity to kiss the soft skin of her shoulder. They settled in to listen to the small four-

piece band. It was a different sort of party than he was used to, but Hawk found he'd enjoyed himself more than at all the fancy events he'd attended combined.

Maybe he'd been wrong about his need for the bright lights and big cities, because at that moment, Hawk couldn't imagine being anywhere else in the world.

Carol Lynne

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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by Carol Lynne

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