



And a Smile – Coke’s Clown

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By BA Tortuga

Chapter One

"We shoulda got to him, Nattie."

"I know, Hoss."

Coke blinked at the tumblers, then at the mostly empty bottle of Jack. There was a third, for when they finished this one. It took some blinking, but he got the booze in the glasses, the image of Sammy Bell bloodied and broken and convulsing in the chute clear as a movie in his mind.

"We shoulda got to him. Why the fuck didn't we get to him?"

"Because we're human, Gramps."

Coke Pharris snarled a little, glaring at the little Aussie. Fred was a dear, but he was fucking annoying and a little goddamn stupid. "We cain't be fucking human. We gotta be better. Gotta be bigger, damn it."

The whiskey burned all the way down.

"So, what, you're going to be monster, Coke?" Dillon appeared, looking washed out, almost transparent.

"How's Sammy?" He tried to stand up, stumbling into Nate. He could see Tracy behind Dillon, fluttering a little.

"He's out of surgery. They say that part went well." Dillon took him when Nate passed him over, hands on his arms.

"I want to go back to the hospital, then. Sit with the Cajun. Pray."

That bull'd come around and tossed Nattie like a bag of potatoes. He hadn't even seen Sammy drop into the chute.

"No." Dillon's voice was flat, a little hard. A lot exhausted. "No, you need to rest. You have to work tomorrow. All of you."

"I c'n work. What 'bout you, Nattie?" He didn't need nobody to tell him what the fuck to do. He didn't...

"Hoss. We done drunk two bottles. My lady needs me." Nattie's face was a little blurry-like.

Damn. Even Natty was letting him down. Dillon's fingers tightened until Coke felt them dig in.

"Come on, babe."

He growled, stumbling a little through the unfamiliar sitting room. Shit, he didn't even know where the fuck he was.

"Steady." Dillon led him out into the hall and he remembered. The hotel hospitality room in the convention area. Shit. He was sloshing.

"I need to go back to the hospital and see Sammy. Tell him I'm sorry."

"Coke, he's not awake. They're gonna keep him under until the swelling goes down." Dillon sounded like he was talking to a child.

"I got his blood all on me. Jase didn't bleed none."

"No. No, he didn't. Sammy's scalp peeled back." Dillon had blood on him, too. Coke vaguely remembered Dillon pulling him off Sam when the EMTs came.

He nodded, or tried to. Jesus, there were sore spots. Bone. There'd been bone. And so much fucking blood. And he should've got to Beau, to Sammy.

"Coke. Damn it, babe, would you listen to me?" Dillon stopped by the elevator, shaking him a little.

"Whut?" He frowned up at Dillon, trying to focus.

"You need to pay attention. One foot in front of the other." Man, Dillon was multiplying.

"I think I oughta sleep here for a few minutes." He couldn't keep a bunch of Dillons happy. He didn't have enough cocks.

"No, babe. We need to sober you up a bit before you sleep."

"Sam Bell got hurt bad. We tried to get to him." He was tired of not saving 'em.

"Oh, Coke. I know. You tried so hard. Sometimes the bull is just faster." All the Dillons looked one way, then the other. Then the middle one moved up close and kissed his cheek. "I'm sorry he got hurt, babe, but the other riders need you tomorrow."

"I'll be there. I will. I just. I gotta make the hurt go away some." He was fucking drowning in it.

"I can help with that." The elevator dinged. "I'm way better than alcohol."

"I left my other bottle back there." He stepped into the elevator, his knees screaming at him. God, he was tired.

"I know. I made sure no one got it." Clownboy could be such a killjoy.

"I hit Mack, I think. Pretty hard."

"Yeah? Well, he's used to getting whomped."

The elevator made him want to puke.

"Yeah." He closed his eyes, but all he could see was Bell's skull bone.

"Coke? Come on, babe. Just down the hall now."

He wasn't sure he could bear it, how nice Dillon was being.

"We called Andy and Jase yet?" He bounced down the hall.

"No. No, not yet. I was busy while you were getting bombed."

He stopped, turned, and looked at Dillon. "Excuse me? I was at the fucking hospital. Y'all sent us away. I was more than willing to man up and help."

Dillon's teeth ground audibly. "I know that, babe. Troy thought it best if you left, and I agreed. However, you could have been doing something useful instead of getting **sloshed!**"

Wow. Dillon could be a harpy.

He stared at Dillon, hands creaking, tension ratcheting up inside his spine like there were little guys with pulleys tugging him tighter and tighter. "Useful. Right. I'm gonna take a walk."

He headed back toward the elevator, his shoulders up under his ears.

"No, you're not. You're going to come back to the room and clean up before Shaun or Jonesy see you and ship you off to the emergency room." Dillon caught his arm.

"I was *in* the fucking emergency room and they made me leave!" He was going to shake the beautiful son of a bitch. "It hurts. It fucking hurts, and we needed a little edge off."

"Okay. Now it's off, right? Off enough that Nate's wife is calling me and telling me to come get you." Dillon dragged him to their room, stuffing him inside just as a couple of doors opened in the hall, folks peeking out.

He was so fucking pissed off he was shaking, every single inch of him tense and tight and raw like he'd been burnt.

Dillon turned to face him, chest bumping his. "You think I don't know? Sam is one of the few people who actually gives two shits about me. He's my friend. I fucking know."

Coke counted to five, which was as far as he could go, then he carefully picked Dillon up and moved him away. "I'm sorry, cowboy."

Then he turned and buried his fist into the wall, about to the elbow.

It was Sandy who paid the cops off quietly, proving that sometimes corporate was good.

Ace settled with the hotel, and Dillon agreed in a private confab that he would pay Ace back for the damages. Coke probably had enough savings, but the big guy was busy sleeping it off in another room and, Dillon refused to add another dose of guilt to what was weighing Coke down.

Coke was exhausted, Dillon was on the edge of a breakdown, and they all had to go back to work in four hours.

He finished moving the last of their toiletries from the room that Coke had pretty much destroyed, then set the alarm on his iPod. He pulled off his old football jersey and crawled into bed next to Coke.

One arm draped over him and drew him in close. "Got you, cowboy. You're okay."

Dillon closed his eyes so hard they stung. Bad. "I'm scared, Coke."

"Shh. Ain't nothing to be scairt of. I got your back, always." Coke sounded like he was a hundred years old, but that torn-up hand petted his head, his back.

"I know. I know, babe." He did. He'd made things worse for Coke, he knew it, but the man had never taken it out on him. Not once.

That rock-solid body held him, surrounded him like he was the most precious thing on fucking earth.

His muscles hurt. His bones hurt. Sam Bell was just about the epitome of what was best about bullriding, and if he didn't recover, Dillon didn't know how they'd all deal with it. And Beau. Beau had to get up and ride one more ride.

He heard Coke's voice -- shaky and soft, praying hard like he did over each and every fallen man. His Coke believed that there was a god that cared and protected and forgave cowboys. Dillon said a little prayer, too, that Coke stayed strong and made it through the day tomorrow without getting any more hurt. Lord, Doc was going to be mad about that hand.

It was Coke's warmth that started leaching the tension away, that solid heat that meant home to Dillon.

A yawn took him, and Dillon stopped watching the clock, the one on the nightstand that didn't have an alarm that worked.

Coke had him, and he wasn't going anywhere.

Chapter Two

"You ready, Hoss?" Nate looked like three-day moldy shit.

"Yeah, Nattie. Lafitte here yet?" Coke couldn't warm up, much; he was so fucking stiff.

He'd gotten a little crazy last night. Hell, Mac was still puking, and Coop... Well, he'd woke up to Coop banging on the hotel room door, the man's lady having ousted him.

"He's in the locker room, yeah. Looks... Well." Nate's mouth went flat line.

"Okay. Gonna go see him. Gonna chat." He met Nattie's eyes. "Twelve rides. That's it. Please, God. No rerides today, huh?"

"Yeah. Yeah, not today." Nattie's lips kept moving for a moment, praying.

He leaned in, took Nate's hand, and they prayed together, then he headed back to the locker room, looking for that familiar hat. "Cajun? You here?"

"Yeah." Beau was sitting there on one of the benches in splendid solitude, hands hanging between his knees. "Hey, cher."

"You holdin' up?" He went to sit close. If the man didn't want him, Beau'd say.

"I don't know." Beau raised his head, eyes hollow under the brim of the hat. "I just got to ride."

"You will. I'll be there. We been praying for him." He wanted to just get on his knees and beg Beau to forgive him.

"I know." Beau's hands unclenched, and one of them landed on his shoulder. "It ain't your fault, cher. It ain't."

"He's gonna pull through and come back to you." Coke had to believe that. Had to.

"That's what Doc says. Says he can tell after the surgery if a bullrider is gonna give up or come back." Those blue eyes glittered at him. "Who's gonna pull my rope, Coke?"

"Balta is. He loves Sam. He'll take care of you."

"He's a good guy." They sat like that, just quiet, until a couple of the older cowboys came in. Biscuit. Hank.

Biscuit looked at Beau. "You look like shit, Lafitte. Want a smoke?"

"Yeah. I think I do." Beau squeezed his shoulder. "Be back in a few."

Hank took Beau's place, long old legs completely different from Beau's stubby ones. "Hell of a thing, Coke. Are we gettin' old?"

"You know it." He felt about as old as he ever had, right now. "You make the short go?"

"Nope. Guess those days are over, huh? No one went home, though. We're all staying to see how Sammy is."

"Yeah. I guess I'll be here 'til he wakes up." Because he would wake up.

"I guess." Hank nudged him. "You okay? Your hand looks raw."

"I sorta lost my shit last night." His hand had split all along the suture lines from the surgery. "I superglued it shut."

"Shit, Coke. Jonesy is gonna hunt your ass down."

"Nattie'll play hazer." If Dillon kept quiet. When it came to his hands and neck, the man could be plumb odd.

"Well, be safe. I'll say a prayer for you." Hank was a good 'un. Mostly quiet, but always there.

"Thanks. I'm gonna go do my walk around." Maybe see his clown.

"Be safe, Coke." Hank touched his arm before he left, as if to make the words stick.

Coke wasn't a bit worried about him being safe. He had that. It was all the others. It felt like he had a weight on his back that was at least ten thousand pounds as he levered up off the bench.

He passed Nattie, who looked just as low, and Coop, who was a patchwork of bruises. Man, he needed Dillon. Coke did his rounds -- he checked the chutes, checked the dirt, then looked at the big old arena. One jog around.

He could do it.

Dillon popped up like he'd been conjured out of thin air. "Want to take a lap with me, babe?"

"You know it." He found a smile for his cowboy, a real one. No matter how bad the world was, this was good.

"Cool." Dillon paced him, gave him something to keep up with. He hung back enough to see that fine ass, still in the little warm-up shorts.

A man had to take his joy where he could.

He was sweating hard about halfway 'round, his body reminding him that he'd taken almost four months off, lost fifteen pounds of muscle, and was sweating whiskey.

"You're almost there, babe. Water and Advil at the end." Dillon knew him too damned well.

"Yeah." He nodded, sweat dripping off him, falling into the dirt.

His legs felt like lead by the time he was done, but Jonesy was there with a water bottle and some pills. If one of 'em was an upper, no one said nothin'.

"You gotta come back after, Coke. Please. Or I'll come to the hotel, but..."

"I'm going to see Bell at the hospital."

"You won't be there all night, though. Dillon, please. Talk to him."

"I'll see what I can do." Dillon gave Jonesy a bright smile that was all brittle underneath. They was all hanging by a string.

Jonesy sighed. "We'll get through Finals and then things will get better, right?"

Coke nodded. "Yes, son. They will."

"Promise, Gramps?"

"You got my word."

And if it was a lie, may the good Lord forgive him.

Dillon stood behind the cage, bouncing from foot to foot.

Three rides left. Three. They'd had a little concert at intermission, had a bunch of high eighty-point rides. The crowd was rockin', their memories way shorter than the guys on tour.

That was good, though. No one wanted to pay money to be depressed. Adam Taggart's horse was almost right behind him; Dillon could feel the rush of hot breath. Was it time to play? He checked with David, raising his palms.

David nodded once, rustling papers before giving him the thumbs up.

Dillon turned around and squeaked, backpedaling like he was surprised to find Smoke right in his face. Adam twitched the reins, and Smoke bobbed his head, looking for all the world like he was laughing.

"Dude! Horse breath! This guy, he's always throwing his horsepower around." The crowd laughed, even though it sounded lame to Dillon. Not even his B game.

Adam looked like they all felt, gray and tense under the Stetson. Still, they had a job to do, and Adam had Smoke dance around. Dillon clapped, getting the crowd

into it, and the sound man got with it, and soon enough, they were ready for the next ride. Two more and then Beau.

Assuming Beau hadn't just had a total temper tantrum and left. The man'd been promised the chance to go first, but between sponsors and the network, well... Nobody got what they wanted.

Sandy had been purple with rage, which made Dillon like him more than he ever had.

Kynan got a score. A ninety. Damn, that was gonna be hard to beat, though really Beau just needed to stay in the middle and make a score.

Still, what mattered was that Sam'd won the event, right? Was still alive.

In a coma.

In the hospital.

Jesus.

Nausea threatened to take him over, so he pasted on a smile and did a flip instead.

The crowd went crazy, and then Raul, that new boy from Brazil, was up. The man had been riding like a madman, covering bull after bull after bull. Rhymes with Snot whirled around and Raul spurred hard, the bullfighters flanking him. He rode a lot like Balta Silva. Pure strength and a very spare style. Dillon stayed quiet, dancing idly to the music. Raul made the ride, easy as you please, then hopped off. The bull headed for Nate, who slapped it aside. Thank God, because just catching Raul had knocked Coke into a gate, and Dillon could see him turn pale.

His feet wanted to go over, but his brain told him that Coke wouldn't thank him. He had to wait.

Beau was next.

Coke was at the gate, talking hard. There was blood dripping from that one poor hand, staining Coke's arm.

Balta pulled Beau's rope, that pretty mouth moving fast, too. Beau wouldn't care if the words were Portuguese. Dillon knew the man just needed to suspend thought.

One ride. Please God. Let the man ride so he could go.

The noise level rose to the point where Dillon could barely hear David in his earpiece. The crowd was just as ready as everyone.

"Okay, Lonnie. One more ride. This is it. Shake it." Dillon was going to kill him.

Dillon shook it, the music swelling to cover the sound of the men down at the chutes. He prayed hard, knowing Coke wouldn't have the chance. He saw the familiar hat brim dip and the gate opened, the little black bull spinning quick. Beau's chin was down, the look on the man's face pure fury. Dillon got it. He was pretty rage-y himself. Damn.

Six. Seven. Eight. Bingo.

Beau got off, landing damn near in Coke's arms. The man barely waved at the crowd, which was going wild.

That had been the best damned ride of a season of amazing rides. Lord above, that was what they all needed.

He barely heard the announcement of the scores, what with David telling him to get Beau the trophy and the big check.

Jogging across the arena, he watched Balta jump down off the chutes and pick Beau up, tears streaming down the big Brazilian's face. Dillon's eyes stung a little, too, but he blamed the dust. Coke and the others were already gone, disappeared into the back.

Ace met him at the front of the chutes with the trophy, and Sandy brought the buckle. Beau looked about ready to explode.

"Joa's got the truck pulled up. I will get your gear."
That was Balta.

"Thanks, Balta." Beau shook hands with the man, then smiled once for the camera. Then the little man was gone. Boom. Running for the back without a single fucking word.

Both David and the TV announcer, John Keane, started talking fast, explaining how Beau'd got beat up the night before, how his best friend and traveling partner was real hurt. They got Raul out there to get his buckle as reserve champion.

Dillon did all the smiling and nodding that he could, then he had to go. He was on fucking break, damn it.

Jonesy was waiting for him, Doc's right hand man and the cowboy's answer to everything that didn't need a surgeon standing firm. "I need to see Coke, Dillon."

"I know, Jonesy, but not when Doc is back there."

"Doc's already headed back to the hospital. Sports medicine is empty."

"Okay. Give me five." He would drag Coke kicking and screaming if he had to.

He saw Nate heading out, head down, bag on his back. "Going home, friend. Taking the wife and kids away from this."

"I hear you, Nate. Travel safe." Who could blame the man? Dillon found Coke in the locker room. "Babe. See Jonesy for five minutes."

"I need to go see Sam, cowboy."

"If you go into the hospital looking like this, they'll admit you." Then all hell would break loose.

"Like what?" Coke didn't do innocent worth a fuck.

"Babe, your hand is dripping blood." He wasn't gonna be a screaming harpy this time. He wasn't. Not to mention the one cheek that was pure hamburger and the shoulder Coke was holding so careful.

"Yeah, that's a little gross, huh?"

"Yeah. Please, babe. They won't let us in to see Sam like this anyway. You're a walking germ." There. That ought to appeal to Coke's sense of responsibility.

"Well, I was gonna *shower*, cowboy." Oh, thank God. That was a grin.

"Shower and bandage. Then we go." It was working. Coke was following him to the med room.

Jonesy was right there, and the man smiled at Coke, the look almost gentle. "Mr. Pharris. It's just the three of us. Let me get that hand cleaned up? How's your shoulder? It looks vicious. We'll ice it." Jonesy started talking and moving, getting Coke eased down on a bed. "Can I give you something to ease the muscles?"

"Not if it's gonna make me stupid."

"Doc gave him some kind of natural muscle relaxant last time, Jonesy. It was a pill. Right, Coke? He liked those. I can drive, so he just needs to be awake and aware."

"A natural... Cool. I'll check the file."

Coke leaned back as soon as the ice hit that shoulder, Jonesy wrapping it all in plastic. Better. Dillon saw a ton of lines ease around the sides of Coke's mouth.

"Here, Coke. Take this, huh?" That wasn't any herbal thing that Jonesy gave Coke, but no one said anything.

"You want to go get showered and cleaned up, Dillon? I'm going to be a few minutes on this. He needs a stitch or two and some butterflies on his cheek."

"Coke?" He would stay if Coke needed him. Hell, Coke would need help in the shower.

Coke looked over at him, gave him a sad little smile. "I'm okay. Just don't let anyone lock up before I get my gear."

"I promise." He touched Coke's good arm before slipping away. He went to their little locker room,

smiling and waving off the maintenance guy. "Still two of us coming. Sorry."

Then he went and stood under the shower for, like, an hour. At least that was what it felt like. And if he bawled a little while he was in there, well, there was no one to see, and the water washed it all away. Then, when he was about done, a solid mass of body came in behind him, pulled him close, one hand held up and away from the spray.

Dillon turned, wrapping his arms around Coke's broad chest, offering support at the same time he leaned. "Coke."

"Hey, cowboy. I locked the door, barred it." Coke leaned hard. "Called the Cajun. No news. He's still under. Gonna be for a few days."

Squeezing, he nodded against Coke's breastbone. "Then I say we rest. He'll be swamped with guys for a few days. When he'll need us is, like, Wednesday, eh?"

"Yeah. We need to figure our shit out, I guess. We're supposed to pick the pups up tomorrow."

"I know. We may have to switch hotels." Dillon knew Ace had fixed the whole trashed-room thing with a few quiet words to the manager, but they might balk at two loud bassets.

"No, I talked to them. We're moving to Beau's suite, keeping it for if we can get him to rest."

Right. Like that was going to happen.

Still, it was a suite, and they could use it as a command center. That worked for him. "Cool. Let's get you clean so you can soak in the hot tub when we get back." He started running his hands gently over Coke's body.

"I tried to get to them, Dillon. I swear to God."

"I know." They swayed a little, just like little kids who needed comforting. "I know, babe. You all try so hard. Sometimes it just happens, though."

That sucked, but there it was.

Coke's face twisted, and he looked up into the water, and Dillon knew he was trying to hold it together.

They finished up and dried off, and Dillon thought about giving Coke a blow job just to release tension, but he honestly wasn't sure if that big body could take it.

"Can you drive?" Coke's pupils were huge.

"I can. I'm good." Poor baby. Definitely a blow job, but later, when they were at the hotel. Then Coke would sleep. "Come on. I got you."

"You sure about the hospital? You sure Beau won't mind?"

He privately didn't think Beau would so much as notice.

"He'll call us when he needs us, Coke." He got towels, leading Coke out of the shower.

"I hope so." Coke was a nice shade of bruised, really. Wow.

"He will, babe." Then they would go see Beau and make sure Sammy would recover.

And then he would take his bullfighter home.

He couldn't sleep.

It was fucking insane. He always had been able to sleep before, but he just fucking couldn't.

Coke wandered the suite, keeping quiet as a mouse so that the bassets didn't wake up. Every so often Beau would text him.

Hey cher. He's moving.

Hey cher. He's cryin. what do i do?

hey cher. you still awake?

Hey.

Hey.

Yeah, he was still awake.

Dillon was little more than a lump in the middle of the big bed, covered up with blankets. It was frigid in the room, but it always was. Dillon slept cold. Coke sat over by the window, looking out at the mountains. Man, it was pretty out here. Little weird, with most of the cowboys gone, but pretty.

He heard a rustle, and the pad of feet that were not basset-shaped. "Babe? You okay?"

He thought about his answer a little. "No."

"Yeah." Dillon sighed, pressing against his back.

"I didn't mean to wake you up." He was glad Dillon was up, though, glad for the warmth pressing against him.

One lean hand came down to stroke his belly, just above his sweatpants. "How's Beau?"

"Scared. Sam ain't woke up yet, but he's hurting."

"Well, I'm gonna choose to think of that as good."

He could see that, maybe. If Sam wasn't in there, he wouldn't be showing pain.

"Yeah." He rested his forehead on the window.

"I love you, Coke. You know that, right?"

"I do. I'm so fucking tired, cowboy." He could tell Dillon that, here in the dark.

"I know, babe." Dillon rubbed, fingers moving in seemingly lazy circles. "I know. Soon we'll go to my place and disappear for Christmas."

"I can't wait." He wanted to go, so bad it ached. He wanted a few minutes of being Dillon's, not being Gramps.

"Yeah. You. Me. Snow in the hot tub."

He moaned; he couldn't help it.

"That's it, babe." Kissing his shoulder, Dillon hummed.

"I want to spend some time away." He wasn't a good man for it, but it was true.

"Me, too. Like soon." He felt more than heard the chuckle.

"Yeah. Been a long week."

"You know it, babe," Dillon started rocking a little, like a backassward slow dance.

It felt damn good, though, so he went with it, letting Dillon move against him. Dillon sang a little, hands moving on his chest and belly, nothing but comfort, nothing but touching for the sake of touching.

"You got good hands."

"I like to touch you, babe." Yeah. Yeah, Dillon had proven that over and over.

"You got a thing for old bullfighters?"

"Only this one. He's a little beat up and a lot scarred, so it's never boring." Dillon's fingers slipped up to glide over his nipples.

"Mmm. You know, you and me, we gotta spend more time on the good touches." His nipples agreed, perking right up.

"We do, don't we?" Dillon's soft laugh sent a gust of warm air over his back, and those clever fingers went right back to pinch and pull a little.

He chuckled, too, and it felt good to have a laugh. Real good.

Dillon touched him some more, down over his ribs, dipping into the hollows of his hipbones.

He was in a pair of soft pants, but they didn't have a chance against those smart, smart hands. They slipped down and off, and he moaned a little as they teased his cock on the way down.

"I got you, babe. Been wanting to do this." Dillon's lips moved on his spine, working down. Both of Dillon's palms pressed against his cock.

"Cowboy... Need you something fierce." Dillon made him wild.

"Mmmhmm. I can feel." His cock rose right up to meet Dillon's touch, and Dillon stroked him good and hard for a few seconds before moving away. "Turn around, babe."

He moved careful, not wanting to bump or bruise or do nothing to fuck this good feeling up.

When his back was up against the cool window, Dillon went up on tiptoe, avoiding leaning on his bad shoulder, and kissed him. Right on the mouth.

Oh.

Oh, damn.

Coke's hands landed on his cowboy's hips and he dove right in, letting all the other shit go in favor of letting Dillon know how much Coke loved him. Dillon moaned, clinging to the maybe two and a half unbruised inches of skin on his arms. They rocked, the kiss going hard and hot.

"Cowboy." He stumbled forward a step, grunted as he tripped on his pants. "Want."

"Shh. I know, babe. Come on. Let's go to the bed." Dillon helped get him out of his pants, got him to the bed, where they'd set up Coke's special back pad.

He sat and leaned forward as best he could, lips on Dillon's belly.

"Oh, Coke. Hot." Warm hands eased him back, the blankets all but swallowing them. Dillon climbed up on him, straddling his hips.

"I need this." He got his mouth on Dillon's wrist, tasting the skin.

"I'm selfish enough to be glad." Rocking back, Dillon rubbed against him, ass to cock.

"Please, Dillon." His hips rolled up, trying to get some more contact.

"Yeah, babe. I got this." Dillon always had his back. And his front. The man slid back, sitting low on his legs to bend and suck him right in, getting his cock good and wet. Sounds were sorta pouring out of him, all about Dillon and that amazing fucking mouth.

The flat of Dillon's tongue rubbed the underside of his cock until he thought he might scream. Then Dillon sat up and moved up over his cock again. "Ready, babe?"

"Cowboy." He reached for that amazing ass, body wanting to move in ways it couldn't right now.

One hand landed on his chest, holding him still. "I told you. I got this." Dillon gave him a purely wicked grin before rising up and pulling Coke's cock into position.

His eyes felt like they were burning in his head, like they were coals.

"Mmm." Dillon sank down on him, back arching as Coke slid inside. It was tight, a little scratchy-tight even, but Dillon didn't seem to mind.

"Yeah..." His knees drew up to give Dillon some support. Oh, fuck. That was the finest place he'd ever wanted to be.

Dillon's eyes crossed, that pink tongue coming out at the tip. "Coke. Oh, Christ."

"So good. Needed." He loved that ass, loved how Dillon rode him.

"Love how you feel." Dillon humped up, then down, riding him but good.

They found themselves a rhythm, just like that. It was easy between them, right, and Coke found himself punching up each time Dillon came down.

"Don't hurt yourself, babe." Always worried about him. But Dillon was grinning that wild, sexy grin and moving fast.

"Not. Fuck, cowboy. You feel so fucking good." His thighs felt like rocks.

"Been... oh." He had to have hit the right spot, because Dillon cried out. "Needing."

There. Right there. His hands kept Dillon moving and he kept driving, fucking his cowboy with all he was. All he could see was Dillon. All he could feel. The heat, the musk, the husky cries. It was all Dillon.

"Cowboy!" He yanked Dillon down harder, all his muscles working to get them off.

"Coke. Oh, God." Dillon reached down, tugging at the hard cock that pushed against Coke's belly. He felt every tug in the way Dillon's ass tightened around him.

Jesus, the sounds he made. Nobody made him do that but Dillon. Nobody.

"Coke. Coke. Coke!" His name became a chant, kind of primal and guttural, Dillon starting to lose it.

"Show me. Come on." His fucking balls felt gigantic.

"Love--" Dillon came for him, all over his belly and chest, ass clamping down on him.

His eyes rolled back in his head and he gritted his teeth, shooting so hard the room spun.

When he came down, Dillon was draped over his chest like a very happy housecat, all limp and warm.

"My cowboy." He blinked, nice and slow, body so heavy.

"Yours." Dillon nuzzled his chin. "Sleep, babe. I got you."

"Yeah?" He hadn't been able to sleep a bit, but...
Yeah.

"Definitely." A soft kiss was pressed against his mouth, and something hit the floor next to the bed. He thought maybe it was his phone.

Dillon cranked up the speed on the treadmill, the sweat dripping in his eyes burning and stinging.

He didn't think he could do it. Maybe it made him a terrible man. Maybe it made him a selfish bastard. Whatever it made him, he couldn't go back to that hospital too many more times, what with Sammy lying there in that bed with all those bandages and machines, not making a lick of sense.

Sammy was awake now, right? It didn't make him a bad friend to want to go home. He couldn't take seeing Coke go in there anymore, either. Every time Coke saw Sammy, his bullfighter aged another year.

Dillon ran faster, harder, thinking about how tired and small Coke had looked in that big king-sized bed, surrounded by bassets who were not allowed up there in this hotel.

It was time to go home. Now. To Idaho, not Texas, where he could control who called Coke.

Coke was off work, damn it. Off work and a man, not an angel, not a fucking hero. Just a hurt, tired man who was aging faster than was right.

His legs were burning, his lungs heaving, but Dillon kept at it, needing to burn off the hurt and fear and rage. Damn it all, this wasn't right. Not for Sammy or Beau or Coop or Nate. And not for his Coke.

He barely heard the door open and close, then there was Coke at the weight machine, testing out that

shoulder. He almost slipped off the treadmill. Distraction was bad at six miles an hour. Coke started slow, arms working carefully, up and down.

Dillon slowed the belt down, going for a trot now, wanting to keep an eye on Coke.

"You have a good run?" Coke did a set of fifteen, then stopped. Panted.

"Yeah." He stopped the machine and headed over. "Think your shoulder might still be a little sore, huh?"

"A little? Nope." He got a crooked grin. "I think that a little is just not near close."

"Well, dumbass, then stop with the pushing." He wiped sweat off his forehead.

"Trying to test it out, dickwad." There was no heat behind the words, just a tired fondness.

"Hey, at least you didn't call me Dill-weed." He winked. "Maybe we ought to hit the hot tub."

"Oh, I do like those. It snowed. Did you see?"

"Nope." Snow. He'd promised Coke snow over the break.

"It didn't last long, but I got to see it."

That made him smile. Coke was a Texan, through and through, with that mixture of horror and fascination when it came to the white stuff.

"Well, it will last up at my place." Lord. And then some.

"Yeah?" Coke sighed. "You think Sammy'll be better today? The pups... they're real tired."

"I think so, babe." He didn't care if Sam was or wasn't. They'd done what they could. It was time to rest and heal. "I say we go by and see them, and then head out."

"Yeah? You think it'd be okay?"

Dillon took it as a huge step forward that Coke was almost agreeing.

"I think so, yeah. I mean, Sammy's on the road to recovery, right? The sooner we all skedaddle, the sooner Beau will be able to get him home."

"If the Cajun thinks it's good, I could be ready to go. Today."

"Yeah? The babies sure would love to run."

"They would. If Beau says it's good, then... yeah. Yeah, it might be time."

"Well, we'll ask Beau, then." Oh, thank God. Dillon would just pull Beau aside, have a word.

"Okay, cowboy."

Dillon felt like doing cartwheels.

"Come on, babe." They needed to shower, take the pups for a walk.

Coke nodded, let him help the poor abused body up. "You need some food, too."

"Yeah. We can call for it, huh? While we walk the babies." That would work. Lord, they were going to get to go home. Hallelujah.

"Sounds good. We can cook at your house, right? You and me?"

"God, yes." It had been so long since they'd been at Coke's house, just them and the grill. "I even got my sister to get a smoker."

Coke would have to wear a snowsuit to use it...

"Excellent." Coke nodded, just the once. "I want to eat stuff that don't have parsley on it."

Dillon laughed, the sound rusty but good. "Me, too. Come on, babe. Let's get what needs done, done, eh?"

"Sounds good." Coke tossed him a towel, grabbed a bottle of water, and opened it.

Chapter Three

"Are you sure we shouldn't stay, cowboy?" He hated leaving the Cajun in the lurch. On the other hand, Silva was there, willing to help out, and Sammy was on the mend.

Dillon's mouth set in that line, the one Coke was starting to label "stubborn." "I'm sure, babe. Sammy is gonna be okay. They have Balta, and Tag says they got this thing whipped."

Dillon did a mean Adam Taggart impersonation.

"If you're sure." The truck was waiting, the bassets taking up the back seat in their cushy crate.

"I am so sure." Dillon stopped, turning to stare into his eyes. "You know I love Sammy. I wouldn't leave him if he wasn't in good hands. Now it's your turn to rest a little."

"Our turn." He loved the stubborn son of a bitch, so bad. "Take me home, then. I want to see our other place."

"There you go." Dillon chuckled, taking his arm. "I want to, too. Sis has done a bunch to fix it up."

"You tell her you have a friend coming to stay?"

"I told her my lover was coming."

Coke stopped, looked over at Dillon. Well, okay, then. "She's good with that? 'Cause I wouldn't have your people upset with you for nothing."

"Well, she's not gonna advertise." Dillon started to swing his hand, but obviously thought better of it. "But we don't have secrets, really."

"I cain't wait to meet her." All of the sudden he was so fucking tired, so ready to be away from this hospital, that he couldn't bear it.

"Cool. Come on, babe." Dillon knew. Dillon always knew. Hell, Dillon went right to the driver's side.

He slipped into the passenger's side, murmuring his hellos to the pups and trying not to worry about his friends.

Dillon got them going, got the radio on. His cowboy did love music.

"You gonna sing to me?" He got the pillows moved around, got his stitched-up hand settled.

"I will, indeed. I have my iPod. Opera? Country? Booty-shaking rap?"

"No opera." He chuckled, though, let himself admire.

"No, huh?" Dillon beat a drum on the steering wheel. "Okay, then we'll go with Garth."

"You do a good Garth. I like when you do Guns 'n Roses, too."

"Yeah? Not so fond of my Aerosmith, though."

No, that was screechy.

"I think your Keith Urban's good."

"Oh, we can go for that!" The music changed, and Dillon started singing, the sound easing him.

Coke hummed along, settling deep into the seat, muscles relaxing. Dillon's hand landed on his thigh, warm and firm, just staying there. "You make me awful happy, cowboy."

"Do I? Are we still people?" Those pretty eyes cut to his just for a second, the smile reaching them easily.

"I don't think the good Lord Himself could make us not people, Dillon. He could call one of us home, but you'll always be one of mine."

Dillon squeezed his leg a little, not saying much, but the singing got a little watery.

Coke leaned back, eyelids getting a little heavy. "We staying in Utah tonight, or driving straight through?"

He wasn't too used to snow-driving, but he'd sure try.

"We'll stay in Salt Lake, babe. I got us a room at the Radisson. It has a pool and hot tub."

"I do like me a hot tub." He took one breath, then another and another, feeling lighter with each one.

"I know. I like you liking. And hey, my legs haven't met Adam's rope in ages."

"Thank you, God." Those poor legs had been just brutalized.

"Yeah. Tag is still apologizing." Dillon chuckled. The man loved to tease Adam Taggart.

"I told you you were lucky he's talking to you again already."

"I know." Dillon hummed along with another song, this one that Brad kid. Something with cloth.

"What did you want for Christmas?"

"Huh?" Dillon kinda stared at him for a moment.

"Uh. Oh, I don't know. What about you?"

He thought about it, really thought. "I want to rest and laugh and drink coffee and watch Christmas specials. Normal stuff. With you." He hadn't done that, not quiet and home and all.

"Oh." Dillon laughed and whacked the steering wheel. "That sounds great, eh? Rudolph and Frosty."

"The Grinch and *White Christmas*."

"Oh, yeah." Dillon rubbed his leg a little. "I almost forgot Christmas was coming."

"Yeah. This thing with Sammy just sucks."

"It does. But he's gonna be fine." Dillon was back to drumming again, this time on Coke's leg.

"If he can figure out I'm not Nattie..." The man couldn't get his words right for love or money.

"He knows. His mouth just doesn't anymore."

"Yeah." Thank God it wasn't Dillon. That man needed his words.

"You okay, babe? Need me to get food or drinks or something." There'd be stretches of highway with

nothing where they were going, and Dillon was always thinking about him.

"I'm a go-baby. I'm good."

"Kay. Well, you let me know if you want to stop." Dillon hummed some more, than sang, and sooner than not it had his head nodding, his eyes heavy.

His phone woke him, and he blinked awake, scrabbling with his good hand, trying to figure out where he was, who was calling.

He fumbled for his phone, but Dillon got it first, and the sound suddenly cut off. "No, babe. Sleep."

"I. Could be Jase or the Cajun..." He blinked, all babyheaded. So sleepy.

"Nope. Was Ace." Dillon had a real hard on for Ace sometimes. Said the man wanted too much access.

"Oh." Then that was cool. He patted Dillon's leg clumsily. "You 'kay?"

"I'm doing all right." Dillon had switched to the Carpenters. That was either really good or really bad.

"She died from not eating, you 'member that?" There'd been a movie about it on the TV, ages ago.

"I do. I might have cried a little. Does that make me a pussy?" Okay, that qualified as good. Dillon was laughing like a loon.

"Nah. It was sad. Not like Ole Yeller sad, but still sad." Coke had cried when he'd seen that movie, but good.

"Well, there you go." Dillon's words made Coke chuckle. Saying there you go like a bona fide Texan. "Not like Chris LeDoux sad."

No. No, now that had been a harsh day for rodeo. "Right. He was something. You ever get to meet him?"

Coke had, sorta.

Once.

The man could ride.

"In person? Nope. I saw him in concert a bunch. Oh, hey, I got some Chris here somewhere." Dillon fiddled with the iPod, but Coke didn't worry none. Dillon was a solid driver.

"Copenhagen..." he sang, chuckling as Pansy started woofing and mooing behind him.

Dillon cackled and sang along, but soon enough Jerome was whining, and Dillon had to get off the highway to find the baby dogs a patch of grass. "Want anything from the store, babe?"

"A Sprite and something crunchy." He hooked on leashes.

"You got it." Dillon had this weird thing about giving the puppies their privacy.

Coke chuckled, holding both leashes in one hand. It was damned cold up here, the sky a steel gray. It was different as anything, and he was kinda glad when Dillon brought him a hot coffee along with his Sprite. "You need to go in and pee, babe?"

"I prob'ly oughta." He hooked the pups' leashes to the little hitch on the back of the truck, drank of his coffee. "You want me to drive?"

"Nope. I want you to rest. Sleep. And if you don't want to sleep, you can talk to me."

Yeah. Dillon liked to chatter, and Coke hadn't been much up for it lately.

He caught Dillon's eyes, grinned. "I like chatting with you, cowboy." And that was no lie.

"I know. It's a good thing." Dillon took his coffee. "Go do your thing."

He nodded, headed in, feeling like he could breathe a little bit for the first time in God knew how long.

When he came back out, Dillon was just hanging up the phone, flipping that fancy little smart phone closed.

"Ace pocket-dialed you. So, it's nothing we need to worry on."

"Good deal." He had a pocket of Slim Jims and those pricey chocolates Dillon liked.

"You know it."

Jerome leaped at something, and Coke thought maybe it was a bug. Then he realized it was a snowflake. He arched an eyebrow. "You gonna be okay to drive if it's snowing?"

"Coke. I grew up driving a sled, then a tractor, then a truck. In snow up to here." Dillon held a hand to his chin. "We may have to stop and get chains somewhere if it gets bad, though."

"Okay. Just tell me what you need me to do." He wasn't sure, but whatever it was, he'd do it.

Dillon driving a tractor. That was a thought. He could probably jack the man off on a tractor. It wouldn't be a motorcycle or nothing, but...

Mmm. Motorcycle.

"Sit and chat, like I said." Dillon stared at him. "You have this look, babe. What are you pondering?"

His cheeks went red -- he could feel them. "Huh? You ready?"

"Sure." Thank God, Dillon let it drop. They had a long way to go before the hotel.

Still, he took a long look at that ass before he got in the truck.

"I saw that." Chuckling, Dillon got the puppers settled, gave them each a biscuit.

"Saw what? I was just getting in."

Getting in.

He chuckled.

"Uh-huh. Perv." Dillon just cackled.

He stuck his tongue out, rolling his eyes.

"Mmm. Nice." Those light eyelashes fluttered, Dillon batting them.

"Turkey." He leaned over, goosed Dillon's leg.

"Uh-huh. Gobble." The snow started falling faster, heavy flakes plopping on the windshield.

"Can you drive a motorcycle?" Sometimes it made him a little gobsmacked, the things he didn't know about Dillon, and vice-versy. Hell, 'til Dillon'd come out to the house, the man hadn't known about his pool, and that was his favorite thing on God's earth. Jesus, look at that snow.

"Uh-huh. My Harley only comes out in the summer, though. Which, you know, it was in Idaho when I was in Texas this summer."

He nodded. Dillon on a Harley. Dillon straddling a Harley.

"You okay, babe?"

"Uh-huh. Good." A little hard, but good.

"You sure?" That sideways look told him Dillon knew.

He chuckled, shrugged. "I think things about you, you know that."

"I do. I think things, too, but I'm not sure a bike ever figured in."

"I like the idea."

"I do, too." Yeah, Dillon was starting to do the little finger-tapping, leg-jumping thing that meant hot, not impatient.

"I bet it'd be fine, watching you ride." Coke was getting a little... shivery.

"It's a great thing. If we were gonna ride, though, I'd have to get a new bike. One with a back seat that would be good to your back."

Oh, now. There was a thought. He could snuggle right up to that sweet ass. There would be vibrations and Dillon singing and moving and driving him crazy...

Coke shifted, cock filling, aching in the best way.

"Mmm. Babe, I swear. You smell like heaven."

Dillon patted his leg, high up on his thigh.

"This is good, you and me." On the road, on break.

"You know it. I like you and me." Dillon gave him that smile again, the one only he saw.

"Yeah." He took Dillon's hand, squeezed it, and said a prayer of thanks for his cowboy, for the fact that Sam Bell'd woke up, that he was going to see Dillon's house.

Dillon just held on, keeping the truck steady and the chatter going until Coke felt himself nodding off again.

Good to him, his cowboy.

So good.

Thank God.

Dillon bebopped up to the room with the little pop-up crate and the dog bed, pushing the cart for the suitcases and humming. He had Coke's special memory foam pillow, too, but he was a little worried that might not be enough. He made a mental note to see if there was a better solution.

Coke was behind him, leading the puppies, murmuring softly and keeping them quiet. He'd gotten them a suite, enough room for the dogs to wander. Hell, this place was nice enough to have staff to walk them.

Not that Dillon or Coke either one would really let anyone do that. Pansy was particular about who watched her pee.

They were both pretty good about the whole travel thing, given how young they were, and... Coke opened

the door, nudged them in and reached for the crate. "Let me help."

"Nope. I got this." The crate wasn't heavy, but setting it up required lots of bending. "I expect you to peruse the room service menu."

"What're you hungry for?" Coke got harnesses off and the water bowl filled.

"Not a burger. Something like chicken or steak." They'd had a lot of burgers in the last week or so. Dillon had nothing against them, but man, he wanted some variety.

"Mmm. I could eat a steak. Something nice and juicy."

"There you go, then. You pick it out, and I can call it in." He pushed and pulled and popped and finally got the crate set up. Then the bed and bowls. Then Coke's pillow. Man, it was like they were moving in.

"You got a pretty ass."

Well, that was unexpected.

"Huh?" Dillon tried to peer over his shoulder, but it didn't work. "Uh. Thanks!" He laughed, wiggling it a little. Coke's chuckle made him happy, deep down. It was a normal, relaxed sound.

Once he got the bassets set up, they settled pretty quick. Dillon had run them like a mad thing in the snow at some rest stop not long before they hit the city, and Coke had walked them out by the hotel for ten or twenty minutes while Dillon checked in.

Coke had called for room service, had settled in the armchair with those muscled legs sprawled.

Dillon hummed, drawn to that solid body like nothing going. "Hey, babe."

Coke's eyes dragged up and down his body, the interest clear as day. "Hey, cowboy."

"You're looking more rested." More horny? More like Dillon wanted Coke to look, for sure.

"You spoil me. Got to sleep all the way here." Coke's hands reached out for him.

"You did. You might have snored a little." He was teasing. Dillon was way more likely to snore. He went to Coke easily, taking one hand.

Coke drew him right in, offering him a grin. "Uh-huh. Come here and kiss me."

"Okay." Like he was gonna argue. Dillon sat on Coke's lap, bending to kiss hard.

Those big, square hands landed on his hips, solid and firm, pulling him close.

"I like this. The chair is not so tiny, huh?" They'd had one room recently where the chair had barely fit Coke's butt.

"Mmm. It's good." Coke wasn't talking about the chair. Dillon could tell. One of those hands started moving him, rocking them together. Someone was feeling better.

A lot better. Hallelujah. Dillon moved, letting his eyes close, letting his body just feel.

"Cowboy." Coke hummed low and soft, eyes traveling his body.

"Missed just touching you." It seemed silly. They slept together every night. Neither of them had been much on the snuggling, though. Dillon rubbed at Coke's shoulders.

"Yeah. You... Shit, Dillon, you're like... music."

"Yeah?" Oh, Oh, wow. That was... He kissed Coke hard, letting the man know what that meant. Coke's mouth was hot, and that tongue pushed against his, sliding between his lips. Sucking Coke's tongue, Dillon touched as much as he could, from shoulders to arms to hands. He stopped there, holding on.

The one hand was still swollen, still hot and awkward, but Coke's other hand held onto him, squeezed tight.

"I got you." He hummed against Coke's chin. "I got you."

"Good." Fuck, look at that smile.

"You know it. It's always good with you." Always.

Coke brought their lips together again, this kiss deep and slow enough to make him shake. His hips started moving, his little sexy kitty dance kicking in. Oh, yeah. Coke's breath pushed into his lips, matching his rhythm just fine. Such a lover, his Coke. Such an amazing man. Dillon wanted skin suddenly. Like, right now.

Their lips parted and Coke groaned, that sound purely starving.

"We don't have time before food, do we?"

"Hmm?" Coke drew him in again, kisses hungry, toothy.

They really didn't have time for the bed, or naked, so he stayed right where he was, kissing and rubbing.

"Open your jeans." Coke dove back into the kisses.

"Mmmhmm." Jeans. Hands. Wait. That sounded complicated.

His bullfighter wasn't helping either, with the nibbling and licking and tasting.

They were panting, both of them shaking a little, and Dillon gave up and opened his jeans. He needed Coke's touch.

"Good." Coke grabbed his hips and yanked, and Dillon found himself kneeling tall, hands braced on the wall while Coke's mouth dropped over his cock like a ton of bricks.

"Oh." A strangled noise came right up from his chest, his whole body hitching when his breath stopped.

Coke's hands helped him move, push into that hot mouth, his cock dragging over Coke's tongue.

"Coke. Babe. Christ." His hips pushed up and in, his cock feeling like it was in heaven. He felt Coke's moan, all around him, the sound vibrating away and leaving him breathless. Dillon humped, trying not to push too hard and make Coke hurty. This was too good to ruin.

He wasn't ruining a damned thing; if anything, Coke was pulling harder, sucking firm enough that his toes curled.

"Please. Oh, please. God, Coke." He'd needed this so bad.

One hand rubbed a slow circle on his lower back, a soft counterpoint to the way Coke's tongue slapped the tip of his cock. His breath hitched again, his balls pulling up so fast and tight that he cried out. One more swack to the slit and then his prick was swallowed, letting him take everything he needed. Dillon grunted, his muscles hard as frozen rope. He came, his vision going all sparkly, his chest heaving.

It was about a million years -- or possibly a few seconds -- before Coke eased him down, held him.

Dillon clung to Coke's shoulders, wheezing. "You. Pants."

"No, cowboy. I'm Coke. I ain't never met no one named Pants."

That had him chuckling, trying to breathe and open Coke's jeans and everything all at once. That fat, heavy cock was waiting for him, hard and damp and eager. It was fine enough to rhapsodize over. Maybe write songs over. Dillon didn't waste any time. He stroked, hand moving up and down quickly.

Coke's eyelids got all heavy, lips parting, a little swollen and wet from sucking him. Dillon had to kiss

that mouth, tasting himself there. His thumb dragged over the tip of Coke's cock, over and over.

"Dillon." Coke's eyes rolled, hips shifting on the chair. "Fuck, yeah..."

"That's it, babe." He kept one hand on Coke's shoulder, just keeping his lover from moving too hard, from hurting anything. The broad chest sucked in air, moving like a great bellows, making Dillon smile. Coke was so fucking fine, so hot, and all his.

He kissed Coke's mouth again, then moved his hand down so his fingers circled the base of the thick cock, twisting just a tiny bit.

Coke's lips parted, then the man came, seed spraying up over his wrist.

"Oh, babe. God, I love it when you do that." Dillon just loved the look in Coke's eyes.

Coke gave him a slow, burning smile. "Been needing you."

"I hear that." God, did he. He was... whoa, happy.

Coke kept touching him, humming some song Dillon just barely recognized as either *On the Road Again* or possibly *Livin' on a Prayer*.

When the knock came on the door, it was almost anticlimactic. Dillon did remember to zip up and cover Coke with a blanket before answering.

Of course, his damned knees were shaking but good. Coke'd sucked him dry. That was better than the steak he'd been craving by far, though, so he wasn't going to complain.

The kid that brought the food didn't recognize either of them and had enough sense not to bother the puppies too much. Dillon tipped him, signed, and sent him on his way, leaving them with a little feast.

Of course, that perked the dogs right up. Silly things.

"You want me to take them down for a walk?"

"Nah. They just want steak." He'd run them later if they had to.

"Me, too." Coke, bless his heart, had ordered an extra steak, just for the babies.

And some carrot cake and chocolate for them. Woo. Dillon moaned a little. "I think I love you."

"You think?" Coke's laugh was fond, warm.

"I do." With everything in him.

He couldn't wait to prove it.

Chapter Four

The snow was coming down like nothing he'd ever seen outside of the movies, but Coke didn't bitch none. Dillon said it was okay, so it was. Hell, he'd thought about telling Dillon to stay in the hotel one extra day, but the puppers needed to be home and he needed a real bed. He just had to hope like hell that Dillon had a real bed.

"How's it going, babe?" Dillon had fussed about his joints and shit. Coke's, not Dillon's. The man worried.

"I'm good. You?"

"Good. So pretty, huh?" Dillon didn't seem the least bit put out driving in the snow.

"It is. A little unnerving, but pretty."

"Unnerving?" Dillon shot him a worried glance.

"Why?"

"The white. I mean, I ain't never seen anything like this, not ever." He kept expecting to blink hard and discover they were way too close to a huge cotton hauler.

"Ah. Yeah, it's quiet, too, huh?" It was. Kinda eerie.

"A little. It's just different. I seen some guys get all freaked out about tornados or flash floods. It's all what you're used to."

"Yeah. Sand storms freak me out. Remember that one in Albuquerque?"

Shit, he'd wondered why Dillon had eaten an entire chocolate pie in one sitting.

"Yep. New Mexico's got all sorts of weather there -- hot, cold, wind. Everything."

"Pretty, though. I went to Ruidoso skiing once, when I was a kid. We ought to go someday."

"Okay. I'd try it." Skiing, huh? Coke'd bet Dillon was good at that, really.

"You'll like the Inn of the Mountain Gods, I bet."

"Inn of the Mountain Gods..." He liked that. It sounded like a good, old western. He'd read one just last week where the Navajo chief had him a pipeline to their gods.

"Yeah. It's on the Apache reservation. It's cool." Dillon was humming between sentences.

"If there's skiing, it's prob'ly more than cool, huh?"

"Just a bit, yeah." He got a grin back. "It's pretty in the summer, too."

"You been there a lot?" Dillon'd had a lot of life before they'd hooked wagons. Hell, so had he, though all of his could be traced to some rodeo somewhere.

"Some, yeah. I like New Mexico, you know? Colorado. I might even like Texas." That got him a wink.

"Maybe, huh? Just a little?" He reached over and patted Dillon's leg. "I like Louisiana pretty well. Beau and Sammy's place is a little like heaven."

"Bugs." Chuckling, Dillon shook his head. "Bugs and gumbo. Otherwise, it's really cool."

"You don't like Beau's cooking? I know folks tease, but... damn, I do enjoy it."

"It's not nasty or anything, Coke. It's just nuclear hot. Like, I'm shitting lava hot." Dillon shook his head.

"Ah." He nodded like he got it, but really he reckoned Dillon still had a lot of Yankee in him, biologically speaking. Everyone knew Idaho folks ate a lot of meat and potatoes and not much spice. Hell, Dillon liked tofu. Him and Nattie had spent one fun three-day event stuffing Dillon's shorts with tofu. That had been fucking funny.

Dillon grinned over. "What are you chuckling about?"

"Huh? Oh, nothing. Just remembering stuff."

"Oh. Was it good?"

"I just love some of the jokes we play, huh? 'Specially Sam Bell." Lord knew that boy had a wicked streak a mile wide.

"Oh, God. Sammy is vicious." Neither one of them mentioned that they hoped Sam still would be ready and able to play jokes.

"You remember when he dyed your hair purple? Or when he superglued Beau's boots inside his bag?"

"God." Cracking up, Dillon laughed until Coke was afraid they'd run off the road. "Remember when he took Nate's shoes and filled them with that expanding foam?"

"Oh, Jesus!" He hooted. "Nattie was gonna kill him, sure as shit."

"I know. He'd dig out a bunch and more would swell up." One of Dillon's hands pounded the steering wheel.

"Then Nate went and poured that clear acrylic in Sammy's spare gloves, took the man forever to figure out what was wrong with 'em!" He was gonna get a stitch, laughing so hard.

"Man, we have a good life, Coke."

"We do!" He always believed that, even when it was hard. They were free, had the best jobs on earth, had the best friends.

"So, when we get to my place, we'll have snow ice cream."

"Ice cream that tastes like snow?" Didn't snow taste like water?

"Nope. Just snow with sugar and food coloring." When he stared, Dillon got laughing again.

"You're teasing me, now..."

"No, sir. I'm serious."

Lord have mercy, he'd like to see that. "We're going to have so much fun, you and me."

"I know!" Dillon patted his leg. "So much."

"How much longer do we have?"

"Until home?" Dillon checked the road signs.

"Maybe a half hour. Did you need to stop?"

"Nope, just curious." He was actually about as happy as a pig in shit.

"Cool. It's pretty up here in the spring, too. You'll like it."

"It's where you are, cowboy." He'd love it.

"Oh." Dillon reached over and squeezed his leg.

"Mmm." He traced Dillon's fingers, knowing every bump and line. There was a little scar on the back of Dillon's hand from a horse that'd bitten him.

"Why'd you start doing rodeo work, cowboy?" He knew Dillon'd done bookkeeping stuff, or at least that's what the man'd gone to school for. College. Good Lord, him falling in love with a college man.

"It was a dare. My sister used to drag me to rodeos for barrel racing stuff, and I bitched about the clowns."

Yeah, he could see that.

"I seen some weird ones." Hell, him and Natty had worked an event in Killeen, once, with this nut-burger guy in a green sparkly wig and a fat suit...

"The one she dared me on was an old bullfighter, and man, he was good at that, but he wasn't funny. I said a clown should be an entertainer, and she said if you're so amazing, you try it."

"Man, I'd give a lot to have seen your first show."

Of course, he'd been there when John Dalton had brought Dillon in to audition. There had been something about Dillon then that had made them all stop and listen, something that had made even Steele smile.

Dillon Walsh was the best thing to happen to bullriding, and Coke had believed that right from the beginning.

"Now you're more goofy. With the grin."

"I was thinking about watching you work, is all."

"Man, you were thinking about work?" They topped a little rise, and a town came into view, just like that.

"That's Pocatello."

"Well, ain't that a picture?" Just like a Christmas card or something -- snowy and charming and shit.

"Yeah. That's where we'll go for supplies and stuff. My sis should have us provisioned for a few days, though."

"She's a good girl." He'd met her once or twice, and she seemed solid, a horsey type.

"She is. Man, my shoulders need a rub when we get home." Dillon rolled his neck, then checked the rearview for the puppies. Coke loved that happy look when Dillon saw sleeping babies.

"I'm on it." He was all about that fine body, oil, and rubbing.

"You so are. You have the best hands." Suddenly the temperature in the cab went up maybe ten degrees. He grinned. His hands had learned every fucking square inch of that fine, lean body.

"Now I'm thinking naughty." Dillon shifted, legs spreading as much as they could.

He pretended to ponder on that. "I approve of naughty."

"I know. I've seen how you approve. In a chair."

He chuckled. "In a pool."

"In the shower." Dillon was grinning, heading off the main road now down a two-lane state highway.

"On the diving board..." That had been fun.

"Bouncy!" Dillon started jittering a little.

"Uh-huh. I like the new deck chairs, too." The old ones hadn't lasted past a... workout or two.

"Oh, God, yes. I like the adjustable bed."

"Mmmhmm." He shifted, his cock waking up. "Kitchen table."

That got him a remembering kind of smile. "That was a good one."

Coke was grinning like a damn monkey. "Uh-huh."

"Almost there, babe. You've been a trooper." Dillon patted his leg again, fingers lingering.

"I just want to let the babies out and get the oil."

Maybe see Dillon's house.

"Mmm. Oil." Dillon bounced. "I can't wait for you to see."

"What's the best part?" His body started taking an active interest in the idea of bouncy Dillon.

"Uh..." They turned down an even smaller road. "I like my kitchen. Hopefully, the hot tub."

"Mmm." He was looking forward to that best, really. A hot tub to soak in for a few hours.

"Yeah. Been a long ride these last few weeks."

"You know it. You... It's a little weird that Beau ain't called, huh?"

"Nope." Those pretty eyes cut to his a moment. "I turned your phone off, and mine is on vibrate. He texted us about an hour ago to let us know Sammy was finally resting a little."

"Oh. You think it's okay, Dillon? What if someone needs me?" Not that he could do much, and not that he hadn't gotten better sleep in the last two days than he had in weeks.

"Oh, babe. Someone always needs help." Shaking his head, Dillon steered around a big old pile of snow on the road. "There are other people who can help while you rest a few days."

Coke nodded, but he couldn't help worrying a bit. Mostly about the pang of guilt at the joy he felt, to think

about setting his burden down for a bit. These days, that burden felt heavy.

"If someone really needs us, we'll be there. They have Balta and Ace and the Taggarts..."

Yeah. Someone else could help, just for a bit. They topped a rise, just like they had back in town, and there was suddenly a little ranch compound out there. A house, some barns...

"Look at that. Ain't that pretty."

"I think so. It's all ours."

Ours. Dillon was doing the whole yours-mine-ours thing. It was, well, hot. Made him feel like a part of something, too. Like he could breathe all this in and just go with it for a long, long while.

When they finally pulled into the drive, which had been farther away than it looked, Dillon hopped out and opened the gate. Hell, even the babies were starting to get excited, tails thumping.

He pushed the console up out of the way and slid under the steering wheel, so he could drive in.

The wheels slipped and slid, but he made it through, reminding himself that ice was worse. Or so Dillon had said. He stopped, waited for Dillon to get in the truck. He wasn't going to pussy out and make Dillon drive the rest of the way. No fucking chance.

"Man, we'll have to get the puppers an outside heater so they can poop."

"It's bitter, huh?" He eased the truck into drive and headed down the way, focusing careful.

"It is. You're good at this, babe."

Ridiculous as it was, Dillon's confidence in him eased him, made him remember that he'd been driving a long time.

He got them parked in a big-assed garage, the truck fitting like a glove. "This is nice, cowboy."

"Yeah. Keeps you from having to tromp through the snow, huh?"

"Yeah." He got out, heading to let the pups out. "Is there a place to let them run safe?"

"Yeah. I had my sis put in a run. It should be right off the laundry room." Dillon led the way into the house, then into a utility room. He turned on a light and opened a door, and boom.

The pups barreled out, paws slapping and ears flapping like mad.

"There they go!" They watched the silly things slip and slide on the new snow. The run had been shoveled, bless someone's heart.

Him and Dillon stood there, just watching like idiots, watching their pups.

Dillon's hand found his, feeling almost shockingly warm. He'd need to find those gloves his cowboy had insisted on buying.

"Thank you." He squeezed Dillon's hand.

"For what, babe?" Moving closer, Dillon leaned against him, not hard, just enough to feel.

What a silly question. "Everything."

"Oh. Well, in that case, you're welcome." Dillon chuckled, sounding tickled as hell.

Pansy leaped over Jerome, grabbing her brother's ear on the way as she ran. They both cracked up, watching the pups run and fall and play. It was good to see them so free.

"We better get some towels for 'em. Those bellies are going to be soaked." And God knew it took forever for the thick fur down there to dry.

"Yeah. Here, come on and get coffee going, and I'll get them."

Dillon led the way, and Coke could see why the man liked the kitchen in this place. It was something, all gleaming granite and stainless steel.

"Man, look at this." He ran his hand along a countertop, shook his head. "Makes my kitchen look sad. Well, the one inside the house."

"Yeah, but the one you use outside? Dude." The coffeepot was obvious, and he knew Dillon liked to keep the coffee beans in the freezer. He did his thing, whistling under his breath as he did. He'd made himself at home in about a thousand cowboys' houses; he did the same thing here. It was kinda reassuring, how Dillon had mismatched coffee cups and weird, chipped plates. That was way more homey.

The coffee started smelling good and he got to hunting some food. There was a bunch of stuff in the fridge. Eggs and bacon, milk, veggies.

"You want eggs, cowboy?" He pulled out the bacon, found some tomatoes, and started hunting peppers. He knew he owed Dillon a massage, but all of a sudden he was ravenous, and the pups sure loved bacon.

Besides, massages led to orgasms, and coming led to naps.

Naps were better on a full belly.

Where the fuck were the jalapenos?

The patter of claws on tile warned him just in time to stick a knee out and keep Jerome from jumping on him. Silly thing.

He found a pan, some bell peppers but no jalapenos, an onion and some frozen biscuits, but he couldn't discover the cookie sheets for love or money.

"How's it going, babe?" Dillon's hands slid down over his butt as he bent over.

"Mmm. Looking for a sheet to make biscuits." His thighs parted a little, sorta all on their own.

"Oh, we should do them in the toaster oven. I'll put foil on the rack." He could hear the grin in Dillon's voice. The hands on his butt squeezed.

"Uh..." He leaned back into the touch, hips rolling sweet as sugar.

"Mmm. You're nice and warm, babe."

"You'll distract me." That was no lie.

"Uh-huh." Dillon backed off, though, because there was already a pan on the stove.

Dillon started singing, just as happy as a lark, and Jerome yodeled along in his hound-dog voice.

"You happy to be home?" He let Dillon get the biscuits on and then plopped some bacon in the pan.

"I am." Grinning, Dillon came dancing over to kiss him before helping him with the bacon so he could get to the eggs.

"You want over easy or scrambled?" The puppies were milling around now, exploring the kitchen, tails going ninety to nothing.

"I'll go with scrambled, so I can have all the veggies."

He chuckled. He could remember when Dillon would look at huevos Mexicana like they'd bite.

Dillon hip-bumped him gently, not enough to knock him off balance, before going to over to unpack the dog treats.

Peppers, onions, eggs -- they had this down, and before too long, they were sitting with full plates, coffee, milk, the works.

Lord, but Dillon already looked more relaxed, the lines around his mouth and eyes easing. It was fine to see.

He made himself a bacon and egg biscuit, chuckling at Dillon as the man gagged. Dillon had positions on biscuits, and all those positions involved sweet things.

Hell, the man put syrup on grits. It was bizarre.

Still, it made for good kisses.

Dillon popped open a biscuit and slathered it with butter and honey. Looked like Dillon's sister really did know the man. That boded well.

The honey started to drip and he reached out, caught it on his finger, then sucked his finger clean. "Yum."

Dillon stared, mouth open a little, eyes wide. "Uh-huh."

"You okay, cowboy?" He loved how Dillon looked on him.

"I am. I, uh..." Yeah. Dillon was okay; Coke had seen the look in those blue eyes more than once.

A little devil grew up in him and he stole another fingerful of honey, licked it off instead of sucking this time. "Sweet."

"Coke, we're eating..." Cheeks red, Dillon shifted in his seat.

"Uh-huh. I'm eating." He thought that he could handle the idea of honey on Dillon's cock. Hell, he'd bet his cowboy wouldn't mind licking it off him, either. Dillon had himself a sweet tooth, too.

"You. Wow. Damn, babe."

"Hmm?" His prick was about as hard as a rock. "I oughta put some of that on mine. I like salt and sweet together."

God, this was fun.

"No. Only on chicken." Dillon had taken a liking to the honey chicken biscuits at the Whataburger.

"I think it'd be okay on you." He went right back to his food.

"I'm not sweet." Dillon'd completely given up on eating, though, and was leaning toward him.

"No. You're good, though." Tasty.

"I can be bad. Really bad, if you want."

Coke shivered a little, grinning as he drank his coffee. It'd been a while since they'd been relaxed enough to just... play together. "I don't doubt that, cowboy."

The honey bottle was the only thing that came with Dillon when he stood and held out a hand. "Come on, babe. Let me show you the bedroom."

He reached out and twined their fingers together, only stopping to settle the bassets in the laundry room with their beds and bones.

Dillon led him to a homey, kinda manly room with a comfortable-looking bed. Yay for that.

"Looks good." He let his sore hand cup Dillon's ass, squeeze once. Jesus, feel that muscle.

"I hope so." Dillon's asscheek went hard and tight under his hand.

"I want you." He figured Dillon knew, but he knew it was always good to hear firsthand.

"Love you." He thought maybe Dillon thought so, too. Look at that smile.

They rocked a little, just feeling, kind of wallowing in each other. Dillon did love to bask. They had time this time -- there wasn't no one waiting or watching or needing, and Coke wanted to stay right here.

"I wonder if there's slick stuff." Dillon laughed. "I didn't feel right asking Sis for that."

"No. No, I don't reckon." Coke started chuckling, stripped them like a pro, and then sat them both down on the bed, Dillon on his lap, fine butt right there were he needed it. "I know there must be. Last time you were here, you were jacking off and texting."

"I so was. God, I wanted you." That little grin was hotter than almost anything else all day.

"You think you did? Shit. I had to watch your ass, every fucking event, and..." He licked his lips. "I wanted. Bad."

"Uhn." Dillon's pupils dilated, and the man got all up in Coke's business, pressing down against him, ass rubbing in little circles against his upper thighs. His eyes crossed, and his hips bucked up, cock like a clown-seeking missile.

"Babe. Oh, babe, yeah." Dillon moaned, hummed, just like he was at a feast.

"Lube. Cowboy, I need in."

"Oh. Right." Dillon kinda cast around like he hoped he lube would appear. Then he just shrugged and licked his fingers, pushing them back behind his body.

Coke thought he might explode.

"Dillon." He bit his bottom lip, eyes focused on that hot little body.

"Uh-huh. We'll find the real lube later."

"Uh-huh..." What was he agreeing to?

Dillon worked those fingers in and out of his own ass, riding them up and down. Christ, that was like Christmas morning in a porno movie. His stupid fingers found Dillon's cock, helping out, moving on that long, heavy prick. He pushed a little at the tip with his thumb, letting Dillon feel the sting some.

"Oh!" Dillon bucked for him, pretty as you please. Muscles moved under skin, Dillon's usually unseen strength obvious like this.

He nodded, did it again. Shit, he was the luckiest bastard on earth.

"Ready, babe?" Dillon used the other hand to slick Coke up with more spit, and hoo-yeah.

"Uhn." That was the best his mouth could do, but his hands... His hands could do way better.

Which was damned good, because Dillon needed a little help getting into position. Right there. He knew what Dillon needed, where they fit, and he let out a deep moan when his cock nudged Dillon's hole.

"Babe. Now, huh? Deep." Dillon braced against his chest, sinking down.

Fuck. Fuck. His hands found purchase on Dillon's hips, dragged him closer.

"That's it." Dillon pushed down, opening up to take him.

The pressure, the heat, was damn near perfect, and he jerked up, trying to get deeper. A low moan answered the move, and Dillon rocked, sliding down another inch. His talented fucking cowboy. It was enough to make his eyes cross. They finally got him all the way in, got Dillon seated right down on his hips. Then they started to move.

It took him a little bit to find where to put his feet, dig into the mattress, and be able to push up. When he found it, though, the slap of their bodies together almost drowned out Dillon's little shout. Not quite.

"Dillon." He bit out the word, then started fucking, driving into the most perfect motherfucking place on earth.

"More." Panting, Dillon nodded, body moving faster with each heartbeat. That man could flat-out move.

Coke let go, slamming them together, dancing with his cowboy, his heart trying to beat its way out of his chest. Fuck, yes.

Dillon was flushed, sweating, that dear face all screwed up with effort. That hot body was tight around him, making him grit his teeth. It took a couple more shifts, but when he found Dillon's gland, it was worth it, worth the work.

"Coke!" Wide, almost shocked eyes looked into his, Dillon bucking like a rank bull.

"Fuck, yeah." He growled low, focusing on hitting it over and over.

"Babe. Babe. Coke." Dillon was chanting, singing. Perfect.

He felt about a thousand feet tall, like he was twenty again and could fucking do this forever.

Grinning like a fool, Dillon pinched at Coke's nipples.

"Shit. Shit, I cain't hold on, you keep that up."

"I want you to come for me, babe. There's no bad there."

Hell, if Dillon could put that many words together, Coke wasn't doing something right. He reckoned he ought to try harder. He reached for Dillon's cock, knowing how his cowboy liked a good firm grip. Dillon's prick was slick, wet with the man's need, and he spread it around.

"Please." That one word, breathless and short, told him he was doing better.

All he could manage was a nod, a thrust of his hips.

Dillon smacked down against him over and over, cock pushing into his hand. Those muscles clamped down around him, tight as a vise.

"Fuck!" He arched hard enough his back protested, but his cock approved, and he shot, pushing himself into that tight ass.

"Coke!" Dillon pushed him right back down, grinding down against him, low moans sounding.

He made his hand work, giving Dillon just that little bit more.

"Coke..." Dillon's head fell forward, shoulders hunching up. He felt Dillon come on his hand, hot and wet, the smell all musk.

They slumped onto the mattress, both breathing hard.

"Damn, babe. That was what I needed." Dillon squeezed the words out between breaths.

His eyelids were damn heavy, but he grunted and nodded.

"Rest, Coke. We'll do the rest of the tour later." Dillon kissed his cheek, hugging on him.

"Mmmhmm." He patted that pretty ass, a little clumsy, then dozed off.

Coke had slept through the night. Well, mostly, save for one bathroom and water trip. Dillon was tickled enough to have a feather up his butt. He hummed and wiggled, making breakfast just like he had that first morning at Coke's. That was an almost, too. At Coke's there was no huge bathrobe and fuzzy slippers.

Coke was wearing jeans, two pairs of socks, and a heavy sweater, drinking coffee and laughing as the puppies played in the snow. The laugh was hearty, happy. Real.

Dillon smiled, watching long enough that the eggs almost burned.

"God, it's pretty up here. Quiet." Coke wandered closer, one hand on his hip as a kiss brushed his shoulder.

"It is, huh?" Super quiet without Coke's phone ringing all the time.

"Mmmhmm. What you got planned for today?"

"I have hours of stuff planned." He twirled, flipping the eggs and actually catching them.

Coke applauded, grinned. "Well, you just point me and shoot me and I'll help."

"Oh, I know you will. You owe me a massage." He grinned. "Then there's rub Coke the right way. Then there's take Coke to the hot tub."

"Oh? Hot tub. Massage. You got yourself a good to-do list." Look at that smile.

"I thought so. I mean, it will be days before I have to actually do work."

"Days, huh? What are we gonna do without a pool?"

"Well, we can always set up heat lamps in the living room." He slid the eggs on plates and got the waffles out of the toaster. Homemade but frozen.

"Nah, we can enjoy snuggling. Body heat's better than heat lamps."

"Yep. We can be naked." Together. Rubbing. Woo.

"Works for me." His bottom got a playful little slap. Dillon's breath stopped for a moment. That felt... tingly. Coke poured two glasses of juice, humming away.

Shaking it off, Dillon went to the table, setting out butter and syrup.

"I need to call Beau, check on Sammy today. Don't let me forget."

"I won't, babe." He would let Coke call from the house phone. That evil cell was going to stay tucked away. Dillon was checking it daily.

Coke smiled at him, looking perfectly relaxed, easy in his skin. "I saw you got some steaks in the freezer, a roast. Which one do you want for supper?"

"Uh." Oh, Coke was a prince among men. "Roast?"

"Good deal. There's taters and carrots and all." Coke headed for the freezer and tugged out a huge chunk of meat, plopped it on the counter. Then his own personal bullfighter sat right next to him.

"Have some food now." They grinned at each other and wolfed food down.

Coke started playing footsie about three-quarters of the way through, toes tickling his shins.

"That was on the to-do, too."

"Hmm?" Those gray eyes smiled over at him.

"Flirting."

"I don't flirt."

"No?" This was fun. "Do you announce intent?"

"I just... don't resist touching you when I don't have to."

His cheeks heated with the pleasure of it. "Good. No resisting."

"No, sir. None at all, cowboy." Those toes slid back up his leg.

"Mmm." Wiggling, he settled into his chair and spread his legs.

"You look happy." Coke actually licked his lips.

"I am. You do, too." Coke looked rested.

"Yeah. So, I should do dishes and then you should give me the tour."

"I can so do that."

Coke stood up, started puttering, washing and humming and looking good in his kitchen. The man could be at home anywhere. Dillon liked that Coke was at home in his home right now, though. A lot.

They needed to talk about Thanksgiving, about decorating for Christmas, shopping. He bounced a little.

God, Christmas with Coke. How cool was that?

He knew that Nate was going to Mexico with his family; Coop had gone home to his. Hell, Fred was back Down Under. He got Coke. He got Coke in the best way.

His lover looked over at him, soap bubbles up to his elbows. "What're you looking at?"

"My Coke." He couldn't call it any other way. Dillon bounced again. "So what did your family do for Thanksgiving?"

"Huh? I usually spend it with the Scotts or the Taggarts."

"Oh." Dillon frowned a little. "I mean when you were a kid. Like, what kinds of traditions do you have?"

"I guess the same as anybody. Nate's Tracy puts on one hell of a spread."

His head tilted. "I bet she does."

Coke nodded, went back to going dishes.

Dillon grabbed a dishtowel. "So, were you hatched from an egg?"

"Crawled from under a cabbage leaf."

"Ah." His nose twitched. God, he wanted to ask more, because no one ever talked about Coke's family, least of all Coke.

The man knew everything about everyone -- babies, birthdays, anniversaries -- but no one had ever said, "I'm Coke's aunt. Cousin. Brother. In-law."

"So, what do you want us to do?" Dillon bumped their hips together. "For Thanksgiving."

"I like to watch the parade. I reckon your family wants to get together, huh?"

"We usually do. We can wait on that until Christmas, though. I mean, my sis will do it at her house if she needs to."

"Cowboy, I'm here for you, to have the holidays with you. Family, kids, food. Whatever. I'm happy."

"Cool." He took the next dish and dried it. "I'm tickled."

"I am, too." Coke grinned at him, and the man looked truly happy.

Dillon turned off the water and took away the cup Coke had picked up. He needed to kiss that smiling mouth.

One eyebrow quirked up. "Everything okay?"

"Uh-huh." He grabbed Coke's shoulders and moved in for a lip-lock.

Coke's hand came up, cupped the back of his head, and the man kissed him like the world was ending. It wasn't. No way. Dillon still thought it was okay to act like it, so he kissed right back.

Jesus, there was nothing like that focus, like that wild, breathtaking kiss. Coke was on fire, holding him like he wanted to keep Dillon from breaking and running. Like Dillon would. There was nowhere on earth he'd rather be.

Dillon moaned a little, the kiss making his knees weak. He sagged, but Coke was rock solid. Those hands held him like he weighed nothing, Coke's muscles not even trembling with effort.

"Babe." He murmured it against Coke's mouth when they finally broke to breathe. "Love."

"You know it." Coke's eyes were sure, steady, looking right into him, letting him see right inside.

"Mmm." He felt a little drugged, a lot horny.

Coke leaned in again, the kisses coming again, harder this time, focused enough to make the world tilt.

Dillon clung to those wide shoulders, swaying a little.

Somewhere, the house phone started ringing, and Coke backed off, just a little bit. "You need to get that?"

"Nope." Ace could go stuff it. "Not right now." No. No interrupting the kissing.

"Good deal." Coke picked him up, put him on the counter, and dove right back in.

"Uhn." Dillon wrapped arms and legs around Coke's body, humping and kissing like crazy. His hands

explored those broad, heavy muscles, the rosy scars. Coke fascinated him, all over. Dillon could spend hours just connecting the dots. His fingers knew exactly where everything was -- ink and scars, hot spots and freckles. He'd explored every inch.

God, he loved this man. He so did. So much. Dillon kissed Coke's mouth, his chin, everywhere.

"Cowboy. Cowboy, Jesus..." Coke dragged him closer, hands hard enough to make him ache a little.

His ass teetered on the edge of the counter, but he knew he didn't have to ask Coke not to drop him. He was safe. His robe parted, Coke's sweater pushed up, and he was rubbed on Coke's fuzzy belly, those rock-hard abs right there for him. Dillon moved one hand down, petting Coke's skin, his fingers finding one tiny nipple. Hello. It was fucking stunning, how Coke's prick jerked and all those muscles rippled as he tugged. He wanted more, so he went after the other nipple. He tugged, and Coke moaned, and man, it was hot.

"Want." Coke's hands were moving him faster.

"Uh-huh." Hell, yes, He wanted, too. Bad. He humped a little, letting Coke know.

"Fuck." Coke groaned, knees bending a little, giving them more friction.

"Babe. Oh, God. Babe, more."

"Uh-huh. More. Dillon." They staggered a little, then Coke leaned back against the fridge, holding him closer.

Dillon hummed and spent a second popping Coke's fly, freeing the fine, fat cock. Then he got back to work at kissing Coke hard, his ass rubbing against Coke's cock now, his hips tilting. Coke was hard as nails, prick wet-tipped as it slid against him, teasing his hole.

"In." He wanted. Now.

"Thank God." Coke leaned back, hips tilting him and that cock pressed against him, demanding.

Dillon bore down, his body opening right up. He always had room for Coke. His bullfighter took him, lifting him and setting him down on that fat, thick prick. Dillon's head fell back, his hands clenching on all that hot skin.

"Mine. Mine. Fuck." Coke was growling now.

"All yours, babe." All Coke's. Every bit of him.

"Yeah." That strong body drove into him, making him absolutely crazy.

Dancing on Coke's body made him want to sing, which maybe was inappropriate, but there it was. Of course, when Coke's cock slammed into his gland, he didn't have the breath to sing. No, all he could do was hold on and grunt, rising and falling and kissing Coke as hard as he could.

"Soon. Fuck. Soon."

He knew. He could feel Coke swelling inside him. "Come on, babe." There. Words. Go him. Dillon squeezed down with his muscles and Coke roared, hips sawing as heat filled him up. "Oh, God. Babe."

"You. You. Need you to."

"I-- uh-huh." He just needed to rub right there...

Coke moved him one more time, cock nudging his gland. That was it. Dillon went off like a bottle rocket, so hot he could hardly stand it. Those strong arms didn't even shake; his Coke just held him.

Dillon panted, leaning his cheek against Coke's. "Damn."

"Mornin'." Coke grinned.

"A good one."

"Mmmhmm."

Dillon hung there for a bit until the bassets started barking somewhere not too far off.

"C'mon. Shower. Then we'll have our day, hmm?"

"You bet." He couldn't even remember what the day was supposed to be like. It didn't matter, really, as long as he was with Coke.

Oh, right. That had been his plan.

Have Coke.

Score!

Chapter Five

"Hey, Cajun. How's Bell doin'?"

Jesus, he'd got his phone ringer turned off, and he'd missed about ten zillion phone calls, easy. Coke shook his head, heading into the kitchen to feed the dogs while he chatted. What was worse was he didn't even really miss it.

"He's better every day. Stubborn. Tired."

"I bet. How're you holding up? Y'all gonna have your turkey dinner there?" Thanksgiving. Right. Coke needed to find out what all he was supposed to do. He needed to call Nattie, too, find out what to send the kids from Santa...

"Shit. The family is all ready to do us up." Beau snorted, and Coke had to grin.

"You think he'll be home come Christmas?"

"I sure as shit hope so. How are you, cher?"

"Real good, real good. Me and Dillon, we're just taking it easy."

Dillon'd got him a bunch of pillows, and the man's bed was as good as his.

"Good. You needed some rest."

"Yeah, it was a long finals." And he was getting older every day.

"Tell me about it. That last ride was harsh." Beau chuckled.

"No shit on that, Cajun. No shit on that."

"Anyway, my people are planning on deep-frying a turkey in the hospital parking lot."

"Good Lord and butter." He hooted, tickled bone-deep. "I'd like to see that, I surely would." Except that he didn't want to miss Thanksgiving here, with Dillon.

"You got snow and all." Beau sighed, and the sound was a touch sad, but Coke reckoned the man had the

right to be a little down. Hospitals wore on folks. "We might here, too, but I ain't got outside in days."

"Is... is he gonna be okay? For real?" He should have moved faster, got in there.

"He is. I promise, cher. I have never lied to you, huh?"

"No. No, you ain't. If you need me to call Bonner's daddy about a truck, I can."

"That would be good, Coke. I just don't have it in me to look right now."

"I'll handle it. You know I will." He sighed, rubbed the back of his neck. "Okay, cowboy. I gotta make some phone calls."

Jason. Nattie. Bonner.

"Okay, cher. You take care. Give clown boy a noogie for Sammy."

"I will, you." He hung up and made himself another pot of coffee, feeling like there was a weight on his shoulders. He really needed to call folks. He did.

"Hey, babe. What's up?"

He looked over, realized he was rubbing the back of his neck. "Talking to Beau. Sammy's doing better."

"Yeah? They having Thanksgiving at the hospital?" Dillon came over to help out.

"Yeah. You want some coffee? I missed, like, ten thousand phone calls."

"I do, and I know. None of them were urgent." Dillon started rubbing his shoulders.

This groan tore out of him, damn near hurting, really. He hated the fucking phone.

"Let it go for a bit, babe." Dillon rubbed harder, really digging in.

"I..." His knees buckled a little. "Fuck, that's good."

He shouldn't just... but he did, damn it. He needed this for a little.

"I got you, babe. I would tell you if anyone needed you." Yeah. Yeah, Dillon was a good guy.

"Uh-huh. I got a wicked headache, you know?"

"I can tell." Dillon took him by the hand, sat him down at the table.

He went, leaned his head on his hands, trying to stretch out a little. "I made us coffee."

"You rock." Something went into the microwave, and before he knew it, he had a nice, hot neck pillow on his skin.

"Oh, damn."

Dillon made him feel so fucking good. Like he wasn't eighty thousand years old and busted.

"Mmm." One hand stroked the back of his head.

"Better?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sorry, cowboy. I got all..." Tense. Aggravated. Worried. "...caught up."

"No need to apologize, babe. You love your people. I get the benefit of that." Dillon kissed the top of his head.

"You're my people." Sometimes he thought that he ought to be guilty for having someone who loved him so good.

"I am. So yours." Now the slippery man just slid between him and the table, landing in his lap.

That made him grin, made him happy where nothing else could. "Well, hello there."

"Hey, babe." He got him a peck on the lips. "You just need to focus."

"Focus." He leaned and took another of those kisses.

"Mmmhmm. You need to be one with the clown." That came with a little wiggle that made his eyes cross.

"I can handle that, I think." His hands found Dillon's hips, rubbed a little bit. "It snowing outside?"

"It is. Just a light dusting." Those lips rubbed his cheek, Dillon's ass moving on Coke's lap.

"That's good. We oughta take a walk tomorrow morning, explore some."

"Sure." Those clever fingers moved up his arms, then to his shoulders, digging in a little again.

Coke hummed, his forehead against Dillon's. "You got the neatest eyes, honey. Clear as all get out."

"Yeah? I like yours. Kinda hazel-y." They rubbed noses, too.

He took a deep breath, relaxed some. "We're basking, cowboy." It felt pretty damn good, actually.

"We are. There is no bad there. I'm thinking of getting us a heat lamp." That had him chuckling.

"Lizard boy." He swatted Dillon's butt playfully.

"Anything for you, babe." Dillon wiggled harder, his breath coming fast.

"You okay?" He leaned in, lips brushing Dillon's again.

"I am." Hugging him tight, Dillon hummed. "I'm here with you."

"Yeah. Damn, we're fixin' to have a holiday, you and me. It... Shit, Cowboy. Sometimes it's so good you just can't believe it."

"I believe." That smile told him how frickin' happy Dillon was.

How real it was.

"Come on." He grabbed hold and stood, bringing Dillon with him. "Let's go channel surf and play tonsil hockey."

He had them cuddled up on the couch before he remembered the coffee.

Dillon got out all the stuff he'd picked up at the REI in Reno for Coke. Long undies. Double socks. A hand

warmer. Flannel. Yeah. He knew Coke had hiking boots in his bag. That would do for Coke's first foray out in the snow. They'd have to get the man new gloves, as the ones Dillon had would be a bit tight, and Coke needed a new coat, but a man had to try those on.

"Babe? You about ready to get dressed?"

"I'm dressed, cowboy." Coke came into the bedroom, looking stunning in a flannel shirt, a quilted flannel on top of that, and a pair of jeans.

"Do you have longies on?"

"Huh?"

God, that was cute.

Texans.

"Long undies." Dillon picked up said longies and waved them.

"Man, I bet you look hot wearing that. You got 'em on?"

"I do." He was vain enough to want to wear denim, but not crazy enough to make that his only layer. "You show me you wearing them; I'll show you mine."

"That's fair, least for me." Coke gave him a grin and started unbuttoning.

"Oh, it's more than fair." He would get to see Coke naked. Coke just got to see his underwear.

"Pshaw. You got that belly, that fine ass."

His cheeks heated, pleasure warming him right up. "Thanks, babe. I like that you like."

"I like. Lemme see." The shirts were tugged off, giving him a look at that broad, fuzzy body.

Dillon's fingers flexed, wanting to touch. He loved everything about Coke, from the scars to the tattoos. Coke opened his belt buckle, started working off the jeans. Oh. He'd splurged on some fancy boxer briefs for Coke -- different colors, different fabrics. He hadn't seen Coke wear them until today.

"Oh, babe. You wore the green ones!" Dillon was a little worried that they'd not make it out in the snow.

His bullfighter blushed, gave him a grin. "They're real soft. I like them best."

"I like the way they look." He liked the way they felt, too, when he reached out and touched them.

Coke's eyes crossed and that pretty cock jerked. "Careful, now."

"Why? Unless you'd rather go tromp through the snow..."

"I want to see you now. You promised."

"I did." Backing up a step, Dillon stripped down to just the long underwear bottoms, wiggling a bit. He had millions of people staring at him in a year. Millions. But it was that look -- hot and happy, like he was the center of the world -- that did it for him. He struck a pose.

"What do you think, babe?"

"I think that I am the luckiest fucker alive."

"Oh." He kinda flung himself at Coke, hopping up for an all-fours hug.

Those strong arms wrapped around him, squeezed him tight.

"Love the way you feel." Luckily they were right by the bed, so if Coke got tired... Which he rarely did.

"Good." Coke's hands were on his ass, fingers squeezing and rubbing. "You got the prettiest ass in rodeoing."

Which was high praise, honestly, given that he had Sam Bell and Balta to compete with there. They both had fine asses, though Dillon would never tell them. Unless he was drunk. Which he'd done to Balta once. He might have even felt up Balta's ass...

Okay, he was getting distracted.

Coke was waiting, so Dillon kissed him, just to say thank you. Coke kissed him back, full force, tongue

pushing between his lips like there was nothing else the man wanted to do, ever. Thank God for that, because Dillon could spend all his time just like this. With Coke.

"Cowboy..." Coke's lips left his, just for a second.

"Yours." Heart and soul and all other sorts of places.

Coke hummed softly, and he got that grin, that wondering little smile that was his and his alone.

"So. Bed or snow?" He grinned back.

"I have to choose?"

"Which one you want first, yeah." They just needed to do them consecutively, not concurrently.

"Well, I reckon the pups are still napping and I'm more nekkid than not. So bed."

"Oh, that was what I was hoping for." Dillon let go, knowing Coke would give him a good toss on the bed.

He landed smack in the middle, his bullfighter looking him up and down.

Dillon hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his long undies, peeling them down a bit. Just enough to tease.

Coke's eyes fastened onto his belly like a laser, and the man's lips parted. The fabric slid down another inch, his cock making a tent there now. God, this was fun. Coke stepped forward, tongue wetting the parted lips, and a dark spot appeared on the green boxer briefs.

Dillon swallowed, letting his legs fall open, letting his hands reach for Coke. Damn. Coke didn't say a word, just came to him, lips slipping up along his cock.

"Coke!" Oh, hell. He was in trouble.

"Mmmhmm?" Fuck. That mouth was wrapping around his cock, nice and careful. From this angle, he could see the heavy, still-red scars on the back of Coke's neck.

Frowning, he stroked them a bit, hoping Coke wasn't overdoing it. Sometimes he forgot because Coke was so strong.

That mouth moved lower, tongue working the shaft of his prick.

"Coke." He loved the feel of Coke's mouth on him, of the heat and wetness of it.

"Mmmhmm." Coke couldn't move fast, but the pressure was enough to make his toes curl.

His belly went tight, his balls drawing up. It was good enough to make him moan. Coke's callused hand found his sac, and the man cupped it in one palm, rolling it firmly. Dillon's heels drummed the mattress, his body arching up. Fuck, yes.

He felt Coke's approval in every inch of his cock.

"Please. Coke." He wasn't sure if he was begging for more sucking, or for Coke to come up and kiss him. Whatever.

Coke moaned softly, that mouth sinking down deeper, taking him in and in and in.

"Oh..." Oh and maybe oh. Dillon rocked, his hips moving like crazy, his chest heaving.

His prick slipped deep in Coke's mouth, the tip nudging the man's throat. When Coke swallowed around him, the heat and pressure made him want to scream. Dillon lasted all of maybe five seconds that way. Then Coke's fingers nudged his balls again, and he just lost it, giving Coke everything he had.

Fuck. Fuck. Coke swallowed around him and it was so fucking huge, so big. He shook with it, barely able to believe his good luck. He had this man all to himself.

Those hands eased him through it, eased him down into the mattress. "Good."

"Good? Coke, that doesn't even begin." Not even close. Good was a pale reflection of what that had been.

Coke's chuckle ghosted over the tip of his cock, soft enough to tickle.

"When I can move, I'm gonna tear you up..."

That was a full-out laugh, hearty and happy. "I'm looking forward to it, Cowboy."

"Mmm. Yeah? Which part do you like best?" His hand felt heavy, but he managed to start petting.

"Shit, Dillon. I just like you." Coke kissed the tip of his prick, tongue barely touching the slit. "I like your flavor, your smell." One hand caressed his ass. "Your pretty backside."

"Mmm. You want it, babe?" He was ready. He could let Coke in now. His energy was coming back.

"I can let you rest..." That hand moved farther down, though, finger teasing his hole.

"I think I'm rested." His cock thought so, too. A lot. It was rising again, sure as anything.

"Do you?" Coke hummed, lips near his balls, tongue moving them from side to side.

"Uh-huh." His eyes crossed, his toes curling again.

Jesus, there was nothing like lazy, focused Coke. Nothing. Coke spread his legs, tongue slipping behind his balls now. Dillon grunted, his breath hitching good and hard. Oh, yeah. His cock was definitely back up. "Need you, babe."

"Got me." Coke got him all right, got him good and wet, got him slick, then pushed over him, strong arms on either side of his shoulders.

Dillon spread wide, pushing his hips up so Coke could line up with his hole. Easy.

"Dillon." Coke slid into him, sank deep and spread him. He got to watch the thick muscles ripple for him, bulge.

"Mine." He gripped those wide shoulders, holding on for dear life. That thick cock pressed into him, opening him up.

"Yeah." He hadn't had Coke like this, covering him, looking strong and sure, since the accident. It was almost enough to short out his brain. Not quite, because he wanted to see and feel and be with Coke. He wanted to make it last.

Those amazing muscles rippled, Coke staring at him, looking at him like he was the center of the earth. Fuck. Fuck, it was hot. "Cowboy. Want to do this forever."

"Okay." Okay, he was right there with that. Yes.

Coke nodded once, then started moving, hard, strong strokes that made him shake, made him cry out. He held on as hard as he could, loving on whatever skin he could reach with his mouth. He was a lover, after all.

"Lean up here. Kiss me. Can't reach you."

Dillon pulled himself up mainly with his abs, knowing Coke loved how that felt. Then he gave Coke a kiss, hard and deep. Coke cried out, slamming into his ass with something close to desperation. That was okay with him. It really was. He understood, even. His kiss became a little ravenous.

Coke lost it, driving into him mindlessly, hand hard on his hip as his bullfighter's eyes rolled. He was gonna have bruises. Fucking hot.

Dillon found himself chanting Coke's name, pushing his bullfighter to come for him, to let him feel it deep inside. He was gonna blow without Coke even touching him this time.

Coke's shoulders rippled, a deep roar pushing from the man's chest as that fine, fat cock pulsed, heat flooding him. Grunting, Dillon bit at the skin of Coke's neck, just hard enough to anchor himself. Then he was coming too, his cock pushing against Coke's belly.

Coke held himself up, arms shaking for a second, before he pulled out and landed beside Dillon.

"God." The word came right out of him, explosive and yet breathless.

Coke grunted, breathing fucking hard.

Dillon grinned. Now they'd have to snuggle and dry off. Everyone knew you didn't dare go out in the snow all sweaty.

Coke's hand landed on his belly, solid and warm.

"Mmm. We could have a snack. A nap..."

"Kay." Coke was almost asleep already, Dillon could tell.

They would nap. Eat. Coke would end up doing housework. They might get out in the snow by tomorrow.

It was warmer in bed anyway.

Chapter Six

Coke grabbed another handful of snow, packed it tight, and threw, the snowball sailing over the yard, two bassets leaping after it.

God, that was fun.

He'd been out God knew how long, throwing and watching, waiting for Dillon to wake up and tell him to come make breakfast. He was shivering some, but it was worth it to watch the babies run and play. Pansy was one hell of a leaper, and Jerome? Well, Jerome was a lot like his namesake, quick and focused, just not real good at jumping.

"Coke?" Dillon sounded like he was laughing, which was a good sign. "I got hot towels."

"Yeah?" He could handle that. He was feeling the cold deep, now. He whistled up the beasts and headed in, leaning to give Dillon a kiss. "Morning, honey."

"Cold!" Dillon's lips were warm, and that mouth tasted like coffee. Woo.

His hands slipped into Dillon's robe, searching that belly.

"Coke!" Man, Dillon could do a girly squeal. The puppies danced and barked, like they were laughing.

"Hmm? You're all toasty." He chuckled, nibbling on Dillon's lips, snuggling in. "What you want for breakfast, cowboy?"

"Naked Coke? Your clothes are all frozen." Dillon started stripping him down, and hot towels appeared out of the oven, along with his sweats. Oh, damn.

His eyes rolled a little, the heat perfect, making his knees buckle.

"I got you, babe. Sit and have a coffee." His slippers were all warm, too, from sitting right next to the stove.

Dillon got him coffee, then dried off the pups, got them curled up in a blanket.

"Did you see them running?" He settled, drinking deep from his mug. "Pansy can catch her some snowballs."

"She can. Jerome can outpace her, though, on sheer speed. We'll make you snow bunnies yet, eh?"

"It's not bad, honey. Not at all." He stretched up tall, trying not to wince at the aches. "So, what's on your plan for today?"

"I have no idea. At some point, we need to food shop." Dillon got him orange juice and aspirin and then went to the fridge.

"That sounds good. You got a grill?" He could grill in this stuff. Probably.

He managed in ice storms at home okay.

"Uh. I think so? It's under a tarp." Peering out the window over the sink, Dillon shrugged.

He chuckled, grinned. "I'll go look so I can make you food."

He could make burgers in the house, but they were better outside.

"Later, babe. We can have omelets. I can do that." That fine ass started bouncing. Dillon always had to dance sooner or later.

Coke chuckled and leaned back to watch. "Nattie texted this morning; wanted to know if we had room for them at Thanksgiving. He's taking Tracy and the babies to Mexico for the holidays after."

"Sure, babe. You've seen my house." The house sure would hold everyone, and Dillon didn't seem the least bit upset.

"Yeah? Excellent. He said we could come down, but..." Coke shrugged. He was happy right now.

"The kids have never seen the like of Thanksgiving here." Winking, Dillon got out eggs, veggies, weird Italian ham.

He stood up, hands on Dillon's hips, pulling the man back into him. "Thank you."

"Huh? What, for not yelling that Nattie is a yellow-bellied traitor?" The joke was an old one by now, and held no heat at all.

"Exactly." He kissed Dillon's shoulder.

"Mmm." Swaying, pushing back, Dillon gave him something to rub on.

He watched Dillon break eggs, stir. It was nice just to watch. He was so warm, pressed up against that fine back. It was like a furnace of his very own. Coke closed his eyes, took a deep, deep breath.

"You okay, babe?" They swayed, Dillon almost slow dancing him from in front.

"Mmmhmm. Just enjoying you for a minute."

"Oh, good." They kinda did a silly shuffle to the stove, but then he didn't have to move. Dillon was pretty good at omelets.

He watched a bit, then went to pour milk and start toast, freshen up coffee. Normal stuff. Good stuff.

Dillon put the plates on the table and gave him a kiss before sitting. "So, you want to head into town in a bit?"

"Yeah. Yeah, that'd be good. We need some food, and there's that DVD movie."

"Cool. We'll make a list of what we want to make. Sis will want to do a lot." Dillon's toes touched his leg, pushing his sweatpants up a bit.

"What's your favorite dish?"

"I like the sweet potatoes and the cranberry sauce." That grin was all about the sugar rush; he'd seen it before.

"Why don't that surprise me?"

"I don't know, babe." Those long toes tugged at his leg hair.

"Hey!" He hooted, pulled back. "I want pecan pie."

"Oh, yum. The kids will want pumpkin. We should make a list." Dillon was not the most organized soul.

"Well, is Susan and your folks coming here or are we bringing Nattie and them over there?"

"I have no idea. My place is a little bigger, but she has more of the stuff..."

"Well, honey. You call her, I'll call Nate, we'll be set for bear." He rolled his shoulders and winked. "I gotta go to the bank, too. I got to get some money."

"Okay." One sandy eyebrow went up. "You should open an account up here. Fewer bank fees."

"Yeah? I just got the old checking account. It don't cost much, I don't think."

Dillon stared at him. "It shouldn't cost you anything, babe. We have member checking almost everywhere."

"Do I have that? Hold up." He headed to the bedroom and grabbed his checkbook out of the little saddlebag that he kept his personal information in.

When he gave it to Dillon, his cowboy just stared harder. "Dude. How long have you had this account?"

"Twenty years, I guess? It's the same account, but it's been a ton of banks. I just put my checks in there, pay my bills from it." There was a goodly amount in there, as a cushion. Lots of zeroes' worth.

"Huh." That frown was more... contemplative than upset. "Well, we can pull just a couple thousand for you to use up here."

"Okay. I don't think on it much. I just got my taxes, my truck payment." The sponsors took care of everything else.

"Yeah." Nodding, Dillon chewed his bottom lip. "We need to talk on it, babe. But not now." He got a sunny smile, the frown clearing up.

"Okay." He was easy. "Go get your sister on the phone, and I'll call Nate. We'll work shit out."

"We will." Bouncing, Dillon tucked Coke's checkbook away in a drawer and went to grab a phone, just dancing.

He chuckled, shook his head. He loved Dillon in this mood -- happy and bouncy, ready to go and do and see.

He forgot to call Natty for a bit, in fact, listening to Dillon chatter to his sister. Gracious, he'd bet they were a hoot together.

Dillon's eyes met his, and he got himself a sweet grin. Somebody was happy.

Damn happy.

That could sustain him for a good long while. Even if he did have to make phone calls.

Dillon had Coke. Coke had his ID and a check. They were gonna go to the bank and start a little checking account for Coke to use while he was up north. Little. Twenty thousand dollars. Dillon was trying not to jump on Coke and demand to know everything there was to know about the man and his finances. He couldn't believe that Coke just popped cash into a checking account. There was an obscene amount of cash sitting there, just sitting. Not working at all.

Money should work for you. That was Dillon's philosophy.

Coke's seemed to be that money was a necessary evil. Lord. They would bank, then head to the grocery.

"You're thinking pretty hard, honey. You okay?"

"Huh? Oh, I was just plotting your investment future." He grinned over at Coke for a second. He'd found that this much snow made Coke a little twitchy if he didn't watch the road.

"You want to do stuff with it, have at. Just leave me enough for taxes and my truck payment."

"I won't break you, babe." It was awesome that Coke trusted him. Really.

"I know." Coke didn't seem stressed out about it at all.

"Did you get the list Susan made?" His sister was like a drill sergeant. She had brand names and everything. She'd faxed it. She lived exactly four and a half miles from him.

"I did. And I talked with her on the phone twice and got all four text messages. She's a trooper."

"She's something." Susan loved Coke. A little unnaturally. Damn it.

Coke's eyes were laughing. "Now, now. Sisters are a blessing."

"Do you have sisters?" He knew he shouldn't dig. It made Coke tense. But it popped out.

"I know lots of folks that do." It didn't escape Dillon that that wasn't an answer.

"Yeah. Does Nate have sisters?" He hoped the man had twelve.

"God, yes. Six. All townies, believe it or not."

"No shit?" Six. Okay, Dillon actually felt bad. "No wonder he's a harpy."

"Hey, now. That ain't very nice." Coke's grin was tickled, though.

"What? Sometimes I'm entitled." He and Nattie had an agreement – bashing the man's nose went a long way toward evening their score -- but Dillon still got to bitch. The interfering turd had gotten in between him and

Coke, back at the beginning and it was like an old, old bone bruise. Not hurting, but still there, if you poked it hard.

"You mean you don't appreciate him meddling in your love life?" Butter wouldn't melt in Coke's mouth.

"No, sir. I want him out of my bedroom, you know?" He patted Coke's leg. "You? You, I like."

"That's good. I ain't going nowhere." Coke's phone rang, and Coke sighed. "You want to guess which cowboy it could be?"

"Jason." Dillon shook his head. Or AJ, or Nate, or-or-or.

"I'll guess Tag." Coke flipped his phone open without looking. "Lo?" Coke grinned wide. "Well, hello, Miss Brenda. How are you? You got them boys there with you?"

Brenda? Oh. Oh! Jason's mom.

Missus Scott sounded like one of Charlie Brown's teachers. Not that he was eavesdropping.

"No? They staying at AJ's? What? Well, good Lord! Congratulations! It's about time that man made you his."

Dillon grinned a little. He wasn't sure what was up, but it sounded good.

Coke looked over at him, smiled. "Jason's momma's getting married. Jack finally popped the question!"

"Oh, wow. That's cool!" It was. He'd heard Jack was a good guy.

Coke nodded and started asking questions, jabbering away. Dillon grinned, shook his head. Brenda had to be ten years older than Coke, easy, but Coke was... Fearless Pharris, the cowboy confessor.

Everyone knew Coke. Sometimes he forgot that those folks didn't all know each other, though. Still, it bugged Dillon that a man that was in everyone's family didn't seem to have ever had one of his own. It was just weird.

It made him itch a little. That little thing he called his nosy bone wanted to dig and dig.

Coke hung up, grinned at him. "She's getting married in February, early on. We'll have to head down for it."

"We can do that. By then we'll be tired of snow. Not to mention working."

"Good deal." Coke leaned back and grinned. "She sounds tickled as a pig in shit. I wonder how Jase is taking it."

"I bet he's fine." Jason would be happy for his mom. Dillon knew it.

"I hope so. I need to get over there, too, get to working on him. I should have been doing more, but... shit." Right, because Coke could have done so much with his broken neck and broken hand.

"Babe." Dillon turned into the bank parking lot, shaking his head a little. "You do what you can. We'll get it done."

Dillon was surprised that any of them had survived last year, what with Jason's head injury, Coke's broken neck, and them almost losing Sam Bell. Shit, he'd even dislocated a shoulder.

"Here we are." The bank was deserted, so it shouldn't take long.

"Cute little bank. This where you go?"

"It is." He'd been going there since he was a kid, and it had changed names three times.

"Cool. I like a place where they know you." Coke headed in a little like he was heading into the arena.

Dillon watched happily for a bit, then followed along. Lord, he liked to look at Coke.

Coke went right up, smiling at the old lady that had worked the front desk for at least ten thousand years.

"Howdy. I'm interested in starting a joint checking account, please, ma'am."

"Sure." What was her name? Alice? Alice smiled, then nodded at Dillon. "Mr. Walsh."

He'd become Mr. Walsh when he started depositing over a million a year in paychecks. Alice handed over some paperwork and Coke peered over it, then handed it to him. "Make sure it's in both our names, cowboy."

"You bet." They'd need Coke's ID and all, but it would be easier to start a joint account as an add-on to his already-there services.

Alice watched with bright eyes while he filled out paperwork and went to sit with Coke to wait for a banker.

"So, where's your favorite place to eat here in town?"

"Albert's. Twenty-four-hour diner." He was so lowbrow sometimes. People would laugh.

"Diners." Coke nodded. "You taking me there for lunch?"

"I am. They have a patty melt to die for." Oh, now he was hungry.

"Oh, man. Good onion rings?" Coke was a whore for the fried and crunchy.

"Yeah." He winked. "And fried pies."

"You had me at grilled onions on hamburger."

"I know. I like to tease."

"Dillon! Hey." The banker was George Stahman, who had gone to high school with him. Yay. Coke looked the man over, hazel eyes sizing George up like the man was an unknown bull. Coke really didn't like banks at all. "What can I help you with, eh?"

Dillon stood and shook like he was expected to. "We want to open a joint account."

"Business?"

"No, sir. Personal." Coke stood, too, the move slow and deliberate.

"Oh." George blinked, and Dillon grinned, the world suddenly shiny and new.

One of Coke's eyebrows slowly started to rise.

"Coke just needs to have easy access to funds while he's up here. Instead of having to write me checks and stuff. He'll be spending a good bit of time with me." He waited for George to ask where Coke would be the rest of the year. Because he would. Five. Four.

"And where is your home base, Mister..."

"Pharris. With a Ph, not an F. And me and Dillon'll be in Texas, when we're not on the road."

"Coke works with me, but I live with him full time. This should not be a surprise, George."

"No. I mean..."

"Look, son. Can y'all get me an account or not? There's onion rings waiting on me."

"Yes, sir!" George finally hopped to it, getting them into his office, and it took twenty minutes.

He signed things, Coke signed things, and then they were out of there, Coke muttering under his breath.

"Sorry, babe. I wish we'd gotten Janine."

"S'all good, cowboy. It's all done."

"It is." He judged the probability of busting his ass on an icy patch and decided to drive.

Coke's phone rang again as the man headed for the truck, and Dillon heard the soft sigh.

When Coke pulled it out, Dillon grabbed it. "Coke's answering service."

"Uh... Hello? Coke?" AJ. He'd know that dorky voice anywhere.

"It's Dillon, man. What's up?" They were going to go have onion rings, damn it.

"Oh, I was just calling. Missy's getting real swole and Jase and them are being weird and stuff and I didn't know if Gramps wanted to come down this direction for

Christmas, since Miz Scott's going to be busy with the wedding thing."

"Oh. Well, bud, he's kinda got plans. We could come down after, if you want. If I can come, that is."

"Well, sure, Dillon! You know you're welcome here, man. I just... Shit, if I have one more person cry on me today, I might have a conniption."

"Oh, man. Hey, man. Why don't you call Hank? He's down there right now, visiting that sister of his, huh?" Dillon knew Hank and AJ were buds, and that would give AJ some man time.

Coke looked back at him, eyes curious.

AJ hooted. "Oh, God. That's a good idea! Hank can get Bax out of his funk. You heard anything about Sam?"

"Yeah. Yeah, he's still in Reno, but he's getting better every day."

"Cool. Cool. Shit, Daisy's screaming. Tell Gramps hey, wouldja?"

"I will. Bye, man." He hung up and handed the phone back to Coke before unlocking the truck. "AJ says hi, babe. Hank is gonna go stay with him a bit."

"Hey? Everything okay?" Coke climbed in, pocketing his phone.

"Yep. I mean, he's worried about Missy and Jase, but I think he just needs some man time." Albert's, here they came.

"Ah." Coke grinned. "Onion rings now?"

The hopeful tone made him wiggly.

"You know it, babe." Hot coffee. Pie. Uhn. He headed to Albert's, grinning when the little chrome diner came into view.

"That looks like a good diner, sort of like Katy's place near the Gardners'."

"Yeah? You'll have to take me. I bet Katy isn't half Portuguese and half Lebanese." Albert was a well-loved local anomaly.

"Lebanese? No shit? Your guy do feijoada?"

"Uh. I have no idea. You'd have to ask him." Man, Coke knew the weirdest shit. He'd bet that Balta had made feijoada for him.

"I love that stuff. One time, oh, shit, five-six years ago, Beau and Balta and Steel Flanagan had a cook-off - gumbo, feiojada, and chicken and dumplings. Jesus, it was good."

"Oh, yum." Steel cooked? Who knew? Oh, God, Albert's smelled good.

Coke nodded. "Was. Oh, man. I'm starving."

"Me, too." All of a sudden. Bang.

Someone who looked vaguely familiar greeted them at the front. God knew it was probably the daughter of someone he went to high school with.

"Two?"

Dillon wanted to snark, but he smiled instead. Were there more than two of them? Lord. "Yes, honey, and I'd like by the window, please."

Coke's smile was warm and the little girl beamed. "Sure! Come on."

"This is his first winter up here." Yeah. She was a doll, and he felt like a bitch. Good thing he'd kept it to himself.

"Oh, God. Snow sucks, man. I hate it. I'm heading to LA as soon as I graduate."

"Can we get some coffee, hon?" He wasn't going to snarl.

"God, yes. Please. I'm chilled." Coke settled right in, looking like he belonged.

Dillon had to smile. Look at that man. When the waitress left, he leaned over and whispered, "Love you, babe."

The lines beside Coke's eyes got deeper with a full-on grin. "Well, listen to you, now."

"What?" He did. Like, with this hugeness.

"I am having the time of my life, cowboy. Tell me this is just the first holiday we get together."

"Only the first of a thousand, at least." He grinned even wider, his face stretching.

"It's a plan." The toe of Coke's boot actually nudged his ankle. Woo. Flirting in public.

"Dillon! My friend. How you?" Albert came bustling out, wiping his hands on his apron.

"Good. Good, this is Coke. He'll be coming in with me a lot."

"Fearless Pharris? A real pleasure, sir."

Coke stood, smiled, shook Albert's hand. "I hear y'all have the best food 'round these parts."

"Oh, Dillon is kind." Albert shook Coke's hand.

"What do you like, Mr. Coke?"

"I was promised patty melts and onion rings and pie."

"Very good! Dillon's favorite. For both, yes?" When Dillon nodded, Albert clapped his hands and headed off, bellaring some crazy song.

Coke grinned, settled in with his coffee, and grabbed the sugar jar.

"Sweet tooth." He teased Coke about that a lot. Coke worked it off, though.

"Yup. Gonna get fat one day."

Right.

Fat.

No way. Coke worked too damned hard. Dillon figured only him and maybe Joa worked out more, and they didn't work near as hard in the arena.

Coke drank deep, humming softly. That was about the time that fucking phone rang again.

Dillon gritted his teeth, hoping Coke would look at it and say, "Telemarketer."

Coke picked his phone up, looked at the display. "You know how to turn the ringer off, cowboy?"

Must be Ace.

"I do." He grabbed the phone and silenced the incoming call, then went to turn the ringer off. Yep. Ace. Then he just slipped the phone in his pocket, rejoicing when Coke didn't so much as blink.

The little gal refilled their coffee and Albert sent out these weird Brazilian cheese breads, which made Coke hoot.

Coke popped two in his mouth, sucking in air. "We oughta get us some movies and some popcorn at the store, too. Make a night of it."

"Oh, that's a good idea." He loved it when Coke was in day-off mode. It wouldn't last forever. Someday soon he'd find Coke in the garage, tinkering.

Another two cheese breads disappeared. "Yup. You. Me. Darkness. Movie. Blanket. Popcorn. Necking."

Dillon tried a roll. Huh. Chewy. "Woo-hoo."

"Yeah." Coke's phone was vibrating wildly in his pocket.

Dillon ignored it. As much as a man could ignore a vibrating titty.

The onion rings came -- a huge pile of crunchy goodness on a platter -- and Coke moaned.

They got ketchup, and malt vinegar. "Can we have some mustard, hon?" Dillon knew Coke would want mustard. It was a Texas thing.

Coke grinned, nodded. "And a thing of ranch dressing."

God, he loved the way Coke said "rainch." It made their little waitress blink, but she nodded and bounced off. She was getting cuter.

Those dancing eyes landed on the onion rings, sizing them up. "Man, how are we going to attack this...?"

"Don't pull from the bottom. Oh, and the first few, you have to cut open, or they'll burn you." Man, wait until Coke saw the patty melts.

"No burning your tongue, Mr. Walsh."

Oh.

Oh, that look was.

Okay.

Dillon damned near swallowed said tongue thinking about what he would do with it later. Maybe he needed water, too.

Coke's grin was slow, wicked, pure fucking sex. And all his.

Dillon cleared his throat. "No. No burning."

"Good deal."

The mustard and the ranch dressing came, then they dug in, dipping and chatting, goofing off like the huge dorks they were.

"Dillon? Dillon, you're in town! How are you, man?" Tim Berringer walked over, grinning at him. The man got bigger every winter, the plow man just swelling.

"Good. Good. How are you?" He stood briefly to shake hands, just to be polite.

"I'm real good. Sold your sister some calves last spring. They're looking good."

"Cool." He stayed out of Susan's business for the most part. She beat him up when he didn't.

"You going to be around for the Christmas parade? We're looking for a grand marshal."

"Oh." Man, sometimes being the local celebrity was... wow. "Uh. If Coke wants to be in a parade, sure."

"Coke? Coke Pharris? You're in town? Man, sir. It's an honor to meet you. I saw you twenty years ago in the National. There's never been anyone so good."

Coke grinned, stood, and shook Tim's hand. "Well, ain't that good of you to say?"

"It's the truth. You're Fearless Pharris!"

Dillon beamed a little. It was good to see Coke get his props.

"Would you like to have a sit, sir?"

Tim grinned wide, actually bounced a little. "I'd love to, but I can't. My daughter's going on her first date tonight, and I promised the missus I'd be there to glower and threaten, so I gotta hustle. I'd love to have coffee one morning, though. If you're gonna be in town."

"He'll be around, yeah." Dillon grinned. "I'll call about the parade."

"Excellent. Janie will be tickled."

Albert called Tim, held up a paper to-go bag.

"What do you think, babe? You're famous."

Coke laughed. "Shit, cowboy. You're the face of the league. I'm just the bullfighter."

"Nah. Ace is the face. Thank God. I just wear make-up." Coke's nose wrinkled when he said Ace's name, and Dillon grabbed an onion ring. "What is it about him, eh?"

"Huh? You mean me and Ace? Shit, we just... he don't do good by folks, and he rides us every time some boy gets hurt on camera. My boys work hard -- damn hard..." He could see the anger rising.

"Hey." He reached out and grabbed Coke's hand. "I'm sorry, babe. It never occurred to me, huh? I just dance." He winked, trying to ease the mood.

"Yeah. You're the best of us. You work hard."

His cheeks heated with the pleasure of it, because Coke meant it. Truly. God, that was hot. "Balta would say he was the best."

"And he's one hell of a bull rider, but you? What you got, ain't nobody else got, cowboy. You're the one and only." Coke nodded like that was gospel.

Dillon was glad he was sitting down. As it was, he had to let go of Coke's hand when the patty melts came, but he wasn't going to be ashamed. Not one bit. Coke moaned over the burger, digging in happily, making him laugh by chasing strings of onion and dangling cheese.

They stuffed themselves, having fried pie and ice cream for dessert. "I wonder what we'll have to do to work this off."

"You'll prob'ly have to shake your heinie. Lots."

"Oh, I bet I will. And you'll have to tell me what you think. Lots."

Coke's eyes lit up. "I can do that. I'm *good* at that."

"You are. Then movies and popcorn. It's a plan." A fine plan.

"Yeah. Let's go shopping, cowboy. Walk this lunch off." Two twenties landed on the table.

"Sounds good." Everything with Coke sounded good. They had plenty of time to hang out at Albert's and be famous.

Coke nodded to Albert, leading him out, just as easy as that.

Dillon grinned, ignoring the vibrating phone in his pocket. He was really looking forward to the rest of their day. And night.

Chapter Seven

"Hoss? You out here?"

Coke dropped the hammer onto the little workbench, leaving the frame he was fixing. "Nattie? Boy, is that you?"

"Yessir. I brought you some rugmonkeys."

He popped out, arms open for hugs. "Y'all made it! How's Miss Tracy?"

Nate grinned at him. "Pregnant."

"Again?"

"Yessir."

Coke hooted, grabbed up that tow-headed gal and smooched her. "Congrats, Nattie."

"Thanks, Hoss. Shee-it, it's cold out here."

"You know it. Come on, y'all. Dillon's got you all set up with rooms and all." He kept Hailey in his arms, Little Coke following along.

As soon as they made it inside, the bassets set up an excited howl, running at the kids. Kids and dogs.

He chuckled, putting Hailey down before giving Nattie a hug. "Good to see you."

He meant it, too. Him and Nate had been tight for a long damn time.

"You, too. Man, it's been crazy." Nattie clapped him on the back, looking around the kitchen. "Nice place."

"It is. Gonna be here through Christmas. You still going to Mexico?"

"Yeah. I mean, Tracy is able, and we can have bottled water, you know?" Nate waggled his eyebrows.

"Uh-huh." Still, he thought it would suck to be in Mexico and not having beer. 'Course, he wasn't a girl.

"So, how's Dillweed?"

"Fine. We're having a ball."

He heard Dillon's voice, sliding down the hall. "You need help getting your shit out of the car?"

"Nah. I got most of it. I'll get the rest after we eat. Tracy had to pee, so we came to find you."

"Hey, asshat." Dillon appeared, Tracy trailing behind. "Look what I found."

Coke grinned at Miss Tracy. "Hey, beautiful girl."

"Hey, Coke." She came and kissed his cheek, her eyes going automatically to her hooligans.

"They're fine, Momma." He winked, grinned at her. "Congrats, by the way."

"He can't keep a secret for love or money, can he?"

"No, ma'am."

"What?" Dillon looked back and forth among them all. "Dude! Tracy."

Tracy grinned, turned bright pink. "Early May, there'll be another cowboy."

Nate beamed. "Or cowgirl."

"That's awesome." Dill hugged Tracy, slapped Nate on the arm. "We'll celebrate. No booze."

"Not for her, anyway. Tell me you brought it, Hoss."

Coke knew what Nate was talking about, and he shook his head. "No, Nattie. We'll run to town, though, and find us one."

"Find one what?" Dillon looked like nothing so much as a blond squirrel. All bright eyes and twitching nose.

He met Nate's eyes, and they both blushed, grinned. "He'll find out eventually, Nattie."

"I think you should make him wait, Hoss."

Coke chuckled, arm draping over Nate to hug the man. "You're a hardass. Come on, buddy. I'll show you Dillon's place."

Dillon would give him no end of shit for the Rock Band thing, but him and Nattie, it was a thing, damn it.

Dillon waited until Coke and Nate were out of sight. Then he turned on Tracy.

"Okay, what was that about?"

She looked at him, eyes laughing. "Quite possibly the cutest thing on earth, but you have to promise not to tease, because I'll hurt you if they stop."

"If it's that cute, I'll just watch and smile."

"The boys -- mostly Nate and Coke, but I've seen Fred and Coop play, too -- get lit and play Rock Band. I mean, the whole thing -- guitars, microphones, drums. Dancing, laughing." She winked at him. "It's adorable. Coke does a *mean* 'Back in Black.'"

How did he not know this?

"Wow. I mean, I've heard Coke rock out to 'Shook Me All Night Long' in the shower..." Oh, God. He had to go get a Rock Band set. Now.

"Well, this is less naked, but possibly more fun. Nate plays the drums more than the guitar, but Coke? Man, his fingers are smart. It's bizarre." Tracy scooped up the littlest one, who was tugging at her jeans.

"Yeah?" Dillon grinned at that. "So. Who wants to go into town? I mean, I know you just got here."

She grinned at him, conspiratorially. "We could leave the boys with the kids and go..."

"Oh, we could." Dillon plucked the little one from Tracy's arms and swung him around. "Let's find Daddy."

"Da!"

Tracy chuckled. "That's right. Daddy and Uncle Poppy."

Dillon whistled, headed for the back door, knowing Coke would be filling Nate in on all of the plans he had for an outdoor living space. They were gonna freeze.

Coke looked up as he opened the door, arms already open for Hailey to jump into. "Howdy, y'all."

"Mommy says to find you!"

Coke kissed the little girl on the nose. "Good job. What's up, Cowboy?"

"Tracy and I need to run into town. She forgot something. You two can watch the kids, eh?"

Coke was looking so happy. Nate and company were a good thing.

"Of course. We need some snacky things, huh?" Coke's smile just heated him up, made him feel more at home than he'd ever been.

"We do. We've just been thinking in terms of two." Dillon winked. "Anything special you want, babe?"

"Tracy makes a snack deal with cereal..." Coke looked charmingly hopeful.

"You up to that, hon?" When Tracy nodded, Dillon grinned. "Then we're on it."

"Come on, Nattie. I'll make some coffee for us and hot chocolate for the wee beasts." Coke herded everyone back in. "We've got a feast planned for Thursday, I swear."

"Yeah? I hear that Dillon's sister is a good cook." Nate winked over Coke's head.

He rolled his eyes, but Coke nodded. "She's a doll baby. Got some babies. It's going to be wild."

That was a spectacular avoidance of the question.

"She is a paragon among women. Come on, Tracy. Bundle up." He nodded at Nate. "I'll keep her safe."

"Of course you will." Nate handed Tracy some cash, kissed her. "Have fun shopping, baby."

"Mmm. Cash." She laughed and kissed the kids, too. "Y'all be good."

Then they were off. Dillon waited until they were in the truck to hand over his iPhone. "Can you find out if there's a store closer than Pocatello has Rock Band?"

"You got it, Dillon." She grinned over at him. "Thank you for the invitation, huh? It's nice to be with friends, family."

"I'm glad you guys could come." He meant it, too. He liked Tracy, and Nate and him had figured it.

"Okay, there's a WalMart closer. That'll work."

"Cool." He stopped at the end of the lane and peered at the screen when she showed him. "Got it."

"Good deal. I need to get some stuff to keep the kids occupied anyway."

"Cool. You guys have a good trip up?"

"We did. I mean, it's been a hard season this year somehow, and it's nice to be able to relax."

"Yeah." Yeah, there had been some suckage. "Did I even know we had a WalMart?"

"Well, Clown-Boy, how'm I supposed to know that?"

"You're not. Rhetorical. You know. Not needing an answer." He loved trading barbs with Tracy. She was good at it.

"Oh, right. Like that question about who's hotter, Joa or Balta, right?"

"Right. Because Balta has the ass and Joa has the belly." Dillon would never admit to another soul that he found the Brazilians hot as hell.

She nodded, chuckling softly. "And Joa is sweet and dear, but Balta... Uhn."

"He's a force of nature." They shared a glance of absolute agreement. "Ah. Wally World. Let's do this thing. Snacks and guitars ahoy."

Tracy chuckled, winked. "And a Coke for the pregnant lady."

Dillon laughed out loud, reaching over to pat her leg. "No, honey. Coke is mine."

They made bacon sandwiches for the kids and put some dog deal on for them to watch, then Coke and Nate went to sit at the kitchen table, eat their own lunches. "I tell you what, Nattie, those babies are something else."

Damn, he loved 'em. He was glad that he didn't have to have them full-time, though. They wore an old man out.

"Yeah." Nate gave him a bright grin. "Exhausting, aren't they?"

"Yep. You cleared out some time to work down to AJ's after Christmas?" They needed to work some shit out, with his neck not turning so good, and also Jason was going to start hitting the little rodeos, and they had to get that happening.

"Yeah. I got some time on the schedule. Long as Tracy stays healthy." Nate knocked on the table. He knocked, too. January would be early enough along, though. From what he'd seen, girls went weird and sick toward the end, if they were gonna do it.

"So. How's it going, Hoss?"

"I'm okay. Sore still, huh? That thing with Sammy at the Finals fucked my shit up. I been praying on it."

"I know." Nate's expression turned grim. "I thought on it a lot. Can't figure what we could've done."

"Me either, but we try. It's good to be here, though. Somewhere new." Somewhere with his Dillon.

"Shit, Hoss. It's freezing here." Winking, Nate sat back and sipped his milk. "Still, the kids will love it."

"Yep. I'm gonna make that little area outside nice and cozy, too. Heaters. Hot boxes. Good stuff." He had been working on a plan.

"Cool. You need any help this summer, you let me know."

He nodded, knowing full well that every free day this summer his best bud would be at home, loving on a new baby. "Y'all still heading to the beach for Christmas?"

"Yeah. Want to do it now. Keep me from getting calls, too." Nate hated to be interrupted at the holidays.

"I hear you. Sammy's going to be headed home by Christmas, Beau says. We're going to do Christmas here, go see them, then head to the Gardners' after the New Year."

"Sounds like a plan." They sat back after the food was gone, and Nate chuckled. "Want ice cream?"

He leaned and looked into the front room with the pile of kids and bassets, all sound asleep. "There's some good stuff in the freezer."

"Excellent. Any I shouldn't touch?" Nate was up and at the freezer in a heartbeat.

"Nope." He was the ice cream fiend. Dillon's snacks were of the candy variety.

"Cool." They both got a bowl of butter pecan. You could take the boy out of Texas...

They clacked their spoons together, smiled at each other, and dug in.

Dinner had been fab. Homemade French bread pizzas, salad, Tracy's cereal thingees with peanut butter in them and a layer of chocolate on top. Lord. They'd lingered over coffee, and the kids had all been put to bed. The bassets were sacked out from a long day of play. It was time.

"Should we tell them?" Dillon nudged Tracy.

"Tell us what? Did y'all get into trouble in town?"

"Huh? No!" Coke would think that. Dork. "No, we got you a present."

"A present?" Coke grinned. "Then, hell yeah! Tell!"

Tracy rolled her eyes. "Maybe we ought to make them wait."

Nate's eyes narrowed, staring her down. "Fess up, baby doll. What did y'all get?"

"Oh-ho! Dangerous man. Come on." Dillon led them all to the living room and made Tracy sit. "I'll get it."

Coke chuckled. "Did y'all find a movie?"

They'd needed a dolly to get all of it in. They'd gotten it all: drums, guitars, the stands, and microphones. And the console to play it all on.

"Dude." That was Nate, blinking. "Y'all! Dude!"

Coke looked over and blushed a dark red. "Tracy, you gave us up!"

"I did." Tracy laughed. "I had to. Dillon had to be in."

Coke looked a little flustered, but Nate nudged him. "Shit, Hoss. He'll be *good* at it. It'll be great. Help me get shit hooked up. Baby doll, get us a little liquid lubrication?"

Dillon chuckled. That was the spirit. He got Tracy sat down and went to get the beer. Nothing harder.

Coke and Nate were laughing already by the time he got back, packaging and wires everywhere. Tracy was watching them with a soft smile, and Dillon stood by the door, just staring for a minute. He could see Coke as a teenager, goofing off with a friend, relaxed and happy. It was a happy picture, and it made him wonder why he never heard stories about Coke from before he became a bullfighter.

Most guys, there was *something*. Coke just came fully formed. Like Athena out of Zeus' head. It was bizarre. "I brought the beer!"

"Yay!" The bullfighters cheered together, both of them sitting on the floor in front of the television.

Dillon cackled and handed out beer, and gave Tracy a Coke. He had a sparkling water, because he intended to sing.

It took half an hour and two beers per bullfighter, but there were soon guitars, microphones, drums, and five different sets of songs to choose from. Coke popped in a disc, handed Tracy the remote. "For the volume."

"I'm on it."

Dillon glanced at Tracy. "You don't play?"

She winked. "I'm the person in charge of noise and also the only girl allowed in the room. I take my responsibilities very seriously."

"Be good, woman. We bought you a tambourine for the house." Nate was already getting a little flushed.

A tambourine. Oh, God. Dillon popped up off the couch. "I have maracas! I'll be right back."

The laughter followed him all the way back to the little music room he had in the back.

"It figures you'd have maracas," Nate told him when he came back into the room.

Dillon flipped him off. "I know how to shake them, too."

Tracy bounced and took them. "We're starting with 'Shook Me All Night Long.' Get ready."

Dillon noticed Coke's eyes dragging over his body at the thought of shaking it.

Nice.

They might have to sneak out to the truck or something to get busy, but he could see it. Like, soon.

Nate tossed him the mic and they started, Tracy whispering explanations. Nate and Coke chose the hardest level, and when the song started, he damn near dropped his jaw. Look at Coke's fingers go.

In fact, he lost them the round because he purely forgot to sing, and even as good as they played, they couldn't save him.

"Sorry! Sorry. Can we start over?"

Nate hooted. "Absolutely!"

Apparently winning wasn't the goal, here. Goofing off was.

This time Dillon sang his heart out and proved that he had perfect pitch once and for all. Hell, two beers later he was singing Matchbox 20 and prowling around the front room like a kitty in heat. He could feel Coke's eyes on him, but to his lover's credit, not one beat was missed. Hell, Tracy gave him a standing ovation while Nate tossed him a beer.

His cheeks heated up, but hey, he was a performer, right? He cooled off with the beer, and with taking Jerome out to potty.

He heard the boys singing when he came out, Coke doing a respectable Def Leppard while Nate howled. Jerome's ears perked up and that long muzzle lifted, the hound puppy joining along.

Dillon laughed, grabbing a bacon on the way through the kitchen so Jerome would follow. By the time he got to the front room, Jerome was trotting and howling and Pansy was yarping along, her yodel much higher pitched. Tracy was rolling on the sofa, laughing so hard she held her stomach, and Nate was at the guitar, chicken walking across the floor like Chuck Berry. Dillon howled in time with the pups, and Coke really poured himself into it, wailing like a crazy man.

When the song ended, he landed in Coke's lap, the strong arms wrapping around him as the laughter filled the room.

Dillon thought about taking a kiss, but being a couple in front of people was still pretty new, so he settled for a hug. "You rock out good, babe."

"Thanks for the game, cowboy. I sure do like it." Coke looked awake, and more relaxed than Dillon had seen him since Sammy's accident.

"Me too!" Tracy was nodding a little all of a sudden, Pansy licking her hand where it dangled over the arm of the couch.

Nate grinned. "Been a long day, huh? All that traveling. Come on, baby. I bet Dillon's guest bathroom is bigger than our kitchen."

"Mmm. We could... I mean, I need a shower." She turned bright pink.

"Uh-huh." Standing, Nate held out a hand to his wife. "Night, y'all."

"Night, Nattie. Pancakes in the morning, huh?" It said something -- a lot -- that Coke didn't move him off to hug Tracy good night.

"You know it, Hoss." Nate and Tracy waved and disappeared, heading off to go do what they were gonna do.

Dillon nuzzled Coke's neck a little. "Happy, babe?"

"Mmm. I am. Love to hear you sing." Coke was humming, rocking him.

"I like to sing." He wiggled. "Like it better when you watch me dance."

Coke gave him a great, strangled little sound.

"Yeah. That was good huh?"

"Yes. It was. I love to watch you..." One hand slid over his thigh.

"Mmm. Wanna go lock ourselves in the bedroom?" He wanted privacy for what he was about to do.

"Hell yes." Coke's lips brushed the back of his neck. "Now is good for me."

"Cool." That was what he wanted to hear. They spent five minutes settling the bassets and turning stuff off. Then they headed for bed hand in hand.

Coke shut the door behind them, locked it, and leaned, smiling at him.

"Hey, babe." He turned, going right into Coke's arms.

"Cowboy." Coke's hands landed on his ass like they belonged there.

They did, really. Coke's and no one else's. "Missed you today."

"Yeah. It's good to have them here, but there's something nice about just... being."

"You know it." He leaned a moment, listening to Coke's heartbeat. "They had fun, though, huh?"

"They did." Coke's hand stroked through his hair, slow and easy, and his bullfighter hummed softly, sounding perfectly happy.

"Mmm. Love how you feel, babe." Coke was solid, warm.

"Good." Coke picked him up, carried him to the bed before he had a chance to point out that Coke wasn't supposed to be lifting. It was hot, though, so once he was down, what could he really complain about? Dillon wiggled out of his sweats, spreading a little.

Coke groaned, licked his lips, eyes wandering over his body as the man undressed. "Finest man in bullriding."

"Come and get me, babe." He'd put Coke on the bottom, actually, but Coke didn't need to know that yet.

The mattress dipped as Coke climbed on, and one hand slipped up his leg. "Gotcha."

"Mmm. Now what?" He could think of, like, a gazillion things.

"That's easy." Coke looked at him, serious as a heart attack. "I keep you."

"Yes." Oh, God, when Coke said shit like that, he just melted. "Come here, babe."

Coke got in push-up position, lowered himself down to cover Dillon. Hot.

"Don't hurt your back..." He had to register the protest, even if he was about to get lost in the kiss.

"Mmmhmm." Coke's tongue slid over his lips, asking to be let in.

Dillon opened up, letting this kiss go deep, slow, and exploratory. Coke was in a good mood. He melted down into the mattress, Coke heavy and solid on top of him. His hands moved, sliding along Coke's shoulders, down the man's ribs.

He could feel it, when Coke's muscles started to argue, tremble. The kiss never changed, though. Not a bit. Dillon hummed, easing Coke over on his side so they faced each other, and he pressed one leg up to meet Coke's cock.

"Dillon." Coke pushed down against him, bit at his bottom lip as they moved.

"Mine, babe. You're so mine." He couldn't ask for more than this, really. His Coke, laid out to love on.

"Yes." Coke's fingers tangled in his hair, pulled him in for another kiss.

His breath hitched, and Dillon had to have more. He rose up on his elbow to push Coke down on his back. Then Dillon crawled on top. He could feel Coke, hot and heavy against his thigh, pushing against him. He reached down between them without even thinking about it, his fingers closing around Coke, his thumb rubbing. Hot. So hot.

"Dillon." Coke spread, lips parting. "Fuck, good. More."

"Uh-huh." He could smell Coke's need, the heat, and Dillon kissed Coke's chin before heading south. He wanted a taste.

He spent a minute on those hard, dark little nipples, lips teasing one to a hard peak. He let his tongue dance with it a moment, too, really getting Coke good and sensitive. Sweet.

"Dillon. Dillon, fuck. I..." A tiny little bite had Coke jerking, cock leaking against him.

"Taste so good, babe." He licked a little to ease the sting before moving on, following his favorite glory trail of all time.

"Love your mouth." Coke's cock was waiting for him, curved over that ripped belly.

"Love tasting you." It was a great partnership. Like chocolate and peanut butter.

He lapped up the little clear drops at the tip, fingers going to stroke Coke's balls.

Coke moaned for him, muscles shifting under skin, the heat going up at least five notches in the room. Yeah. That was how he liked it. Coke's legs parted, hips moving slow and easy. Dillon played with the heavy balls, tickling the thin skin covering them even as he sank down and took Coke's prick all the way in. Deep.

He heard Coke's strangled cry, felt the fat cock throb on his tongue.

He loved how Coke responded to him, loved every breath and shiver and drop of precome. He went looking for more, tongue working up and down. His fingers slid back, circled Coke's hole, and Coke groaned, legs parting farther.

"Babe." His finger slid right inside Coke's body, which was tight and hot and amazing. So was the way Coke moaned.

"Yes. Want you." Coke's body squeezed his fingers.

"Me, too. I mean, I want you." He wanted whatever he could get.

"Good. Another finger, cowboy. I need."

"I got you, babe." He did. He had Coke so good. He put two fingers in.

One of Coke's legs drew up, and his lover moaned, riding him nice and easy.

"That's it." His lips moved against the head of Coke's prick, and his fingers pushed in and out rhythmically.

He glanced up. Coke's face was a study in need, in abandon. That look was his. Only his.

Dillon gave Coke another finger, knowing that would verge on pain. Not cause it, though. Just push Coke to the edge.

Coke grunted, cheeks flushing dark. "Oh, fuck."

"That's it." Dillon murmured a few other inane things before sucking Coke back in, needing to feel Coke's response.

One of Coke's hands landed on his head -- not pushing, but right there, solid, touching as that sweet prick swelled, jerked between his lips. Right there. Coke was right there. One deep push of his fingers, one more swallow, and Coke was calling out his name, spunk pouring into his mouth.

Dillon took it all, his hips rocking a little at the amazing flavor. Fuck, he loved that.

Coke sank to the mattress, murmuring broken words, fingers petting his hair.

"Better, babe?" Dillon kissed Coke's belly.

"Uhn." Ooh. Incoherence. He approved.

"Oh, good." He climbed up and started humping Coke's leg. Coke's fingers wrapped around him, strong and sure, helping him out. "Oh. Oh, yeah, babe. Harder."

"Anything." Coke had calluses on his calluses.

"I need more, babe." He needed pressure and friction.

Coke hauled him up to where he was straddling the broad chest, both hands wrapping around his cock and pulling hard enough his eyes crossed.

"Oh, fuck. Coke. Babe." Dillon rocked hard, his breath short, his balls pulling up.

"Mmmhmm. Gonna smell like you."

"Uh-huh. I taste like you." Dillon grinned, humping hard.

"Good." Coke's thumb rubbed hard over the tip of his cock, making him jerk. That was it. God, if Coke would just do that one more time... Coke teased him for two more strokes, then bingo. Paydirt.

"Coke!" Dillon spilled all over Coke's skin, his own hand and belly and leg. Hell, yes.

Coke groaned, rocked under him a little, then rubbed him right in. Fuck, that was... Yeah. It made his cock jerk, the final hurrah almost painful, it was so good.

When he stopped shaking and slumped down, Coke was smiling for him. Dillon got it. He felt like grinning, too.

"Thank you." Coke's eyes were closing.

"Mmmhmm." He'd classified Coke as 'passes out after sex' once. Some things didn't change.

Coke chuckled. "Wasn't talking to you, cowboy. Was talking to the good Lord *about* you."

"Oh." Oops. Dillon chuckled. "Ditto."

Coke patted his butt and boom.

El Zonko.

Laughing, he wiggled into a better sleeping position, one that wouldn't send Coke into paroxysms later in the night.

One arm curled around him, holding him close. Protecting him. That was his Coke, the cowboy protector. Even when he was unconscious. Dillon wouldn't have him any other way.

Chapter Eight

"Mister Coke! I think the turkey's burning!"

"Uncle Poppy? Can we play merry-go-round?"

"Coke, honey, can you grab that big platter?"

"Hoss, I think the toilet's backed up. Y'all got a plunger?"

By the time Thanksgiving supper was ready, Coke had a vicious headache and no appetite. He said a prayer over everything, handed out plates, and headed down to the barn for a walk. Of course, about the time he got there, his phone rang for the fortieth time. Jason.

"Hey, son. Happy Thanksgiving."

"Hey, Gramps! When're you coming to see me?"

"Is that Gramps? Say hey for me." It sounded just as loud at Jason's place.

"I'll be out there after the holidays, son. I have to go see Sam Bell and then I'll come. How's folks?" His head was gonna explode.

"Good. I-- It's loud, you know?"

Oh, fuck a doodle. He nodded, sending up a quick apology for bitching. "I bet it is, son. You got fifty thousand Gardners there. I bet Mrs. Gardner made sausage balls, though. Those are good."

"She did. Bax snuck me a beer. Just one."

"Good deal. I miss you, Jase. I'm ready to see you. What do you want for Christmas?"

"To see Bax."

He winced, sighed. "I can't do that for you."

"I know." Jase sighed. "Sorry, Gramps. Guess I'm getting maudlin. Looking forward to y'all coming."

"I'll be there with bells on." Then Jason could hear him coming.

"Cool. Okay, Gramps. I'll let you go. Tell the clown hello. Happy Thanksgiving."

"Happy Thanksgiving, Jase. Give those babies hugs." He hung up and sat down, taking one slow breath, then another.

His head eased up a little, the pounding dropping to a dull roar. His eyelids drooped, and he had no idea how long he dozed before a very cold nose pushed into his hand.

He let his hand drop down, stroking Pansy's ears. "Hey, baby girl. What's up?"

She whined a little, her big, fat paw swacking his leg. She did that when she was agitated.

"No swacking." He blinked at her, smiled. "Guess I'd better get up, go eat."

Except he couldn't. It was cold and his muscles just wouldn't go. Well, fuck.

"Hey, babe. You've been here a bit." Oh, Dillon had a knack.

"Yeah?" He looked up, just a little worried. "I'm a little froze."

"Shit, babe." Dill came and hugged him tight, that compact body radiating heat.

"Oh." He groaned as his back screamed, his neck going crazy. Still, it felt good, the warm.

"Shh. Just relax into it, babe. Then we'll get you up to the house and get you a shower."

"We got comp'ny, cowboy."

"Mmmhmm. They're watching football and napping." Had he been out there that long?

"Oh." He might have to take a pain pill.

"You need me to get you a hot blanket or something, babe? There's the hot tub. You could soak." His cowboy was purely worried.

"I don't want to make a fuss. Just pull me up, the back will remember how to do its thing."

"Okay." Dillon got a hold under his arms and helped him unfold. His muscles screamed, but he made it.

"Thanks." The word didn't have a lot of air to it, but he managed to start walking. One foot after another.

Nattie met them at the fence, eyes narrowed. "Oh, Hoss..."

"Hush." Folks hurt sometimes.

"I think we ought to fire up the hot tub," Dillon said, smiling. "We need to test it out. There's heated tiles, and I can make hot chocolate!"

"I'll get his pills and a plate of food for him, huh?"

"I'm fine, y'all."

"Yep. We know. It's a holiday. Let me spoil you." Dillon led him to the kitchen, where warmth still lingered from the cooking.

Tracy looked in, shook her head. "Nate."

"I got it, baby girl."

Nate looked at Dillon. "Where's his meds?"

"Y'all!"

Tracy gave him a look. "Hush. You want gravy on your stuffing? You'll need to eat with your pills."

"Here." Dillon shook his head, going for Coke's pill box, looking a little gobsmacked.

"Good deal." Tracy sat him down; Nate brought him milk and pulled out a muscle relaxant from his own stash. Tracy took his hat off, took his phone, and kissed his cheek. "Coke, you know all you have to do is tell us when you have a headache coming on. I hate that you let them go so long."

"Don't fuss, girlie."

She snorted. "Coke Pharris, I was the one that cleaned you up during the first broken neck. I've earned the right to fuss."

Coke's cheeks heated, and Dillon kept his head down, handing Nate the box where he kept his meds, Nate sorting through and getting him the migraine pills Doc gave him. "I'll go get your trunks and a robe, babe."

"Hey." He scowled at Tracy and Nate a second. "Dillon, stay, huh?" He'd be damned if his cowboy felt like it wasn't Dillon's place to take care.

Nate looked at Tracy, who nodded. "I think I hear the kids. We'll be back."

"Sure, babe. Sure." Dillon patted Tracy's arm as they passed each other, coming to touch his cheek. "You gonna make it?"

"Shit, yeah. I just get headaches sometimes, huh? From the first bad break. Been a long time." He leaned into the touch, smiling as Dillon grabbed the pills, pushed them on him.

"Well, take these and have a little food, and then we'll go from there." Dillon stroked the back of his neck.

He took a shaky breath. "I'm not trying to be trouble." God, that touch felt good.

"I know that, babe. Don't be silly." Dillon loved on him, nice and slow, lulling him a little.

He leaned forward, almost landing in the food. Right. Food. He should prob'ly eat.

"How about a little bread? Dinner rolls. Nice and soft and should sit okay." Dillon let him lean, pressing a tiny bite to his lips.

"Mmm. Smells good." He rested, nibbled, letting Dillon love on him some.

"It's all amazing. We did good. Thank God a Thanksgiving feast tastes just as good left over." Dillon chuckled.

"Everybody have fun?" The headache was easing off, leaving him a little shaky, sweaty.

"Yeah. The kids had a blast. I'm surprised the bassets didn't explode." Dillon's sister had been there, too. She must have left. Lord.

"I'm sorry about pooping out. I didn't mean to fall asleep."

"Hush." That hand just kept moving, easing the pain in his neck and back. He blinked, the muscles slowly letting go, letting him relax.

"That's better. Oh, so much better." He got a tiny bite of turkey, some bright cranberry. Then some fruit salad, some dressing.

He thought he heard Nattie, asking Dillon if they needed any help.

Dillon murmured something that sounded like a no, but thanks. The man was focused on him, for sure.

The world got real slow, lazy, and he chuckled softly. "Can we have some pie?"

"We can. What kind do you want, babe?" Dillon moved, helping him up, and they went to the front room, where he sank down in the comfy recliner.

"Pecan, if we have it."

One of Nattie's wee babies toddled over to him, and he held out his arms.

"No lifting, Hoss. I'll put him in your lap, if you want."

"Yeah. That'd be good." Nate lifted the baby up, and Dillon put a heat pad on Coke's neck, and Tracy went to get pie. The day was looking a lot better.

When his cowboy settled on the arm of his recliner, the day was just fine.

Wow.

Wow, poor Coke. The man was sound asleep in the recliner, a toddler in each arm. The pie and the pain pill had kicked in, and there was snoring and a serious aww factor.

Dillon followed Tracy to the kitchen, carrying pie-smearred plates and coffee mugs. "Does Coke get headaches like this often? I mean, this is the first once since..."

"He used to, all the time. After the first break, they were constant. I haven't seen one in... Nate? Over a year?"

Nate had come in behind him to pour another cup of coffee. "Yeah. It's worse in the cold."

"That's the muscles, though, in his neck." Tracy started washing, winked at him. "Bullfighters have these weird things. Nate? Wakes up with leg cramps so bad he screams and walks for hours. Coop shakes all the time now, and Fred's butt is numb."

"I don't think I wanted to know that about Fred." He tried a smile, but it was a little less than bright.

"Hey, you just need to learn the signs. I think it's great that he hasn't had one in so long. You must ease him."

"I try." He hated to see Coke hurt. "He gets lots of shoulder rubs."

"Good deal. He worked hard today, and I caught him picking up kids more than once. He forgets."

"Well, now that I know, I won't." He winked, knocked Nate on the arm. "Don't worry about the dishes, eh? Just put them in the sink."

Tracy had done most of the clean-up with Dillon's sister. He could do the rest.

"Bah. You go get Hoss in the hot tub. Me and Tracy were gonna take the kids into town to that Santa movie, if y'all don't mind."

"I don't mind a bit." Dillon hugged Tracy. "Thanks, you guys."

Tracy winked at him. "If you'll let us borrow a house key, we won't bother you when we come back in."

"Oh, sure. Hey, take my truck, too, huh? It has snow tires." He handed over the keys easily.

"I'll finish here. Nate, bundle babies. Dillon, get Coke into bubbly water before he volunteers to help."

"Got it."

When he headed back into the front room, Coke was blinky but awake, and trying to get up. "Hey, babe. I got your trunks."

"We goin' swimming?" Coke gave him this warm, sweet smile.

"Soaking." He heard the door close behind Nate and company. "In fact, we don't need shorts. Everyone else went to a movie."

"Oh? You didn't want to go?" Coke let Dillon lead him into the bedroom, where the door to the hot tub waited.

"Nope. I wanted to soak and be quiet with you." Dillon grinned. "It was crazy today."

"It was. I didn't ruin the dinner, did I?"

"No, babe." Dillon hugged Coke gently. "Everyone had a great time."

"The pie was good." Coke's arms wrapped around him. "Water. Soaking. Together."

"Yeah. I got it fired up while you were napping." Steam was pouring out, and the heated tiles would keep their feet warm. Coke let him strip them down, then they headed out, wrapped in their heavy robes.

Dillon was suddenly glad he'd had the tub put in, especially when Coke slid into the water up to his neck. The sound Coke made was worth it all.

Coke drew him right in close, nuzzled his temple.
"Cowboy."

"Hey, you." Dillon took a kiss. "Better?"

"Mmm. Head's doing good."

"Your back?" He could almost feel Coke melt.

"Feels like heaven in here."

"It does." Mainly because he was there with Coke.
He loved that man silly.

Coke's fingers moved nice and slow, petting him.
"Your sister did good, honey. She says y'all don't usually have so many folks at Thanksgiving."

"Nope. Christmas should be much quieter." Thing was, with folks in the area knowing not just Coke but Nate was there, cousins had turned up from all over. Their kids had all wanted to meet the famous bullfighters. It was a little embarrassing.

"What do you want for Christmas?" Coke was starting to kiss his shoulders.

"Huh? Oh, I'm easy, babe." He didn't really care as long as they had time together. "Not fruitcake."

"No. No, I don't like that. I think we should make snacky foods and just relax."

"Yeah?" He could see that. That would be a hoot.
"Sue will have roast and shit, we can drop by. We'll do simple here."

"Good deal." Coke sighed, but it didn't sound pained.
"Jesus, I haven't had a headache like that in a long time."

"I had never seen it." He wasn't bitching; he just needed to know these things.

"Sorta hoped you wouldn't have to."

"Oh." Well, he could see that, he guessed. "I need to know how to take care of you as good as you do me, babe."

Coke hummed, nodded. "That's fair."

"Mmmhmm." Damn, the bubbles felt good. Dillon hadn't realized he was so tense, too.

"Happy Thanksgiving, Dillon." Coke sounded purely happy.

"Same to you, babe. I hope it was a decent one, even with everything."

"It was great. We were together."

"We were. Our first." He would bet that Coke would be hungry after they got out of the water.

"We'll get better at it every year."

"You know it." He and Coke would have a lot of years to practice. Dillon was gonna make sure of that. No matter what.

Chapter Nine

"Okay, Hoss. I'll call you. We're meeting at AJ's on the third?"

Coke hugged Nate, nodded. "That's the plan, Nattie. We got work to do. Enjoy the beach."

The snow was coming down hard, so their company was leaving a day early to make sure they got to the airport.

"You stay warm, Hoss." Nate grinned. "Don't get too froze."

"I won't. Dillon's making a fire up right now." A fire, popcorn, and blankets on the sofa. Coke was ready.

"Cool." Tracy came over and hugged him, too. "You be good to him. He's got it bad for you."

"I am good to him. You take care of all my babies. Love y'all. Call me at Christmas."

"We will, Hoss." Nate and Tracy started herding kids, and Dillon came back in to hug and kiss everyone before corralling the pups.

He waved and grinned and watched until they were just a dot, then he sighed, smiled. Lord knew he loved folks, but it was time to have himself a cowboy.

Dillon let the puppers out, let them in, dried them off, then turned to him. "Hey, you."

"Hey, cowboy." He grinned. "We're alone again."

"We are! It's amazing. I got the fire going in the front room and in the firepit that you and Nate put out by the hot tub."

Look at that. Dillon giving him choices.

"Let's take a dip, then spend the evening on the couch." Dillon was a champion snuggler, especially when there were Christmas specials to watch.

"That sounds like a plan. I think there might be Rudolph on tonight." Dillon started stripping right

down. They'd begun leaving their robes by the back door. Dillon was promising to get a towel-warming rack.

He had been working on a backyard eating/soaking/relaxing area. Coke wanted to come up for a few weeks in the summer, make it all ready for next year.

This whole snow thing made it hard to get out and do. But he had plans. Dillon helped him on with his robe, and they went out, the cold taking his breath for a moment. The snow was coming down, though, and it was a little magical. They hurried to the hot tub, the fire out there sparkling and bright.

"Mmm. I should have made hot chocolate." Dillon had made sure the decking around the hot tub was clear, so they could slip right in.

"We'll make some inside." He watched the bassets bursting through the doggie door to say hi, then barreling back in.

Chuckling, Dillon floated close. "We need to get you a hat. Like a knitted one. I'll tell Susan."

He snorted, grabbed that lean body, and drew Dillon onto his lap. "She a knitter?"

"She's something. I'm not sure what. She has all this yarn..."

"Yeah." He could sort of get it. He had a workshop.

"I mean more yarn than she could ever use." Dillon chuckled. "Kind of like my iTunes."

"Ah." That, he got. "You have the best music, though."

"I try." Dillon did a little dance of some kind, sloshing water all over.

"Oh... dancing. Love your dancing."

"Yeah?" That always seemed to make Dillon happy, that he liked it so.

"God, yes. I... When I, you know..." He made the universal jack-off sign. "That's what I think about."

Dillon's cheeks went hot, those hands coming up to touch his shoulders. "Oh."

"I can't help it. You move and it's purely hot." Better than porn.

"I'm glad you like, babe. I like you watching." Dillon grinned, so close Coke's eyes crossed trying to see.

Coke stole a kiss, hands on that pretty heinie, moving Dillon up against him.

"Feels so good, babe."

"Mmmhmm." He'd never been in a place where he was so happy to have no company.

Especially when Dillon started kissing him, mouth cool to begin with, then heating up. He moaned, hands squeezing that hot ass, rocking them together. Dillon grunted, pushing against him.

"Hungry cowboy." He could do this forever.

"I am. I need my Coke time." Dillon's fingers dug into his shoulders. "I've gotten greedy."

"Yes. I never wanted them to leave before."

"I hope that's not bad." Dillon laughed a little. "I know they're family."

"They are, but..." They weren't Dillon.

"It's okay, babe. You would have been happy if they'd stayed until tomorrow."

He chuckled. "I want to be able to make you come while we're sitting on the sofa, though." Sometimes he liked to say things to make Dillon hot.

Dillon's pupils dilated on cue, that Adam's apple bobbing as the man swallowed. "Yes. Okay. Here first?"

"Yeah. Here first, cowboy." He patted Dillon's ass, took that open mouth.

Dillon kissed him back like there was no tomorrow, like his cowboy would eat him up faster than

Thanksgiving dinner. Yum. His cock was sliding along Dillon's crease, teasing and rubbing and slipping.

"Babe. Oh, God."

"Want." He wanted bad enough it ached.

"I know. I didn't bring anything."

Damn. They could just rub, though. "Rubbing works, for the first go-round."

"Uh-huh." Dillon's tongue stuck out a little, that lean body moving faster and faster.

"Want to, though. Be in you. Feel you all around me." This was a fun game.

"Oh. Please." Dillon nodded, which jostled things all the way up and down. He wanted to tease more, but he needed a kiss right then. He got it, Dillon diving right in, just wow.

He wrapped one arm around Dillon's neck, tongue pushing between the parted lips so he could taste.

They moved faster, the friction not as good in the water as out, but the heat and steam felt amazing. He groaned, bit on Dillon's bottom lip a little.

"Uhn." Dillon's hips popped, hard, smacking against him.

That's it. Come on. Come on. He grabbed on tight.

Dillon cried out, head falling back, hips rocking and rolling against his. He could feel it when Dillon came for him, even in the hot water.

"Damn, cowboy." That felt good.

"Hell, yes." Dillon rested against him, the water pushing them together gently.

He chuckled, kissed Dillon's forehead. "It's snowing out there."

"It is. I swear, it must be in your honor, to get so much this early in the season." Those hands rubbed his neck, keeping it good and warm.

"It knows I'm not used to it."

"There you go. You ready to dry off and snuggle?"

"You know I am." Dillon, him, blankets, touching.

"Cool. Okay, let me get out first," Coke had slipped once at a hotel hot tub, and ever since Dillon had insisted on being where he could help.

"Take good care of me." He took Dillon's hand, hopped out, and grabbed a huge, warm towel.

"Mmm." His robe was slipped over his arms and shoulders, and Dillon led him inside.

He followed along, humming softly, the pups sitting, wagging, watching them. As soon as it was clear they were going for the couch, Pansy and Jerome hopped up and settled, blinking innocently. Coke chuckled. He'd fought the puppies on the sofa fight valiantly, and lost.

"Well, someone's ready. I bet they want to watch *Bolt*." The pups loved dog movies. It was crazy. "I think I'd rather go for Indiana Jones, eh?"

"Oh, I love that one. I saw it when I was a kid." He hadn't seen a lot of movies in the theater.

"Cool." Dillon popped in the movie and bustled around, getting blankets and drinks and basically being beboppy. Coke settled on the sofa and watched. It was one of his favorite things. Ever.

That fine ass showed through, even in the robe. Like a tight little bubble. And it wiggled. He put the blanket over him, slowly rubbing his prick while he watched. By the time Dillon got back with the hot chocolate, he was on his way to happy. Dillon raised a brow.

He slowed his touch. "What?"

"Starting without me?"

"Just watching you."

"I feel like I should bump and grind, but not in front of the babies."

"No. You'll traumatize my Pansy."

"Exactly." Dillon slid in next to him on the couch, snuggling up.

He wrapped one hand around Dillon's hip, settled the blankets. "This good?"

"This is grand." Keying up the remote, Dillon started the movie.

"Hell, yeah." It was perfect.

Perfect.

Chapter Ten

"So, what should I get Coke for Christmas?" Dillon tilted the phone up under his ear, doing the dance of cooking and talking at the same time.

"Porn?" He heard Sam Bell's laugh, low and husky.

God, it was good to hear Sammy's voice. For a bit there, he'd thought it would never happen again. "I could get the video camera, I guess. Give him home movies."

"Uh-huh. I came to get Beau a truck box for the hammer and wire. A new one." The brain injury had scrambled Sammy's ability to talk a little, but it was so good to know he was still in there.

"That's cool, man. I was thinking of a snowmobile..."
Mmm. Bacon.

"Oh, yeah? Coke likes to spin the four-wheelers. That's four-wheelers in the snow. I walk to come and try." Right, like Beau'd allow that.

"Anytime, Sammy. You know I like speed."

"You come to see us?"

"Yeah. Yeah, we're planning to after Christmas."

"Good. Beau can cook." Sammy laughed, and he heard Beau's soft, teasing voice.

"Coke will be tickled. Me? I'll sneak in McDonald's."

"Bring me a shake."

"I will. Give Beau a big hug for Coke and pinch his butt for me, huh?" Beau would laugh like a loon at the very idea.

"I will. Tell Nate happy Santa."

Nate. Jesus. "You know it, Sammy. Love you." He never, ever wanted his friend not to know that.

"Love you, man. Going." Click.

He chuckled, shook his head. Lord.

Coke's cell phone started ringing in the living room. He knew Coke was outside, working on the hot tub cover.

Dillon bebopped out and got it, taking it back to his bacon. "Lo?"

"Gramps? It's Aje. Missy's all swollen and she's going into the hospital."

"Coke is outside. Hold on, huh?" This was important enough to have Coke actually talk to AJ, even if they couldn't do anything.

He went to the door and waved and banged a little, not willing to leave his bacon. It would burn in a flash. Coke looked up, all bundled up, gimme cap on. He got a nod, then Coke came in, bassets at his heels.

Dillon handed over the phone, stopping Jerome mid-leap to the stove.

"Lo? Hey, son, what's... Oh, man. Man, that sucks. What do you need me to do?"

Dillon turned, making slashing motions across his throat with the tongs. They were not going down there early. AJ had, like, a bazillion siblings.

Coke's eyebrow went up. "Huh?"

"We'll come down after Christmas." He didn't shout it or anything, but he wanted to make sure Coke didn't promise.

"I promised Beau I'd stop by, but then I'll come help." Coke sighed, shook his head. "I don't know, AJ. Ask your momma."

Poor Coke. The man hated to have to say no. Still, he had to learn. This was their life now, damn it.

Dillon kept one ear open and got the bacon out of the pan. Not burned. Yay.

"I... Son, you know you can call any time, but I'm way up north. I ain't at my house."

Go Coke. Dillon was proud. Of course he wanted to help AJ, but the man had a ton of family. They could see what Missy was actually up against, then make a decision.

"Yeah. Yeah, okay. You call, huh? Uh-huh. Good deal. Tell Jase to holler. Right." Coke sighed, hung up the phone.

"You okay, babe?" He slid a plate of food down in front of Coke, hoping that would help.

"Smells good." Coke grabbed a fork. "I'm fine. A little guilty for not helping, but..."

"But AJ has people." Dillon grinned. "And we can't help until we know what it is."

"Right. And I'm here. With you."

"You are." He slid his arms around Coke. "Do you think I'm a bad person?"

"What?" Coke's eyes went comically wide.

"I mean, for wanting it to be just us for Christmas." He didn't want Coke to think he was an ass. He was. He knew it. But still.

"Shut up, cowboy, and come eat. This looks perfect." Coke drew him into a kiss that said a ton about whether Coke thought he was awful.

"Mmm. Okay." He plopped down on Coke's lap. Coke's arm wrapped around his waist. "Bacon?" He held a piece of bacon to Coke's lips.

"Absolutely. I'm a fan." Coke opened right up.

He fed Coke the bacon, then licked his fingers. "Me, too."

Coke grinned, nipped at his fingers. "Then get you a bite."

"I just did." Dillon chuckled, but munched at the bacon, too.

Coke relaxed, and between them they cleaned the plate.

"I should put the other in the microwave, huh?" He'd learned that from Coke, just like he'd learned it was okay to leave the butter out on the table and not immediately stuff things in the fridge.

"Mmmhmm. I think so. We should go to town or something. Go see if we can't find our Christmas tree."

"Oh, that's a good idea." He hugged on Coke for just a moment before hopping up. "Did your folks do a big tree?"

"They had a fake one, but I thought it was. You should see the one at Mrs. Gardner's. It's huge."

"Does she do real?" Sometimes it was bizarre how Coke avoided talking about family.

"She does, and it's huge. Tons of ornaments and stuff. Christmas there is wild."

"I bet." Dillon cleaned up a bit, humming, before he glanced at Coke. "Did I ever ask why you don't get along with your family?"

"Probably." Coke went over to the coffee pot, poured two mugs.

"Oh." Wow. That was definite. "Okay. I'm sorry, babe."

"No apologies needed." Coke handed him his mug. "I have lots of family -- cowboys every one."

"Yeah. This is true." Dillon thought on it for a moment. "Who's been around the longest? I mean, now that Daniel Scott is gone?"

"John Dalton, I reckon. Him and Lefty were the ones that helped me."

"Yeah? I like Lefty." Dillon hadn't worked with either man, but they'd been around all his adult life.

Coke nodded. "Lefty is a good man. Understanding. Solid."

Dillon filed that away in a tiny part of his mind. He wanted to ask Lefty some questions.

"Drink your coffee, cowboy. We have errands to run."

"Yeah. We need ornaments, too." He winked. "Sis has most of my ones from when I was a kid."

"Yeah? That's neat. What's your favorite?"

"I had this terrible glittery snowflake." He should get the wives he knew to get their kids to send ornaments for him and Coke...

"Oh, now. We need that on the tree."

"I'll call Susan." He grinned. She would be happy to get rid of some of his childhood foibles. He'd just never had his own tree that wasn't tiny.

"Good deal." Coke nodded. "I ain't never needed one. I always go visit someone."

"Well, this year we'll do it up right." Dillon pulled Coke to his feet. "Let's bundle you up."

"Yep. Let the babies out, I'll fetch our coats."

"Got it." Dillon let the puppers out, let them in, all that jazz. In his head, he was making all sorts of lists about what they needed to get and what all he needed to do. If he made a note to call Lefty later in the week, well, that was okay, too.

He could hear Coke whistling, the sound happy as hell. Made him feel good to know that his bullfighter was so relaxed and easy.

He would do whatever he could to keep it that way, too. Coke deserved some happiness and a lot of love. Dillon figured he was just the guy to provide it.

Lucky him.

End