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Men on Holiday



Carol McKenzie

Cowboys' Christmas

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**Cowboys' Christmas
From MEN: On Holiday
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Chapter One



Blake Kingsley pulled his truck and fifth wheel into a vacant island of Huck's Gas Mart in downtown Longview, Washington, and stopped the engine. He climbed out and put his gray Stetson on his head. Heavy, cold rain beat down on the overhang and the air smelled of gasoline. He lifted the nozzle, pressed the mid-grade button and pumped forty dollars worth of gas into his tank, mumbling his displeasure the whole time. When he finished, he put handle back and ambled toward the pay station, the soles of his boots smacking in puddles.

A sleepy-eyed, brunette attendant behind a counter looked at him over her gold-rimmed glasses and blinked long, curling lashes.

Tipping onto his toes, he drew a couple of wadded bills from his tight jeans' pocket and placed them on the steel counter.

The attendant took them without a word.

"Thank you, Ma'am," he said and returned to his truck.

He climbed into the cab, closed the door and within the minute, drove toward Kalama, Washington, taking the interstate north. Pangs of loneliness entered his system again. He thought about his family; those alive and dead. *I need to make a call.* He retrieved his cell phone from the center console. Without swerving off the road, he dialed his sister in Rufus, Oregon.

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"Katy, this season's done. Thank God."

"I hope you come home." Her voice sounded creaky. He imagined her soft, freckled face and auburn, curly hair. "It's been quiet here since mom and dad's died."

A picture of their parent's crumpled automobile, with blood on the seats the day after their head on collision in Medford played in his mind. The horrible call from the emergency room had come announcing their demise. He gulped air in his sadness.

His sister sighed, bringing him back to the here and now. "Things are fallin' apart around this ol' place. Frank's not into ranchin'. He can't even ride a horse."

Blake wiped a tear from the corner of his eye and the remembrance ended. He clucked his tongue, recalling her tenderfoot boyfriend, Frank. "I'll bet." A misplaced smile quirked at the corners of his lips. *It's best I change the subject, or she'll cry.* "What do you want for Christmas, sis?"

"Just get here safely. We'll have a nice holiday, if you come. I'm invitin' you, you know."

"I'll spring for the turkey, if I was to come," Blake said and placed his Stetson on the passenger seat.

"So, how are you doin' otherwise, little brother?"

"It's best you not ask, 'cause right now, I'm in a piss poor mood."

"Why's that?"

"These friggin' gas prices suck. They're high as hell. It costs too much drivin' the circuit anymore. I'm twenty-eight and gettin' too old for bustin' brones."

"Get a different job, then. Stay home, settle down. Maybe get a job as, I dunno, be a cop."

"I've done ruint my back."

"Maybe it's time to quit."

"I've got to think about it. See you."

"Tell your buddy hi. Oh, and call when you get close."

"Will do."

Once he put the cell phone back in the case and closed the console lid, he took a left onto a different highway and began thinking about

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what Katy didn't know—his ideas on sexual preferences. *It'd shock her to death.* He thought about his job situation, too. *Maybe I'll work the farm. Or become a cop.* At a stoplight he lit a cigarette and slid the Bic back into the pocket of his blue western shirt. *Right now, all I do is get out there and risk life and limb...for what? To give the audience thrills, and all I get is a few measly dollars. Shit. I must have rocks in my fuckin' head. What the hell am I goin' to do? Should I rodeo another year, or quit? Cops' lives are always in danger. Maybe my back ain't in good enough shape to do that kind of work.*

He coughed, took another drag off his Benson & Hedges and glanced at the speedometer. The dial read he was going five miles per hour over the speed limit. He raised his foot a bit on the gas pedal until the needle stopped just over sixty-five. An elongated sigh left his lips.

He passed several dense, vast forested areas. The dark green fir trees alongside the road forked upward toward a gloomy, cloudy sky. Rain splattered on the windshield as the wipers thump-thump-thumped. When he stopped at a sign, he flicked his cigarette out the window into a mud puddle. He turned the satellite's radio knob to a country-western station and hummed along with George Strait who sang *Easy Come, Easy Go*.

As he started driving, his thoughts turned to a better subject. *Yeah, I'll park this thing and take a rest. Gettin' a mess of Riley will make me feel better.* The U-Shine Car Wash caught Blake's eye. *Maybe I should unhook this thing and wash the road dust off my pickup.* He decided to keep on trucking, wanting to get to his destination before dark and get a space rented. *I'll wash it tomorrow.*

Mid-afternoon, driving along on I-5, he gazed out upon the sparkling Columbia River near his exit. Slow barges made their way north and west; a breathtaking sight.

Once off the interstate and in town, he drove down the main drag looking for the old, peeling sign that read Campground--Marty's Trailer Spaces--Weekly and Monthly Rates. Blake passed the launderette and the post office. He traveled two blocks past the totem pole, the Lone Pine Cafe and made a right just like he had at previous season's end.

I'll rest. Maybe spend part of the winter with my ol' buddy.

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He pictured his pal, Riley S. Campbell, when he last saw him over a year earlier. He stood five ten and had a slim, strong build. Blake never thought to ask his exact age, but he guessed it to be around twenty-eight. He'd worn hand-tooled boots and a belt that sported a silver Texas longhorn buckle. Riley's onyx gaze seemed to penetrate his soul and mind. Worn jeans, most of the time faded, encased a well-shaped ass. Blake began to feel the slide of him coming inside his body. *Damn, I've missed him. He'll be a sight for sore eyes.*

Chapter Two



Riley shaved, showered and changed into a clean pair of boxers and a gray tee-shirt that read Calgary Stampede '07 across the back. He hitched his Wrangler jeans up strong, hair-dappled legs, buttoned and zipped them closed. Using a light touch, he patted Obsession cologne on his cheeks while he peered into the mirror. Using long strokes, he combed his short, raven hair. He left the ivory, well-lighted room, padded across the carpeting and took a seat on the edge of the bed. Harsh, morning sunlight peeked through the east window and dotted the bed, giving his sister's spare bedroom an artistic, Impressionistic appearance. He'd begun pulling a boot with its rounded toe and horse-man heel onto his stockinged foot, when he heard footsteps coming up the hallway.

Marla. He glanced at his suitcases standing in the corner of the room and pulled on his second boot. *I need to tell her something I've been meaning to say for years. Maybe I'll do it today.*

"You up, Riley?" she asked in her unique, musical tone from the hallway. It reminded him of Texas and his childhood. "I've got breakfast waitin' for you on the table."

Throughout his early years, her voice cheered him out of his gloomiest moods. For a second or two, he gazed at the partially opened door, having a light flashback of his father spanking him with his belt and his

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sister coming to talk him out of the depression that followed. "Okay, Marla."

"Did I hear you groanin' a minute ago?" She peered in and drew a few strands of dark hair behind her ear.

"Yeah." He shoved his belt through all the loops on the waistband of his jeans and fastened the steer head silver buckle in front.

"What's wrong?"

"Ahhh. My back's actin' up."

"Damn, li'l brother. You're only thirty."

"Hold on." He left his Stetson on the bed and traipsed to the door, grasped the knob and pulled it open. Marla smiled up at him batting her curling, dark brown lashes.

"You want to come down and eat? Jeff's gone to work earlier. They were havin' trouble and needed him. I thought you and I could finally have a heart to heart. The sun's a shinin' and the boys can play outside."

"Sounds good." He'd been here three days already and hadn't had a chance to sit down with his sister Marla and have a meaningful conversation. Their friends came over occasionally, and Jeff constantly needed her attention. "Sure. Lead the way, Marla."

"Okay." In the hallway, his sister began walking ahead of him past the boys' bedroom. "Now tell me about what happened."

"About what?"

"How you injured yourself."

"Ohhhh." He gazed at the straight, raven hair tumbling down her back as they walked. "A mare at a Sheridan rodeo fell on me one night." He grasped the banister and smiled down at her cute boys playing cowboys and Indians, shooting at one another between the large, over-stuffed sofas and matching chair. Their Irish setter loped to the opposite side of the room and disappeared out the doggie door.

"Is that when the pain started?"

"Ever since that one ride, it's given me fits. I guess my backache is caused from a whole slew of misfortune, really. Some days are worse than others and there are days it doesn't hurt. Maybe it'll feel good today," he said as he peered down at the living and dining rooms.

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"God, I hope so."

"It's not hurting now."

"Why don't you stop at the chiropractor's office today? I've heard he can work wonders on backs."

He followed her toward the stairs of their luxurious log home, which smelled of bacon, eggs and cinnamon rolls. Spurred on by the delicious scents, he snapped the sleeves at his wrists, thinking it was about time he told her. In his family, she was the only one left alive he dearly loved. "I would, but I'm leavin'."

"For where?"

"Kalama."

She stopped for a moment. The skin between her brows rumpling as she peered at him. "You just got here."

He shrugged. "I'm meetin' someone." He made a gesture for her to go down first.

"Uh...you are?" she asked a quarter of the way down. "A friend, eh?"

"Yep."

The four year old twins, Matt and Mark, dropped their plastic six shooters and scurried across the hardwood floor and grabbed onto their uncle's legs the moment he set foot on the living room carpeting.

Their house was the lightest, airiest home he'd ever remembered seeing. If he lived in a house instead of the fifth wheel, he would want one just like theirs.

Matt ran across the room, his hands spread. He wore a red cowboy hat and carried a toy gun. "Less pway horsies, unca Wylie."

"Ohhh."

"Honey, Uncle Riley is going to drink some coffee and talk to mommy for a little while."

The suggestion made him wince at the pain two bouncing, mischievous boys could cause.

"Yay!" Mark yelled.

"Horsie ride, horsie ride."

"Boys, I can't play that this morning."

"Why not?" asked the brown-haired, pouting Mark.

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"This horsie's got a busted back, boys."

"What happened?" Matt asked.

"If you promise to eat your Fruit Loops, I'll tell you all about it."

"I'd like to hear this," Marla said as she poured him a large, green mug of coffee.

They sipped coffees and watched, smiling as the boys settled in their chairs and began eating spoonfuls of various colored loops that floated in bowls of milk. "Okay, Uncle. We're eating. See? Tell us."

"Bout rodeos," Matt said as he fingered a cherry red piece of cereal and popped it into his mouth.

"Okay. Are you eating?"

"We are. See?"

"Men who busts brones are good riders. At least, they should be."

"Are you good, Unca?"

"I'm among the best. I take pride in my work."

Marla turned her head and smiled back at Riley.

"Once I get in the saddle, I try to keep the horse's head up."

"Why?"

"That's important to do. Then, if I'm thrown, I have to get back on the horse quick. I can't ever let the horse think he's won. I've had my foot hung up in the stirrup, and found myself under a man-killer's hoofs. That's bad too."

"I wanna be what you are, Unca Wylie. A bwrnc wider," Matt said with a mouth full of cereal and milk dripping down his cheek.

"I think you should go to college first, then decide. Okay?"

"Nooo!" Mark jumped in place. "I wanna ride in a rodeo."

Blake ruffled the boys' hair and coaxed them to finish their breakfast. After the kids ate, they dressed, jabbered some more and finally went outside and played on the swing set while Riley sipped another coffee in the bright and warm dining room overlooking the back yard. Marla took a seat across the table and sipped from a brown cup.

"What I didn't tell them is that I have to kick free of the stirrups. I have to go limp and hit the ground rolling. Just to make a long story short, Marla, I'm over the hill now at thirty. I hope to hell they don't get into that occupation."

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"I don't think Jeff or I would allow it."

"When they get to a certain age, you can't tell 'em a damn thing. If you remember way back when, Mom couldn't talk me out of it, either."

"I know. If you had to do it over, would you have busted that first bronc?"

He took a sip of coffee and put the mug down on the table. "I believe I would have. I'm a glutton for punishment, I guess."

After a short pause, Marla directed her gaze to his and stayed. "So, who is this mysterious friend you're meeting in Kalama?"

He tried to shrug off his nervousness and discomfort, but failed. "I don't think—"

The boys squealed while swinging, drawing their attention outside.

Once they determined the two boys were safe, Marla said, "Look. This is me. Just say it."

Another long pause stretched between. He cleared his throat, knowing he owed his sister some honesty, because she had always been above board with him. *I can't. I don't want her to think...*

"All I do is talk about Jeff, the kids and me. Tell me about you. There's a big chunk of stuff you're not telling me. I know you well enough to know that."

He frowned and shook his head. "The first thing I'm going to do is quit the circuit."

She nodded. "I can't say I'm sorry. You should've quit it years ago. What else did you want to tell me?"

"This person I'm meeting...is...." He took a long sip of coffee, knowing she waited for the rest of the story. He peered at the valance of the sunshine yellow sheer curtains swaying from the heated air breezing up from the floor vent. "He's a he that I'm meeting."

She batted dark lashes a few times and wedged her elbow on the tabletop with her chin. "Riley? Are you gay?"

She's finally asked. Now, I can't lie. 'Specially not to her. He gazed at the swaying lodgepole pines at the far edge of the yard, seeing but not seeing. "I don't know what "gay" means. I do know that have feelings for him." *I haven't seen him for a year. He may not show up or care about me anymore.*

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"Is that all?" she asked with a shrug.

"Aren't you shocked?" He didn't understand her nonchalant attitude.

"What'll Jeff say?"

"Who cares what he thinks? If that's who you are, so be it."

Their lines of vision caught and held. "Really?"

"Yeah. Jeff's little brother...is gay. He announced it last year."

"Oh?" Relief swept through his system.

"Yep. So, don't give it another thought. Besides, I always thought you were. Your relationships were good with women, but not your thing."

"How could you tell?"

"I guess I know you better than anyone alive—inside and out. Is there anything else I need to know? I'll worry about HIV and other things...just your safety in general. "

They leaned toward each other and hugged. *It feels good to lay it all on the table to her.* "I'll be fine. You're my favorite sister, you know?"

"You silly," she said and smiled with tears welling in her eyes. "I'm your only sister."

"If I had a dozen sisters, you'd still be my pick."

"Bring him by some time. Is he a bronc buster too?"

"Yeah. He's with a different circuit. Sometimes I get to see him a few times through the year. Sometimes not."

Her arched eyebrow rose. "How serious is it?"

"I'd like to settle down and maybe retire with him."

"From the rodeo. I see."

"Yeah." He shrugged and swallowed hard. "But I'm not sure that's what he wants." *I guess I'll find out tomorrow.*

Chapter Three



Riley drove his truck north on a wet Interstate 5 from California through Oregon, with his trailer in tow, toward the rendezvous point with Blake in southern Washington. A few miles short of his destination, he exited the highway, gassed up outside Portland, trying to curb his excitement. Within ten minutes, he climbed back into the cab to drive the last few miles. His need resurfaced. *How long has it been? Eight months?* They had planned to meet at the same campground they'd met at every December for the past several years. They had no family or friends in town, and it was merely a clean, interesting place to park for several days. The area boasted dense, dark forests, deer and an occasional elk. Tourists were gone for the winter.

Blake's handsome image returned in his mind as he exited onto I-5. The second he set his eyes on the rough and tough cowboy, he'd felt heat twirling and building in his loins.

The first time Riley saw Blake, amidst the background and excitement of a state fair one summer night, entered his mind. Blake had sauntered up to him and began a conversation about horses. He said he saw Riley bustin' a bronc at the Washington State Fair the previous year. At twenty four, the man's hawk-like, dark eyes and flawless skin had toyed with Riley's imagination. Blake removed the Stetson from his short,

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raven hair that had been styled to perfection, fitting his warm personality and white smile. His chiseled jaw line gave him an aristocratic appearance. He wore faded, torn jeans, tight around his torso, and a western shirt unsnapped at the neckline to reveal a few sprigs of hair peeking above the lowest dip of the V. How many mornings did he wake up rock hard, thinking of Blake's onyx gaze and beefed up body?

Does he lift weights? It shows that he cares about his appearance.

As he recalled their first moments together, tingling sensations spiraled through his loins. *Christ, I can still smell his clean scent, and feel his rough hands sliding over my bare skin.*

Riley recalled the night they discovered their fifth wheels sat parked next to each other at the campgrounds in Kalama, and the vivid memory washed over him.

The rodeo season had just ended, and the time to drive home had arrived and passed, but they stayed on. They talked, played cards and cooked for each other. A day merged into two days, then several days passed and soon a week approached. Neither man made a move to leave.

Moody, inky clouds clung to the brooding sky above the lodgepole pines that surrounded their trailers. One night, they bar-b-qued chicken on a campfire and drank beer while discussing their upbringing and times they spent camping as kids. The truth be known, after drinking a case of beer, they held hands and kissed, but hadn't carried their lust into the bedroom.

After they ate and cleaned up, a sharp pain low in Riley's back threatened to send him inside, moaning in pain. Not wanting to end their pleasant evening so early, he put his beer down and walked around the small area between their trucks, trying to ease the stiffness.

"Ow, damn it. I wish I'd never gone into bustin' broncs. I've done messed up my body. In the state I'm in, I'd fail at a desk job, too."

Blake stepped up, hugged him and asked in a low voice, "Why don't you let me take care of you tonight?" His hands left Riley's shoulders.

The suggestion peaked Riley's interest, but he still experienced severe apprehension. He knew the pain would resume the next day no matter what Blake did. Blake wants to rub me down as much as I want

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him to do it. Riley had shrugged as his penis twitched to life. "Where?" His heartbeat quickened and his knees weakened.

With a head motion toward his trailer, Blake asked in a suggestive tone, "Inside, Riley. On my bed. I've got good hands."

You've got more than good hands, partner. He couldn't deny that the idea of climbing onto a bed with Blake turned him on. "I dunno."

"Let me know when you're ready."

Feeling a little embarrassed, he said, "Okay."

A few minutes later, after a slow, cold December rain wet their jackets and shirts, and their discussion quieted, Riley succumbed to the inviting suggestion, because he didn't want to call it a night. Not just yet. He wanted to spend more time with Blake. The chemistry seemed almost tangible.

Blake flicked his cigarette into the fire, winked at him and strolled to the steps of his trailer. "C'mon then."

Riley sighed, thought about it for a moment and followed.

"You go in first."

A little nervous, Riley went inside and looked around the tidy but small living space. In one corner, he saw a shower.

"Go ahead. Don't be afraid. You can undress, if ya want." Blake grasped and turned the off-on button. The television silenced.

He put his hands on his hips and put his weight on his left leg. "I ain't afraid of nothin'."

Blake shrugged. "Didn't figure you were."

The tan bedspread didn't bear a wrinkle until he sat on its edge. He removed his boots and socks and stuffed them down into the leather tops while Blake also took his boots off. The thick carpeting tickled the bottoms of his feet. He stood up, unfastened his belt buckle and slid it from the loops of his Levi's thinking that maybe a back rub will feel good.

Blake began unfastening his own shirt, baring his muscular chest. "Put your clothes on the chair and lay down."

The idea of lying naked before Blake unnerved him in a thrilling sort of way. Since the first moment he'd met him, he knew they'd get together sexually, but he didn't know how or when it would take place. Neverthe-

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less, he unsnapped his shirt all the way and yanked the tails from under his jeans' waistband. Blake sat on the edge of the bed and tugged his footwear off. Each boot landed on a soft rug with a dull thud.

"That's okay. Take your shorts off. I'm going to use gel and don't want to get any your clothes. I'm taking mine off, too."

Very, very reluctantly, Riley hooked his thumbs under the waistband of his gray boxers and pulled them to the floor. He sat on the edge of the bed beside Blake before scooting over and lying on his stomach, not knowing what to expect, and realizing it seemed very gay what they were about to do.

Blake brought out a white, drawstring bag and pulled out a bottle of lotion, loosened the lid and squirted some gel on Riley's back, giving him the chills. He began pressing and plying as Riley moaned his delight. Blake spread the liquid all over Riley's upper back. His hands moved in soothing circles, and his fingers kneaded his skin as though it was bread dough. He reached for the bottle again, squirted more lotion, and rubbed it into his lower back.

Riley winced in pain, needing more of his back rub. "Aaaah."

"Relax, honey," Blake said, putting hands on Riley's shoulders.

He massaged him for a few minutes, paused and put more gel onto his hand. Blake wiped a glob on Riley's hip. "I need to massage down here too and work my way up. Don't bolt on me."

"I'm afraid you'll make me hot." Riley squinched his eyes closed and mashed his face into the pillow, trying to relax.

In a soft voice, Blake echoed his thoughts. "I get hot from doing it to you. It's nothing. It happens."

After dousing Riley's ass cheeks, Blake grasped one hip in each hand and massaged by pushing them together and then spreading them. He continued until the sides of his hands moved against Riley's ball sacs. Riley sucked in a noisy breath, relieved he was face down, hiding his nine inch arousal.

Blake's deep voice broke into his thoughts. "How does it feel?"

"You had to ask, didn't you?"

"Yep."

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His hands roamed up and down his spine, eliciting a groan. He kneaded away more knots of tension and pain, pressing hard into the aching spots with his strong fingers.

"This makes it feel better," Riley said during a long, noisy exhalation.

Blake playfully smacked his ass, laughed and continued the life-altering rub down. His voice turned husky. "Riley, you feel good to the touch."

"I like you doing this."

His finger began probing Riley's asshole, while the other hand continued to coat the gel all over his bottom. "How about this? Do you like it?" He pressed two fingers loaded with the lube up into him.

"Oh, yes." Riley turned his head off the pillow and glimpsed Blake's hardened eight to nine inch cock. It amazed him how it thickened and grew so much like his own. Tortured in pleasure and need, Riley began to push his bottom up against Blake's hand, forgetting his aching back and his preconceived ideas about having sex with a man, seeking full penetration. Blake climbed onto the back of his thighs, his cock brushing up against his bottom. Sensations shot through his body like an arrow as Blake worked one, and two fingers, in and out of him.

"You like this, don't you, darlin'?"

Forgetting all about his sore back, Riley rasped out his words. "Oh, God, yes."

"Your body's perfect for fuckin,' hon," Blake whispered, adding fuel to the already leaping flames.

"I need it, Blake."

"Me too."

He slid another finger into his ass, causing Riley's need, as well as his heart rate to increase. A groan left his lips. "Have you ever done this, Blake?"

"With a man, you mean? Sex?"

"Yeah, I suppose so." Blake continued to finger fuck him.

"Well, I haven't been with anyone other than a woman."

Suddenly, Blake's cock head replaced his fingers. He pressed further up between his ass cheeks, a mere fraction of an inch into his hole.

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"I'll keep that in mind," Blake said. "I'll go gentle."

A green sign with large white lettering appeared at the right side of the road, bringing Riley back to the present. He left the erotic scene that Blake and he shared several years earlier, their first time fucking. The sign read: Kalama Next Exit.

The wiper blades batted the newly fallen rain off the windshield. His jeans tightened at his now uncomfortable crotch, causing him to smile. He remembered that the subsequent sessions of sex with Blake included similar but different foreplay. He couldn't wait to see him again, to feel his body against his own.

Chapter Four



As Blake strode into the eating establishment, he glanced around at the December rain crystallized on the window. He deposited his Levi jacket on a coat hook.

Several men's heads turned his way and eyed him. A couple who sat in a window booth nodded their welcome.

"How're ya doin'?" Blake asked with a smile.

Two or three others in the dining room said, "Hello," and "How're ya doin'?" making him feel comfortable.

A bus passed on the road outside and a cop car pulled up and parked. The place smelled of cinnamon rolls, pies and coffee, and the men who sat at the tables and counters talked quietly. The jukebox played a country song that Blake couldn't recognize. The neon green Lone Pine Cafe sign flashed—Fine Dining at its Best.

Blake put his hat on an empty chair, sat down at a vacated table and read the menu for thirty seconds or so until a waitress walked up. Poised to write on a green pad, she asked, "You know what you want?"

"Uh, yeah. Bring me a...burger and fries. And uh, a Coke. Put everything on the burger."

"All righty," the brunette, heavily made up waitress said in a floral tone. Soon, she brought a straw and a plastic glass of Coke and ice and

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placed them on the red checkered tabletop before him. He barely realized it, though.

When will Riley show up? He should be close. The last time I gave him a jingle on the cell, he'd just crossed the state line going out of California and into Oregon.

Behind the counter a black, plastic Felix the Cat clock, with its tail wagging left and right, read eleven-thirteen. *Maybe I'll eat then call him. Well, maybe and maybe not.*

Fifteen to twenty minutes passed and the woman, who wore a white nametag that read Kellie, lowered a grilled hamburger plate, the green guest check and a napkin from the pocket of her apron to the table. "Enjoy your lunch."

"Thank you, Ma'am."

"You're welcome," she said in a suggestive tone and then strode to the waitress station and plucked up a plastic pitcher.

Blake sipped his drink, brought the hamburger to his lips and took a healthy bite. *Is she flirting? If she is, I'm so not interested.* A red, Chevy pick up towing a white travel trailer toward Marty's Trailer Spaces caught his attention. *Riley's in town*, he thought, smiling. He felt his cock straining against the seam of his jeans, thinking of his friend's awesome appeal, his sexy, dark gaze and smirky grin. His heart rate quickened. Thoughts of his friend kept him awake at night and his dick hard. *I'll eat and go see ol' Ril.'*



Twenty minutes after he passed through town, Riley paid two weeks in advance at the campsite office and soon backed into the space he rented adjacent Blake's trailer. The campsites would stay vacant until April, he figured. *Blake's truck's not here, but his trailer is. So, I know he's come to meet me. But where the hell is he?* Riley glanced around at the empty trailer spaces and the quiet, gravel road that skirted the wilderness.

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Rain dripped off his hat and onto the front of his rawhide jacket as he hooked up the trailer to the services. *It'll be a long, cold night if he didn't show up.* He unlocked the door, went inside and turned on the heat. Once finished, he returned to his truck and locked it up. The sound of tires crunching rocks caught his attention. Blake's truck made its way up the lane and parked.

"Just as I figured. Right on time."

He kept his eyes on Blake as he climbed down from the cab and shut the door. Riley marveled at his attire; a brown suede thigh-length jacket and matching Stetson. The man looked good. "How're ya doin'?" Riley asked, nodded and grinned. "You're a sight for sore eyes."

"Just fine. And you?" Blake asked, while his line of vision flitted down Riley's tall body.

His voice turned suggestive. "Mine just got a whole lot finer."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah." Blake crooked a finger. "Bring your hot body over here."

Riley stepped up to him and planted a kiss onto his waiting lips. Their tongues tangled for a few seconds before they parted.

"Want something to eat?" he whispered.

"You."

Blake grinned and dragged a thumb over Riley's lower lip. "How about a drink?"

I love his masculine, musky scent today. "Beer?" Riley felt himself stiffening up, straining against the seam of his jeans.

"Sounds good."

"It's pourin' down. Let's go inside and get cozy."

"Lead the way." Riley reached around and groped his ass. *I can tell we're not going to get a second of sleep tonight.*

Chapter Five



Five beers and three hours of rodeo chat later, Riley placed his hands on Blake's thigh and pulled him in for a kiss. *I can tell this Christmas season is going to be special. Bein' with Blake is always special, though.*

Once they drank the last of the beer, they crossed the room hand in hand and stopped beside the bed, where they stripped down to their briefs. Lying next to each other on the bed that filled most of the one room travel trailer, Riley began rubbing the bulge in Blake's briefs and feathered his throat with kisses. Rising on all fours over Blake, he pulled the man's shirt over his head began licking his nipples and resumed massaging Blake's phallus through the fabric. Riley's lips left Blake's breast and he breathed the words, "I love your scent when we're fucking." He slid his hand under the waistband and began to fondle Blake's cock and balls. "It's been a while," he said. "I missed you like Hell, don't you know."

"I'll bet you say that to all the cowpokes you run into, right?" he asked

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in his deep, husky voice, and blushing like a new bride.

"Just you." Riley leaned and dimmed the lights another notch.

"I'm glad."

He brought his hands from under the elastic, hooked his thumbs at each side to draw the white garment down Blake's hair dappled legs and got down between his thighs. The sight of that delicious bulge turned him on. With each movement of his knees, the mattress depressed and rose. Riley's firm member bobbed for Blake's visual enjoyment. "Let me take special care of you."

"God knows, I need it."

Riley put his head down and probed Blake's balls with his tongue, inhaling the manly scent of him—hot male muskiness. He licked the head of the pulsing cock, paying special attention to the sensitive slit. Without thinking, and becoming more and more aroused, Riley sucked it, his lips moving up and down the length of the shaft while moans escaped Blake's lips.

Riley felt a sticky wetness on his tongue. His latent, lewd, oral assault continued and Blake writhed in place. Riley took his mouth off the quivering end. "You taste good."

"God, Ril', your lips...they feel so...ahhh....there ain't no words."


"Doin' this is like primin' a pump, I've come to find out." He resumed suckling. His mouth rose off the end. In a husky voice, he asked, "I hope I'm hittin' all your right buttons about now."

"Mmmm. Hell, yeah, you are."

A drop of white cream oozed from the end, so Riley lowered his mouth back onto the corona, licked it from the slit, enjoying the salty taste. He blew cool air onto the sensitive head, giving him the shivers. "Fuck me, babe," he murmured with urgency as he caressed Blake's stomach and thighs. "Let's get the first one out of our system."

Blake pulled Riley's underwear down his body and tossed the garment onto a nearby chair. He moved up on Riley's body, his intent clear. His tongue pushed between Riley's lips, going deep into his mouth. Riley turned on his side, his back to Blake, enticing him.

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Blake, now on his knees, reached into a drawer, pulled out a condom and sheathed himself. "I'm needin' this so bad." He scooted up tight against Riley and moved the sensitive head against the butt cheeks. Using great care, he slipped himself into Riley's tight hole. At the sheer pleasure, Blake uttered a grunt. The wonderful squeezing sensation gave him immeasurable pleasure as he shoved himself deep inside Riley's beautiful and accommodating ass. Exhilarated and enjoying the moment, he stilled and pressed a kiss to his lover's back. His lover's butt cheeks pressed up against his pubic bone.

Riley's harsh, raspy moan yielded to a soft "mmmm."

Their bodies glistened with sweat. Blake's breaths quickened as he gently thrust and retreated. Blake reached around, pinched Riley's nipples, slid his hands down his lean torso and gripped his lover's cock while kissing his shoulder. Blake massaged Riley's shaft in between the rough pushes the thrusts and strokes grew harder and faster, and orgasm time for them neared.

"Dear God," Blake whispered breathily into Riley's ear. "I've waited for this for months."

Riley tensed and when he did, the muscles in his ass contracted, squeezing Blake's throbbing cock even more. He pumped, his rhythm fast and relentless. "Oh, hell, baby." Obsessed with finding his peak, Blake pummeled him in the ass. In a few seconds, Blake drew air deep into his lungs, tightened and shot his scalding, potent load. He possessed Riley fully and rode the rippling waves of supreme pleasure.

"Ride me hard. Yeah," Riley said as he, too, met his climax. "...ahhh." His cum shot into Blake's hand and up his belly. He cried out in the throes of heated passion. "Yesssss, oh, God, yes."

Seconds yielded to minutes, and the aftereffects subsided. Riley turned in his arms and pecked a kiss on his forehead. "I love you."

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"And I do you."

Riley ran a hand through Blake's hair, treating him as though he were the most precious commodity in the world. The hands left Blake's head and cupped his face in his hands.

Blake whispered, "I'm so glad we're back together. I never quite looked forward to Christmas until we began meeting. Now, it can't come around fast enough."

"Want to join me at my sister's house this year?" Riley asked.

"Marla's your sister, right?" Blake asked and reached for a pack of Benson & Hedges. *Outside people getting in on our relationship makes me nervous as a whore in church.*

"Yeah."

He got up, pulled the condom off his relaxing cock and tossed it into a waste can near the bed. Tensed up, he padded to the sink and washed his hands and cock before returning to the bed. He grasped and patted the gold pack, drew a cigarette out and lit it, then coughed while exhaling.

After a nervous pause, Riley said, "I've told her."

Blake's tone changed to one of surprise. "Crap. And she's not mad?"

"Hell, no. Riley sat up and began to search for a cigarette pack in his jeans. "She practically dragged it out of me, and then went and accepted it. I can't say that for the friggin' circuit though. They'd have a cow."

"I wish I could tell my sister" Blake looked away. He took a few puffs and stubbed the butt out in an ashtray. He turned and lay down facing Riley, wondering what his sister Katy would say and how she would handle it.

"You may be surprised." Riley sniffed. "Let me use your lighter."

He handed over his Bic, fluffed his pillow and yawned. Blake contemplated the gentle rain falling outside. "I just don't know about telling Katy."

"Go with your heart on it, Blake."

Chapter Six



Riley savored the lazy afternoons they whiled away. The days that followed held hikes through the forest. During the evenings, they drove to the Lone Pine Cafe for supper where they ate and discussed politics, religion, growing up and a myriad of other subjects. On occasion, they watched movies and later stopped at quiet bars for cocktails. They topped their evenings off by watching late night talk shows on satellite television. Steamy nights of passion ended their perfect days. In the wee hours of the morning, they dozed in each other's arms. It seemed to Riley they lost two days somewhere along the line. Somewhere along the line, they lost those days to sex.

They switched beds, sleeping first in Blake's trailer and the next night in Riley's. They had the campsite to themselves. The owner left town for the holidays, closing the business. His absence gave them solitude and privacy for come what may. For Riley, attraction yielded to a degree of adoration and caring that he'd never felt for another person.

A week and a half after they'd reunited, Riley, naked and blurry-eyed, climbed from under the covers and brewed coffee, filling Blake's small one-room space with its rich aroma. Sun lightened the dark green landscape outside and filtered inside, lightening the room's warm shades of beige, green and brown. Simple, tie back curtains adorned the win-

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dows. A deep cabinet, white refrigerator and wooden table with two chairs comprised a kitchenette. A wooden dresser occupied a wall space opposite the bed. In the corner, a mirror occupied a space between two big windows.

Blake covered his mid-section with a sheet and sat with his back to the wall in the middle of the bed. He began reading the *Oregonian* they'd picked up the previous evening.

While sipping coffee, Riley affixed a towel to his lower torso and read the sports section while sitting on a dark, tangerine chair.

Blake stopped reading and glanced his way.

"What do you want to do later?" Riley asked, folding the paper. His gaze left the print and met Blake's dark eyes after he looked up from the basketball scores.

Blake shrugged. "Let's see...we can take a short drive?"

"Okay, sure. Where to?" He turned the page and crossed his legs.

"Someplace nice. How about to Astoria?" asked Blake.

"Christmas is coming in a couple of weeks. We can shop. I can buy a couple of presents."

"I want to buy you a present. What do you want?" Blake asked, his eyes flitting back to his reading material.

"Nothin."

"You sure?"

"Yep."

"I'd like to take some pictures and give one of you to my sister," said Riley.

Blake said a ruffled, "I dunno."

"Would you be interested in goin' to her house with me for Christmas? To Marla and Jeff's?"

Blake's attention lifted. He squinted into the sun during the pause that followed. "I don't know. My sister invited us, too. The only problem is she doesn't know about us. I don't think I'm ready..." he sighed and shook his head before finishing, "...for the outside world's opinions regarding us." His voice trailed away as he picked up another part of the newspaper.

Cowboy's Christmas

"Oh, I see." Riley nodded, hiding his disdain. "Hm. Well..."

"Hey. Listen. Forget that. It's, uh, whatever you want to do."

"Well, as I told you before, Marla knows. We can go there. And we won't have to worry about how we act."

"Let's think it over today and then decide."

"Good."

A few minutes later Riley quietly asked, "So, Blake, do you want your sister to know? Don't answer if you don't want."

"About...what?"

"Us...you and me?"

He blinked and didn't reply. His line of vision dove to the newspaper. "Actually, no. I just—" His voice trailed away.

Feeling a bit uncomfortable with carrying on with the topic, and knowing the discussion bothered Blake, Riley didn't bring the subject up again. "Don't say anymore. Consider the subject dropped."

"Okay."

"Sorry, babe."

"It's all right."

"You're an incredible man. I feel lucky to ride out Decembers with you." Riley put down his newspaper, padded to the bed and put his face close to Blake's frowning features. "Kiss?"



The following Sunday they awoke in Blake's travel trailer. They'd been discussing the latest political news when Riley felt a rush of love and lust for Blake. He considered the man's onyx gaze, wide set eyes and taut lips that could deliver much pleasure. A pause lingered between them. Blake smiled his come hither smile Riley missed on long, lonely nights on the road with the circuit. He leaned until his mouth met Blake's gentle lips. Their tongues touched and began mingling as Riley guided Blake back among the pillows, making sure they both were comfortable. The sheet slipped down Blake's body.

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"Let me show you how I feel," said Riley, his words breathy. *Spoken sentiments are so inadequate. Deep down, I feel this ravenous hunger that's so fuckin' raw and explosive. It's all for this man.* His hard dick pressed against the side of Blake's hip; the towel hiding his own erection fell to the floor. "I swear, you're goin' to be the death of me. I'll die happy, though."

Riley ran the rough pads of his hand and fingers down his lover's manly torso, his spread fingers furrowed through the fine hairs below his navel in a deliberate attempt to warm him up to the possibility of a new round of sex. He massaged the front side, and at all costs avoiding the awakening cock. He pressed and plied as desire grew. Riley closed his eyes and lost himself in the sensation.

When Riley's fingers smoothed over an erogenous zone, Blake uttered a moan. Sliding his hands down his arms, Riley slipped them around his lover's awesome slim waist and pulled him closer until their cocks met and mingled. Blake moaned and rotated his lower body ever so lightly.

Blake's thumb and forefinger ringed Riley's swollen shaft. His other hand glided over his scrotum. The familiar, furious craving built.

Riley returned the favor and slid his fingers over Blake's balls, down and back over the mystical area behind his scrotum. He brought his hands back, let them slide to Blake's lower back and moved down where they dipped between the globes of his ass. He sank a digit into his cleft and kept it there.

"Mm, what you do to me feels so good," Blake whispered.

Riley pulled his fingers from his ass, guided him to turn over on his stomach and positioned himself between Blake's upper thighs. Riley shifted and leaned. He grasped an ass cheek in each hand and parted him. He rimmed Blake, preparing him for entry, his own cock pulsing, awaiting the squeezing fit with his member dripping like a broken faucet.

Just as he was about to lube up and start the slow task of readying him, Riley heard a sound outside and froze.

In an intense, breathless voice, Blake asked, "Wha--why the fuck did you stop?"

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"A car. I swear I heard a car."

"Where?"

"Outside."

"Crap."

A knock sounded on the door.

"I'll get it. Maybe Marty's not left yet for Christmas."

"You mean the owner of the trailer spaces?"

"Yeah."

"Impossible. He told me he'll be gone...unless he came back, or didn't go."

Riley grabbed a pillow to cover himself and headed to the door muttering, "Whoever it is, their excuse better be good."

Chapter Seven



Shocked they had a visitor, Blake gripped the sheet and covered his chest. *Someone out here? Crap! A forest ranger maybe?*

Riley, who lay in bed beside Blake, grabbed a pillow. Using one hand, he yanked it off the bedspread, covered himself and went to the door. With his other hand, he turned the knob and peered outdoors. "May I help you?"

"Riley?"

Who in the world? Blake wanted to see the woman's face.

"Uh, yes?"

The familiar voice said, "I'm here to see my brother, Blake. I had an awful time finding him. He told me he was going to stay at Kalama. When I got here, I discovered this was a public campsite. Then I knew he'd be here. May I talk to him, please?"

Blake covered his head with the remaining pillow. *Fuck my luck! No!*

"Uh...well, sure," Riley stammered, turned and peered over his shoulder at him.

When Blake moved the pillow, he noticed an unsure, fearful look of horror in Riley's expression.

"I drove to Portland to do some Christmas shopping. I thought maybe Blake would like to go." She motioned for Riley to step aside.

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"Blake? He's here, isn't he? This is his trailer, isn't it?"

Riley stepped behind the door. "Oh, yes. And you must be—"

"Katy," she said in a matter of fact tone in a way that unnerved him

"That's right, Katy."

Blake rolled his eyes displaying his gush of helplessness; he needed to stop the tidal wave of unwanted events. Katy leaned and peered in long enough to get a gander at her brother. When she lifted her sunglasses, he saw her freckled face displaying her realization of what she'd interrupted.

Blake's gaze locked and held hers for a few, painful seconds. "Oh my, God," she said and gasped. "I don't believe this, Blake. You're...gay?" She spun and was gone.

Blake groaned. "Wait a sec—"

He climbed out of bed, pulled the sheet up, wound it around himself and headed toward the door. Stepping on the corner of the sheet, he tripped. "Jesus!" With a hand to the top of the dresser, he broke his fall. Peering out, he saw her stomping toward her car.

With her fierce Kingsley attitude in place, she looked back and frowned. The expression distorted her usually gentle features. Auburn, curly hair bounced on her shoulders as she back to her car. Her motions erratic, she climbed in and put the vehicle into reverse.

Blake leaned out the door and yelled, "Shit! Katy, get back here!"

For a couple of seconds, her fiery gaze locked with Blake's one more time. She gasped and said through clenched teeth, "No way." She haphazardly backed down the lane. Her poor driving habits entered his mind. She'd already had two wrecks. In one accident, she'd totaled the car she drove.

"For god sakes, Katy! Drive carefully! *"This is a friggin' nightmare,* Blake lamented. Stinging tears formed in his eyes and a large lump blocked his throat. He ran a spread hand through his hair. "I guess she's not as open-minded as Marla, Riley. I-I apologize for this."

"Don't think a thing of it." With understanding as large as Texas, Riley slipped his arm around his shoulders and pulled him close. "Everything'll be okay. You've got me, and I'm not going anywhere. I know."

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It's difficult."

He fought more tears and shrugged. His shoulders drooped forward in his sudden depression. Smiling was out of the question. "I guess Christmas with Katy is out."

"We'll go see my family, then."

"They, uh, just learned about us?"

"Yep. I think they'll adjust."

"Good. God, this is difficult."

"I know. Just remember, I'm here for you."

"I'm sorry about Katy and all, but I just want you to know, I am so glad you're here."



Riley frowned in disbelief after experiencing Blake's sister's furious response. To his amazement, it didn't end at the door. In fact, she drove down the lane toward the exit like a jet screeching through hell. Without crashing into the white speed limit sign a hundred feet down the road, she careened onto the road back to town, leaving Marty's Trailer Spaces and a maimed brother in her wake.

The two men went back into the trailer, showered, dressed and spent the rest of the day driving the highways and back roads of southern Washington. In Astoria, Riley stopped the truck outside a souvenir shop, "Want to go inside and look around?"

Still clearly shaken, Blake gazed toward the rustic shop, which had the appearance of a modern log home. Acute pain displayed in his eyes. After shaking his head, he said, "I don't want to ruin your vacation, Ril'." Blake re-directed his line of vision through the rain-dotted window.

At a stop sign, he reached over and enveloped Blake's hand in his own. "You're not. I guess I'm just lucky that I have family who is accepting. You come with me to my sister's house."

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"I will. I just hope...well, never mind."

"Say it."

"I am what I am."

Riley asked in a cheerful voice, "Are you Popeye the Sailor now?"

Finally, Blake laughed. "That's right. He said that too."

"I'm glad to see you smile." Riley looked out over the vast expanse of Columbia passing by outside and added, "It's okay to feel hurt. I guess I would've felt that way, if it happened to me."

Shrugging, he turned his eyes Blake's way and nodded once. "I'll be okay. Thanks for caring."

He gripped and loosened his hold on the steering wheel. "There's something else I wanted to talk to you about. But it can wait."

Blake sat a little straighter, lit a cigarette and inhaled a deep breath of smoke. On the exhale he said, "Can't we talk about it now?"

Admiring his friend's strength of character in the face of a heart-breaking rejection, he asked, "Want to stop at this Denny's up here and talk over coffee?"

"Sounds good."

Once they were seated at a booth next to a window that had a breathtaking view of the river, the waitress filled their mugs with coffee. Riley picked up a creamer and peeled back the paper top. Considering his words carefully, he stirred cream into the dark brew. "I was thinkin' of somethin' you may be interested in." He brought the spoon out and set it beside the mug. "...bein's we're thirty and all now." He shrugged and stopped talking, knowing he should continue. The words were hard to find, though. He supposed he'd plant a seed for the future.

Blake's eyes searched his face. "What, Ril'?"

"Well, it's just an idea and all. Feel free to say "no" if it doesn't suit you."

"I will. I'm not afraid to say "no." What is it you're tryin' to say?"

"Over the past five years, you and me have got to knowin' each other pretty damned well. And we get along just fine, right?"

"We get along great."

"I was thinkin' that we're nearly over the hill as far as bronc ridin'

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goes. The circuit likes the younger dudes out there. Both o' us has got sore backs now all the friggin' time." He reached for a pack of cigarettes in the pocket of his blue western shirt and pulled the cellophane top off it. "Neither one of us it seems is lookin' to get married the traditional way..." He crumpled the paper and put it on the white tabletop.

Blake raised a cigarette to his lips. "So, what are you wantin' to say, Riley?"

He studied Blake's brows that drew together, rumpling his brow and took a swallow of coffee then lit his cigarette. "I thought it might be good if we were to settle down together. Maybe find a ranch around here. Maybe have a few horses." He gazed across the tabletop at Blake, hoping for his positive answer.

"Retire? You and me? Together?" Blake's voice grew high and dramatic.

"Yeah. As a couple. Of course, if you're not ready to tell no one that we're lovers, we don't have to do that yet. Or ever really, 'cause it's no one's biz 'cept our own. Right?"

"I s'pose." Blake's shaky laugh followed. "You're serious?"

"Yep," he shot back without giving it a second thought.

Blake opened his mouth, but the only words that came out were, "I'm baffled."

"Nah, you're not."

"I truly am."

"If you're all freaked out, then we can just drop it."

Blake exhaled smoke and added, "You're out of your ever lovin' mind."

"Am I?"

"After we're shackled, I'd probably have trouble getting my dick hard," Blake said with a smile. "I just wish my sister accepted..." He quieted and frowned. "...crap."

"I'm sorry."

"Never mind."

Riley dropped the subject for the time being. *Yeah. He likes the idea of "us" real well. I just wish his sister were more accepting.*

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Several hours later, when Blake stripped and traipsed across the carpeting to the shower, Riley peered down at a scrap of paper with an area code and phone number scrawled on it. He picked it up and read the words "Katy's cell." Suddenly, an idea entered his mind.

Chapter Eight



Early that evening, they lay down and watched satellite television. Riley heard Blake's even breathing. Out the corner of his eye, Riley watched the silhouette of his chest rise and fall. His mind wandered off the plot of the movie and onto his continual concern about Blake's sister's wrath toward his orientation. He frowned.

Fidgety, he sat up, turned and rose to standing. He supposed he should do something. After plucking his clothing off the chest of drawers and chair, he dressed and unplugged his cell phone. *I need to talk to Blake's sister in private.* Not wanting to awaken him, Riley quietly stepped outside in the icy night air with the phone, closed the door and walked down the road.

Twenty or so feet away from the trailer, he stopped and pressed the call button. The scent of pine laced the air and electronic phone beeps sounded in his ear. He glanced at the darkened forest and cabin where Marty stayed during the summer season. The face of the phone brightened and he dialed the number that he'd memorized. A couple of shaky moments passed as he waited. Unable to get an answer, he went back inside, frustrated. Four tries and three days later, the day they drove to Riley's sister's house in Othello. Along the way, they stopped at a Shell gas station, where Riley called Blake's sister's home. This time, Katy's voice, the voice he remembered screeching at Blake, answered.

Christ. She answered. Now what do I say? Frozen in place with dread,

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he hesitated. *I hope to hell this won't be a fuckin' mistake.*

"Hello?" she asked again.

"Katy?"

"Yes?"

He took a deep breath and began. "It's Riley. Blake's friend." He raised an outspread hand. "Don't hang up. Please..."

"Okay."

Riley touched his forefinger to his temple and grimaced. "Don't hate him." A lengthy silence fell on the line that tore him up. "Did you hear me?"

"Yes," she said after unleashing a squeaky sob.

"I don't know if you know it, but he loves you." He listened to her weep.

"I do know."

He let the bit of charged knowledge sink into her head a little longer. "In fact, he cares about you almost more than anyone else in his family."

In a high-pitched voice she said, "I know. I care about him too."

"He is how he is. He...he wants you to accept him."

"I need...time."

"Do you have a pen?"

"Yes. Why?" She sniffed.

"Take this number down. We'll be at my sister's house for Christmas. Call him. He's really down. You two need to talk. He can't help who he is. And you mean so much to him."

"I know. It's just...I really don't know..."

"Take it down anyway and think about it. The number is 206-555-2938." His heartbeat raced at the possibility of her calling Blake. He contained his excitement because he knew it could be premature.

"Okay."

"Katy, I love him and want to spend the rest of my life with him. His happiness means a lot to me."

"I feel that way too."

They said goodbye, and Riley left the stinky men's restroom and rejoined Blake by the gas pump.

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Blake muttered something about the gas prices and hung the nozzle back on its stand. "Somebody's making a hell of a lot of money off us."

Feeling smug, he said, "They sure are." *He doesn't suspect a thing.*



With his truck and trailer locked and parked at the end of the road in the campgrounds, Blake took one long, last look and climbed into the cab of Riley's truck. They drove toward the highway. Country music seeped out of the speakers, playing a song about love gone wrong, but he barely noticed.

Nervous and feeling down, he stilled his shaking hands in his lap twenty miles north of Kalama on the interstate. He plastered his concentration on passing, blurred pines as Riley drove north and then east toward his sister's home. His thoughts revisited the hostile reception his own sister had given him when she saw them together.

A couple of hours later, once they passed the city limits of Othello, Blake let his mind wander as he gazed out at city streets lined with brick and white-sided one and two-story houses. His childhood came back to him. The times he'd had were happy. If only Katy would be as accepting as Riley's sister. But no such luck. She had to throw a fit, probably even aggravating Riley who never gets upset. Blake pulled a cigarette from a pack on the console, lit it and opened the window a quarter of an inch so the smoke would escape.

Riley drew him out of his reverie when he reached over, shut off the radio and patted the back of Blake's free hand. "They live outside town. I thought I'd drive through and give you a tour." Riley's line of vision returned to the road ahead.

Blake turned his attention at a church and a red brick elementary school. "Is this the town you grew up in?"

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"Yeah. It sure has changed."

More of his own childhood popped into his head, haunting him. He considered his lack of sexual feelings for girls and frowned. His father and mother knew him well. They loved him too, he supposed. They just weren't people of many words, and he never discussed his ideas with them, especially about sexual likes and dislikes. His brother knew him inside and out, but didn't care an iota about him. His problem, Blake guessed, was sibling rivalry and a bad case of homophobia. Guilt hung like an anvil over him. Strangely enough, everyone, except his sister, knew about his preference. His family, who was gone now, had not told her.

Riley's voice interrupted his thoughts. "It's just around the bend."

Blake nodded. "They live pretty damned far out."

"I'll say. They like to ride horses."

"Really?"

"Yeah. We'll have to take a leisurely ride."



Like a painting, a pinkish-orange watercolor mixture washed the Othello horizon above the jagged tree line. Blake gathered from Riley's expression that they neared their destination. Riley stepped on the brake and the truck slowed. He flashed a perfect, white smile across the divide to Blake and turned the volume down on the radio. "It looks like they've decorated."

"We're here?"

"Yeah."

Blake turned his attention toward the log home and marveled at the red and green eaves and blinking gold Christmas tree standing in the window.

"This is it. Jeff and Marla's ranch. "

Yellow light on two lower level windows spilled out onto the shad-

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owed, murky lawn. Riley tapped the signal indicator knob and turned into the driveway. To the right, Blake noted a horse barn and corral. A dark, forest occupied the land to the left.

Riley parked and shut off the engine. "Don't be nervous."

"I'll try."

"They're okay with us. Really."

He tried to shake his apprehension and sound positive. "Great. Let's go."

Chapter Nine



A man who wore jeans and a pretty, dark-haired woman who wore a short-waisted brown leather coat and jeans greeted them when they stepped out of the truck and onto the driveway. Fine snow coated their coats and hats, and a vaporous mist rose from Riley's mouth as he touched the woman's shoulder and faced Blake. "Blake, this is my sis, Marla. And this is Jeff, my brother-in-law."

"Blake, it's good to meet you."

He took her gloved hand in his and smiled. "I've heard a lot about you."

Jeff held out his hand and Blake took it. "It's good to meet you too. Merry Christmas."

Marla entwined her arm in the crook of Blake's elbow and they strolled inside, where upon Riley's introduction to his two rambunctious nephews, one of them said, "We wanna horsie ride, Unca Wylie."

Riley held the back of his hand to his mouth and whispered, "My aching back. That one's Matt."

Blake smiled and then laughed out loud.

"Me too, Uncle Riley," shouted the second boy.

"And that one is Mark."

"Boys, this is Riley's friend," said Marla. "His name's Blake."

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"Hi, Bwake!" Matt hopped in place. "Do you give horsie rides too?"

Much to Blake's surprise, after having a gab session at the kitchen table until a little after midnight over beer, Riley's sister showed them up to their room that held a king-sized bed. The boys were fast asleep down the hallway when they bid the host and hostess goodnight, went to their room and fell asleep.

Christmas Eve came several days later. At sundown, a few members of Riley's family came to visit. They dressed in holiday attire and brought presents, bottles of champagne and other goodies. Seven or eight squealing children exchanged gifts and played in the recreation room. A couple of dozen adults sang carols, ate finger food and sipped beer, champagne, or wine. Two young, gay men attended too. Marla introduced one of them as her younger brother and the other as her brother's friend. To Blake, they seemed more than just friends. They held hands and kissed. It didn't take Blake and Riley long to loosen up and feel accepted by everyone.

When folks began gathering their children, gifts and plates. Blake heard the phone ring in the next room. Marla appeared in the doorway holding up the handset. "Riley?"

He turned away from an aunt and moved his attention to his sister. "Yeah?"

She covered the mouthpiece. "It's for Blake. She says she's his sister."

Sitting on an overstuffed beige sofa, Blake blinked and swiveled his head toward Marla, away from an elderly woman he'd been talking to about the high prices of gasoline. For a split second he paused and touched Riley's aunt's arm. "Excuse me." He stood, set his beer on a coffee table, and gave Riley, who stood nearby, a grim look. Several sets of eyes glanced his way as he strode toward the door. Surprised, wondering what Katy had to say on Christmas Eve, he took the phone and smiled, though he felt uncomfortable and swore under his breath. His heart beat hard in his chest. In a puzzled, wary tone he said, "Thanks, Marla. I'll take it down the hallway, if it's okay." *God, what is she going to say this time?*

"Go ahead. Use our bedroom. I'll shut the door. It'll be a lot quieter," she said, mouthing the words.

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"Thanks." Blake swallowed hard and put the phone to his ear. He looked at a heavy-legged dresser sitting across the room from the queen sized bed and said, "Hello?"

"Blake?" Katy's nose sounded congested.

He stood still, pressing the phone to his ear. Tears threatened to well. Visualizing her he said, "Yep."

"How are you?" she asked, her voice void of shock and anger, much to his relief.

"Fine, sis. You?"

"Same here."

"How's Frank?" he asked in a hesitant tone.

"He's fine. We plan to get married."

Blake's brow furrowed. *Why is she calling?*

"I-I just wanted to wish you Merry Christmas."

"Thanks. I wish you one too."

"Hope you're having a good holiday."

"I am. We're having a get together at Riley's sister and brother-in-law's house."

"That's good."

He took a couple of slow, long strides to the bed and sat down on the soft, brown spread. He tilted his head back and gazed at the ceiling. "Is there something you need or want?"

"Actually I called to...to apologize for my horrible reaction. You must hate me."

"Katy...no...I don't. I love you. Always did. Always will."

She openly wept on the other end of the line. "Thank you, Blake. It was just a shock. My mouth sometimes gets the better of me."

"It's okay."

"Riley...he seems so nice."

"He is. I guess you can say we're permanent friends."

"That's good." Several seconds of silence followed. "Blake, if y'all are lookin' for a place to settle down together...I, well, come to the ranch here."

"You're livin' there and—"

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"Blake, I am moving with Frank to Indiana. He's got work there. I need you to take over the ranch, if you can. Otherwise, we have to sell it. It needs new fencin', and the horses needs lots of care."

Blake's mouth dropped open. When he recovered he asked, "Are you sure?"

"Yeah. As soon as you can, so we can leave, if it's convenient with you, too. I just can't take care of it anymore. Frank's not into ranchin'."


He laughed and raised an outstretched hand. "Uh, sure. Yes. I'll get right back to you...tomorrow. I need to talk to my part...uh, Riley."

"I remember you sayin' you wanted to retire and all. It'd be a good opportunity for you. Maybe you and Riley could start a dude ranch or somethin'."

"I-can we let you know soon? A couple of days, maybe?"

"Yes, sure. Again, I'm so sorry. I need a boot to my butt. I've always thought you may be gay, but uh, I guess it never sank in. I accept and love you, Blake. Come on home. Bring Riley with you."

Chapter Ten



On New Year's Eve, Blake uttered a sigh of relief once they bid Riley's family goodbye and returned to the campsite in Kalama. *Finally, I'll have time alone with him.*

Once they passed the Othello city limit sign, Riley said, "I love kids, especially Mark and Matt. But there 're times I like quiet."

Blake laughed and rolled his eyes. "Yep. Same here."

A few hours later, outside Blake's trailer, Riley slipped his hard arms around him in a loving embrace. "At last," he whispered. "Wanna go out and celebrate."

"Yeah."

"Let's do it, then."

Their lips met. His probing tongue slid through the inner recesses of Riley's mouth. He tasted minty mouthwash. The soft kiss ended and their mouths and bodies parted. Hand in hand, they climbed the steps, unlocked the door, and entered the dark trailer that smelled of fabric softener.

They showered, shaved and dressed in their best Levi's, western shirts and hats, and went out for quiet beers to celebrate the New Year.

Riley and Blake watched a barroom full of blue collar workers, Indians, loggers and trailer trash swizzle noisemakers and don shiny hats. They occupied a small table in the dark corner of a tavern a mile or so from the turn off to the campgrounds. They downed a couple of beers

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and engaged in quiet conversation about their future and retiring from the rodeo circuit. *Life with Riley, even if only a few weeks out of the year, is the best I've ever known. I don't want it to end.*

Riley ordered two beers for them. After the waitress returned with icy mugs of the golden, foamy liquid, he said, "I don't want us to go our separate ways."

"I'm going to find another job." He lit a cigarette, contemplating their staying together. "I can't do this rodeoin' shit anymore."

"So, uh, you're not going out?"

He pointed over his shoulder. "My back's bad. How about you?"

Riley leaned over and ran a palm over the seam at Blake's crotch, turning him on. The urge to leave the tavern overwhelmed him. "Same here."

After the countdown commenced at ten seconds 'til midnight, Blake whispered in Riley's ear, "Let's stay together, then."

He put his cigarette on the edge of an ashtray. "Stay?" Riley made eye contact...long and deep.

"Make that live together."

Riley nodded slowly. "Yeah, I want that too. We'll figure it out." He touched a finger to Blake's nose and smiled. "C'mon. Let's go home. I think I'm goin' to bust out of my pants."

He took a sip of beer and gently set the mug down, fiddling with the edge of a coaster. "Remind me tomorrow that I have something important to talk to you about."

"About...what?"

Blake smiled his most beguiling, come-on smile. "It's a secret. I'll tell you tomorrow."



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Later, they arrived at Blake's travel trailer. Once inside, the scent of fabric softener tickled Blake's nostrils.

Lights dimmed, they shoved their boots off one foot with the other and Riley flipped on the light, closed and locked the door. They drew their shirts off. Blake lovingly observed Riley's silhouette as he stepped up to him, toe to toe. Riley slipped fingers under the waistband of Blake's jeans, causing him to suck in a deep breath. The button slid through the stitched hole and knuckles pressed into Blake's abdomen, teasing him with touches. With a slight yank, he pulled Blake's tight jeans, with his underwear, down his legs.

Riley's fascination remained fixed on Blake's body, and Blake hoped he teased him beyond endurance by scrutinizing him. He found his lips kissable, alluring and enticing.

After administering a firm, deep massage to Blake's cock, Riley stepped back. His thumbs at his own side, he hooked the elastic band and ditched his own clothes, baring his magnificent erection. His nine-inch rod had given Blake much pleasure over the past three Decembers they'd been together, and he wanted it to do the same thing now and for many years to come. *If he agrees with my plan, my dream will come true.*

Blake smiled as a feeling of pure artistic appreciation flowed over him as he took in his lover's assets.

When Riley captured his mouth in a rough, long kiss that tasted of beer, excitement thrummed through his system. He reached down and grasped his own phallus, making himself appealing and feeling his own erection. Blake gasped aloud when their cock heads touched and their loins ground together.

Riley slid spread fingers into Blake's mane at the temple and gazed deeply into his eyes, as though he was searching for something. "I love you," Riley said. He turned down the covers and stretched out on the soft bed. "Now bring that cock of yours here." Riley lay back, with his legs sort of splayed out.

"Oh yeah? What'd you have in mind?" Blake asked and leaned down, anticipating much pleasure in the next several minutes.

Riley whispered, "Why don't 'cha come here, get real close and find

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out."

A herd of wild mustangs couldn't stop me, Blake thought as he climbed onto the bed and turned toward his lover.

Riley brushed a kiss to his forehead and moved his mouth down, pressing his lips to his chest. He flicked his nipples. Loving every second of it and not realizing that somehow his breasts were connected to his loins, Blake grunted with pleasure and settled beside him. He kissed Riley's biceps.

Their noses touched. "Happy New Year."

"Same to ya."

Blake grasped his cock and balls. "C'mere, cowboy. That's it."

As Blake ran the pad of his thumb over the head of Riley's cock, he nibbled his ear until he sucked in a deep breath.

Riley raised his hands and tightened his grip on Blake's shoulders.

Riley moaned and said breathlessly, "You don't know what your touch does to me." He flinched with each of Blake's little movements dancing on the tip of his cock "Hon', you can pull the orgasms right out of my soul."

"Mm," Blake said as he maneuvered his body and head to the junction of Riley's upper thighs. "Let me take care of you." Blake took his cock between his lips and tightened his mouth around the thick shaft. He loved the feeling of Riley's member as it filled up with blood.

His dick slid over the tongue toward the back of Blake's throat. When it stopped, Riley's pubic hairs tickled his cheeks and nose. His leg muscles tensed and relaxed. Blake massaged his balls while nuzzling with his mouth and nose. Blake moved his hands over thighs and squeezed, giving him more sensations. He cupped Riley's bottom and slid fingers into Riley's twitching ass. When Riley's cum spurted, he suckled while finger-fucking his ass. The bed shook under their bodies.

A troubled moan left Riley's lips. "Oh, yeahhhhh, babe." His body loosened, and he rode the plateau of orgasm.

Blake pondered his love for him while swallowing the cum. *Hell yeah. I want to live the rest of my life with this cowboy.* Feeling like he'd arrived in heaven, Blake drew Riley up, held him in his arms and kissed him. He

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traipsed to the bathroom and peed, showered away the remnants of lovemaking and returned to Riley's arms.



They slept for an hour or so, before Riley stirred and gathered his thoughts about his lover who smelled of soap and tasting of toothpaste. He followed suit and took a shower, returned and climbed under the sheets with Blake.

They mutually greeted each other by handling each other's cocks and balls. Lying nose-to-nose, Riley took one hand off his partner's member, reached around his hips and ran a finger up and down the crack. In response, Blake slowly moved his hips. It didn't take but a few minutes for the friction they experienced got too much to handle.

Waves of pleasure rushed through Riley as they undulated together in rhythm, their dicks dancing and mingling. When Riley was satisfied with Blake's hard-on, he brought a plastic tube from a drawer next to the bed and squirted lube on the pulsing cock. "It's your turn to get some relief." Riley gave the shaft a nice squeeze. They got into position and Blake slid the cock between the crevice of his buttocks.

Pain shimmered through him as the head of Blake's cock slid into him, moving in half inch increments. He gripped Blake's slippery member by squeezing his ass muscles.

Their breathing deepened and quickened. The pain subsided and an awesome fullness followed. Carefully, and with deliberate unhurriedness, Blake continued until their bodies fit flush.

Air burst from Riley's lungs. "Tight enough?"


"Mm, babe, yessss,"

Blake began sliding his cock in and out, slowly at first, before picking up speed. During the one hell of a ride that followed, Blake held onto Riley's shoulders for dear life.

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His lips touched Riley's neck, and he hoarsely whispered, " Your wonderful ass is so goddamned tight." He groaned, sucked in a breath and expelled his juice deep into Riley's body. With his back to Blake's chest, they dozed.

Chapter Eleven



Two days later, after studying all the angles of living together and running the ranch, Riley and Blake drove to Rufus, Oregon. They took a left on Main Street and headed toward the Kingsley Ranch.

From behind the steering wheel, Riley watched as Blake raised a cell phone to his ear. He turned down the volume on George Strait's *Carrying Your Love With Me*.

"Katy. We're almost there. Watch for us."

Soon, a silver mailbox marked the driveway of the Kingsley Ranch.

"It was really something in its heyday," Blake explained.

Riley pulled into the yard and braked. "It's nice."

"Dad hired some hands that lived in their own quarters over in that gray, dilapidated building over there. We raised horses and cows. Katy kept the horses. Over time, she had to get rid of the cows. Couldn't take care of them."

A beige SUV that towed a U-Haul trailer occupied the driveway. Katy burst out the front door, her arms outstretched. She wrapped Blake in her arms and kissed his cheeks. "I'm so glad to see you. Forgive me. Please."

"That's all over." He gave her a smooch on the forehead, turned to Riley and smiled. "C'mon inside, Riley."

He joined Blake and chatted with Katy and Frank for the rest of the

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afternoon and evening. They slept in the front bedroom behind closed doors, wrapped in each other's arms as the old grandfather clock ticked in the living room. At six the next morning, they woke to the smell of bacon and eggs, and the four of them ate breakfast that Katy had prepared. By mid-morning, Katy and Frank prepared to leave the Kingsley Ranch and drive to Indiana, get married, and debark on their new life. They loaded the back end of the SUV with suitcases, and shut the back doors of the trailer.

Riley, Blake and Katy stood in a semi-circle outside the Kingsley red brick and white sided ranch and discussed the bad roof, the plumbing and the need for a new refrigerator.

From what Riley could tell about, parts of the fence stood in a state of disrepair. Boards needed replaced. The horse barn's roof bore gaping holes. "I can't wait to get busy," Riley told Katy in a cheerful tone that came straight from his heart.

"We'll have the place lookin' spiffy," Blake told his sister. They hugged and smooched. All aflutter, she parted from her brother, climbed into the beige SUV and scooted close to Frank in the front seat. The engine started.

"It's all yours, Blake," his sister said as she looked outside at them.

"Frank, good luck with my sister."

"Looks like I'll need it," Frank muttered.

Blake made a funny face that caused Riley to chuckle, but his expression disappeared when Katy looked his way.

"I heard that, Frank."

Frank's eyes lit up and he laughed. His tone proud, he said, "We'll be fine." He raised a finger signaling their departure. "You two take care."

Katy pulled down the sun visor, opened the mirror and daubed her lips with ruby red lipstick. She stopped for a moment and added, "I couldn't do the upkeep. It needs your touch." Holding up the gold tube, she paused and smiled their way. "...yours and Riley's, that is." She waved and hung out the window as Frank pulled away. The vehicle pulled ahead ten feet and stopped. When Riley and Blake caught up and looked inside, Frank yelled, "Welcome to our family, Riley!"

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Honored, Riley said, "Glad to be a part of it." Red heat colored his cheeks. His heart pumped with excitement because now him and Blake would be living together full time. "Thanks, Katy. I sure as hell won't miss gettin' bucked off horses."

This time the SUV pulled away and didn't stop.

Riley watched until the back end of the vehicle disappeared in the dark ridge of lodge pole pines that lined the horizon. "Don't that beat all? You survived." Riley said feeling smug and happy to be alive. He raised his Stetson with one hand and ran the other through his dark hair.

"Yep. Guess I did." Blake looked down at the toe of his shiny boot and stabbed his fingertips under his belt. A brief look of worry crossed his dark features. "It's not everyday a guy's sister goes off to get hitched."

"I know." Riley stepped up to him and patted him on the back. "Well, give me a tour."

Blake cleared his throat. "Sure. Let's go get the horses."

After riding around the property, they made a list of chores that needed done. Mid-afternoon, they drove into Rufus and stopped at a lumber company where they ordered boards for the fences and bought some nails.

"There 're tools at the ranch," Blake explained.

"All right."

After the clerk wrote down the last item, feed for the horses, they sauntered down to the local diner. A bell dinged over the entrance, and they sat at a table next to the window. The place smelled of baking bread, coffee and roast beef just out of the oven.

Blake grinned Riley's way as he scooted his chair up and under the small, white clothed table. He glanced at a chalkboard that held a list of specials. "Well, what do you think about the ranch?" His eyes stayed with Riley.

He felt a little uneasy. One small matter still bothered him. "I like it. It's just...well, what if you decide you want me to leave. Then what?"

Just when Blake's mouth dropped open, a short, stocky man with a head full of chestnut hair and a thick mustache strode up to the table and said, "What can I get for you?" He held a pencil to a green pad of

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paper. Blake took his gaze off Riley and cast it onto the waiter.

"I think the special."

Riley added, "Make mine the special, too. And two teas."

Blake found his voice after the waiter left. "What the hell are you sayin'?" The corner of his lip quirked, displaying his amusement. "When I kick your ass out, you mean?"

"Yeah. You may get tired of me. Or, maybe go back to the circuit. Here I'd be, stuck out in the cold."

Blake rolled his gorgeous, onyx eyes and shook his head. He kneed his thigh under the table. "That's the silliest thing I've ever heard. I'd never do that. Hell, what if you decide to leave me? I'd be alone in Rufus, Oregon, hurtin' my ass off because you left. Let's be positive about this. We're going to make it. We're perfect for one another. Tell me, Riley. Aren't you okay with this?"

He's right. An elongated sigh left Riley's lips. "I'm sorry." He felt his own voice shake. "Hell, yes. It's just that sometimes I feel like I'm goin' to wake up and this...us will all be gone."

"Riley, you're my man. Just let me provide the ranch for us to work on."

"But—"

A knowing, understanding grin spread over Blake's lips. "No if's, and's or but's. We're a couple now. Forever."

God, I love that smile. "You bet." Riley smirked. "And we'll make the best of it, too, promise".

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