

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

WRECKING BALL

Elin Austen

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

WRECKING BALL

By Elin Austen

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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WRECKING BALL

By Elin Austen

Photo Description

Two men lay entwined on a bed in a hotel room, newspapers tossed aside as they nuzzle and hold each other. Both men have dark hair, and one could be Native American. They are bare-chested and covered by blankets from the waist down.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

We've been holed up in this room for days, avoiding the real world. Three days of sex, tears, and laughter; fueled by longing and the hollow need I've felt since he'd walked away the first time. I never thought he'd actually come back to me, choose me over everything else he had waiting for him. Now as I absorb the feel of his heat and weight behind me, I think of the few headlines I'd managed to read before he tossed the papers on the bed and made me forget all about what was waiting for us outside of this hotel room. My breath hitches and I squeeze my eyelids shut, wishing I could go back to sleep. But I know reality will come knocking soon. Was he serious when he said he was choosing me? Choosing us? A shiver of doubt races up my spine. I feel his arms suddenly tighten and his warm body stretches behind me. Time to face the real world...

Wish List: HEA/HFN, I do love some angst, drama!

Sincerely,

~E~

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: Utah, Mormon, farmer, lawyer, in the closet, same-sex marriage, teen shelter

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WRECKING BALL

By Elin Austen

Chapter One

April 2010

“Hang on, Grandpa. Please, just hang on,” whispered Race as he gripped the old man’s hand. A volunteer in a pink smock gently took his arm and led him to the waiting room while the paramedics rushed his grandfather through the ER. Race perched on the end of a hard chair, swallowing frequently to keep his churning gut from erupting. His heart pounding in his ears, he finally bowed his head and silently prayed to Heavenly Father for the life of Grandpa Ace. A long fifteen minutes later, Race was led back to the ER bay where his grandfather lay on a wheeled hospital bed hooked up to tubes and a breathing mask. Race stood close to the bed and looked down at the pale face and closed eyes. *When did Grandpa get so small?*

“He’s had a stroke,” the doctor announced quietly. “We have him scheduled for a CT scan in a few minutes to determine the type of stroke and ascertain the extent of the damage. His heart rate is strong and that is a very good sign that he will survive this episode, but I can’t tell you yet how much his cognitive functions or his mobility will be impaired.” Race blinked back tears as an orderly stepped into the bay and maneuvered the bed out to the hall and pushed it towards the double doors at the end. “Why don’t you get some coffee while you wait? It will be at least an hour, and possibly more if a procedure is needed. Give the nurse your cell phone number and wait in the cafeteria. Someone will call you when we know more,” the doctor told him as he made notes on a chart and moved to the next bay.

Race nursed his second cup of tea as he slouched in the almost-empty cafeteria. It was close to midnight when Grandpa had been brought in, and the hospital had that “settled for the night” feel. A few tired-looking staff in wrinkled scrubs sat at one end, murmuring privately. Race glanced again at the young man sitting by himself next to the glass wall, staring out at the atrium and occasionally sipping from a cup of water or jotting something in a notebook. His faded jeans were torn and dirty, and blood spattered the front of his tee shirt. A stuffed backpack sat on the floor by his tattered sneakers. Race could guess what the kid’s story was. He looked very much as Race had five years ago after being on the street for a month; before Grandpa found him and brought him back to the Blue Turkey Farm to stay for good. Race thought again of the old man somewhere in the hospital and felt a squirt of acid hit his

stomach. He swallowed hard and checked his phone once more to make sure it was on.

Race felt he was being watched. Without raising his head, Race peered at the kid out of the corner of his eye. Sure enough, the kid was staring straight at him. Truth time. Race quickly looked up and into the kid's sapphire blue eyes, pinning him with his gaze. The kid gave a startled jump, but held Race's appraising look long enough for Race to know. Gay. Just like Race. Race tilted his head in a slight nod, and the kid blushed and looked down at his notes.

Race had zero interest in hooking up right now, with Grandpa seriously ill, and his own plans now in question. But he did wonder if he was right about the kid... and if the kid needed help.

He shuddered as he remembered the shame and the fear and the stark loss felt by his fifteen year old self as he faced life without a family or a home. He took a deep breath and walked over to the kid's table.

"Looks like you've had a rough time." Race nodded at the blood on the kid's shirt.

"Uh... yeah."

"Mind if I sit?"

The kid shrugged. Race stood until the kid muttered, "Go ahead." Race sat and stuck out his hand.

"I'm Race Blue."

"Tanner," the kid responded and briefly touched his palm in a quick shake.

Race looked him over. Tanner had tiny sutures in his lip, a slowly blackening eye, and scrapes on his face and arms. He held himself carefully, as though any movement hurt. His nose was red and swollen. "You look like I did a few years ago, after some men tried to make me do something I didn't want to do."

Tanner sucked in a surprised breath and blinked. Race waited patiently for the kid to own up to whatever had happened. Or not.

"I was mugged," he finally mumbled, looking down at his notes.

A universal favorite for closeted gays after an attack, Race mused. He looked down at the notebook and saw names with towns in an ordered list, some crossed out and others with a question mark next to it. Race frowned and looked at him closer. Tanner had clean, dark brown hair with a recent trim and

smelled like soap under that sharp, antiseptic odor. He had a slight build and was on the thin side, but didn't look like he had been eating out of a dumpster. *So, not on the streets yet but perhaps about to be.*

"Do you have a place to stay?" he asked gently. "I think you're too young to be able to stay in the adult shelter. You need a parent to sign you in at the family shelter, and you probably already noticed there are no youth shelters in this county. There are laws against people harboring runaways, which juveniles are considered even if they got kicked out of their home. Makes it hard for a homeless teen to find a safe place to sleep at night," Race continued. "There's a camp out in the canyon if you prefer camping to sleeping in an alley or the park at night."

Tanner's eyes narrowed and he looked at Race, assessing. He cleared his throat. "I don't need a place to stay, thank you."

Race's phone buzzed. He made a snap decision. "My grandfather took me in after my stepfather threw me out for liking boys. I was... am... safe there. He's taken in more boys since then. They stay long enough to get on their feet and decide what to do next. Let me know if you change your mind. No drugs allowed." Race scribbled his phone number on the notes and got up, turning his back on Tanner as he opened his phone to hear about Grandpa.

Race sat next to Grandpa's bed in the ICU, lightly holding the hand not sporting the small blood pressure monitor on a finger. The old man had fresh bandages on his neck, where the surgeon had cut to thread a probe up into a blood vessel and dissolve the clot that was shutting off life-giving oxygen to Grandpa's brain cells. Race had kept up a quiet monologue since he got to the room, talking about the orchards and outlining the plans for the upcoming summer cherry harvest and wondering if he should hire someone to run the stall at the farmer's market. Did Grandpa think Race should make cobbler again this year? It was a solid money-maker and he honored his late grandmother every time he made it from her recipe. Race's mouth was dry from the constant chatter, but it calmed him and the doctor had told him earlier that aural stimulation could aid in brain recovery. That was many hours ago and Grandpa had not opened his eyes, still sedated. Race let his monologue wind to a stop and laid his head on the bed, closing his eyes, thinking he could put off sleeping if he just rested his eyes for a short time.

"You're exhausted," said a voice from the doorway. Race looked up with bleary eyes. "I brought you some hot tea," Tanner told him, holding out a cup.

Race slowly got to his feet and reached for the cup, taking several sips of the steaming liquid.

“Thank you.” Race motioned him into the room. “Still here?” he asked Tanner.

“I have nowhere else I need to be,” Tanner admitted. He cleared his throat. “I heard you mention needing help at the... uh... orchard. I can assist, in trade for room and board. If the offer is still open,” Tanner trailed off with a tentative smile at Race.

Why the hell not? He had already offered the kid a safe place to stay and if he was willing to work for his keep, even better. And Race knew he would be busy doing Grandpa's work in addition to his own. “Sure.” He smiled tiredly at Tanner.

Chapter Two

“Son of a bitch!!” Race scrolled again through yet another spreadsheet of the Blue Turkey Farm finances, trying to figure out how to pay for the extended care and therapy Grandpa needed in time for his release from the rehab center in Provo. After four weeks, he was finally coming home and the house needed to be made wheelchair-accessible, so Race and Tanner had rearranged the first-floor rooms, turning the spacious office into Grandpa’s new bedroom. Race and his friend Samuel had spent a day opening a wall into the hall bathroom to make an en-suite. They had ripped up the worn carpet in the common areas of the house and uncovered original hardwood floors. He sat behind the handmade desk that was now in the living room, with piles of file folders hastily stacked after the move. The kitchen door slammed and Race looked up in time to see Tanner edge his way through the cluttered living room with a large laundry basket. Tanner wore a tee shirt and jeans. His clothes had grown tighter in the weeks he had been at the farm. Working every day in the orchard had put some muscle on his arms and shoulders, and eating Race’s fine meals had filled out the rest of him. Lustrous, chestnut hair curled around his ears.

“Hey.” Tanner grinned, flipping hair out of his eyes. He had an easy smile once his split lip healed.

Despite his current frustration, Race’s mouth lifted in an unconscious smile. He leaned back and stretched, slightly more cheerful. From the first day, Tanner had quickly found ways to be useful. He didn’t say much about his previous life, and Race respected that. Everyone had their own way of dealing with a familial kick in the teeth. He and Grandpa always ran the risk that one of the boys they helped would rob them or worse, but Grandpa insisted that treating them as a welcome family member in their home would do much to counteract the horrible stigma etched onto their souls by families who had discarded their children simply for being gay.

“Laundry’s done and the pickers are under contract,” Tanner announced with a cool indifference, as though one task was as simple as the other.

“How...”

“Easy. I told them we had another harvester bidding on the work, one who maintained his own insurance and included transport to the shipping center.” Tanner pulled folded papers from his back pocket and dropped them on the desk. “He reduced his original bid and struck through some of the more risky

clauses. I don't understand why your grandfather kept doing business with that group. It was costing him money and exposing him to some serious liability."

Race squinted, puzzled at Tanner's adept answer and wondering how he came by such confident knowledge. "I dunno. Family friend, maybe. My mother probably set up the original contract and Grandpa never renegotiated it. She's still the farm's bookkeeper, even though she doesn't come out here much anymore." Race gestured at the computer screen in front of him, irritated. "I don't know if we have enough money for Grandpa or not. The banking is done electronically, but I can't follow these accounts and I really don't want to call my mother." He let out a defeated sigh and then looked at Tanner again. "Hungry?"

"Starving," replied Tanner, absently brushing his hand over his abdomen. Race watched and suddenly felt hotter as he imagined that hand being his own, resting against skin-warmed cotton stretched over Tanner's smooth muscles. He stood abruptly and headed for the kitchen. "I'll set dinner out. Fifteen minutes alright?"

"Sounds good. I just need a quick shower," Tanner answered as he grabbed the laundry basket and started towards his room.

Thoughts of steamy water dripping down that trim back and running between those taut butt cheeks invaded Race's mind. Other thoughts of a similar nature had lately become more frequent. "Stop it," Race chided himself, appalled at his misbehaving libido. He would never touch an underage boy and he couldn't understand where these wrong feelings were coming from. "Not a pervert," he scolded himself again as he now did several times a day. Race's fleeting good mood evaporated as he realized that putting some distance between himself and Tanner had become a necessity. He closed his eyes, unhappily resigning himself to spending more time away from him, and was unsettled at the sudden sense of loss.

"I don't know if I can help, but I'd like to try," Tanner offered cheerfully as he buttered another freshly baked yeast roll. "I was president of my school's accounting club, and I helped in my father's office several summers."

"Then you know more than me. Thanks for the help. I'll get the cobbler." Race pulled his eyes away from the sight of Tanner's lips, glistening with melted butter. He hoped Tanner hadn't noticed how his face suddenly flushed red when the thought that butter would make an excellent emergency lube flashed through his mind. Jeez. He needed a hookup. Maybe that male nurse he

had met while Grandpa was in the hospital was up for some mutual fun. He swallowed the last of his homebrewed peach beer and served their dessert. Race avoided looking at Tanner as they both inhaled the fresh cherry cobbler, taking a moment to savor the sweet vanilla and nectar reduction. "I'm going out for a few hours tonight... to see some friends. You gonna be okay?" he asked cautiously, hoping Tanner wouldn't want to come along.

"Yeah, kinda tired." He yawned. "Have fun tonight."

Race quietly closed the door as he entered the dark kitchen, making an effort not to wake Tanner at this late, or rather very early, hour. He felt relaxed for the first time in weeks. Race couldn't believe how much stress he had been under until its absence left him almost floating. Steven had taken good care of him, torturously sucking him off with mind-blowing finesse and then fucking him until he came a second time. He appreciated the pleasure Steven could bring him, but he was already a fading memory. Steven's masterful technique could not erase the potent feelings Race felt himself developing for Tanner. Race shuffled past the living room and stopped short. Tanner was at the desk, muttering to himself as he clicked through files on the laptop with impressive speed, his eyes focused on the screen. Race thought he somehow seemed older, and realized it was because Tanner had not shaved recently and his usually smooth face sported the beginnings of a beard. Race coughed lightly and Tanner looked up, surprised.

"You didn't have to do that tonight, Tanner. I thought you were going to bed early."

Tanner stood up and stretched, exposing a dark trail of hair disappearing into the sleep shorts hanging low on his hips. Race unexpectedly felt his cock stir.

"I thought I'd just take a quick look to see how much effort this would be, but I kept looking deeper into all the accounts I could find and I couldn't stop." He picked up a notepad and consulted it before he sighed and looked up at Race. "The farm has adequate funds coming in throughout the year, but some of these expenditures don't make sense. And, uh, the other employees are paid very well for laborers. Also, it looks like your grandfather's tithe is computed on gross income of the farm rather than on net income paid to him. If you change it to ten percent of just his net income and let the other employees pay their own tithe, I believe you will have more than enough for his extra care. Would your grandfather consent to that?"

“Tithe?”

“Yes. To the LDS church.”

“Grandpa Ace doesn’t belong to the church anymore. Why would he pay a tithe?” Race rubbed his face.

“To maintain a temple recommend, for one. That would allow him to participate in sacraments at the temple,” Tanner explained, brows furrowed.

“That doesn’t make sense. Grandpa didn’t even attend my mother’s temple wedding to my stepfather.” Race grinned. “She was mad for a long time. I was only five, but I remember the fight she and Grandpa had, and she mentioned it many times in the years I lived with her and my stepfather.”

“Race, this money is definitely being automatically deposited to a LDS church account. I know, because I helped my father with the ward accounts when he was a bishop.”

“I’ll ask Grandpa. He seems lucid often enough now.” Race yawned. “Also... what employees? Even I don’t get a salary. Grandpa gave me access to the household account and I take what I need from it.”

Tanner tapped his pencil against the notepad, thinking. He motioned to the sofa and they both sat down. Race’s pulse jumped when his hand brushed Tanner’s partially bared thigh. He pointed to several names with a dollar total next to it. “Do you recognize these employee names?”

A scented tendril of Tanner’s lime shampoo hit Race’s nose. Race idly wondered if Tanner could smell the coconut oil he’d had Steven use for lube, and his groin tightened at the thought of Tanner smelling sex on him. Race swallowed and peered at the list. “Sure. That’s my mother and my three brothers. Half brothers,” he corrected himself. “Why?”

“They’ve been paid a salary for the past four years. If your mother is the bookkeeper for the farm, then I can see how she would get a salary, but you told me the first week I was here that there are no permanent employees. And her salary is not within industry standards for a part-time bookkeeper.”

“Mom won’t let my brothers come here since she found out I live here. I have no idea why they’re getting paid out of farm income.”

“Hmm. Maybe he’s putting money towards their missions,” Tanner speculated.

Race closed his eyes. “Yet another question for Grandpa. Anything else?”

“I was curious about some of these items that are being depreciated. If I understood what they are, I could possibly redefine the basis and get your grandfather more of a tax deduction. But that can wait until tomorrow. You look tired.”

Race opened one eye. “So do you. Let’s hit the sack.”

“Uh...” Tanner stuttered. Race smiled to himself.

“Goodnight Tanner,” Race said softly, and left for his own room. He hoped he would sleep soundly for the rest of the night and not dream about Tanner.

Chapter Three

“Race? You in there?” Tanner called from outside the dilapidated cannery.

“Fuck!” Race swore creatively when his head hit the side of the fermenter. The blasted thing was just a large cooker with a temperature control, but that was exactly what he needed for his wort.

He got to his feet and headed towards the door, wiping sweat off of his face with his discarded tee shirt. The cannery was hot as blazes in the summer and currently smelled strongly of mash. Race stepped outside and shut his eyes against the bright sunlight. He heard a small gasp and squinted in that direction. Tanner was looking him up and down, and seemed to like what he saw. Race wore boots, faded comfortable jeans that hung low on his hips, and sweat on his chest... where Tanner was now staring. Race couldn't resist. He flexed his abs and pecs, and Race's lips twitched when Tanner groaned. Race had become aware over the past weeks that his attraction to Tanner was not one-sided. Tanner now smiled shyly and seemed to glow when Race looked his way. If the attraction *was* mutual Tanner had not acted on it, thank Heavenly Father. Race didn't think he could resist if the dark-haired, blue-eyed boy came on to him.

Race had watched unseen and noticed how kind Tanner was towards Grandpa when they were working to straighten out the farm's accounts, and Grandpa always managed his half-smile when Tanner was around. Race felt better about leaving Grandpa alone with Tanner, and avoiding the house when Tanner was there, but it didn't seem to lessen the connection he felt with the boy.

“Er... what is this place?” Tanner asked, trying to divert attention from his reaction.

“This glorified shack was the famous Blue Turkey Farm Cannery,” Race answered. “It started life as a barn when the farm was first settled in the last century, but was retrofitted with canning equipment when the fruit trees started producing in huge amounts. The Blue Turkey Farm's own orchard's jams and home-canned peaches and cherries were famous statewide.”

Tanner peered into the dark interior. “What's it used for now?”

“I brew beer. Welcome to the Blue Turkey Farm Microbrewery,” Race said proudly. “Very micro,” he added. “Grandpa stopped the canning operation decades ago when Grandma died. I was able to convert the old cookers to a

mash tun, copper and fermenter a year ago when home brewing became legal in Utah. There's room to store the recycled wine casks I use for kegs. Adds flavor during aging." Race stood in the quiet morning sunlight and added "As soon as I'm happy with my yield and do the paperwork, I can start to sell my brew, maybe expand if I can navigate my way through all the Utah liquor laws." Race grew pensive. "At least, that was my plan before Grandpa got sick. I'll have to stay close to home now."

Tanner tilted his head. "What other plans did you have? College? Stay here and run the farm?" he asked curiously.

"I was going to stay on the farm as long as Grandpa needed me, and before he got sick I had some freedom, since there wasn't any reason for me to be here every day. The fields are rented quite profitably to an organic startup and to several weekend farmers. The fruit orchards don't require daily attention except around the harvest, and the only animals left on the farm property are the wild blue turkeys, and they live in the woods. I take a few courses at the community college when I have time, but I haven't decided where I want to go with that. I work construction part time and I have my heirloom garden," Race said. "Let me show you something."

Race motioned for Tanner to follow him, resisting the urge to reach for him and walk hand-in-hand. "I love this part of the farm. It's the original land grant. The orchards were acquired later. The old homestead is up this trail." Race led Tanner on a short path to a flat meadow. A one-story stone cottage stood surrounded by summer flowers in every shade of blue. Race's step quickened as he headed for the door and waited for Tanner to follow him into the home. He watched Tanner take in the soft golden glow of the hardwood floors, and the thought of Tanner stretched out naked on a quilt on that floor in front of a fire slid into his mind. Race clenched his fists until his nails dug into his skin.

"The floors were my winter project a year ago. We replaced several of the boards, then sanded and varnished and polished. The boys staying with us that winter helped." He waved his hand at the hearth. "Every season I do more. We've fixed the roof, cleaned the chimney out, updated the wiring, sealed the walls, and replaced windows. The old place is snug and weatherproof now." Race showed him a slate-floored corner that served as the kitchen. "Eventually I'll replace the old appliances and update the plumbing so I can have a modern kitchen. Need to keep my beer cold." He grinned. "The bathroom needs work but at least we don't have to use an outhouse. That sucks in winter," he added. Race took a deep breath. "No one has lived in this place for over sixty years,

and I had planned to move in here eventually, to give myself some privacy for, ah, dates and stuff, but now I'll need to stay with Grandpa at the main house. I owe him so much." Race smiled sadly. "I don't think we can take in lost gay boys anymore. Grandpa was the guiding force behind that."

"Your grandfather is one of the finest men I know," Tanner declared. "Given his illness, perhaps he'll need to go into a long-term care facility. Will you stay at the farm then?" Tanner's voice became a barely noticeable whisper. "What will you do when the inevitable happens?"

"My mother is his only child, so she'll inherit and probably sell the property and business, and that of course will leave me homeless." Race sighed. "I try not to think about it."

"You need to start thinking about it, Race," Tanner said gently. "He is frail and will only get worse. You should have a plan in place."

"Yeah, I know. By the way, why'd you come looking for me?"

"Your grandfather's lawyer, Seth, is at the house with him now. He wants you there."

"Any idea why?"

"Your mother called. She's on her way out to the farm."

Chapter Four

“You haven’t had any problems with the farm budget, have you?” demanded a shrill voice. “The bills are paid on time and the farm still turns a profit, thanks to my money management skills.”

Another voice calmly responded. “The farm turns a profit because the land has been free of a mortgage or any other encumbrance for over thirty years. In addition, your father divested the farm of any activities that required his daily presence after his wife died, and that allowed him to continue teaching high school for many years. His retirement benefits are what pay his daily expenses, not the farm income.”

Race and Tanner stood inside the kitchen and listened to the argument between Race’s mother and the lawyer. “I need to be here in case Seth needs some assistance explaining the details of the new banking structure we put in place. Are you coming in?” Tanner murmured.

“No.”

Tanner gave a sympathetic squeeze to Race’s shoulder and quietly entered the living room. Race began packing supplies for several nights away from the house, not knowing how long his mother planned to visit. He grabbed all the bottles of home brew and a plastic tub of his leftover beef bourguignon and put them into an insulated carry bag. He mentally planned his menu and added items as he thought of them. He checked the laundry room for any clean clothing and lucked out with a dryer full of his clothing. He gathered what he needed. Race knew when his mother noticed Tanner.

“Who are you?” she challenged.

“Good afternoon ma’am. I’m Tanner Boileau. I audited your father’s accounts and provided recommendations for possible courses of action to his attorney,” he stated with quiet authority.

Race felt a shimmer of attraction curl in his belly. Tanner sounded... powerful. Had his voice changed, gotten deeper? Race couldn’t quite pinpoint what was different. And the name Boileau got his attention as well. Wasn’t that the name of the family his stepfather had followed in the news, back when Race still lived with him? Both sides of the Boileau family could trace its roots back to two primary members of Brigham Young’s original settlers, and both Utah history and the LDS church hierarchy were full of mentions of the prominent family.

“There was no need for an audit. You could have just asked me whatever you wanted know,” she huffed.

“My fiduciary responsibility is to my client. I am duty bound to be thorough and to act on what I find. Your father instructed me to call Seth.”

“Client? You’re nothing but a high school kid. How old are you, sixteen?” she scoffed.

“I am twenty one and an honors graduate of the BYU Marriott School of Management. I have the necessary professional licenses to allow your father to contract for my services. Seth can provide my vitae to your lawyer if requested.”

Race dropped into a chair, his mouth hanging open in surprise. *Tanner was twenty one? The same age as Race. A BYU graduate of Marriott? What the hell were vitae?* The voices became a background murmur as he processed the astounding news. A swirl of emotions crashed through him; relief that he wasn’t a pervert after all, followed quickly by betrayal. Tanner had misled him. What the hell was he, anyway? Certainly not a homeless kid in need of a safe place to sleep. Race felt the burn of anger rising in him. He grabbed his supplies and took off out of the house before his temper detonated.

Race seethed during the drive out to the homestead, and his anger continued unabated while he checked the current batch of mash in the cannery and banged on the fermenter again. He wanted to be alone to process his emotions and the cottage was just what he needed. He usually camped there during his mother’s annual visit to her father, or when his grandfather needed more room at the main house for lost boys. He briefly worried about Grandpa, then concluded Tanner could bloody well stay at the house with him tonight, and possibly the next. He spent the remainder of the afternoon first harvesting ripe tomatoes from his garden and then working on the cottage bathroom. His friend Samuel frequently hired him when he needed help with his construction business, but there was never enough steady work to call it a job. It did give him access to greatly reduced building material, and he took advantage of it to refurbish the cottage. The final layout would have two bedrooms with a bathroom between them.

Tonight he wanted to finish the wet area. It had already been plumbed out and framed with cement-based backerboard. It would be a large walk-in shower, big enough for two big men to get active in when it was complete. Race had calmed down by now and his thoughts had wandered to what could

now happen with the very legal Tanner. He grinned as he bonded tile to the shelf that was at just the right height for...

“What the fuck?” he muttered as a muted rumbling caught his attention. He slapped the lid back onto the glue bucket and stepped to the door of the cottage. Tanner shut the ATV off and looked at him, smiling nervously. Race turned and wordlessly walked back into the cottage before Tanner could see his flushed face. He was washing his trembling hands when Tanner appeared. Race felt his pulse echoing in his ears. He had felt that brief rush of anticipation before whenever he met someone new for a hookup, but this was so much more. Race was scared, and he realized in a flash that it was because Tanner could hurt him. He could wound his heart, step on it, even crush it and Race would still want him like there was no other. This feeling was so new to Race he didn't quite know what to do about it. He carefully relaxed his face before he turned to look at Tanner.

“I expect you have some questions for me. Ask me anything,” Tanner offered, standing tall and sure, waiting for Race to make the next move.

“Is what you told my mother the truth? You're twenty-one and already a college graduate?”

“Yes. I took classes year-round at BYU and avoided going on a mission, much to my family's disapproval. I graduated at the end of April.”

All the feelings Race felt for Tanner boiled to the surface and he couldn't help himself. He stepped close and ran a finger across Tanner's lip. “That's around the time I saw you at the hospital in Provo. You looked like a homeless kid.”

Tanner closed his eyes at Race's gentle touch. “You assumed. I was trying to decide where to go after being in student housing for the last three years. I had no desire to return to my parents' home. There was no way to hide my injuries and my father would have questioned me endlessly. I would have had to admit some things that I... that I'm not willing to tell them yet.”

“They don't know you're gay.” Race realized as he placed his hands lightly on either side of Tanner's head, rubbing his thumbs over his temples.

Tanner breathed deeply, and Race saw the struggle within. “They don't know. They can never know what a sinner I am,” he said unhappily. “It would hurt them so much, and I can't do that to them.”

Race pulled Tanner into his arms and gently stroked his back. *That was so like Tanner, always thinking of others before his own happiness.* Race

wondered how long Tanner could bury a part of himself so that he wouldn't cause distress for his family. Race's own silver gray eyes softly searched Tanner's blue ones, hoping that Tanner could see acceptance in his gaze. He slowly leaned in, Tanner's breath tickling his face; giving Tanner a chance to avoid what was coming. Race's lips closed on Tanner's sweet mouth, and they both moaned. Race deepened the kiss, Tanner following his lead. He opened his mouth over Tanner's, tasting him, pressing his tongue against those lips until they opened hesitantly. Race pressed in with gentle pulses until Tanner's tongue met his own. Tanner pulled his mouth away with a startled hitch.

"You okay?" Race asked as he stroked Tanner's hair.

Another deep breath. "Yes. That surprised me. I didn't think I would feel that much..." Tanner shivered. "Is it always like that?" he asked curiously.

"No. Often times it's better." Race grinned.

"Finally," murmured Tanner.

Realization dawned. "Uh, Tanner?" Race pulled Tanner into his arms and whispered in this ear. "Was that, by any chance, your first kiss?"

"First kiss with a guy," corrected Tanner. "I've kissed girls before, because I'm supposed to. This with you... was so much more."

"So you're..."

"A virgin. Yes, sadly. I did try to change that. It's how I ended up at the hospital."

"What happened?"

Tanner sighed. "I came to terms with my sexuality several years ago, and I thought I would have to stay celibate to avoid sinning. But I kept wondering why it was so bad if Heavenly Father made me this way. I had to know what it was like, sin or not. I had to see if these feelings and urges would go away if I took care of it," he admitted. "I knew about the park. It was the place the gays went to meet each other. I thought I could be brave and find someone to suck my dick, or... maybe let me do the sucking. I don't know if I could have actually gone through with it, but I was determined to try. So I changed clothes and walked through the trees and found a place to wait. Then a group of thugs came by looking for a gay to 'teach a lesson to' and they beat me. Someone blew a whistle and I got away while they were distracted. My nose... there was so much blood. I got treated at the hospital and you know the rest."

Race knew what it was like to be singled out as *different* and punished for it. Every year there was a group of classmates who objected to his darker skin and long straight black hair, the only hints he had of his natural father's origin. Grandpa thought Race's father was a Ute his mother met that summer she ran away after Grandma died, eventually returning as a pregnant sixteen year old. Race wondered how much harder they would have beaten him if his classmates knew how often he thought about what was under their jeans.

"Remind me to show you other options for finding a willing partner, ways that are less dangerous than a park." *So the kid... no, the man wanted some dick.* Race felt his cock stir.

Race held himself back, determined to get his last question answered. His brow wrinkled. "Even I've heard of the Marriott School of Management. You can work anywhere you choose with a diploma from that school. You didn't need the farm like the other boys that've come here. What are you doing here?"

"I couldn't exactly start a job looking as smashed up as I was. So, when morning came, I looked into what you told me at the hospital, what your grandfather has going on out here."

Race stepped back warily. "Why?"

Tanner reached out and laid a hand on Race's cheek. "The boys in the park warned me of predators and drug pushers that would get boys addicted and trick them out. One boy had heard a rumor of a place to go if they were hurt or cold, a place that wasn't the day center or a UCC church, since those places are watched for anyone breaking the law by giving shelter to runaways. I wanted to know which category your grandfather was in."

"You thought he was one of those perverts that prey on desperate boys?" Race asked incredulously, and angrily pushed past him into the main room. Tanner followed him and watched him pace around the room.

"I learned very quickly that he is not that."

Race's agitation lessened a tiny bit as he glared at Tanner. "And what else did you find?"

"The social worker that runs the day center gave me a phone number to call since she thought I was too injured to be on the streets that night. I called it and got a recording for the Blue Turkey Farm."

"And I had already invited you to the farm," Race finished the thought.

“Yes, and you were a perfect gentleman the whole time I was here,” Tanner smiled. “And I noticed other things, like the locks and bolts on the *inside* of the bedroom doors.”

“The kids feel safer if they can lock everyone out of their room while they sleep, especially the boys that come to us from the hospital needing to heal from surgery to repair torn rectums and other injuries. There’s a doctor who sometimes calls the farm about a kid needing help,” Race explained.

“I also noticed the extra computers in the farm office when we moved things around so your grandfather could have a bedroom on the first floor. Those are for lessons, aren’t they?”

“Yes. Most of the boys come here when they want to get out of the cold, which also happens to be during the school term. Grandpa helps them with online classes in the Utah virtual school so they don’t fall behind.”

Race still wasn’t happy. “The same church that runs the college you graduated from is also the church that has convinced a lot of families to shun their gay children and throw them out with nothing but the clothes on their backs.” Race turned and stared at him fiercely. “And you still go to that church every Sunday for half the damn day.” He stalked the room. “How can I trust you? Several people in the right places are willing to take a risk and quietly help the kids. They are vulnerable and I don’t want them hurt. I want to know what you plan on doing next.” He stepped closer.

Tanner backed up and found himself against a wall. He held up placating hands. “Relax, relax. I want to help.”

“You still have a family you can go back to. Why would you help us, risk charges?” Race was nervous about how much Tanner had learned. How could he have been so careless?

It was Tanner’s turn to nervously stride across the room and back, then finally stop in front of Race. “Both my parents are from families that have held high positions in the LDS church and still do. They had my life scripted out for me, but I have known since I was fourteen that I would not fit into that script. I prayed and fasted and I gradually came to realize that my family loves me and I love them, and I won’t hurt them or give them a reason to think they have to hurt me. So I didn’t come out. They offered to pay for my college if I attended BYU. I’m supposed to be celibate until marriage anyway, especially while attending BYU.” Tanner’s face turned wistful. “So I went along with most of their plan for me, since I did benefit. When I turned nineteen, they started

pressing me to go on a mission, but I knew by then I could not do that in good faith. So I opted to help develop an online mission referral website, and that kept me at BYU until they stopped asking me about going on a mission. I just kept registering for the next term and they would pay the tuition, and then I graduated. I have a standing offer, expectation really, to go to work in one of the family businesses.” Tanner looked Race straight in the eye. “I don’t want to do that. I feel like this is my chance to break out of the life they planned for me. I like what you’re doing here at the farm, and I would rather help you out here for now. Will you let me do that?” Tanner pleaded.

Race sighed and rubbed his face. “You’ve already helped with the finances and managed to shut down my mother’s little scam, and Grandpa likes you. I think you’ve earned my trust.” He smiled tiredly. “What does your family think you’re spending your time on?”

“I told them I had committed to a service project out of town, so I bought myself the summer to consider my options.”

Race plastered a rogue’s grin on his face. “We suddenly have more options, don’t we?”

“Yes we do,” Tanner said with a speculative smile.

They both moved and reached for each other in a choreographed dance as old as time. Race framed Tanner’s head with his hands and pulled him into a hard kiss. Tanner’s arms wrapped around Race’s waist and his hands landed with a firm grip on Race’s ass cheeks.

And this time when Race’s tongue pressed against Tanner’s he didn’t pull back. Race finally broke their kiss, but only to feather soft kisses down Tanner’s neck, inhaling the spicy lime that was Tanner’s own scent. Tanner moaned and trembled, then started a slow grind, groin against groin. Race felt Tanner’s thick cock against his own, pleased to find them both hard as rocks.

“Tanner, look at me,” Race ordered.

Tanner blinked, distracted. “Huh?”

“You’re new to this, so you decide how far we go, all right? You say stop and I’ll stop.”

“Uh... okay.” Tanner searched for his lips and pulled Race into another deep wet kiss.

Race reached down and unbuttoned Tanner’s jeans, forcing the zipper open as he reached in and gripped Tanner’s cock. He rubbed his thumb over the

drops of precum, smearing it around the head, and then started a slow stroking slide down his velvet shaft to his balls. It didn't take long. Tanner's breath was coming in gasps now, and Race knew he was ready.

"Tanner... baby, you're about to come in your pants. Give me some room here so I can take care of you," Race murmured as he deftly pushed Tanner's clothes down his thighs. His cock bobbed free, thick and ruddy and dripping. Race sank to his knees and swallowed Tanner's heavy cock, taking him in well past his usual gag point. He sucked as he pulled off, making sure to rub his tongue over that sensitive spot just under the head. He cupped his balls and Tanner gasped, cum erupting into Race's mouth. He swallowed and sucked some more, determined to give Tanner a reason to keep sinning.

Tanner wilted and slowly collapsed onto his knees. "Oh my Lord, that was... unbelievable."

Race leaned in and lightly kissed him, letting Tanner run his tongue experimentally along Race's lips, tasting himself. Race smiled.

"Next time won't be so fast," he promised Tanner. "I'll take my time with you and make you sing with pleasure."

Tanner rubbed Race's cock through his jeans. "Your turn," he said, breathless with anticipation. He rose and grabbed Race's hand and pulled him up and along to one of the bedrooms. Race had placed a mattress and sleeping bag and a few odd pieces of furniture in the cottage as he worked in it. He laughed joyfully as Tanner pulled hastily at his own jeans and shoes, and then Race's. He finally managed to peel them off, followed by their shirts. They both stood facing each other, naked. Race enjoyed a leisurely visual inspection of Tanner, and his cock thickened further until he was fully erect. Tanner reached for him and took command of their kiss, backing him up until Race's foot touched the mattress.

"Down you go, sweet man. Lay on your back for me," Tanner gently ordered. Race shivered as his body recognized the natural top in Tanner. *Oh, this couldn't get more perfect.* Race loved to bottom. Tanner crawled up Race, planting random kisses along the way until he landed on his mouth again.

"Uh, baby? I don't have supplies here so..."

"Hush," said Tanner. "Just let me suck you. I've thought about this way too long," he whispered hoarsely as he stroked Race's cock.

Race let Tanner explore as he worked his way back down to his dripping shaft. Tanner flicked out his tongue, tasting. Race inhaled sharply, trying his

damndest to last long enough for Tanner to try everything he'd fantasized about his first blow job. Finally, Tanner took Race into his mouth. "Baby... please... no teeth," gasped Race.

Tanner pulled off with a popping sound. "Sorry." He grinned sheepishly and took Race back into his mouth with much more care. Race closed his eyes as Tanner took more of him, not getting much farther when his gag reflex kicked in. Tanner quickly gripped Race and worked his hand up and down, stroking what he couldn't manage with his mouth.

"Baby... gonna come," Race warned seconds before he shot cum into Tanner's mouth. When Race opened his eyes again, Tanner was leaning over him with streaks of cum on his face and in his hair, grinning like a well-fed cat.

"We are definitely doing that again," Tanner announced.

Race laughed. "You'll be ready to go again soon but let's eat while you recover. Then we'll both have energy to play more, okay?"

Race heated his beef bourguignon and shared it with Tanner, along with the colorful heirloom tomato salad and too much cherry beer.

"I feel happy," Tanner hiccupped.

"What you're feeling is slightly drunk, Mormon boy," Race corrected. "Go easy. You're new to a lot of things tonight, including alcohol. You've been very brave to misbehave."

"It was so worth sinning for." Tanner giggled. "When can we fuck?"

Race spewed beer. "When we have supplies, and after we have the safe sex talk," Race finally managed to answer. "Besides, someone needs to be at the house tonight with Grandpa. I don't want him to be alone with my mother."

"She's gone, and Seth was playing cards with Grandpa when I left to find you. I had a long chat with him. He's given me some ideas."

"What about?" Race was curious.

"A real youth shelter, for one. Do you know forty-percent of homeless teens identify as LGBT? There needs to be a place they can go to be safe. Stay alive. Be accepted. Need some laws changed to do that." Tanner slurped down more beer.

"In Utah County? Fat chance. Maybe in Salt Lake City. Seth and other allies manage to get most of the boys who leave here to a host family, usually an

older sibling or other relative or a gay couple with an extra bedroom willing to take the risk. The farm is sort of a way station. Nobody has stayed more than a few months, except for one.” Race smiled to himself as he remembered that one boy.

“It would be a lot better if kids didn’t get disowned to begin with. My church needs to stop ruining families,” Tanner grumbled.

“That’ll happen when pigs fly and it snows in hell and when gays can get married in Utah,” Race added dejectedly.

On that sour note, they returned to the main house.

Tanner was more restrained after that alcohol-fueled discussion. They limited their sex to grinding and sucking each other off, since Tanner decided he wasn’t ready for more after all. Race knew Tanner spent time online methodically researching positions and anatomical restrictions, and several times their night started with watching gay internet porn, leaving Tanner speechless and horny and Race amused. Race found he enjoyed this time with Tanner. They would lay entangled with each other after both of them had climaxed, covered in each other’s scent and talking quietly of things they cared about. Their many nights together over the summer led to the development of a deeper connection between them, and Race knew he was falling in love. It bothered him more than he would admit that Tanner always changed the subject when Race voiced thoughts about a shared future. Race’s happiness was tempered with occasional moodiness whenever Tanner mentioned his eventual move back the city. Race found himself wishing the summer would never end.

Race got a phone call one August evening, and he returned the next morning with a bandaged and traumatized kid.

“He’s sleeping. He’s on strong pain medication and retro-antiviral meds, so I’ll keep him on a no fiber diet until his ass heals and his stomach calms. He’ll have to wait several more months before he can get the second HIV test,” Race reported to Grandpa Ace. “He’ll need counseling about the event, and possibly treatment for drug addiction. Doc said there was no indication of long-term use but sometimes all it takes is one time. Poor kid. I heard he was an honor student.” He shook his head in sadness.

Grandpa nodded and steered his motorized chair to a window, silently staring out at the green orchards down the hill. Race went to the kitchen to cook something that required a lot of chopping with a big knife. He went looking for

Tanner when dinner was ready and found him deep in conversation with Seth, with Grandpa listening.

“Staying for dinner?” he asked.

“Nope. I have some paperwork to process before the court clerk’s office closes,” Seth answered as he gathered up his papers and stuffed them into his briefcase. “I’ll call you later, Ace,” he told Grandpa as he touched his shoulder.

Tanner was quiet during dinner, and just wanted to hold Race close when they went to bed that night. “That boy was used as a bottom, wasn’t he? I don’t want to hurt you like that.”

“Baby, we’ll be fine. Go to sleep.” Race knew from Tanner’s demeanor that he was backing away from sex after he learned what happened to the kid. Race wondered what wild scenarios Tanner was imagining, but he was too tired to bring it out in the open and discuss it. He dropped off to sleep.

Race was pleased when Tanner volunteered to take meals to the new kid, and help him get settled in at the farm. Cody seemed at ease with having Tanner visit in his room, so Race left them to it. Race spent most of the morning at the farmer’s market near Provo and sold out early. He was still astounded at how much people were willing to pay for “authentic pioneer seed” vegetables, and today he had added cherry cobbler and a few bunches of fresh cut flowers to the usual offerings of just-picked seasonal fruit from the farm’s orchards and his many varieties of heirloom tomatoes. He was mentally calculating what he could buy next for his brewery as he drove home.

The first signs that something was wrong were the sheriff’s cars in the driveway. His heart almost stopped when he rounded the corner and saw the ambulance. “Grandpa!” he shouted as he ran into the house. He skidded to a halt inside and stared. Grandpa sat in his chair, wrists handcuffed while a deputy stood guard. Cody was strapped onto a stretcher and was being wheeled out to the ambulance.

“What...?”

“Seth,” was all Grandpa could manage to say clearly as the deputy pushed his chair forward towards the door. Race pulled his phone out and hit the button for the lawyer.

“Where are you going with him?” demanded Race.

“County jail,” said the sheriff as he stepped forward. “The charge is harboring a runaway and interfering with a law enforcement officer. The

prosecutor will determine what additional charges to add. Some serious allegations have been made.”

Race relayed the information to Seth as he followed them out and got back into his truck. He was in Provo by the time he realized he had not seen Tanner at the house. Race texted Tanner a few times from the sheriff's office, then gave up as he concentrated on supporting Grandpa. Later that night, as an exhausted Race fell into bed, he realized Tanner had not answered any of his texts. And Tanner did not come to their bed; in fact he was not at the house at all. Sleep eluded him as his mind buzzed, making up excuses for Tanner's absence. Race curled up with a pillow, his stomach churning as he allowed himself to consider for the first time the awful possibility that Tanner had left.

Chapter Five

Wednesday June 26, 2013 (Three years later)

“RACE!!!” squealed Morgan, grabbing him and planting a sloppy, wet kiss on his mouth. “Six years and no contact!” He leaned back and pouted. “If I didn’t already know how fabulous I am, I’d think like a teenage girl and obsess about you avoiding me.”

Race laughed and gave his old friend a hug. “Last I heard, you’d arrived safely in Wyoming after leaving the farm and were busy chasing cowboys. How’ve you been?”

“Good. I stayed at my brother’s ranch and finished high school. Make sure you tell Ace that! Then I went to college and came back to Salt Lake City after graduation. Lots of high tech companies to work for here, and I did miss some of my family members. They don’t all hate me.”

“Yeah, this town is pretty gay friendly.” Race looked around at the packed bar. “Lots of celebration tonight,” he commented.

“Yes,” said Morgan, serious for once. “Overturning a major part of the Defense of Marriage Act is a huge milestone. Too bad they stopped short of upholding same-sex marriage nationwide, but at least California gays can get married now. Again.”

“Utah will be last, as usual. Even the liquor laws are ridiculously antiquated, about a hundred years behind the rest of the country.” He sighed. “Which reminds me. I have a delivery to finish...”

Race’s sentence came to a halt as a scantily clad girl came up to Morgan and rubbed up against him, drunkenly shouting, “Boner!” at him.

“I have that effect on clits.” He grinned at Race, and wiggled his way back to the dance floor with the girl in tow. They joined another male and the three of them gyrated away to the pounding beat of the music.

Race smiled to himself. Morgan had been an irrepressible seventeen year old when he’d ended up at the farm, the same age as Race, and he’d had his first real crush on the beautiful boy with black hair, slightly Asiatic black eyes, and a dancer’s lithe build. Together, they had explored each other in relative safety and Race cried when Morgan’s older brother finally consented to let him move in. He’d moped for months. Race sighed and looked for the bar manager. Maybe he’d look for a hook up later.

"I'll stock some of the pepper beer, the peach beer and the gluten-free ale behind the bar, and put the rest in your cooler. Anything else?" Race asked the manager as he checked off the ordered items.

"Did you bring any cherry beer? I have one customer who comes in once a week and that's all he's ever ordered. Specified Blue Turkey cherry beer, first time he walked in. Sold the last bottle this evening." The manager searched the crowded room, then nodded towards a darkened corner.

"That's him."

Race turned and looked. His heart stopped. It was Tanner. The noise in the bar shrank to a muted buzz and his world snapped into sharp focus, with just the two of them in it. Tanner was quietly watching him, like a spider, leaving it up to Race to make contact. Race tried to work through the tornado of emotions that gripped his mind, trying to find a solid foothold to anchor himself before his heart blew away. Then Tanner's mouth moved in a tentative smile, and Race was a goner. He slowly made his way through the throng to Tanner's tiny corner table and sat down, still mute.

Tanner reached out and covered his hand. "Hey," he murmured.

"Hey," was all Race could manage.

"I never stopped thinking about you," Tanner blurted, and opened his fingers so that they entwined with Race's, holding his hand for all to see.

Race thudded back to reality. "Really? Then why didn't you show up for Grandpa's hearing? A solid church goer, BYU graduate, a member of *two* of Utah's pioneer families would have stopped everything in its tracks if you'd spoken up on his behalf."

Tanner squirmed. "I told you in the email I sent. I couldn't risk being associated with Ace given what he was charged with. It could have reflected badly on my family."

"Those were bogus charges and you know it."

"Yes, I knew it. Which is why I was confident Seth and his team would get everything thrown out. And he did."

"Eventually! But not before Grandpa was dragged through the press as some sort of monster, gay-boy trafficker. He hasn't been the same since, and he can't risk helping lost boys anymore. And don't forget he did end up paying a fine for harboring a runaway. He has a record now, and he could have gone to jail for up to six months! At his age!"

Tanner sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Of all the things that I have done wrong in my life, that is the one consequence that I am most ashamed of."

"You should be," Race snarled, the anger working its way back to the surface even after three years.

"I did what I could to help, working quietly in the background, hidden from scrutiny. Who do you think tracked down the anonymous tipster, and gave the information to the newspapers?" Tanner demanded defensively. "It was your mother who started it. Look to your own family for blame before you fault me," Tanner almost yelled.

Race slumped in his chair. Tanner was right. His mother had been so pissed about the changes to the farm's business structure and subsequent loss of her income and inheritance that she hit back the only way she knew how. The bitch. Sometimes, Race wondered if she was really his mother, but she had the same silver eyes shared by his grandfather and himself.

"You could have come around after everything settled down. You cut off all contact," Race said sadly.

"I can explain that. Would you like to leave? Go someplace quieter? I don't feel like shouting out my feelings in a bar," Tanner suggested hopefully.

Race wasn't completely won over, but he remembered Tanner well enough to give him a chance. "Sure. Let me finish my delivery, then we'll go."

Rainbow flags waved, as gays and lesbians joyfully celebrated a long sought after victory at the US Supreme Court. Race and Tanner walked side by side down the sidewalk in the Marmalade District, enjoying the festive atmosphere. The mood was contagious, and Race was feeling better. He even found himself thinking about grabbing Tanner's hand as they walked. But, no. Tanner was the one to cut things off between them three years ago. Race wouldn't risk his heart again. Tanner had to make the first move towards anything physical. They found a bench and sat down.

Tanner leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, his hands folded loosely together. "I did what was best for us at the time. You didn't know it, but I'd been accepted at BYU law school with my parents agreeing to pay for it. BYU has strict codes of conduct that all students agree to follow while they attend," Tanner explained. "It would have been horribly, frustratingly tempting to touch you if I continued to see you while I was attending law school. And it was unfair to expect you to wait for me."

Race sat back. Tanner had surprised him again. Not many people were so honorable they would forgo private pleasure for the sake of their scribbled signature on a code of conduct.

“That’s a good law school,” Race finally managed.

“Yes. Top tier nationally. I’d have been a fool to throw that opportunity away, especially considering how competitive it is to get in. I didn’t think I would, since I didn’t go on a mission and that seems to be a prerequisite for advancing in church-centric circles. But I had a very high LSAT score, and had also been accepted into the graduate management program at Marriott. My advisors thought I was a shining star and wanted me in the joint program.”

“Did you?” asked Race, awed. He had only managed to complete a two-year program in biology at a community college, with an eye to being a better brewmaster. He also managed to earn a certified nursing assistant certificate, which helped him take care of Grandpa.

Tanner laughed lightly. “No, just law school. I graduated not too long ago. I’d still be in school for another year if I was in the joint program. And you wouldn’t have seen me in that gay friendly bar we just left.”

“About that... are you out now?” Race asked pointedly, daring to consider they might see each other again.

“No, not really. But I suspect some of my family members have guessed correctly. My mother has stopped asking me when I’m going to bring home a nice Mormon girl, but she’s never asked me directly and I’ve never felt the need to announce it. And I won’t as long as my grandfather is in the Quorum and my father is a stake president.”

“You’re still in the closet then,” Race stated the obvious. “You know, at some point you have to live your own life and just let things happen as they will. Do your family members love you enough to let you be yourself, openly?” Race asked.

Tanner sat back and considered the question. “I know they love me, but faith is an overwhelming influence and I would probably lose in a contest against deeply held religious beliefs, so I won’t force the issue. In the meantime I’m now working and living on my own and I’ve been going out more. I watched *Pride* this year for the first time, met some men I’ve kept in touch with. Even went on a date. So far I’ve not heard anything from my family about it.”

Race was surprised at the sudden flash of jealousy he felt. "Date?"

Tanner grinned. "Yeah, for coffee. My job keeps me too busy to do much more. First-year lawyers are run ragged, and I still need to pass the bar exam."

Race felt discouraged again, thinking Tanner was leading up to excuses why they couldn't spend time together after this evening. He resigned himself to saying good-bye and didn't bother to invite Tanner out to visit with Grandpa, although he knew they would both like that.

"Did Ace like the MoTab tickets I sent?" Tanner asked.

"That was you? Yes, he loves the choir and applies for tickets every year. Never successfully, though. Thank you," Race answered, surprised again.

"Having high ranking church members in the family has some advantages," Tanner commented.

"You should let Grandpa thank you personally. I know he'd want to," Race suggested hopefully.

Tanner turned a radiant smile on him. "I'd love to. How about next weekend? I can get away Saturday afternoon."

"Yes. Absolutely!"

Tanner leaned in quickly and brushed a feather light kiss over Race's lips. He grinned and stood up, holding his hand as they walked back to Race's truck.

Race couldn't believe how the day trip into Salt Lake City had turned out. He was usually exhausted after a day of beer sales and deliveries and traffic and smog, but now he felt energized. He smiled the entire drive home to the farm.

Chapter Six

“Beef bourguignon,” muttered Race to himself, nervous with anticipation and wanting everything to be perfect. “Cold vegetable salad. Cherry beer.” He mulled over the contents of the refrigerator, determined to make the best burgundy beef stew Tanner had ever tasted. Race also hoped the meal would remind Tanner of what they had been doing when they ate that long ago meal. He used a better grade of beef than chuck and already had it simmering in red wine. The result would melt in your mouth. Later he would add carrots, small potatoes, pearl onions, and mushrooms to the rich wine gravy. He set his bowl of bread dough to rise on a warm window sill, and went out to his garden to harvest something fresh for the vegetable salad.

Tanner was late. Race didn't know what time he planned on being at the farm, but he was pretty sure “afternoon” meant there would still be daylight. He thought of calling him but then decided he didn't want to seem like a needy girl. Evening turned to night and Race had finally given up and put the leftovers away. He had just finished cleaning up the kitchen and went to make sure Grandpa was ready for bed. The only good thing was that Race had not told Grandpa that Tanner was coming. He had wanted it to be a surprise. Now, Race was just relieved that Grandpa had not been cruelly disappointed. Race slowly got ready for bed, but sleep eluded him. He felt like a fool, wondering why he had ever thought that Tanner *fucking* Boileau would be interested in a lowly farmer. Race hadn't been this depressed in a long time.

Grandpa enjoyed reading his morning news online at the breakfast table, so Race was used to seeing the laptop sitting next to his omelet. He was spreading peach pepper jam on his toast when Grandpa touched his hand and slowly turned the laptop around so Race could read whatever had caught Grandpa's attention. He didn't see it at first, then noticed the title near the middle of the page. “*A death in a prominent Provo family. Matteo Boileau killed while serving as an Army Captain in...*” Race scrolled to the next page “*...Afghanistan.*” There was a photo of a metal coffin being off loaded from a plane at Salt Lake City Airport with a hearse waiting nearby. A young man stood to the side, his mouth set in a grim line as Race imagined him trying to maintain his composure with the press close by. Race looked closer. “Oh Lord... it's Tanner,” he whispered, shocked. Grandpa nodded. The photo was dated the day before. Race instantly felt guilty for being angry at Tanner, knew that if it had been Grandpa in that coffin he probably wouldn't have thought to

call anyone either. Race longed to go to Tanner and hold him, comfort him. But that couldn't happen, and he realized that if Tanner had been the one killed, no one would have known to call Race. He texted a simple, *'I'm so sorry'*, to Tanner.

Race cut a selection of fresh blue flowers from the cottage garden and arranged them in a vase along with some deep green foliage. He and Grandpa signed a small card and Race drove into Provo and dropped the vase off at the funeral home. It was a small offering among many large formal arrangements, and Race doubted Tanner would even see it. He drove home, wishing more than ever that he could sit next to Tanner at the funeral and hold his hand during the service. But he wasn't family so it was not to be.

Chapter Seven

The August peach harvest was due to start next month and Race had completed the arrangements. All of the fruit harvests had gone much smoother since Tanner had renegotiated the contracts three years ago. He was trying out a new peach salsa recipe to sell alongside the fresh fruit at the farmer's market when he heard a car drive up. He idly noted it was early for Grandpa's night assistant to show up. He stripped off the gloves he wore whenever he worked with habañero peppers and looked out the window. A Lexus stood in the driveway. *Did Seth get a new car?* The door opened and Tanner stepped out, pulling an overnight bag over his shoulder.

Race felt his heart skip a beat and his breath hitched, simultaneously relieved that Tanner had come back to him and a little saddened that their reunion would probably not be christened with physical activity. Race felt sympathy for Tanner and his recent bereavement. He knew how his own brother's cyber presence in his life gave him even more of a solid link to his family than what Grandpa provided. Race's brother Jacob had been sporadically emailing him for the past three years, starting shortly after Grandpa was arrested. They had exchanged chat and photos, and Race was pleased his younger brother had reached out to him and continued with the connection. Race knew the bond between Tanner and Matt was even closer.

A slow smile crept over Tanner's face as he surveyed the orchards down the hill in the fading afternoon sunlight. He walked up to the door and Race met him there. Without saying a word, Tanner dropped his bag and pulled Race into a plundering, wet, lingering kiss. Race ran his fingers over Tanner's face, noticing the fine lines that radiated from his tired eyes and knew he would do anything Tanner wanted if it could ease his loss.

"It's Saturday, just not the same Saturday I originally planned on," Tanner apologized. "Is Ace here?" he asked.

"Yeah. Let's see if he's up from his nap."

"How's he doing?"

"He's frail and he tires easily. I have a CNA come out to stay at the house when I need to be gone overnight."

"Grandpa, look who's here," Race announced as he led Tanner into the house.

Tanner stepped forward and bent down to give the old man a hug. He sat and started talking quietly while Grandpa just grinned his half-smile. Race left them alone.

Race pondered the contents of the refrigerator, mentally running menus through his head. He had planned a meatloaf dinner with Grandpa before the CNA showed up for the standing twenty-four hour shift starting Saturday night. Race had started the shift over a year ago to give himself a night away from the farm. He had been able to head into Salt Lake City and even over to Park City to hook up with gay men. He had not gone looking since he ran into Tanner in late June, but he kept the shift scheduled anyway. He enjoyed spending nights at his cottage instead of the main house. Race shut the refrigerator. Tanner could eat meatloaf with them and then he and Tanner would spend the night at the cottage. He'd make him beef bourguignon another time.

Race ushered Tanner into the cottage and watched while he took in all the changes. The cottage was fully furnished now and decorated in colors of the mountains. Tanner was examining a series of small framed oil paintings of blue flowers hung on the wall behind the sofa while Race moved to the modern, well-equipped kitchen and unloaded his insulated carry bag. He pulled out some frosty cherry beers and brought one to Tanner.

"These are lovely," Tanner commented as he waved his beer at the paintings. "Local artist?"

"Sort of. A beekeeper I spent time with here at the cottage when he was in the area. He takes his hives all over the Valley. He says bees are attracted to blue flowers and he really loved the garden here. He has a lot of time to paint while his bees are doing their thing."

Tanner suddenly seemed less animated. "So you and he... you date?"

"We dated. We fucked," Race stated, and sipped his beer.

Tanner set his beer down. "Perhaps I should go. I didn't mean to presume, but I thought... after Salt Lake City... you were available. I would've tried to leave you alone if I knew you had a boyfriend."

Race reached for Tanner's face and ran his finger across his lips. "He was just a hookup. Past tense. We were two rural gays looking for fun. He has a boyfriend now that travels with him. I let them stay at the cottage last spring when they brought their bees for the orchards. He gave me the paintings as a thank you."

“Uh... okay. So no boyfriend?” Tanner tried to clarify.

Race smiled softly. “No, Tanner. There’s no boyfriend,” Race murmured. “To be clear, I didn’t stay celibate. I’m a healthy, gay man and I have needs, and... the only person I ever felt a real connection with wasn’t here anymore.” Race tapped Tanner’s nose.

“Well that was certainly my doing, and I’d like to make it up to you if you let me.” Tanner looked at him hopefully.

Race smiled and pulled Tanner into his arms. “Let me show you my bedroom,” he whispered in his ear.

They kissed each other and pulled off each other’s clothes, standing naked facing each other.

“You work out,” Race noted as he admired the sculpted muscles. “And you don’t shave.” Race ran a hand down the dark hair that spread over Tanner’s chest and abdomen, and ended in a wiry thatch between his legs. His cock was hardening.

“No. Why should I?” he asked as he ran his hand over Race’s smooth chest.

Race shrugged. “Doesn’t matter,” he muttered and pushed Tanner back onto the bed. Tanner pulled him down for a kiss and flipped them over. *Yep, Tanner was still a top.* Race grinned as he spread his legs and let Tanner lay between them as he kissed him some more. Tanner then moved slowly down his body, swirling his tongue on Race’s nipples and into his bellybutton as Race buried his fingers in Tanner’s thick shiny hair. The feather light touch of his lover warmed him, while his nipples perked to attention. He felt a frisson of heat take hold deep in his core. Tanner finally took him into his mouth. He still had quite a gag reflex but made up for it by working his fist over Race’s cock while easing a finger over his crack. Race’s cock thickened and he lifted his knees so Tanner could press a finger against his entry. Nerves fired and heat tore up his spine as Tanner sucked him and stroked a fingertip over that sensitive flesh. Race fumbled for his bedside table and retrieved a jar of his favorite organic coconut oil, bumping it against Tanner’s arm.

“Lube.”

Tanner opened the jar and took a glob of the fragrant semisolid material onto his finger. He pressed it against Race’s hole and it slid in. Race shivered as Tanner pressed further into his ass, turning his finger and coating him with the now liquid oil, while continuing to suck his cock. Tanner gently rooted around

in his ass, like he was experimenting. Race gasped when one foray hit his prostate. Tanner stroked his finger over that same spot again and again and Race exploded into his mouth, shooting cum until he was empty.

“Where did you learn that?” demanded Race breathlessly.

“Internet porn and e-books.” Tanner smiled smugly as he added another oil-coated finger to Race’s ass. He soon inserted a third finger and lightly but steadily stretched him.

Race silently thanked Heavenly Father for gay porn as he reached for a condom and showed it to Tanner. “Suit up,” he ordered, and Tanner raised himself to his knees so Race could roll the condom onto him.

“That sort of crinkles. What kind of condom is this?” Tanner asked curiously.

“It’s polyurethane. Shouldn’t use latex with the coconut oil.” Race made a note to himself to pick up the larger size condoms for Tanner next time he went shopping.

Tanner smeared another dollop of coconut oil over his sheathed cock, and lay over Race. He lifted his legs and wrapped them around Tanner’s waist. He felt Tanner’s thick cock head press continuously until Race’s ass relaxed and opened, and he popped in. Tanner stopped and Race smiled at the look of wonder on Tanner’s face. “Feels good, baby?” he asked.

“Oh my Lord! This is sooooo good,” he purred, and pushed in further. Tanner tried a few experimental thrusts, unconsciously adding a twist to each push that had Race’s insides turning to hot jelly. He was soon breathing hard and pumping as best he could, working himself in deeper each time. Race felt like liquid and let himself go boneless when Tanner placed a hand behind Race’s back and pressed him close so they touched skin to skin. Tanner opened his mouth and kissed him thoroughly, then gave one last thrust and came inside Race’s heated body.

Race lightly stroked Tanner’s back as they lay against each other, smeared with sweat and coconut oil. “Hold the lip of the condom tight before you pull out. Trash can is next to the bed.”

Tanner took care of the condom and rolled Race into his arm as they lay on their sides facing each other. “If I had to wait, I’m so glad it was for you.” He kissed Race.

Race was glad, too. “We have all night, baby. What else did you think about trying?” Race asked as he pushed damp hair off of Tanner’s forehead.

“Rimming.”

“Uh... okay. We should clean up real good before we do that,” Race answered uncertainly. That was sort of... advanced. Gay sex 201.

“Nope. I’m ready now, and you smell good. Is coconut a typical lube flavor?” he asked as he moved back down and pushed Race’s knees up. “Hold these for me,” he ordered as he settled in and inspected Race up close. He wrapped his arms around Race’s hips and flicked an experimental lick over Race’s sensitive hole. Race sucked in a breath and shivered, instantly forgetting about being embarrassed. Tanner peeked up from his position and Race saw him grin. He sank back down and stroked his tongue more firmly around Race’s hole and Race went liquid again. Race’s back shot off the bed when Tanner pushed his tongue inside and swirled it around the highly sensitized inner lining.

“Oh, Lord!” Race panted as heat torpedoed up his back and tiny sparkling lights invaded his vision. Cum shot from his cock and he found himself mildly surprised. He hadn’t even noticed he had hardened a second time. He didn’t even squirm when Tanner crawled back up and landed an open-mouthed kiss on Race’s lips. He smelled and tasted like the high quality coconut oil he used for cooking, and it wasn’t bad.

“Never tasted so good getting a cherry popped,” Tanner commented tiredly before they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

Chapter Eight

As Tanner sat in the cottage kitchen drinking coffee, Race was making pecan pancakes with peach sauce for him.

“The AG’s office gives all the new clerks a week off to cram for and take the bar exam. I wasn’t going to be any more ready than I already was, so I took the exam yesterday. I have a week off.” Tanner grinned. He stayed a whole week at the farm, even traveling into Salt Lake City with Race on Wednesday to make his usual beer deliveries in time for the busy bar weekend. The lifting and stocking went very quickly with a second person helping. Race finished in record time and Tanner directed him to his apartment near the capitol.

“You come and stay with me on Wednesday nights from now on, okay? I don’t want you driving when you’re that tired. And you’re welcome to spend your twenty-four hour Saturday night manhunt here with me, as well.” Tanner playfully tweaked his chin and kissed him.

Race agreed. Two nights a week didn’t seem like near enough time for them.

When he wasn’t with Race, Tanner spent the remainder of the week with Grandpa, visiting and playing internet scrabble. The two made plans to keep playing when Tanner returned to the city.

Race was looking forward to the harvest, hoping the work would keep him so busy he wouldn’t miss Tanner too much while they were apart. Tanner packed his bag Sunday afternoon, and left that evening.

Race saw Tanner every Wednesday and Saturday night, and sometimes Tanner made it out to the farm for the weekend. Race was now in the habit of texting Tanner first thing in the morning, exchanging texts all day, and ending his day with a goodnight text. He knew better than to phone Tanner. The man was so busy. He was now a full member of the Utah state bar and had been promoted to a state attorney, still working in the Utah Attorney General’s office.

The time they spent together erased history and soon it seemed as though they had never been apart. Race deleted his Grindr account and answered any texts about hookups with a curt, ‘*No. New BF*’, message. Although they hadn’t discussed exclusivity yet, they both went for HIV testing.

"I don't have a good feeling about working in that place, but my family expects it. Matt was supposed to be the family politician this generation, not me," Tanner complained one night in September. "They're also reminding me I should have a priesthood, too."

"Are you going to model your fig apron for me?" Race teased.

"Shut up," Tanner laughed, then sighed. "I thought I could do this, but they're pulling me more and more into that world." Tanner grabbed his phone and brought up his scheduler. "My father sent me this."

Race saw lunch meetings every day and several meet and greet meetings each evening.

"What are you going to do?"

Tanner shrugged. "I'll let him drive me around and shake some hands. It's not like I have to make a speech." He sat up straighter. "They're still grieving over Matt, and I don't want to disappoint them. My mother... I'd like to see her smile again."

"Some Mormon moms support their gay sons. Did you see that video of the gay couple who got engaged after a flash mob proposal in a home improvement store? Their families were there as part of the flash mob. It was great. Let me show you," Race said, excited. He brought it up on his iPad.

Tanner smiled when the parents came out bouncing to the music, and the two gay men embraced and kissed in front of a crowd of their family and friends, in a public store. In Utah.

"Look how many hits this video has... over nine million in a week. And look at these comments. If it can be accepted in Utah, it can be accepted anywhere. Those two men just put a very human face on same-sex marriage. Too bad they can't get married here," Race said.

Tanner looked pensive. "Not now, but did I tell you there is a lawsuit the AG's office is defending that would overturn Amendment Three? It was filed before DOMA was overturned, so no one at the office was taking it very seriously. But it uses a very well-reasoned Fourteenth Amendment argument for overturning the ban on same-sex marriage. I think it has a chance."

"Are you involved in the lawsuit?" Race asked.

"I did some of the preliminary paperwork when I was just a clerk there, before I passed the bar exam," Tanner explained.

“Well, you should stop helping the AG’s office!”

Tanner sighed. “It’s my job, Race. Lawyers have clients they can’t stand all the time. My situation is no different. However, if it makes you feel better, they moved me to another case. It’s a messy one about tariffs that requires my business background to analyze properly and formulate an approach for the state. I’m lead counsel.”

“You’re already swamped, and with what your father has added to your plate we’re not going to have much time together,” Race said with concern.

“You’re not wrong. I have something for you.” Tanner pulled a key from his pocket and handed it to Race, then squeezed his shoulder. “So you can let yourself in when I run late, instead of having to sit in a bar until I call you.” He rubbed his eyes. “I may be stuck in an office until 2 a.m., but at least I know you’ll be getting some rest.”

Race was touched, and said the words that had been percolating in his mind and heart for many weeks. “I love you, Tanner Boileau. Just putting it out there,” Race told him, then kissed him hard until Tanner sank into the leather sofa. Race didn’t leave much of a way for Tanner to breathe, let alone respond.

“Tan, baby, I made your favorite,” Race called one evening from the kitchen when he heard the apartment door open. He was wiping his hands when he went to greet his boo, smiling as he relished the term they both used for each other now. Race stopped short at the sight of the older man standing in the middle of the living room, looking around. “Who the fuck are you?” he demanded.

“I could ask you the same, but I really don’t care. I’m Tanner’s father.”

Race stood still, like a prey animal paralyzed with fear when it realizes a predator has just entered the area. “I’m surprised you have a key. Tan likes his privacy and his independence.”

“I used the emergency key he left with his mother. They have a strong bond, those two. Even more since my son died.” He walked over to the window. “I’ll ask first. Please stay away from my son. With Tanner working for the AG, he is making contacts and building a solid resumé for a future in Utah politics. He can be governor, eventually. But not if the voters learn of his little experiment with a sodomizer.”

“Technically, he’s the sodomizer. I like to receive,” Race said evilly.

The man's face crinkled in distaste. "If you don't, I'll bring Tanner's mother into this and I can guarantee you he won't do anything to hurt her. If she asks him to break off contact with you, he will."

"You sure about that? 'Cause Tan has come back to me before."

"I'll have this same conversation with Tanner and he can decide whether I bring his mother into this. I can't stop you from contacting him, but you should move on, find someone else," he said, not unkindly. He turned and headed for the door. "By the way, Tanner won't be back tonight. His mother is despondent and he went to spend time with her. You should just go." He quietly shut the door behind him. Tanner didn't return that night or answer any of his texts. Race drove back to the farm the next day, hoping fervently that this separation was just temporary and that Tanner would return to him when his mother improved. Race wanted to have faith in their relationship, but Tanner made it hard to do that when he wouldn't even text him back.

At breakfast one morning, Grandpa tapped his hand and pushed the laptop towards Race. He saw the article right away. It was a feature on Tanner with lots of photos, no doubt arranged by his father in his continuing effort to introduce his son to future voters.

"He's not smiling in any of these," he told Grandpa. "Except for this one where he is looking at his mother. And he looks terrified here where he's escorting some girl to church." Race sent him a text, '*luv u. miss u*'. It went unanswered.

Race earned extra cash by leading hunting parties in the days leading up to Thanksgiving. Grandpa had realized years ago that the hunt was what made the blue turkeys popular, and hunters would come from all over the valley each year to bow hunt the birds on farm property. Race had made easy money leading hunt teams in his earlier years on the farm. The flocks weren't as big in recent years. Race thought the birds had migrated to national forest land where they were protected most of the year. He had bagged his own bird and it was already cleaned and ready for roasting.

Race was preparing a fruit and grain stuffing when he heard a car arrive. He closed his eyes. Déjà vu left him hoping it was Tanner. He wiped his hands and went to the door.

Two teens stepped out of an old car, looking around curiously. The driver cautiously raised his hand in a quick wave and Race squinted. The young man came forward and Race recognized his younger half brother.

“Jacob? What are you doing here?”

The kid took a deep breath and stood straighter. “My boyfriend and I would like to spend Thanksgiving with Grandpa, if you don’t mind,” he requested.

Race hid his shock. *A boyfriend?* Jacob had never mentioned that in his emails, but Race supposed he wouldn’t have put that in writing at his age, either. He was never sure how much privacy Jacob had. Race gleefully grinned when he imagined what his mother’s reaction would be to another gay son. *Heh heh*. Race covered the legal stuff first. “You both eighteen yet?” Jacob was family but the boyfriend was not, and Seth had warned Grandpa it was unwise to let non-family minors stay at the farm, even for a night.

“Yes. Last summer. We met at the University of Utah where we’re students, and neither one of us wants to go home for the holidays. Also, I wanted to thank Grandpa in person for letting me keep the money Mom stole from him. It’s paying for my college.”

Race’s spirit rose for the first time in weeks. He knew Grandpa wanted to settle the family rift before he died, and Jacob reaching out was just the thing to make this a season to be truly thankful for. Grandpa smiled all during the meal, his eyes on Jacob. The two young men were funny and told tales of raucous misbehavior in Salt Lake City. The talk reminded Race of how much he missed Tanner, and after dinner he sent a simple text, *‘happy Tday. miss u’*. He didn’t bother to wait for a response he knew in his heart would never come.

Chapter Nine

Friday Dec 20, 2013

Race headed for the day center to drop off donated items for the homeless teens served by the center. Grandpa had pressed a large check for the center into his hand before Race left the farm that day, soon after Jacob and his boyfriend had shown up. The boys planned to spend their entire Christmas break at the farm with Grandpa, which left Race free to travel into Salt Lake City and arrange for warehouse space and other brewery business. He tuned the radio to a Salt Lake City station.

“In the news today, wildlife officials are scrambling to identify the cause of the sickness killing bald eagles in the Utah valley,” said the newscaster. Race had a brief thought about the blue turkey flock and their health, but couldn’t do anything until the cause was identified. He hoped it was soon.

The broadcast continued “In breaking news, the...” Race flicked the radio off as he pulled into the parking lot of the day center. Several kids came out to help him unload boxes of supplies, and he chatted with the director after he handed her a pile of \$30 Walmart gift cards. He hoped it would help the teens have a little more merry in their Christmas, and wished he could do more.

Race was sitting in his truck debating with himself whether to go look at warehouses this late in the afternoon, when his phone buzzed. A text... from Tanner? In disbelief, he pulled up his missed messages. He read, ‘*luv u*’, and another one soon after, ‘*miss u badly*’, and then another one, ‘*meet me plz?*’.

Race almost cried. He sent, ‘*luv u 2*’, and then, ‘*yes! where?*’. Tanner called a minute later, as though he had been glued to his phone waiting for a response.

“Race sweetheart, I’m so sorry. Let me explain?” Tanner blurted.

“Baby, just tell me where you are and I’ll come to you,” Race told him, breathless.

“I’m at the county offices. Where are you?” Tanner quickly answered.

“I’m in the city, at the day center. It’s not far. Give me ten minutes, fifteen maybe? Traffic’s bad,” Race told him.

“Oh Lord yes! I’ll be in the lobby.”

“See you soon, baby,” Race whispered, and pulled into traffic. The county building was easy to find but parking was not. What the hell? Why were people

running two by two into the building this late on a Friday? Maybe late for a Christmas program in one of the meeting rooms, he guessed. He walked into the crowded lobby, looking for Tanner. Television news crews were all over the place, and a long line of people snaked out of an office on the second floor and curved all the way down the hall. He spotted Tanner, and everything except him blurred out of focus as he walked towards his love. Tanner smiled hugely, and with relief, it seemed to Race.

Race smiled softly as he reached for Tanner's face and stroked his cheek. "Baby," he whispered.

Tanner looked deep into his eyes as he pulled Race in for a lingering open-mouthed kiss. Race vaguely registered hot, bright lights trained on them, and broke from the kiss in confusion. Tanner looked at him lovingly for a few seconds as he held both his hands. Then, to Race's utter amazement, Tanner sank to one knee and looked up at him, still smiling, eyes shining with tears.

"Race Blue, only love of my life, will you marry me?" Tanner asked earnestly.

Race felt tears leak down his cheeks as he speechlessly nodded yes. *I can't believe this is happening!*

Tanner started to cry, too, and Race pulled him to his feet. "Uhm, are we going to California? Or Hawaii!" Race murmured, blinking through his tears. Christmas in Hawaii would be awesome. Tanner shook his head mutely, and nodded his head towards the long line visible on the second floor balcony.

"No sweetheart. We're getting married right here in Utah, before the governor manages to get a stay put in place," Tanner answered as he brushed tears off of Race's face. Race glanced around him, finally taking in the activity going on all around them. There was a minister in a rainbow stole saying words to two women holding each other's hands, and other small groups surrounding couples standing before an officiant. He turned to Tanner, confused.

"Haven't you been following the news? It's been on all the stations this afternoon. A federal judge here in Utah ruled that Amendment Three is unconstitutional, and no one asked for a stay so the judgment was immediately in place. Everyone's rushing to get a license and then get their marriage solemnized before a judge issues a stay. There's the first same-sex couple to be legally married in Utah right over there getting interviewed," Tanner explained as he nodded towards a beaming male couple holding tightly to each other's hands. "C'mon, sweetheart. Let's get in line for our marriage license before the AG's office figures out how to get a stay put in place."

They held hands as they walked to the line, Race still in a daze. A sheriff's deputy stood at the end of the line, sending people away.

"Sorry fellows. The clerk's office is closing. They will process anyone that was already in line by closing time, but everyone else will have to come back later. These folks have been on their feet all day. They need a rest, too," the deputy told them kindly. Race's heart plummeted. So, there would be no marriage to Tanner. He had no doubt the legal stuff would be in place anytime now and the window would close. His earlier happiness tanked at that thought. Doubt started to stir and he wondered if Tanner would still marry him if they could not do it in Utah.

"If your family didn't know about us before, they sure do now," Race stated, resigned. "Your father is likely to stop us, don't you think?" Race asked, pretty sure Tanner couldn't withstand his father's persuasion.

Tanner thought for a bit, then nodded. "Then we'll make sure he can't reach us. We'll find a nice hotel and hole up there until Monday, when with luck and a sympathetic judge, the clerk's office will be open for all of us again. Let's go." He grabbed Race's hand and pulled him out of the building, while calls of "Tanner! Tanner Boileau!" followed them out the door. Race took over and led Tanner around the corner to his truck. They were already exiting into traffic when the news crews came through the door.

"We are so lucky his wife went into labor today. This was supposed to be their last chance for a romantic getaway before the baby came. He was happy I could take it off his hands and pay for it. Look at that view!" Tanner chattered as he stood by the picture windows and admired the snow covered mountains in the evening light. "Dad won't look for us anywhere near Park City. He knows how much I hate the holiday crowds at the ski resorts." He turned and looked at Race. "And I don't plan on leaving this room all weekend." He smiled.

"We bought enough supplies to last that long," Race commented as he pulled out eight boxes of polyurethane condoms and four jars of his favorite organic virgin coconut oil. He looked at his lover. "Tanner, as much as I want you inside me right now, we need to talk."

Tanner nodded nervously. "You get the fireplace started and I'll order us room service. Is steak okay with you?"

"Sure." He grinned when Tanner tried to order Blue Turkey cherry beer from the kitchen. "I don't supply it all the way out here. My profit would disappear when I paid for all the gas."

“It never hurts to spread the word. I’ll show you how to set up a decent distribution system.”

Race enjoyed his excellent steak and baked potato with shallot butter. The vegetable choice was not as good as he was used to. Fresh-picked vegetables from his own garden tasted so much better. Blackberry cheesecake with lemon sauce was a decadent delight, made even more so when Tanner fed it to him, interspersed with kisses. They took their wine and sat in front of the fire.

“Ask me anything,” Tanner told him.

“How is your mother?” Race asked immediately.

Tanner smiled softly at him. “She’s still grieving. It’s hardest on the mothers, isn’t it? But I see her getting stronger every day, learning to live with it. The first grandbaby arrived a few weeks ago, and that seemed to be a turning point for her.” He sipped his wine.

“Your father wants you to be governor some day. Is that what you want?”

“No!” he said emphatically. “The one thing I learned from working in the AG’s office is that I hate politics. The stink of it has gotten pretty pungent lately. The whole office is reeling from the AG’s undignified departure, and others may soon follow. Corrupt, backstabbing incompetents.” Tanner glowered.

“You have to tell your father that. Bring an end to it,” Race told him.

Tanner sighed. “That was supposed to be Matt’s life, not mine. Dad is still grieving as well. It’s easier on Dad if he’s still working on getting a Boileau into the statehouse some day. I thought I would go along with it for a while, until he came to some acceptance of Matt being gone, but it’s been almost six months. I always expected to live my life in the background out of the public eye, given who I love, and I was happy with that.” He lifted his glass in a toast. “I’m pretty sure he knows now that I am not Matt and I will not be the family member to make it to the governor’s office.” He tilted his wine glass and drained it. He set it on the table and reached for Race. “Any more questions, sweetheart?” he asked as he pulled Race half onto his lap.

“Is this...” Race waved his hands between them, “...us, for good this time?” Race held his breath while Tanner looked at him with concern in his eyes. Understanding crept into Tanner’s eyes.

“Yes, my heart.” Tanner grabbed both hands and held them tight against his chest. “I’m yours... and you’re mine; until the end of time.” Tanner lifted Race’s hands to his lips and kissed them reverently.

“Then you can’t run off and cut contact with me anymore. When we say our vows, you have to promise to stop doing that, okay?” Race blurted, finally voicing his deepest fear. “You can’t keep breaking my heart.” Race felt his eyes fill with tears.

Tanner gently stroked circles on Race’s back. “I’m so sorry I let you down. I’m so ashamed I hurt you again, and I’ve been miserable without you. I don’t deserve you, Race Blue,” he said chagrined. “I’ll do anything you want. From now on I’m choosing you, always,” Tanner promised. “My family might disown me and I’ll for sure get fired from my job, but that doesn’t matter compared to not having you in my life, out in the open. You’re something I need, like oxygen. With you back in my life, I feel like I can breathe again.”

Race kissed his chin, but held back making a similar declaration. Twice Tanner had left him, once for three years and a second time for three months. Doubts plagued Race, and he sadly realized that he didn’t quite believe Tanner’s promise. Race wondered if Tanner would find a reason to leave him again when the euphoria of the day’s unprecedented events faded. He knew Tanner was giving up a career most people would envy, but his biggest sacrifice was the likely loss of his family, a family that Tanner had chosen over Race twice before. Race leaned against Tanner’s chest and listened to his heart beating strong and true. Still, Tanner had outed himself in a spectacularly public way and he must have known what the fallout would be. Tanner couldn’t go back. Race dared to hope and decided that if Tanner was willing to make a commitment to him, then he could do the same. Come Monday morning, Race would hold Tanner’s hand and they would plunge into married life together. Maybe. But right now his body hummed with need, and they had all weekend to enjoy each other undisturbed.

Tanner made love to him with aching tenderness, and cradled him in his arms as he fell asleep.

Race woke up feeling happy, loved, and grateful. He was afraid to open his eyes, certain that the warm man snuggled up behind him was just a dream. The hard length prodding his sore ass urged him fully awake and he turned to kiss Tanner.

“Let me heal a bit, baby. You used a half box of condoms on me last night,” he mumbled in Tanner’s ear.

“Then maybe it’s time you used the condoms,” Tanner said slowly.

Race’s eyes went wide and he sat up. “Tan, are you serious?” He kissed Tanner. “I would be so good to you, so careful,” he promised.

Tanner leaned back on the pillow. "Yes. You're *the one* for me, and I'm sorry I took so long to realize that. Let's eat first. You'll need the energy." He smiled mischievously.

Race started coffee and inspected the contents of the kitchenette while Tanner retrieved the complimentary newspaper and muffin basket left outside their door.

"Omelet or French toast?" he asked as Tanner sipped coffee and read the paper.

"You choose, sweetheart," he murmured distractedly.

Race saw a glimpse of the photo covering the front page, and recognized Tanner kneeling on one knee in the photo. *Yep, Tan was out and there was no going back.* Race smiled as a small hardness inside of him dissolved at that knowledge.

"What are they saying?" he asked nervously.

"Don't worry about it. They'll come around. Eventually," Tanner told him as Race's spirits sank. It seemed the repercussions had already started.

"Is there a stay?"

"No, the judge told the state to make their request in writing, and he would consider it Monday at nine in the morning. That leaves one hour for marriages to continue after the clerk's office opens. Want to leave early and get in line?" Tanner asked.

Race smiled warmly at his love. "Yes, baby. I do." Maybe this would really happen.

Tanner folded the paper and tossed it aside. "Then I know how to spend part of this afternoon. Are you up for some shopping?"

Race grinned. "As a matter of fact, I suddenly have a fiancé I need to get a Christmas gift for."

They finished a leisurely breakfast, with Race sitting halfway on Tanner's lap while they fed each other bites of French toast with fresh strawberries.

Race was nervous when they left the hotel and wandered down a quaint street in the mountain town. Tanner held his hand the whole time, and several people smiled warmly at them. *Hmm. Maybe Utah was ready for them after all?*

“I don’t want anything ornate. I like the matching white gold bands,” Race told Tanner as they looked at the offerings in a high-end jewelry store. He held a ring next to Tanner’s hand and admired the bright band against warm tan skin, eagerly anticipating placing it on his love and wearing his own ring.

“They’re perfect.” Tanner pulled out his credit card to pay for the rings. “My wedding present to you, sweetheart,” Tanner told him as he waved away the card Race pulled out of his own wallet, and leaned over and kissed him in full view of everyone in the store.

“It’s on the radio that the appeals court denied an emergency stay request an hour ago,” the clerk told them, smiling. “Good luck on Monday, boys,” she told them as she handed Tanner his purchase.

Race had never enjoyed shopping so much. Tanner kept hold of his hand, and laughed easily at Race’s comments as they discussed the selection of gifts for each other’s family members, hoping they would be welcome at the family home. At least Race knew Tanner was welcome at the farm. Race found a cashmere sweater in the same shades of blue as the flowers outside his cottage in spring. He quickly bought it while Tanner was occupied with a salesclerk about what to get his sisters. Burdened with bags of wrapped gifts, they found a tiny vegan restaurant that served fresh organic vegetables in a variety of seasonings and sauces along with homemade bread. Race was astounded when Tanner asked for, and received, a bottle of Blue Turkey cherry beer. He admired the deep red brew with pink foam as it was poured into a chilled glass.

“Dad brings it over from Salt Lake City when he can find it,” the server told them, and left to get their meals.

That evening, they sat in the hot tub. Tanner had Race folded in his arms and held him against his chest as they looked out the floor-to-ceiling window at the snow falling on the trees beyond the hotel. They shared several glasses of wine before they dried off and curled up in the bed. Race started with a body massage, rubbing oil into Tanner’s back and gradually moving down to his thighs and calves. Tanner was boneless from the hot soak and the plentiful wine, and he barely tensed when Race gently pushed his legs apart and knelt between them. He moved his hands up to his ass cheeks and started to alternate rubbing and squeezing. Race worked up to briefly pulling his cheeks apart on each stroke, letting Tanner feel air on his exposed hole. Then Race bent and blew a hot breath and flicked his tongue around the pink pucker. Tanner moaned, and Race could see him swallow. Race watched his own cock harden

as he bent low again and pushed his tongue into Tanner. Tanner squirmed on the bed, and lifted his ass towards Race, wanting more.

“Go deeper, sweetheart... please,” he begged. Race obliged.

When Race had Tanner quivering with need, he reached over for his coconut oil and scooped up a plentiful fingerful. He pressed the slick goo against Tanner, and his hole gradually opened and gently pulled Race's finger in. He worked the oil around Tanner's passage, then he loaded a second finger and pressed that one inside with the first. He worked both fingers in and around, gradually stretching Tanner. He reached under Tanner and grabbed his hardened cock, stroking it while he added a third finger to his hole.

“Are you ready for me, baby?” he asked as he let go of Tanner's cock long enough to roll a condom on. The polyurethane crackled as he smoothed it over himself. Race reminded himself to talk to Tanner about going bare. His test had come out negative and he hadn't been with anyone else. He assumed Tanner could say the same, but he wouldn't go bare unless they both agreed to it.

Tanner was breathing hard, and silently nodded.

Race pulled his fingers out and quickly pressed his cockhead onto Tanner's hole, letting him get familiar with the feeling. Race kissed his neck and whispered in his ear the whole time.

“Push against me, then relax,” Race murmured in his ear.

As expected, Tanner's hole loosened again and gradually pulled Race's cock into him, with Race pressing in each time until he was several inches inside his love. He made a few tentative thrusts, and when Tanner moaned and lifted his ass for more, Race started longer thrusts until he had worked up to a steady gentle rhythm. *So hot, so tight.* He added a few more smears of oil onto his cock as he worked it in and out of Tanner, keeping him well lubricated. Sweat dripped down his face as he strained to hold himself up while he carefully pushed into Tanner. Tanner's hot channel quivered and rippled against his straining cock.

“I can go deeper if you get on your knees, baby,” he whispered. *Why hadn't he topped more often these past years? This was awesome!*

Tanner pulled himself onto his knees and Race grabbed his hips as he thrust forcefully. He reached under and grabbed Tanner's cock, stroking him to hardness until Race felt precum dripping from the tip. He licked sweat off of Tanner's back and nuzzled his neck. Race changed his angle slightly each time, until Tanner yelled on one thrust.

“Ah, found your sweet spot,” Race murmured while he carefully hit that same spot over and over. Tanner came with a roar, spurting cum on Race’s fist as he bucked and growled his way through his orgasm. Race sped up his own rhythm and felt the shimmer start in his balls. The tingles got stronger and rushed up his spine, and he came soon after, shaking through his own orgasm. Finally spent, Tanner dropped onto the bed and lay there breathing heavily while Race pulled out and dumped the condom. He gently ran a warm cloth over Tanner’s ass and thighs, cleaning him and laying kisses on his back. He turned him over and cleaned cum out of his chest hair and off his chin. Race pulled the covers over them both as he snuggled into Tanner’s waiting arms.

“I love you,” Tanner told him as he drifted off to sleep.

“Love you, too.” *Yeah, he would top again.* Race smiled tiredly and soon followed.

Race made pepper jack omelets with bacon as Tanner perused the newspaper. As he sipped tea, Race spent Sunday morning on his iPad checking the Utah gay websites.

“It says here we should download an application and print it and have it filled out before we go to the clerk’s office. Also bring cash for the fee. They’re trying to get as many people as possible processed before a stay is issued. Officiants are being asked to come to the lobby so that couples can get married and turn in the completed license that same day.” Race looked up, awed. “This is really happening. They processed 300 couples on Friday.”

Tanner smiled to himself. “That will make it very hard for a judge to undo the marriages. If it is performed while marriage is legal, and right now it is, then it can’t be taken away later. There’s precedent in California. And once some couples are married, it will be very hard to deny it to others in the future no matter what the state does. Equal protection.” Tanner was smiling in satisfaction. “The door’s been opened and it won’t stay closed. We’ll just keep shoving it open wider and wider until the damn door gets torn off its hinges. And then we’ll knock the whole bloody wall down. We’re a wrecking ball!” Tanner laughed happily.

“Sometimes it takes a wrecking ball to change things. The walls of ignorance and oppression need to come down,” Race agreed with his love.

“Have you checked your messages yet?” Race asked.

“No. Kind of scared to. I don’t want my family or coworkers to ruin this time we have together.”

“Want me to look for you? I’ll only read you the nice ones,” Race offered. Tanner tossed him his phone. Race moved through the messages.

“Someone named Samantha says she knew it all along, and wants you to go shopping with her. Why do they all think us gays have a fashion sense? I know I don’t,” Race grumbled.

“She’s a coworker at the AG, and she’s very nice.” Tanner smiled. Race scrolled through more messages.

“Why is your youngest sister sending you all these dog pictures?”

“It’s a hint for me. She wants a puppy for Christmas. I’m not touching that one. It’s up to Mom,” Tanner answered. Race read some more, looking specifically for something... anything... from Tanner’s mother. Finally, Race smiled.

“Your mother sent two messages. One yesterday afternoon says, ‘*I love you,*’ and one this morning says, ‘*don’t get married without me*’. That’s nice.” He looked up just in time to see Tanner wipe a tear from his eye. Race silently pulled him into a hug.

Tanner blinked his eyes a few times. “If we can make it happen, I would like your grandfather there when we get married and my mother as well.”

“Let’s see if we manage to get a license tomorrow. Did you see this story about people already lining up outside the Salt Lake County clerk’s office? They’re determined to get a license and are going to spend the night outside, in freezing winter weather, to get that chance,” Race told him.

Now Tanner was checking something. “It says Summit County will be issuing licenses starting tomorrow when they open at eight in the morning. We can get married right here in Park City. Sure beats spending the night in the cold. What do you say, sweetheart? Still want to marry me?”

Race leaned in and kissed him. “Yes, and we’re going to write our vows before we go to bed tonight.” And they did.

Race and Tanner stood in line at the clerk’s office Monday and had their marriage license by eight thirty in the morning.

“*Horace?* Why didn’t I know your legal name is Horace?” Tanner exclaimed.

“I’m named for Grandpa. He was already nicknamed Ace, so I got called Race.”

By nine in the morning Tanner had called his mother, who begged him to wait for her to get there before they had whatever ceremony they had planned. When he told her they didn’t plan anything and would probably just go find the mayor, she insisted on knowing where they were staying and told them not to go anywhere. She had things to do.

“Mom’s doing something. Do you want to risk waiting? Maybe get Ace up here, too?”

Race warmed at the thought of Grandpa being at his wedding and nodded and called Jacob, who promised to get Grandpa to Park City that afternoon.

At eleven in the morning, his friend in Salt Lake City tweeted him, ‘*Stay denied! Let freedom continue to ring in Zion!*’ Race breathed a little easier, knowing they had some time for Grandpa to get into town. Race tensed up again an hour later when the news reported the state had requested an emergency stay from the tenth circuit court of appeals. Race wondered what shape his nerves would be in by the end of the day, and was doubly glad to have Tanner’s hand to hold onto during the rollercoaster of events. Late in the afternoon, the appeals court told the plaintiffs to get their arguments in by five in the afternoon the next day. Race breathed a sigh of relief, knowing they had another whole day to get married. Tanner hugged him and rubbed his back.

“We have at least until five o’clock in the afternoon tomorrow to get married,” Tanner told his mother on the phone later that day. He chatted with her a bit more and then hung up. “She says everything is arranged and for us to enjoy our night. They’ll be here tomorrow. She won’t tell me yet who else is coming.” Tanner looked worried. Race grabbed his hand and kissed it.

“We’ll face them together. Jacob says the snow is bad and he doesn’t want to drive the canyon road until they clear it. They’ll try again tomorrow,” Race told him.

Tanner called his office a few times, keeping track of what was happening from the inside.

“They are so screwed. All of this took them by surprise and they don’t have the right people to work it.” Tanner grinned. “Samantha says my name was

suggested as the state attorney with the best connections at the tenth circuit, but then somebody waved the front page around and they decided not to call me. Sam said it's a great picture, and you look especially handsome although somewhat confused." Tanner leaned in and kissed him. They walked around town at twilight and admired the Christmas lights, then went to bed early. They didn't go to sleep until much later.

Tuesday morning was bright and clear, and after a leisurely breakfast that Tanner insisted they order from room service, "You do not cook on your wedding day, sweetheart," Tanner's family rolled into town. His sister took them up to their room and had them try on identical tuxes. A little man with her did some tucking and measuring on Race's tux and then left with the suits. She then escorted them to a spa and had them shaved and plucked and exfoliated, and their hair trimmed and styled.

"Is your family always this bossy?"

"No, they're usually much worse. You did meet my father, right?"

Race twitched uncomfortably.

When their couple's massage was done, Race and Tanner retired to their room and told everyone not to disturb them for an hour while they had a private lunch. Jacob and Grandpa got there at two in the afternoon and Tanner sat down with him for a quiet chat.

"Did you tell Mom?" Race asked Jacob.

"I left a message. Don't hold your breath." Jacob shrugged. No surprise there.

At three in the afternoon, the tuxes were returned and they both got dressed. Tanner grinned at the blue underwear his sister had bought for them. Their wedding bands would be their 'something new'. Race admired the crisp lines of the elegant black suit and pressed white shirt.

"That's Matt's tux he wore when our sister got married," Tanner told him. "We were groomsmen. I'm glad it fits you," he said quietly as he cleared his throat a few times. "It's like a part of Matt is here with us today. It's perfect for your 'something borrowed'."

They had matching red satin bowties, and matching antique cufflinks tearfully handed to them in elegantly gift-wrapped boxes by Tanner's mother as

his father unhappily looked on. Someone had managed to find a nice suit for Jacob, and he was enlisted as Race's best man. Tanner's sister wore a red satin gown and held a bouquet of red and white roses with sprigs of holly. At four-thirty in the afternoon on Christmas Eve, Race and Tanner were married in the private dining room of their hotel with family and some friends in attendance. They stood in front of the huge windows with a view of the mountains and fresh snow, surrounded by red and white flower arrangements briefly borrowed from all the dining room tables. They cried as they said their vows. Tanner promised to stay forever by Race's side. Race promised the same, and also to keep making him cherry beer. Jacob handed them their rings, and after they slipped them on, the mayor declared them married.

Chapter Ten

June 26, 2015 (one and a half years later)

“It all started on this day two years ago,” the newscaster announced. “The decision that overturned DOMA led to a cascade of judge’s decisions that one by one overturned most of the marriage bans in the United States, starting with Utah. Same-sex couples took immediate advantage of legal marriage, which through either a quirk of fate or just human error, was legal for seventeen days. Over 1300 couples tied the knot in that brief window that opened because no one thought to ask for a preemptive stay. The Fourteenth Amendment is the reason same-sex marriage is now legal across the land, but the heart of the case is people. These married couples have lived their lives and loved their families and by doing so have shown all of us that their love is the same as ours. The court agreed today.”

Race stopped listening to the broadcast as he noticed the small smile that played on his husband’s lips.

“What are you looking so smug about, baby?”

“It was just one piece of paper,” Tanner answered cryptically.

“What paper?”

“The typical motion request form submitted with an argument, asking for a stay should the decision be adverse. I had one filled out and ready to submit along with the rest of the defense arguments when I did the paperwork while I was a clerk in the AGs office. But the state attorney leading the case didn’t specifically ask for one, and I decided to take a chance. If there was no motion for the judge to rule on, perhaps he wouldn’t stay his decision, and there would be a brief window when marriage would be legal for us. Most courts won’t take away rights once they are granted, so any marriages that occurred would be forever legal,” Tanner explained. “It also sets up a legal precedent if a future case was needed. It’s a violation of the due process and equal protection clauses for some gays to be married in Utah while others cannot be, so a new case could be brought to argue that and ultimately result in marriage equality. It was a long shot, but it kept the door open if the court decided it was a state’s right to define marriage.”

“So you tossed it?” Race asked.

“I put it straight into the shredder, and no one ever asked about it.”

“Uh... Baby? Can't you get disbarred for that?”

“Technically, no. I wasn't a member of the bar yet and was not subject to their rules at the time. And since our marriage, I don't and won't ever work in state government again... unless my sister becomes governor,” he clarified. “So I doubt anyone from that office will remember the lowly clerk who cracked open a door to see if something good would happen.”

“My very own wrecking ball. I'm impressed. Want another beer?” Race asked as he got up. He returned with a Blue Turkey cherry beer for his husband, and they toasted the decision handed down by the US Supreme Court that day.

The End

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