

A person's hands are tucked into the back pockets of blue denim jeans. In the background, a white horse stands in a green field with trees. In the foreground, a brown leather saddle with intricate tooling and a rope is visible.

# Rough in the Saddle

Hennessee Andrews

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# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## ROUGH IN THE SADDLE

By Hennessee Andrews

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

### What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

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 they 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 Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, 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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# ROUGH IN THE SADDLE

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## Photo Description

Two men in ball hats, plaid shirts, jeans, and boots sprawl in their seats in a rodeo grandstand. Their heads rest together and their shoulders touch, and the man on the right has his hand around the other man's thigh. They are clearly friends, probably lovers. At the rail in front of and below them, three cowboys watch the action in the arena.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*These two guys were childhood friends. They tried to hide their relationship in the rodeo but they got caught, so they ran away. That is when they found the gay rodeo. HEA please, and not too much angst.*

*Sincerely,*

*Ang*

## Story Info

**Genre:** western

**Tags:** cowboys, coming out, friends to lovers, masturbation, gay rodeo

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# ROUGH IN THE SADDLE

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## CHAPTER 1

A warm breeze blew through the newly budding trees, while the bright sun above cast its life-giving rays down to the earth below. The clothesline was loaded full of brilliant white sheets his mother had just hung out to dry.

Eight-year-old Wade stood proud with his new pair of Wrangler's on, complete with his boots and the spurs Santa brought him for Christmas. In his right hand, he held his lariat and practiced twirling it above his head. Macon Sumner, his best friend, was there for a sleepover, and the two were out in the front yard with a calf roping dummy.

Macon tossed his rope, yanked, and missed the back metal legs. Wade shook his head with disgust. "How you gonna be a heeler, Macon, if you can't throw a rope any better than that?"

Macon reeled up his rope and glared. "I bet you can't do any better."

"Oh, yeah?" Wade stepped up to the challenge and motioned for Macon to back up. "Get out of the way. I'll show you."

He narrowed his eyes in concentration as he swung his rope. "One of these days, I'm gonna be in the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame just like Jake Barnes. If you want to be as good as his partner, Clay Cooper, you better start practicing more."

"Just throw the rope, Wade." Macon poked his little hands into his pockets and gave an irritated growl.

"Don't rush me. I'm concentrating."

Macon rolled his eyes. "You ain't setting no records, that's for sure."

"Shut up, Macon."

"Throw the rope since you think you're so good," Macon taunted him.

Wade's rope twirled faster above his head while he worked on his aim, remembering what his dad taught him. Concentrate, steady as you throw. He could almost imagine being on a horse and chasing the elusive prize, a calf running out of a chute with trails of dust flying up behind him. He threw and Macon snickered.

"Miss, ha!"

Wade pointed his finger at Macon. "It's your fault. You laughed when I threw the rope."

"You're just mad cuz you missed and ain't no better than me," Macon smarted off, and stuck out his tongue at him.

Wade jerked his rope and began pulling it back to him. "Am too."

"Are not." Macon straightened his posture, bowing up for a fight. The boys played hard and fought hard if they took a notion to.

Wade glared. "You wanna fight?"

"Oh, no. There won't be any fighting or fussing, boys." Wade's father spoke in his deep baritone voice as he walked up.

Wade crossed his arms over his chest and looked down at the ground. "He said—"

"No fussing," his father repeated himself. "Roping is hard work and takes a lot of practice. No one is good when they first set out. Fighting doesn't help either. Hear me?"

"Yes, sir." Wade didn't bother to look up. When his dad laid down the law, he knew to listen and keep his mouth shut.

"Y'all go on up to the house and get washed up for lunch. Afterwards, I'll come out and work with you two. Remember now, it takes lots of practice and team work. That's why it's called team roping."

Macon nodded, his fingers wrapped tightly around his rope. "Sorry, Wade."

Wade shrugged and looked off into the distance. "Sorry, Macon."

That event had happened fifteen years previously, and now twenty-three-year-old Wade Sutherland woke up to his annoying alarm clock. He pushed up to a sitting position and put his feet to the floor while thinking about times long ago when life was simple and easy. Back then, his biggest worries were breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Now, he felt lost and without direction.

The sun peeked through the blinds as it rose. He looked at the time and scrubbed his head, trying to wake up. There was a lot to do at his father's ranch today. He blinked the sleepiness from his eyes and summoned the energy to rise, wishing he could lie back down instead.

Wade padded out of his tiny bedroom toward the kitchen. Coffee was his first order of business to attend to. He realized he missed being at home. His mother would already be up, with a fresh pot of coffee waiting and breakfast cooking on the stove. Since he moved out nearly six months ago, his diet consisted mainly of toaster-ready breakfast meals in the morning, lunch at his parents' house, and most anything off the menu of the local diner, Angela's Place, for dinner.

It had been past time to move out. But who in their right mind would purposely leave a place with home-cooked meals, laundry service, a job, and all bills paid? The event that changed his life eight months earlier helped nudge him out of the nest, only because he couldn't stand the tension any longer, or the crummy looks his father offered as a result.

One scoop of ground coffee, then two, dropped into the waiting filter. He yawned as he pulled the pot out and moved to the sink to fill it. As he turned on the water, he looked out the window to the driveway. His shiny, blue Ford truck shimmered in the sunlight. Outside of that truck, and the trailer parked by the fence, Wade only had one other possession he adored. That was Macon Sumner.

The water ran over while he got lost in his thoughts. Wade wasn't much of a morning person, at all. He shut the faucet off and poured the excess out. His ears perked up as a familiar rumble outside grew closer and closer. He smiled and poured the water into the maker, then flipped the on switch.

The back door flew open and Macon entered. “Hot damn! What a great day.” He grinned and pulled out a chair and sat down. “I see you’re up, but that’s about all I can say.” He motioned to the fact that Wade was still wearing his boxers and sporting morning wood.

Wade shook his head. Macon was a morning person, and an annoying one at that. Wade leaned against the counter and leveled his gaze on the sandy-blond-haired guy he grew up with. Even after all these years, Macon still had his crooked grin and dimples when he smiled extra hard. Macon’s bright blue eyes regarded Wade, raking over his naked torso. “Have I ever been a morning person, man?” Wade raised a questioning brow.

“No, but it’s about damn time. Tell that coffee maker of yours to hurry it up. We need to pour a couple of cups down your throat and get you jump-started.”

Wade chuckled. “You’re like that annoying rabbit that keeps going and going.”

“Really?” Macon adjusted the front of his jeans. “That’s the first complaint about my energy and stamina.” He winked and took off his ball hat and tossed it on the table.

The guy never ceased to surprise Wade or to excite him. After all they had been through, he never tired of looking at Macon’s handsome face, bright blue eyes, and short, stylish hair. His smile was one that Wade couldn’t resist and it never failed to brighten his day. He liked many, many other qualities about Macon, and those concerned his fit and muscled body, tight, round ass, and what was concealed beneath the denim.

Macon chuckled and leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms while appraising Wade with a grin. His legs were relaxed and gaped open wide, with his boot-clad feet sprawled out in front of him. The worn denim of his jeans molded around his muscular legs and highlighted his bulge. Around his waist was the belt Wade bought him a few years back, and the buckle they won in the team roping championship last fall prominently commanded his attention. “See something you like?”

“As always.” Wade grinned and turned to pull two cups from the cabinet. “As much as I’d like to explore, I’ll have to take a rain check. Dad has a shit-ton of calves that have to be worked today. I need to get my ass over there and not give him any more reasons to be disgusted with me.”

“Is it still that bad?” Macon reached for the cup of coffee Wade handed him.

Wade shrugged. “He’s actually down to one or two offhanded comments a day now. How’s your old man?”

Macon sipped his coffee. “Whew, hot.”

“You know it’s hot, so why do you do that?” Wade shook his head and snorted.

Macon awarded him with a middle-finger salute.

Wade smiled. “Later.”

Macon sat his cup down and tapped his fingers on the table for a moment. “To be honest, my dad isn’t a barrel of fucking laughs either. I’m just getting better at ignoring him.” He paused and shrugged. “I figure it’s my life, not his, or anyone else’s. My business is my business and really, they can all kiss my ass. You should adopt that attitude as well.” He nodded his head as if speaking the gospel.

Wade took a sip of coffee. *If it were only as easy for me.*

“Oooh, shit. I’m going to be late for work.” Macon hopped up out of his chair. “I’ll be by to pick you up at seven.” He walked over to Wade. “Be ready.” He kissed him softly. “I’ll have everything loaded.”

Wade groaned and grabbed Macon’s belted waist and pulled him closer. “Oh, believe me, I’ll be waiting.” He angled his head to the side and gently kissed Macon’s neck. “All the things I’m going to do to you, boy.”

“Shit, man.” Macon backed up and looked down. “See what you did? Great, I’m going to work with a hard-on, again!”

Wade reached over and grasped Macon's cock through his jeans. He gave a playful squeeze and grinned. "I promise to make it up to you."

Macon licked his lips, closed his eyes, and moaned. "Damn right, you better."

Wade laughed and let go. "Get to work."

"That's what I want to say to you." Macon opened his eyes. They had already taken on the lustful glaze he got when aroused. Wade had to work to control the desire tenting his form-fitting boxers. Macon looked down and his lips quirked up. "Looks like you'll be leaving the house as hard as I am."

"Nah, I have time to stroke one off before I leave," he teased, rubbing his erection for Macon to see. "Tick, tock. You're going to be late."

Macon growled and turned to leave. "I don't know whether to hate you or fuck you sometimes."

"You forgot your hat," Wade called.

Macon stomped back toward the table and picked up his hat. "Tonight, man, be ready," he warned, and pulled his hat down onto his head. His blue eyes twinkled with enjoyment. They teased each other all the time, and Wade found it heightened their later encounters.

He watched as Macon jogged from the house, his tight jeans showcasing his marvelous ass with each quick step he took. Wade couldn't be sure who lost this battle. He supposed they both did, as he had lied and actually had no time to tame his highly alert cock. Macon's truck roared to life outside and Wade smiled, stopping to pick up his coffee on the way to his bedroom.

He dressed quickly and sat down on the edge of his bed to pull on his boots. His little stunt created a painful situation when he bent over. Excitement about the upcoming night made him smile. Every year, at this same time, the pair camped out by the river on the back of his dad's place. The tradition started when they were thirteen. During that year, their parents had finally agreed they were old enough to camp alone. He and Macon continued the

tradition, until the one camping trip back in high school when they were seniors changed everything between them. At eighteen, both were full of raging hormones, and awoke each morning with their soldiers standing at attention.

That night, so many years ago, was one Wade would never forget. He was sure Macon wouldn't either. That fateful night they went from being best friends to lovers. Macon hauled his father's stash of porn magazines to the campsite, and Wade managed to get his hands on a twelve pack of beer. They drank beer and sat by the campfire looking at endless pictures of R-rated sex in full color. Both became mesmerized by the sight and also extremely hard up.

Wade recalled that night as if it were yesterday. Macon had never been shy about anything and had no qualms about pulling out a tube of lubricant he'd stowed away in his backpack. "Look what I brought." He'd grinned as he tossed the tube down between them and began unbuckling his belt.

Wade became nervous and oddly excited about the notion of jacking off with his best friend. "Don't you feel weird about this?" he'd asked, and averted his gaze, but he couldn't keep his eyes from wandering down to watch Macon unzip his jeans.

"Hell no. It's not like we haven't seen each other's dicks before." Macon sat up on his knees and pushed his jeans down. His erection popped out, his pale flesh highlighted by the fire. "And don't tell me you don't stroke yours."

"Well, I—"

Macon had laughed and grabbed the tube, flipped open the lid, and squeezed out a healthy dose. "Suit yourself, liar."

Wade watched with eagerness as Macon lubed his shaft and groaned with enthusiasm. There was something about the deep sound of his voice when it rumbled in his chest, and the way his face took on a contented expression. Something about the moment just left him awestruck and rendered him speechless.

“Oh, yeah, this is awesome.” Macon hummed while pulling slowly from the base of his cock to the tip, before traveling back down the length again. The fire made the lube glisten and shine.

Whether it was the alcohol, countless erotic pictures, or Macon stroking his cock in front of him, Wade couldn't decide which had him more turned on. The warm orange light of the fire homed in on Macon's face, accenting his cheek bones and the curve of his lips as they opened and then smiled with a sensual expression. Wade couldn't peel his eyes away from the scene playing out in front of him. A new desire percolated through his veins, a feeling unlike any he'd ever experienced when around any girl he had dated. The feeling so overwhelming, in fact... it caused his dick to become painfully erect.

“You know you want to, Wade.” Macon spoke softly and opened his eyes, his hand still working his swollen shaft. “This is between you and me. It will never leave camp.”

Wade wobbled as he moved to his knees. The alcohol had his mind abuzz, and the moment caused his heart to race erratically. His fingers fumbled with his belt. He couldn't shake the newfound thrill that made his skin tingle. Quickly, he managed to gain control of his faculties, unbuttoning and unzipping his jeans. Macon offered an approving smile as Wade shoved his jeans down and reached for the lube. His hands shook as he squeezed out almost a handful, not meaning to take so much.

As his heart irregularly beat in his chest, his hand reached for his cock. The heat from the fire, and his nervousness, made him break out in a sweat. His cock hurt so bad, he could barely stand to stroke it. Watching Macon pleasure himself without regard or embarrassment caused Wade's balls to pull up tight.

“That's it, Wade, stroke it,” Macon encouraged him, never losing his rhythm. His hips moved, pushing his cock through his grip with slow and easy strokes. His flat washboard abs flexed while his hips wiggled and thrust forward.

Wade's breaths came quickly, his chest rising and falling rapidly. He was so hard and so wound up at that moment. He couldn't stop the uncontrollable

desire or the quivers that raced through his gut. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His release hovered seemingly at the tip. He didn't want to blow so fast in front of Macon. Wouldn't that make him seem weak, he wondered, as he took another large gulp of air.

When he found the control he wanted, he opened his eyes and Macon was there, a few inches away. Something feral and dark loomed in his expression. His normally playful blue eyes were narrowed, piercing. Wade wanted to speak, but couldn't. His words lumped in his chest when Macon grabbed his cock and took over the task for him. A shuddered breath was all he could manage. Having Macon grasp his cock terrified and shocked him, but more so, it excited the hell out of him.

"I've always wanted to do this, Wade," Macon stated with an intense look on his face. "I've dreamt of this, me and you... like this."

"You—you have?" Wade stuttered, and his stomach muscles tightened. It felt so wrong, but at the same time, so right.

"Oh, yeah." Macon pulled Wade's cock with a tight grip, sending Wade's head spinning with an overload of emotions. "I've always wanted to do this, too." He paused and moved closer, pressing his cock against Wade's. He wrapped both of his hands around their swollen shafts and slowly moved his hips back and forth, rubbing them together. "Oh, hell, it feels better than I could have imagined."

Wade couldn't summon the courage to move or mutter a word. He was overcome with longing to experience more. The feel of their cocks gliding over each other in Macon's hands was out of this world. His eyes closed as he succumbed, and he reveled in the new sensation. Each and every defined ripple of their shafts bumped over each other's and sent a new jolt of electricity to his nerve endings.

"It feels awesome, doesn't it?" Macon thrust with a little more intent and squeezed tighter.

"Yes." Wade gasped and opened his eyes. At that moment, he wanted nothing more than to touch Macon and feel his lips pressed against his own.

With a tentative hand, he reached out and grazed Macon's bare chest. His skin was smooth with hard muscles flexing under his flesh. Nature took over, pushing out all rational thoughts and feelings. Slowly Wade moved closer, his eyes connecting with Macon's as he neared. He moistened his lips and his body quivered when his lips were a breath away. "Can I kiss you?"

Macon smiled. "Hell, yes."

Wade's mouth sealed over Macon's and engaged his lips in a gentle kiss that began to build with shy enthusiasm.

"Oh, hell yeah, Wade." Macon gasped between their heated kisses. His hips bucked harder.

Wade's tongue thrust deep into Macon's mouth, gathering his tongue up, sliding and pulling, tasting the sin of beer and pleasure that bubbled between them. His hands wrapped around Macon's neck and pulled him closer as Wade thrust with more force into Macon's mouth. His hips rocked slowly, finding a cadence with Macon's. At first it was awkward, out of sync, but they continued, working together until their hips complemented one another. When one pushed, the other pulled. Light moans broke the still night air and joined in with nature's symphony of croaking frogs, hooting owls, and energetic crickets. They pumped their cocks with a steady rhythm, kisses hungry and demanding. Their breaths were heavy, turning to panting, each sucking in much-needed air before engaging their mouths again. Hands touched and explored, groping and squeezing.

"Oh, shit, Macon, I'm about to blow." Wade tried to pull away, but Macon held him, thrusting his cock harder as his grip tightened.

"Me, too." Macon let go with a loud cry. His thrusts picked up and he stroked harder as his come erupted, leaving a hot trail over Wade's stomach.

"Fuck!" Wade stilled, and come spurted out in long streams. He shivered and held Macon's forehead against his, aftershocks of pleasure making his body quiver from head to toe. They both laughed as their hands stroked one another, taking all the pleasure from the moment they could.

Macon breathed heavily and kissed Wade again, keeping his eyes open and staring directly at him. His expression was deep and longing, happy, yet sad. Something new was developing between them, much more than best friends, so much more.

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## CHAPTER 2

“Bout time.” Wade’s father looked up from the kitchen table, annoyance narrowing his eyes and furrowing his brows.

His mother came in and kissed him on the cheek. “Good morning, Wade. Can I get you breakfast or coffee?”

“No, but thank you. I brought a thermos with me.”

“I’ll be at the barn when you’re ready.” His father rose, leaving his plate behind for his mother clean up.

When the door shut, Wade exhaled an exasperated breath. “How long is this going to go on?”

“Your father is a difficult man. You know that.” She hugged him around the waist. “It will get better. Just give him some time.”

Wade shifted his weight and shoved his hands into his pockets, shaking his head. “It’s been eight months, and it’s not as if I fell for a perfect stranger. Macon has always been my best friend. I mean, he practically lived here most of time.”

“I know, and we love him like a son, but you have to understand your father’s feelings in the matter. It isn’t fair or right.” She shook her head, her once-youthful blonde hair highlighted with silver strands. “It took us both by surprise. I think he’s still in denial, and I also wonder if he doesn’t blame himself, maybe believing he somehow raised you wrong.”

Wade gave a sarcastic chuckle. “You can’t be serious. I couldn’t have asked for a better life.” He looked at his mother and exhaled. “I am what I am. There is no blame. I love Macon. Always have and always will.”

“I know, sweetie.” She offered a sympathetic smile, but looked away. “Better get out there and get a move on. He’s waiting.”

By lunchtime, Wade and his father had vaccinated nearly half of the eighty head of calves they had weaned earlier in the spring. Sweat trickled down Wade’s temples, and he wiped it away before opening the chute and allowing the last calf out. He scanned the lot of the remainder left to work after lunch. Half of this year’s crop was his, and he wondered if he shouldn’t just sell them all and try to buy his own land somewhere, far enough away from prying eyes, but close enough to see his mom. Home was in Kansas and the thought of leaving bothered him, but staying bothered him more.

They walked to the house without words exchanged. Wade hated the silence, hated that the close bond with his dad had been reduced to being held at arm’s length. His father walked with long strides. At nearly six feet, the man covered a lot of ground with few steps. One part of Wade wanted to yell at the man. After all, he was his only son, and also only child. He was gay; not a criminal, not a drug dealer, not a murderer or anything of that nature. His only crime was falling in love with his best friend.

Where his sexuality was concerned, Wade had wondered for years why he turned out the way he did. It wasn’t like he didn’t try to be heterosexual. He had, lots of times. But with Macon, everything was easy. There were no games to be played, no worries. He wasn’t expected to be a gentleman. He wasn’t expected to open doors, woo for his attention, or pretend to be anyone other than himself. They complemented each other like two halves of a whole. They understood each other and shared the same dreams and goals. What more could he ask for? Wade was attracted to Macon in a way women couldn’t compete with.

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Macon packed his truck with all the essentials he and Wade would need. It wasn't like they were going deep into the wilderness or camping out for a week or anything, but he liked to be prepared. The beer chilled in the cooler of ice. The tent was loaded, groceries, blankets... lube. He smiled when he thought of it all. One night at the river and his most important item outside of beer was lubricant. *Maybe two days were in order.* He pulled into Wade's driveway. With his job and Wade's responsibilities at the ranch, neither seemed to have enough time for each other.

Ideally, Macon wanted to share the small house Wade rented, but his friend had said no. They lived in a small town and everyone suspected the truth of their relationship. But Wade wasn't comfortable with coming out for all to see. Yeah, it hurt, but what could he do? Macon understood Wade's feelings and still loved him, but he yearned to wake up each morning with Wade, or cuddle on the couch in the evening for a movie. Hell, he'd settle for the local news.

Nothing would change as long as they resided in this sleepy, backwoods town. It was a town where everyone knew everyone's business, a place where half the residents were related in some form or another. A place where Bibles were kept on nightstands and where people believed there was no room for gray. The place was small town, rural America. It had one stop light, one school, four churches and two convenience stores. And if something wasn't in the Good Book, well, it was wrong.

Macon parked behind Wade's truck and got out. Wade had chosen a place on the edge of town because he wanted privacy. The only downfall was the neighbors, and they were nosy ones at that. He wished attitudes were different, that people could understand or even turn a blind eye so he and Wade could just be together the way they wanted to be.

Dogs from the adjoining yard barked as he walked to the back door. "Shut up!" he shouted as he turned the knob. "Stupid fuckers." He continued to grumble as he walked into the kitchen.

"The neighbor's dogs are quite a treat to listen to." Wade dropped his overnight bag on the table. "The dumbasses were barking at two this morning."

“Sounds like you had a good night’s sleep, then. No wonder you were so grumpy when I got here this morning.”

Wade rolled his eyes. “Well, that among other things.”

“Hold that thought.” Macon strode across the kitchen, closing the gap between them. He grabbed Wade’s collar and pulled him to his mouth. He brushed his lips over Wade’s, kissing him, allowing his tongue to peek out. “Fuck them all. We have a night of fun to have, just me and you.”

A smile curved on Wade’s face. “Yeah, just me and you.”

The spot they camped each year lay on the river, the farthest point from the main house on the Sutherland’s six-hundred-acre ranch. It was only accessible from one gate on the property and required a key. Wade got out of the truck and unlocked the gate for Macon to drive through. After closing and locking it back, Wade jumped into the truck, ready to hide away with Macon. The truck bounced and bumped across the field in an area where groundhogs had torn up the ground.

“I feel like a bobblehead doll,” Macon laughed, and tried to correct the steering after striking another hole. “Holy shit, there must be an entire colony living here.”

Wade steadied himself with what he called the “Oh shit handle” above the door. “A couple of guns and a little time would take care of this.”

Macon’s truck leveled off, seemingly out of the groundhog village. Wade cracked open a beer and the truck struck another hole. “Damn!” Beer sloshed and bubbled from the top. He sucked the fizz that kept bubbling up.

“I got something you can suck.” Macon grinned.

“Oh, don’t worry, I will.” Wade offered Macon a wink.

A large grove of trees sat in the distance, with a small clearing cut in the middle. Macon remembered cutting the path through the small saplings with Wade when they were young. Since that time, they maintained it every year.

The sun was still high in the sky, but waning. The air was slightly warm and lightly blowing through their open windows. Macon loved this time of

year. Everything in nature came back to life after the winter slumber. With the weather mild and not quite warm enough for a plethora of bugs... spring had always been the perfect time to camp.

“Bout there, man.” Macon drove along their path and down the sloping hill that led to the river and their campsite.

“Bout time. I’ve worn more of this beer than I’ve drunk.”

Macon pulled his truck along a row of trees and cut the engine. The river flowed nice and smooth, rippling here and there over fallen logs. A bright shimmer glared back off the clear water, making him squint. He knew the water must be freezing still, because when warm, the water took on a murky brown appearance. Skinny dipping that night with Wade would be out of the question.

“Do you want to put up the tent?” Wade asked as he stepped out of the truck and surveyed everything Macon had brought with them.

“I’d like to sleep under the stars, but I’m worried we’ll have a cold morning wake up.”

“I’ll keep you warm.” Wade walked over and gave him a smack on the butt.

With the sun moving toward the horizon, they gathered up enough wood to keep them warm through the night. The same fire pit they built ten years ago with large rocks from the river served them as well as the day they built it. Wade smiled when he lit up the dry driftwood with the help of a little diesel and a torch. Macon busied himself with constructing a bed. He had brought along two bales of straw and was scattering them over the ground, fluffing the matter up so it would act as a cushion under their blankets. The other reason for the straw was to keep them off the cold, damp ground.

The fire began to crackle and roar to life. Wade helped him lay the thick wool blanket over the straw to keep it from poking up. Macon’s enthusiasm kicked up a notch. He and Wade hadn’t been intimate in nearly a week. If they only shared the same address, he thought, he wouldn’t be so hard up by the end of the week.

A couple of thick quilts were laid down next, adding an extra layer of protection. For the top, Macon had brought two down-filled sleeping bags. He wasn't sure why he was worried about being cold. As hot as he expected their night to be, he might need to peel some blankets back in order to cool off. He chuckled as he finished up, and Wade gave him a quizzical look.

“Care to share?” Wade opened the cooler and fetched them both a beer.

Macon chafed his bare arms briskly. The warm air had become cooler with the setting sun. “I'm just damn glad to be here with you. I didn't think this week would ever be over.” He accepted the beer Wade handed to him. “Are you hungry?”

“Mmm, hmm.” Wade closed the gap between them. “But I don't want food.”

“Oh, yeah?” Macon sipped his beer and rubbed his growing erection. He hoped Wade would say that. A week had felt like an eternity.

Wade took their beers and set them on the truck. He returned with purposeful steps, never stopping until they were toe to toe. “We have some business that needs attending to.” He grasped Macon's head with both hands and pulled their mouths together. Hunger radiated between them, the kiss becoming urgent in nature.

They broke apart and tore into their clothes, stumbling as they worked to kick off their boots, hands touching and pawing at each other. Macon could feel Wade's lips smile just before Wade pushed him. Macon fell to the makeshift bed and pulled Wade with him. They landed with a thud, Wade on top of him. Laughter erupted for a moment before it became heated again. Their mouths crashed together, with tongues delving deep and swirling together. Macon could feel Wade's erect cock pressing against his own. Their championship buckles clanked and scraped together as they moved.

“Boy, I plan to wear your ass out,” Wade growled between kisses. “Damn, I've missed you this week.”

Macon moaned with pleasure. He loved hearing Wade's admission. If they were anywhere else besides Small Town, USA, maybe their lives would be

different, better. All he knew was he couldn't stand their arrangement. All the hiding and sneaking around wore on him. Earlier in the day, he had received an interesting call, exciting his imagination. The information could wait, though. Currently, his dance card was as full as the jeans stretching with his straining erection.

Soft lips caressed Macon's neck, moving lower to nip his shoulder. Wade knew how to bite him, not too hard and not too gentle. He loved having the man's teeth and mouth nipping and sucking every square inch of his body. Wade tugged his T-shirt out of his jeans and pulled it over his head when he leaned forward. The cool evening air made Macon's nipples perk up. Wade warmed them, lashing over each, stopping to suck and roll the nubs between his teeth.

"Fuck, yeah," Macon moaned, and ran his hands through Wade's thick, brown hair. His hips rolled, causing friction between their denim jeans. The distinctive clank of metal was the only noise to be heard outside of the crackling fire. "We have too many clothes on." He wiggled and let out a surprised moan when Wade sucked his neck hard.

Wade rose up on his hands and loomed above him. His blue eyes twinkled in the firelight as a wicked smile lit his expression. "Impatient, are we?"

Macon studied his gorgeous face, noting the cute dimples when he grinned. God, he loved Wade, loved him more than life itself. "Very." He reached forward and pulled Wade's shirt over his head. His strong chest, thick arms, and muscles flexed, rippling down over his abs to the waist of his jeans. "Take 'em off."

"Demanding, too?" Wade teased and leaned back on his heels. "Do I have something you want?"

Macon moistened his lips. "Oh, yeah." He watched as Wade took his time, slowly tugging and releasing his belt buckle. His strong hands wrenched the belt apart and moved to the button of his jeans. Underneath his Wranglers was

heaven, in the form of a very large and thick cock. The zipper eased down at a snail's pace. Macon nearly demanded he hurry up.

“Are you going to suck it?” Wade asked with a grin.

“Damn straight.” Macon could almost taste Wade's precome, so salty and sweet, touching the tip of his tongue. The orange light from the fire highlighted Wade's features. The moment was so much like their first time. The outside world didn't matter. Nothing mattered except them and how they made each other feel.

Wade pushed his jeans down, allowing his cock to flop out, heavy with its weight.

“Stroke it for me,” Macon demanded and licked his lips. He loved to watch Wade pleasure himself.

Wade's strong hand cupped his girth, slowly rubbing from root to tip. Precome glistened, oozing from the top. Wade ran his finger through it and spread it around his crown. “Do you want this cock?” He gently bucked his hips and pulled his bottom lip with his teeth. “I'd love to feel it inside your mouth with your lips wrapped around it.”

“Well, come on.”

Wade shimmied out of his jeans and kicked them off the bed. He crawled over Macon's hips and straddled his waist and chest as he moved closer. He held his dick in his hand and wagged it in front of Macon's mouth.

“Don't tease, or I'll bite it.” Macon eased his hands up Wade's thighs.

“Mmm, do it, bite me.” Wade playfully smacked his cock against Macon's lips.

Soft hair rubbed his chest as Wade's balls dragged over his collar bone. Unable to take any more teasing, Macon grabbed Wade's cock and pulled the tip to his mouth. A loud moan erupted from Wade's lungs when Macon bit down, just enough to get his attention.

The smell of Wade's clean soap and musky skin invaded his nose. Wade possessed a unique scent that drove him crazy. Macon traced the crown of his

cock, which became rigid at his touch. He probed through the slit at the top to taste. Wade moaned and watched him. Macon wrapped his hand around the shaft and pumped, moving with the rhythm of Wade's hips rocking his cock into his mouth.

"Yeah, suck it," Wade growled, and caressed Macon's face. "Mmmm." His head fell back, his body moving, muscles flexing with delight.

Another round of Wade's sweet fluid coated his tongue as his cock swelled even more. Macon loved that feeling, knowing he caused Wade to get hard with pleasure. He looked up while he slid his mouth over Wade's shaft, catching Wade staring down at him. His expression was intense and wild, yet loving. He pulled out of Macon's mouth and stood up. He looked like a carefully carved statue from antiquity, all lean and muscular, with a wide chest, narrow waist, and large cock standing at attention.

"I'll be back." Wade grinned down at Macon before sprinting barefooted to the truck. He opened his bag and hurried back. Kneeling down beside him, Wade unbuckled Macon's belt. When he unbuttoned and unzipped the jeans, Macon lifted his hips for Wade to pull them off. "Nice hardware, boy." He reached for Macon's dick and lowered his mouth over it, taking him all in.

"Oh, fuck!" Macon writhed with enjoyment. Wade pulled back to the tip, tightening the suction of his mouth. Macon gasped and squeezed Wade's thigh. Over and over Wade repeated the process, making Macon's back arch while his hips wiggled and thrust up into Wade's awaiting mouth. *Son of a bitch, he knows how to suck a cock.* "Easy or I'll blow, man."

Wade chuckled and lightened the suction, stopping at the tip to twirl his tongue over the head. The cool night air blew across Macon's wet cock and it helped calm him. He pulled at Wade's leg. "Bring your ass over here." Wade moved and lifted his leg over Macon's chest, straddling him and backing up so that his dick was even with Macon's mouth.

The soft hairs on Wade's chest brushed over Macon's bare stomach. Wade's hand resumed and grasped Macon's shaft again, tongue flicking over the tip. Macon ran his hands up the back of Wade's legs, up to his ass where

he stopped to squeeze and knead it. He caressed down between the cheeks of Wade's ass, paused at his perineum and gave it a gentle rub. Wade moaned, sending vibrations down Macon's cock buried deep in his mouth. Wade lifted and positioned his swollen crown above Macon's lips. Macon opened and Wade eased in, inch by inch, meeting resistance at the back of Macon's throat.

"Relax, man." Wade pumped Macon's saliva-covered cock with his strong grip and took it back deep into his mouth.

Macon squeezed Wade's thighs as he flexed again. Wade's cock tickled the back of Macon's throat, making his eyes water. Even after all these years of sucking Wade, Macon struggled to do what Wade loved most. He swallowed when Wade eased out. During the next thrust, Macon opened his throat and Wade's cock slide all the way in.

"Fuck, yes. I love when you do that," Wade groaned, and gently fucked Macon's mouth. "Holy shit." He gasped and palmed Macon's cock in his callused hand.

Wade nipped lightly up the inside of his thigh and pushed his legs further apart. He touched Macon's tight hole and massaged cool lube into it. Macon's fingertips dug into Wade's ass, guiding his lightly pumping hips, which drove his cock stroke after stroke into Macon's mouth and down his throat.

"I can't take any more of that." Wade pulled out of his mouth. His wet cock dragged over Macon's chest. His finger breached Macon's opening and wiggled.

Macon hissed. He was so sensitive to Wade's touch. Wade knew where and how to touch him to make his heart race. Two fingers invaded, easing in and out, stretching him. Wade moved his body off of Macon and settled between his thighs. His fingers continued to impale him, his thumb pressing the sensitive region under his balls.

"Suck me, Wade," he pleaded with a raspy voice, his breaths becoming short and fast. He loved to have Wade's hands and mouth on him, loving and pleasing him in a way that only he knew how. His hot mouth pulled his cock

deep inside, tongue wrapping around the circumference, sliding up and down the length of him. God, he was so close. It felt so good to be like this.

The hot fire kept them warm. Sparks leapt from the flames and soared up into the air. Stars twinkled above, winking and shining down on them.

Wade removed his fingers and Macon whimpered his protest. Wade chuckled and reached for the lubricant and squeezed a liberal amount into his palm. "I hope you're ready, because I can't wait any longer." His hand spread the slick gel over the length of him.

"I love to watch you stroke your cock, Wade."

Wade grinned. "And I love to stick my cock deep in your ass." He leaned over, held his weight off Macon, and nudged his entrance. His smooth crown rubbed and eased in past the ring of muscles. He paused and allowed Macon to adjust. "So damn tight," he hissed, and leaned down to pepper Macon's chest with soft kisses.

Macon reached for him, brushing his hands over Wade's thick biceps. A bite of pain radiated outward as his sphincter worked to accommodate Wade's thick girth. It always hurt at first, but he knew it would soon turn to intense pleasure.

Wade's lips touched his, brushing softly over them. "I love you," he whispered, and slid further inside.

"Oh, wow." Macon squeezed Wade's arms as he adjusted further. "Kiss me."

Their kiss started slow and built until they gasped for air. Macon's hands glided down Wade's sides to his waist and urged him to continue. "I'm okay, fuck me, please." Macon flicked his tongue over Wade's lips.

With a loud grunt Wade pushed all the way in, his balls settling against Macon's ass. His muscles flexed as he pulled back and pushed in again, burying himself deep.

"So fucking good." His eyes burned with intensity. "I've missed this." He eased back and thrust back in with more force, and moaned. "I miss the old

days of being on the road before prying eyes were watching us—” He thrust in a series of quick bursts and Macon whimpered with pleasure. “I hate being forced to sneak off just so I can touch you.” His eyes became passionate and filled with pain. “You are my world, my life, Macon.”

Macon pulled Wade’s mouth to his and poured his heart into his kiss. He knew Wade loved him, but to have him admit it, with his confession that he’d harbored doubts regarding their current relationship status, made his heart swell to overflowing. Their hands caressed while their lips and tongues tangled with desire. Wade delivered thrust after thrust, measured and loving.

Any discomfort Macon previously felt had morphed into extreme bliss. The bulbous head of Wade’s cock tickled the inner walls of his channel and rubbed his prostate. He felt full and deliciously stretched. “More. Give me more, Wade. Harder.”

Wade leaned back and grabbed Macon’s legs and pressed them forward. Macon’s knees pushed against his chest, revealing his ass and opening him wide. Wade’s thick length was still impaled inside him. The soft light blazed in the depths of Wade’s eyes as he smiled. “You must need a good fuckin’. Don’t you?”

“Mmm, yes.” Macon moaned. The position allowed Wade to sink deeper inside him.

“Stroke your cock.” Wade’s voice was husky as he picked up his pace and began to fuck him with more enthusiasm. “Yeah, stroke that beautiful dick of yours.” He grunted and thrust harder, their skin slapping together upon impact. His cock sank deep, so deep.

“I’m close, Wade.” Macon pumped his cock hard.

“Me too, and I’m going to unload inside you.”

“Fuck!” Macon reached his summit. Jets of come spurted from his cock and landed on his chest. He took a deep breath and groaned with delight. “Fuck yeah!”

“Here it comes!” Wade hollered, pounding in deep, and let go with a loud cry. His hips bucked, milking his cock with urgency. “Oh, man.” He fought for air and collapsed on top of Macon.

Macon held him and wrapped his legs around his waist. He could feel their hearts hammering in their chests and Wade’s hot breath on his skin. Wade nuzzled his neck and kissed it sweetly. This was heaven for him.

“I didn’t mean to blow so fast.” Wade kissed Macon’s chest. “It’s been a long week.”

“We have all night.” Macon tightened his hold around him.

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Later that night, Wade sat in his jeans and bare feet in a folding chair next to Macon. The sounds of frogs gently croaking in harmony echoed through the trees. It was peaceful out, serene. He thought about his day and the way his father gave him the “look” when he said he and Macon were going camping. Eight months should have been enough time for his father to at least try and understand his relationship with Macon. Everything changed that night at the championship last fall, when a reporter caught him kissing Macon beside his trailer. Hell, the rodeo was over, and had been for an hour at the time. Why the nosy fucker was out in the parking lot with his camera was anyone’s guess, but the asshole made sure the photo went public.

There were a few golden rules that the reporter broke that night. The most important was “mind your own business”. Wade wasn’t the type to go poking around in other people’s business, so it royally pissed him off that his private moment became front page news. Since then, his usual posse of ropers who got together to practice quit calling. Residents of their tiny town give him disapproving looks and whispered when he walked by, more so if he and Macon were together. Sometimes, he just wanted to yell at them, ask if they’d like their private lives to become public knowledge. He was sure a few of the fine residents wouldn’t want their dirty laundry hung out to dry. Was his and

Macon's relationship so scandalous, so wrong, that they deserved the moral shunning they'd received?

"Great night, huh?" Macon spoke as he looked up at the stars.

"Yeah, sure is," Wade replied and chugged down half of his beer with disgust.

Macon touched his arm and looked at him. Somehow, he always knew when something big was weighing on his mind. "Out with it."

Wade growled and polished off the remainder of his beer and tossed the can aside. "I'm just sick of it all."

"Me too, man." Macon entwined his fingers between his. "I had an interesting call earlier."

"Yeah?"

"Do you remember a guy by the name of Zander Wesley? We met him early last spring. One hell of a bronc rider."

Wade thought a moment and shook his head. "Nah, I don't recall. What about him?"

"Well, he invited us to his ranch up in Montana."

"Why?" Wade reached into the cooler beside his chair and pulled out another beer. "Need another one?"

Macon nodded. "It seems we're not alone in this world, outcasts of the rodeo and all."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Wade cracked open his beer and turned it up.

"Zander hosts a big rodeo every year up there."

"And?" Wade didn't know where he was going.

"This rodeo is for guys like us." Macon pointed at him and then back at himself. "It's a gay rodeo."

Wade busted up laughing and spit his last drink out. “Gay rodeo, huh? Do they ride through the arena with rainbow flags?” He chuckled harder. “I bet they have a cross-dressing drag queen for a rodeo clown.”

Macon didn’t join in and Wade sobered. “For someone who’s tired of being stereotyped, you sure as hell do it just the same.”

“Macon, I-I-I didn’t mean it that way. It just sounded funny. I guess I don’t really look at us as being gay in the way that other men are gay.”

“That is the stupidest shit I’ve ever heard. Why would other gay men be any different? Okay, so there are some that may subscribe to a different way of life or dress, but deep down, are we really any different?”

Wade thought about it for a moment. Outside of the small town he grew up and resided in, he knew little about the outside world. He grew up in the country, farming with his father. Other than driving endless miles from rodeo to rodeo during the summers, he had experienced little. “I’m sorry, okay. We’re different, or at least I think we’re different.”

“How so? You suck dick, Wade. Hell, I love to suck dick. You like to stick your dick in my ass and from time to time, you let me stick my dick in your ass.”

“We love each other.” Wade gave him a serious look. “We’ve been best friends since we were kids.”

“We’re gay, man.”

“Yes, thank you, Macon. I’m very aware that we are gay, but that doesn’t mean I want to join up with a bunch of other gay men and proclaim my sexuality in front of an audience.”

Macon looked hurt by his words. “Are you embarrassed about us?”

“Hell, no!” Wade sat up straight in his chair and turned toward Macon. “I love you, and nothing will ever change that.”

“Yet we stay here in this little shithole town while everyone looks down at us. We have separate houses even though everyone knows. We—”

“I know.” Macon interrupted. “I’m sorry. I hate it, too.”

Macon sipped his beer and grew quiet. When Wade didn’t continue, Macon got up and walked to the fire, his back facing Wade. Wade hated what was happening and had been happening. What was he to do? His father couldn’t run the ranch alone, and he had a vested interest in the place and cattle to tend to as well. The idea of picking up and moving never seemed to be an option. Not that he didn’t want to. Besides, where in the hell would they go? Nothing would please him more than to be somewhere far away from society, where he and Macon could live in peace without narrow minds judging them. The thought of further complicating their lives by competing in a gay rodeo didn’t seem a good idea either. What would his father say? Or Macon’s father?

Why did life have to be so complicated? Why couldn’t he love anyone he wanted to love? Wade got up from his chair and walked up behind Macon. He wrapped his arms around his waist and held him. “If we compete in this gay rodeo, don’t you think it will just cause us more trouble than we already have?”

Macon sighed and leaned his head back on Wade’s shoulder. “Can it be any worse than it already is? I mean, have you given any thought to the upcoming season and what we will face? It will be the same town to town. I just thought it would be nice to go and meet others like us and compete in a rodeo where we’re accepted.”

He made a lot of sense. Wade wondered if coming out and proclaiming their sexuality by competing in the event could harm them anymore. Ideally, the damage was done. Everyone knew. There was nothing innocent or in team spirit about that headline-grabbing kiss. Men playing football could pat each other’s asses and nothing be said of it. Two men celebrate and share a kiss? Scandalous. “When is this rodeo?”

“Two weeks. Zander invited us to come and stay on the ranch beforehand so we could practice. You do realize that since last fall we haven’t roped once.”

“Yeah, I know.” Macon was right. They hadn’t joined one local roping practice in order to get ready for this season. Normally, by this time of year, they would have been to several and have made a little extra money to put in their pockets along the way. No invitations or calls had come letting them know of any, and Wade suspected it was because they weren’t welcome.

“Please consider it, for me.” Macon turned around and looked into his eyes. “I need to know there’s a place for us, a place where we can be who we are without judgment. Most of all, I just want to be with you and not have to feel like shit because of what people think of us.”

“Fine, I’ll go. Hell, I don’t know what we have to lose. I need to get away from here for a while, anyway.” Wade pulled Macon close and kissed him. “Me and you, always.”

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### CHAPTER 3

*Two days later...*

Wade’s bags were loaded and ready. He looked at his watch and completed one last walk-through of his house. With everything in order, he locked the door behind himself and headed to his truck.

The day had started on a sour note. He’d gone to the ranch and helped with the feeding. He’d been nervous about telling his father he planned on leaving for the next two weeks, and he honestly felt bad about it. In previous years, when he was away at rodeos, his father hired someone to help out. This year seemed different. Hell, everything was different. When he broke the news, his father became irate. Wade knew it wasn’t because he would be gone roping, because that was a given every year. It was because his father knew he was going with Macon and their relationship was as strong as ever. He did leave out the part about the gay rodeo they would be competing in. There was only so much a homophobic father could take.

He left after kissing his mother on the cheek and telling his father to pay the help with the proceeds from his cattle check when he sold their calves the next week. Wade didn't want to owe him anything or feel indebted to him. His mother hugged him and apologized for his father's attitude, but it wasn't her place and he said as much.

The blue Ford roared to life with his horse, Caesar, and his tack loaded. Macon had called and was ready and waiting. Wade pulled out onto the chip and seal country road in front of his house and headed north toward Macon's. As he drove, his tiny house grew smaller in his rearview mirror. All the anger that welled inside his stomach began to dissipate somewhat. He was leaving, color him gone, fuck 'em all. He was an adult and would live life in the manner that suited him, and to hell with anyone who tried to stop him. The warm weather made him itch to ride and rope. A new sense of enthusiasm built the closer to Macon's he got. Bright sunshine and the usual tug of the trailer on his truck made him smile. Saddle up, boys, Wade was back in the saddle, he thought and shifted gears.

Within minutes, he pulled into the long drive of the Sumner's place. Macon led Diablo by his halter out of the barn and waited for him. Wade cut the engine and got out to open the trailer. Macon led his horse in and tethered him as Wade began loading Macon's saddle in the tack section. This gooseneck trailer was a Cadillac to them. The upfront section was a small living quarters, complete with bed, sink, refrigerator, cook top, shower, and bathroom. A tack area and separate door divided the living area from where the horses stayed. Holding tanks for water allowed them to keep their horses hydrated on long trips. They had lived the better part of the last four years inside that trailer through the summers. The space was a little cramped but afforded them all they needed while on the road. The bed wasn't the most comfortable in the world, but it served its purpose.

"Hot damn, boy. Let's get the hell out of Dodge!" Macon was in high spirits when he stepped in the door with his bag. He tossed it to the floor and clapped his hands together. "Two weeks, man. Riding and roping, and lots of beer drinking. Now this is what I call a vacation."

Normally they'd already planned and mapped out their summer, one rodeo at a time, but they hadn't this year. It occurred to Wade that in reality, they allowed the views of others to dictate their lives. Fear of returning to the rodeo world had lodged into both of their brains, stealing away what they lived to do. He, for one, had had enough of it. How he planned to deal with reality was something he was unsure of at the moment.

"Boys." Jared, Macon's father, walked up. His hands were on his hips and he looked torn with indecision. He hadn't taken the news about their relationship any better than Wade's father. "Be careful." He looked off toward the pasture for a moment before turning his gaze back to them. "It'll be rough in the saddle for a spell. Don't give in, and don't let 'em know it bothers you."

Wade knew what he meant and nodded. "Thank you, sir."

Jared thought they were headed to the usual kind of rodeo, and that was fine by Wade. The sentiment was worth everything anyway.

Macon gave his father a manly hug. "See you in two weeks."

They got in the truck and set out on their journey. Just having Macon's father give them somewhat of an approval made Wade's spirits lift higher. He only wished his father would come around the same.

Hours went by as they traveled the long stretch of interstate. The radio blared country music and when a good song came on, he and Macon belted out the lyrics with a twang in their voices and feet tapping to the rhythm. They liked old country, Merle-Haggard-and-Hank-Williams-Jr. old country.

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During the thirteen hour trip they had stopped three times for fuel and to check on their horses, allowing time for water, feed, and rest. There were four pee breaks and one fast food run along the way. Macon drove for the last six of those hours, following the directions Zander gave him. The dirt roads seemed to wind endlessly through the middle of nowhere. There had been no houses or signs of life as far as he could tell. It neared ten at night when lights broke through the darkness off in the distance. Between them and the only notable

signs of civilization was a large gate. He pulled up and found a key pad. Zander hadn't mentioned a code. A call button was his only resource.

Wade stirred when he noticed they had quit moving and looked around. Macon pressed the button and waited.

"Is this it?" Wade rubbed his sleepy eyes.

Macon's fingers tapped the steering wheel. "I think so."

"State your name." A deep voice erupted over the intercom.

"Uh, Macon Sumner."

The large gate opened before them. "Proceed."

As they drove down the long, narrow road, Macon noticed many more lights as they grew closer. From a distance, he had only noted a few. Now, he was seeing lots of lights, scattered over a vast expanse.

"What in the hell is this place?" Wade asked.

"It's supposed to be the XYZ Ranch."

"Do they have an army working for them?"

"I don't know," Macon mumbled when the place came into full view. A large barn and main house sat forefront, with smaller-looking cabins and outbuildings scattered as far as he could see. Trucks and trailers were parked neatly in a row on the far side of the barn. Bright lights flooded an arena behind the barn, which wasn't visible from the road. Men were out on horseback, leaving trails of dust as they raced by.

When they stopped, two men approached them as they got out. "You must be Macon and Wade. I'm John and this is Dean. Welcome aboard."

John was a thick, muscular cowboy. His jeans were covered by brown leather chaps embellished with silver conchos. Bright green eyes regarded them with interest as Wade shook the man's hand. "Nice to meet you both." He nodded. "I'm Wade."

Dean gave a loud whistle and two guys came out of the barn. The pair walked up and waited for instructions. “Take these men’s horses to the pasture for some exercise and fresh water.”

“Yes, sir.” One guy walked to the back of the trailer with the other, who looked no older than Macon or Wade, following.

Macon, who never seemed at a loss for words, stood quietly, sizing up the two cowboys in front of them. The men were older in years, he guessed mid-thirties.

“Zander is up at the main house. We’ll take you up to see him.” John waved for the guy leading Wade’s horse over. “After you get their horses settled, you and Jamie grab their bags and bring them up to the house.”

The guy nodded. “Yes, sir.” John winked at him and the guy grinned.

The house was enormous as they approached. It looked like a fancy ski resort cabin, decked out with cedar siding, large windows, and a huge deck supported by thick timber logs. The oversized front door was embellished with wrought iron work. John opened the door and entered ahead of them. Macon wondered what kind of host they would be meeting.

A tall cowboy with black hair walked up as soon as they entered. He was easily in his late thirties, distinguished by a few laugh lines at the corners of his eyes. The man smiled as he extended his hand. “Damn good to meet you boys. I’m Zander. Let’s go have a seat and get to know each other.”

Macon and Wade followed, with John and Dean directly behind them. Macon looked around wide-eyed at the woodsy décor with large elk and deer heads mounted on the walls. He felt a hint of nervousness as they continued on. John and Dean seemed like henchmen, quiet as they walked, their boots lightly clunking on the wood floor behind them. It was obvious Zander was the man, the leader of this, what was it? Organization? They weren’t dealing with just any cowboy. This place was something more.

“Have a seat.” Zander directed them to a leather couch. He took an opposing leather chair adjacent to them. “John, get these boys a beer.” He turned back to them. “You do drink beer, don’t ya?”

Wade and Macon nodded. Macon wasn't sure if they had made a good decision by coming there. He expected a small ranch with maybe a couple of ranch hands and a makeshift arena. This, he looked around, was no small venture. These men were big time.

Zander studied them for a moment as John came back with a bucket of cold beers and set them down, pulling two out and handing them to Macon and Wade. "Thank you," they said, nearly in unison.

Zander leaned back with his beer. John and Dean took a seat on a smaller loveseat opposite them. "I guess you two would like to know what this is all about." He stopped and took a sip from the bottle.

They nodded.

"It's like this." He motioned to John and Dean. "We started this outfit nearly seven years ago, just the three of us. In the off season, we run over a thousand head of cattle on this ranch. We've grown, and now we employ hired hands and have shareholders as well. We all reside here. We work hard and we play hard. This ranch is a place we can be ourselves without the outside world meddling in our business."

Macon chewed on that for a minute, and Wade shifted uncomfortably next to him. "Why did you call us?" He was confused by the strangeness of the situation. Why would they need them?

"I thought you'd never ask." Zander smiled. "Rodeo is our world, our lives. As you two have already experienced firsthand, the rodeo world hasn't taken too kindly to men of our caliber."

Wade piped in, "You mean gay?"

Zander chuckled with his dark eyes dancing with amusement. "That would be what society has labeled us."

"So, you're ga-gay?" Macon couldn't help the surprise in his tone. He had an idea the man was gay, but he sure didn't look it. There was nothing about his appearance that would hint of his preference. It shocked him nonetheless.

Zander laughed loudly. “You could say I fancy men.” He looked over at John and Dean and winked at them.

Realization struck Wade about the time it did Macon. “Ohhh.” Macon felt his cheeks get hot.

“How long you boys been together?” John asked with his elbows resting on his thighs, a beer in his hands.

Wade looked at Macon. “Well, we’ve been friends our entire lives.”

Dean chuckled and slapped his leg. His dark brown eyes danced with enjoyment. “I think what John meant to ask is, how long have you boys been fucking?”

Wade choked on his beer and began to cough, much to the amusement of the trio of cowboys flanking them. Macon felt his own cheeks burn. He wasn’t accustomed to talking about their relationship. They had been in the closet better than five years now. Well, until that reporter splashed the photo of them kissing after the rodeo last fall.

“We want to know how solid is your relationship, boys,” Zander rephrased the question.

“No, I really want to know how long they’ve been fucking.” John grinned and sipped his beer.

Dean belted out a laugh. “I’d like to know that as well.”

Macon glanced toward Wade. “Five years.” He turned and looked at them all. “We’ve been fucking five years.”

Zander smiled as if he was pleased and shifted his weight in the chair he occupied. “Good, that’s real good. We need men with solid foundations here.” He took a sip of his beer and paused. “We’ve managed to corral the best of the best who enjoy our lifestyle. Our aim is to win every contest at the Nationals this year.”

Wade leaned back to get more comfortable. “So your goal is for gay men to win every competition. Am I right?”

“That’s right.” John leveled his stare at Wade. “We want to win the whole fucking thing.”

“Ain’t nothing soft about us, is there?” Dean sounded off and high-fived John. “The stereotypes have to go. When people think of gay cowboys, they think of pansies wearing rainbow colored bandanas and asking for help to get on their horses. Stupid bastards don’t have a clue.”

Zander laughed as he looked at Dean, then shifted his gaze back to Wade and Macon. “Sore spot. You understand.”

“If I’m understanding this correctly,” Macon spoke up, “Y’all are in need of team ropers, gay team ropers?”

“Give this boy another beer!” John shouted, and stood up. He walked to the ice bucket and pulled out another for Macon.

Zander smiled at John before turning his attention back to them. “You boys were the projected winners at the Nationals last year, what happened?”

Macon shook his head while thinking back to the event the previous year. After the news broke of their relationship, everything took a turn for the worse. With their families caught off-guard and dealing with the drama, their winning streak nose-dived fast. They ended up placing fourth overall. “The news came as quite a shock to everyone.”

“Holy shit!” John belted out a laugh. “Y’all were in the closet.”

Macon nodded. “The shit hit the fan, and with all the damn drama, we choked under pressure. It’s as simple as that.” The truth was the truth, no matter how bad he hated to admit it.

“We’re not going to let that happen again. If you decide to stay, for the next two weeks we will be getting ready for the gay rodeo. Although it isn’t big yet, I suspect one day it will be. This is a way for those much like you to compete without the bullshit stigma. Take the next two weeks and hone your talents. We’d love it if you two would stay and help out the cause, but if you decide not to we’ll understand.”

Macon pondered his words. He and Wade could sure use the practice. The ranch offered everything they needed, plus an environment that wouldn't look down on them. He glanced over at Wade. "You okay with staying two weeks and competing?"

"Count me in." Wade turned up his bottle.

"John will get you settled into a room. We'll see you two in the morning." Zander smiled and stood up.

The long drive had taken its toll on Macon. A bed was all he needed at this point. They followed John upstairs and down a long, rustic hall.

"This is one of the largest rooms in the place, with a private bath." He opened the door and allowed them to enter. "On a serious note, give Zander's offer a lot of consideration. It's a great opportunity and will also bring light to our world if we take the Nationals like we plan to."

"I will. Thank you." Wade sat down on the bed and began taking off his boots.

John exited quietly and Macon fell back on the bed. "Oh, my God, this bed is so comfortable."

He looked over at Wade. They had a room, together. If he wasn't so tired, he'd take full advantage of it.

Wade stood up. "I'm going to hit the shower. My ass is dragging."

Later that night, they cuddled together under the down-filled comforter. Heat radiated between them, keeping them both nice and warm. Macon yawned and Wade followed. They had a lot to think about and serious decisions to make, but right now, he couldn't summon the energy and drifted off.

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## CHAPTER 4

Macon awoke as the sun broke over the horizon. The pale orange of its rays flooded through the window. Wade slept soundly beside him, his arm still draped over Macon's waist. For the first time in months, Macon had slept peacefully. Having Wade holding him close kept the demons that haunted his dreams at bay. This is how he wanted to feel when he rose in the morning, content and happy. Back home, he and Wade couldn't share the same bed. It wasn't as if he didn't want to or yearn to, but the small minds would spread gossip like wildfire. He understood Wade's position, not wanting to add fuel to the fire, but Macon was sick of it. He loved Wade and knew Wade loved him as well. Why couldn't they be together without assholes making them miserable?

This new adventure was one he was willing and ready to jump into. He had nothing to hide, and the only people he truly cared for already knew his position. Wade, on the other hand, would be a different story. His father seemed to enjoy busting his balls daily about their relationship. That was the reason Wade kept him at arm's length and didn't want to share a place together. Macon couldn't understand that. He knew Wade had admitted to his family that he was in love with Macon, but he seemed unsure of taking the final leap.

At the moment, Macon decided to push out the offending thought and just relish their current position, loving Wade pressed against him, soundly sleeping. This was what he'd dreamed and hoped for. Somehow, he had to make it happen. He loved Wade more than life itself and would trade anything, do anything, to make his dream come true. All he wanted was to be with his best friend, his lover, his mate, always.

Gentle kisses to his back made him smile. Wade's hand brushed over Macon's chest slowly and began to trail down over his abs. His cock twitched with anticipation. Behind him, Wade was already hard, his hips gently rocking, rubbing his shaft against Macon's ass.

"Good morning." Wade's raspy voice came out as a whisper. He continued to kiss Macon's back, moving up to his shoulders and sensitive neck.

Macon groaned and closed his eyes. The soft bed was like lying on a cloud, all fluffy and soft. Wade's strong hand moved lower, teasing his cock with a light brush of his knuckles. Blood pulsed, sending it racing through his veins to the region that demanded it. His cock grew painfully erect and sensitive to the touch. "Oh, golly, good morning," he moaned, and squeezed Wade's forearm, hips grinding against Wade's groin.

To wake up in Wade's arms in such a luxurious bed was a dream come true. Once, he and Wade had drunk too much at Wade's house for either to drive. They spent the better part of the night falling into the pleasures of the flesh. They had passed out near one in the morning. By five, Wade was up and getting ready, urging Macon to do the same. Macon knew Wade didn't want the neighbors to know he'd stayed the night. Although he was so exhausted that he could barely rise, he grabbed his clothes and dressed quickly, leaving within five minutes. That morning still haunted him. In truth, it hurt him deeply. He wanted to wake up in this position, with Wade loving him and working him into a frenzy of lust.

Wade hummed at his ear, sending a new wave of want trickling down his back and flip-flopping his stomach. "I know we have a big day ahead and are probably expected to be downstairs soon, but first I'm going to take advantage of this bed. I plan on fucking you so hard and deep, your ass will hurt in the saddle. When I'm done, I'm going to suck you until you come."

"Oh, hell yeah," Macon groaned. Before he went to bed the night before, he'd placed a tube of lubricant in the nightstand, hoping for this kind of wake-up. His hand fumbled with the drawer and opened it. Wade had already begun shoving his boxers down and untangling them from his ankles. He immediately started removing Macon's, stopping to grip his cock and give it a gentle squeeze.

"I don't mean to rush, but I need to be inside you, now," Wade whispered, and pulled the tube from Macon's hand.

Macon's heart pounded in his chest as adrenaline built. Wade might not need to suck him off, because he was sure he'd blow soon. Without the worry and the burden from prying eyes, his heart swelled as well as his cock.

Slick fingers ran between the cheeks of his ass, generously lubing him. Wade's teeth nipped the side of his neck as his finger eased into Macon's tight hole. "Oh, fuck." Macon took a deep breath. The initial pain caused his muscles to contract everywhere. This was the only downside of being gay. They couldn't just get to the good stuff right away.

"Easy, babe," Wade coaxed, and wiggled his finger. "Relax."

Macon stroked his cock as Wade stretched his opening. Easy thrusts while Wade's thumb rimmed his hole made Macon's tense muscles loosen up.

"There you go." Wade inserted a second finger. "Son of a bitch, I can't wait to sink my dick into you."

"Yes." Macon panted and worked his cock. "Now, do it now." He was ready, and unable to wait any longer.

The hot, bulbous head of Wade's shaft nudged his opening. Slowly he pushed in with a grunt, stopping when Macon gripped his hip tightly.

"Easy." Macon winced with pain. "I swear your cock is bigger in the morning."

Wade chuckled. "It's because I'm well rested."

When Macon quit squeezing and rubbed Wade's ass, Wade pushed further in. The guy was a very sensitive lover. "Are you okay, Macon?" Wade stilled.

"Mmm, yeah."

They started at an easy pace. Wade gently pushed in and out, lovingly kissing Macon's neck, his hand grazing over his flesh. It was tender and affectionate. He reached under Macon's leg and lifted it, opening him wide and sinking deeper inside him.

Macon moaned and reached over his head to run his fingers through Wade's thick locks of hair. "Yeah, baby. Fuck it."

Wade's hand glided down the inside of Macon's thigh. He rubbed Macon's cock, stopping at the tip to run his finger through Macon's precome. "Put some lube on my fingers," Wade said, grunting and thrusting deeper.

Macon did as Wade requested. He shuddered when Wade sank inside, blow after blow, into Macon's ass. "I'm so sensitive," Macon moaned, and gripped the blanket. Wade pulled out of him and thrust his cock up along Macon's cock. He held the two of them together and continued to move, his dick gliding over Macon's as his grip encircled them.

The entire time, Macon tried to soothe his racing libido. Wade lovingly nuzzled his neck. "I love you, Wade."

"I love you more than you'll ever know," Wade rasped at his neck. His hand let go and he gave Macon's ass a slap. "On your knees."

He maneuvered around under the thick comforter and got on his knees, spreading his legs wide open. Wade inserted his thumb inside him and rubbed his prostate.

"Yeah, mmm." Macon moaned.

"Get ready, boy, the storm has just begun," Wade warned, and thrust his cock in roughly. "Fuck, yes. I love watching my cock disappear inside you." He sounded out of breath. His thumb rimmed Macon's opening around his thick circumference, sending a new sensation racing to every part of Macon's body.

Wade's motions became more demanding and hard. Skin slapped against skin. Wade's sack bounced off Macon's each time.

Macon wailed into his pillow for fear he'd wake the entire house. Stroke after rigid stroke impaled him hard, pushing his bare chest back and forth over the silky sheets. Wade slapped his ass, and Macon's muscles contracted tighter around him.

"Yeah, grip my cock. Damn, I love your tight ass," Wade said with a growl. He pulled out abruptly and ran the length of himself between Macon's cheeks. "Fuck, I'm not ready to let go." He gripped his cock and smacked it against Macon's ass cheeks, almost as if demanding it to mind. Then he was there, pushing back in roughly and groaning with satisfaction. He grabbed Macon's hips and vigorously fucked him. "I'm gonna come in your ass, boy."

“Yes, do it.” Macon gasped for air with his body jiggling. Wade’s hips slammed over and over against his ass.

“Oh, shit!” Wade thrust in deep and hard with a growl.

Heat radiated, and Macon felt Wade’s cock twitch inside his channel. His own shaft begged to release as well, but he bit his lip hard, hoping to stave it off until he could feel Wade’s mouth on him.

Wade pumped, milking himself, with his hands gripping Macon’s hips tight. He grunted with each thrust, emptying the last of his release. “Oh, God,” he gasped, as he wrapped his arms around Macon’s chest. His lips brushed over Macon’s back. “What a hell of a way to start the day.”

“I wish it could always be like this.” Macon quivered with each gentle kiss Wade delivered. A new desire overtook him. “Roll over on your back, Wade.”

“Uh, oh. I think I have an idea of what you want,” Wade teased, and gently stroked Macon’s semi-erect shaft.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I want it.” Macon squeezed lube over his fingers. “I want to repay the favor.” He grinned and fell over on top of Wade so he could feel their bodies pressed together. His teeth nipped Wade’s bottom lip as his erection nudged Wade’s tight hole. Wade’s hands caressed his back and urged him on.

“Oh, my, my, my,” Wade gasped as Macon drove slowly inside him.

Macon sucked Wade’s neck and shivered as his cock continued to delve deeper. A tight grip from Wade’s muscles nearly sent him over the edge. No wonder Wade liked being the top so much. He himself didn’t always have to have it, but times like this, when he yearned to be closer and more joined with Wade, his desire peaked the most.

“Damn, Wade,” Macon groaned when he was fully seated.

Wade hummed and licked his lips. “Ah, man, give me a second.”

Their mouths connected, sweeping their tongues between each other's lips. Wade's hands slid down Macon's back and squeezed his ass. Macon could feel Wade's tight muscles begin to relax and twitch, gripping Macon snugly and then becoming more lax.

"Fucking fabulous." Macon took in a quick breath as he moved. He gave a wiggle, his hips rubbing the inside of Wade's thighs. As he pulled back, Wade's muscles gripped him tighter. "Oh, yeah, like a glove."

Slowly he worked, unhurried and gentle. Wade's legs folded around his waist in a close embrace. They kissed as if enjoying the best dessert on the planet, reveling in all the sensations of each touch and caress. Macon felt electrified, and daggers of pleasure tingled his nerve endings. He hissed as the overwhelming urge to let go consumed him. He didn't want to, not yet. They were together and joined. No impending doom floated above them like a dark rain cloud anymore. They were free, free to love, touch and fuck as they pleased. The boulder of condemnation was gone, leaving behind two men who yearned to love one another without fear.

Sweat trickled down Macon's forehead as he delivered each loving stroke. An approving groan escaped his lips. He sucked in a breath, a hiss echoing through the room. "I can't hold it," he gasped, and felt his arms tremble. Being with Wade like this put his dreams to shame. If he was dreaming this adventure up, he never wanted to awaken.

"Let it go." Wade pulled Macon's mouth to his.

The bed began to rock with a steady rhythm. Macon's breaths became short. A quiver in his sack built, turning to a tremor of euphoria. "Oh, yes. Hell yes!" He groaned and growled as he buried himself deep and let the wave of his release pull him under.

They held each other, heavy panting breaking the silence. Their hands caressed one another's flesh as if it were the first time. Their love was deep, the kind that should give a person peace with the knowledge, but for Macon, he knew that love alone could not conquer the storm they faced. For now, he

took what he could get while praying for a brighter tomorrow. If this venture failed, their relationship might fail as well.

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Downstairs, they sat at the table with Zander, John, and Dean. A woman in her later years fussed with John about using his manners. Wade had to laugh because she sounded much like his own mother. It seemed that the only people residing in the main house for now were the five of them. The house was enormous and boasted multiple rooms. Why the man needed such a big house was indeed a mystery.

Before Wade's mind could form more questions, the smell of bacon wafted from the kitchen and made his stomach growl. The last thing he remembered eating yesterday was a bag of cheese curls, and that was around seven.

"Marjorie, breakfast smells divine." Zander grinned at her while she set a large platter of sausage and bacon in the middle of the table.

"I do my best." She hurried out of the dining room to the kitchen and immediately came back out with a basket of biscuits. Dean got up and went into the kitchen to help, and reappeared with a bowl of gravy.

"No need to get it, Dean. I'm capable of feeding you all. You need to cultivate a little patience."

"How can I cultivate patience when you make the best gravy in the world?" Dean smiled up at her as he sat down, making her smile in return. "Besides, we need to help you more."

"Oh, rat's ass. I'm old, but I'm not dead. Better eat up before it gets cold." She waved her hand at him to get started.

"I don't need to be told twice." John already had a biscuit in one hand and a butter knife in the other. He looked toward Macon and Wade. "Better get it while the gettin' is good."

Wade's stomach growled again, urging him to fill his plate. Zander smiled like he had a secret. Wade could tell he wasn't a man of many words, but his

mannerisms spoke volumes. Macon passed him the platter of meat after loading his plate up. Next to come his way were the biscuits and gravy. With a loaded plate, he dug in. Sweet heaven, he understood what Dean meant about the gravy. As much as he hated to admit it, Marjorie's recipe topped his mother's.

"Great cook, ain't she?" Zander spoke up as he lifted his cup of coffee. "Miss Marjorie has been taking care of our sorry asses for the last six years. The woman is a saint and one hell of a cook."

Macon smiled as he chewed. Wade knew he was a breakfast guy, but he himself hadn't had a home-cooked breakfast since he moved out of his parents' house. He also wasn't much of a cook. His idea of dinner was a frozen pizza or a trip to the local diner.

"Man, this is awesome," Wade finally replied after he swallowed.

"Damn right it's awesome." Macon took another bite and hummed with enjoyment.

The other men chuckled and continued to eat.

After breakfast, Macon and Wade followed Zander out to the arena. The same younger guy who had put their horses up and brought in their bags the night before was waiting for them.

"Morning, boss." He was all business. Their horses were already saddled and tied off to the pipe railing.

Men were standing around while others worked. A few guys hollered as calves thrashed and banged against the pen they were held in. It would seem that Wade and Macon were on show this morning. There was nothing like waking up in a new place only to discover a group of men waiting to see what they were made of. Wade cursed under his breath. He and Macon hadn't practiced in ages.

"I'll go get my rope and gloves." Wade turned and felt his forehead break out in a sweat. It wasn't like him to get nervous, but this was different.

“I already brought your things up.” The young guy smiled at him as Wade turned around. “I hope you don’t mind. It’s sort of in my job description.”

Macon offered a confused a look at Wade, as if secretly saying, “What the hell?”

Wade shrugged and turned around again.

“Go ahead and warm up your horses, boys,” Zander directed them.

Wade and Macon climbed over the rail and mounted. *Please don’t suck, please don’t suck.* Wade felt his anxiety grow. Why he cared was irrelevant. It was important to Macon, and that’s all he needed to know. This could be a great opportunity, and he didn’t want to blow it right out of the gate. They also sorely needed the practice. He spurred his horse on in a steady lope. Images of the event last fall and how they blew it ran through his mind as the cool morning air raced over his face. Even as he had readied behind the line that night, his mind hadn’t been on roping. It was on the thousands of eyes watching him. All he could do was wonder what they thought about him and Macon. Was the world really against them? Or did he have it all wrong? In their hometown, they were met with leering eyes and whispers following the newspaper article. How could he expect much more from the rest of society when the people that had known him his entire life turned a cold shoulder to him?

His pace increasing to a steady gallop, Caesar whinnied and got a little fresh with excitement. Wade knew horses got as much enjoyment from the sport as their riders. Caesar showed his enthusiasm with a snort and threw his head down, his hooves plowing through the soft dirt of the arena.

“Easy boy. We’ll get ’em,” Wade coaxed and leaned forward to pat him on the neck. He rode over to the men at the rail to retrieve his rope. God, he loved this. Nothing spoke more to a cowboy than a rope in his hands or the smell of fresh dirt mixed with leather.

While making another lap around, Wade swung his rope over his head. Macon’s father’s last words before they departed entered his mind. “*It’ll be*

*rough in the saddle for a spell. Don't give in, and don't let 'em know it bothers you."*

"Ready?" Macon loped up beside him.

"Not really, but let's give it a go." He turned in order to head up to the end of the arena and take his position. This shouldn't bother him and he knew it. Never before had he been affected by an audience. He had to shake this feeling of dread off.

Two men walked behind them and secured the ropes across the front of the boxes they waited in. A longhorn calf thrashed in the chute, making a heap of noise, ready to run. Caesar snorted and pawed the ground. Wade looked over at Macon. The guy always seemed so collected and cool under pressure. The sunlight kissed his face, highlighting his rough jawline and cheekbones. He had his ball hat pulled down in order to shade his eyes. Macon turned to glance at him. He smiled and offered a wink. Under Wade, Caesar nervously pranced in place, ready to give chase. Wade reined him in, taking control.

Men sat on rails here and there, all waiting to see the action. The man at the chute waited for his cue. Caesar grew impatient and reared back a little. Wade was the one to call, so Macon kept his eyes open for his cue. When Wade nodded, the chute opened and the calf bounded out like his ass was on fire. Caesar broke out in a run a fraction of a second ahead of Macon on Diablo. Macon chased, his rope above his head, his eyes homing in on their target. Wade roped the calf's neck. A split second later, Macon caught the calf's back legs. Diablo backed up as the rope stretched tight. His nostrils flared as he took deep breaths, his hooves still ready to run and impatiently shifting his weight from one leg to another.

Wade jerked his rope free and reeled it up into his hand. He was pleased and also relieved. Macon gave his rope a toss, allowing the calf's feet freedom. The calf bolted immediately to the far end of the arena. Two men opened a gate and it darted inside a pen.

"Hot damn, I've missed that!" Wade shouted as he rode up. "Not at all our personal best, but we'll get back there."

Macon looked as determined as ever. “Yeah, we will. We have to. I don’t intend on blowing it again this year.”

With a nod, Macon galloped toward Zander and his small posse.

Wade followed and dismounted as soon as he met up with them. “Well? How’d we do?” He was almost too nervous to ask. He felt a stall in time before he threw his rope. That equaled wasted time, and tenths of a second mattered in this sport.

“Not bad. Not bad at all. Five point one.”

“We can beat that,” Macon said as he tied off his horse. “Our best is almost a second faster.”

Zander beamed. “If you can hit that time, we can take it all. I have no doubt. The arena is yours for the next hour. Take the time to practice. Afterwards, let Chase take care of your horses and meet me back up at the house. I want to tell you about our business proposition.”

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## CHAPTER 5

It had been two weeks since Wade had come with Macon to the XYZ Ranch. The burden and sense of dread Wade had carried the last eight months were now nonexistent. He rose every morning with a little more enthusiasm than the one before. Each day had become more routine and natural. They practiced every day during their allotted time, and the remainder of the day they worked on the ranch just like the other men.

The highlight of their stay had been when they and a large group of cowboys at the XYZ Ranch headed out on horseback to round up cattle. Just as cowboys a century earlier would have, they corralled and branded all the new calves. They also vaccinated and wormed them. That was a side of ranching Wade had never experienced, but always wanted to. Back home on his father’s ranch, he brought cattle in on horseback, but the experience was

much different. Their cattle were tamer and easier to handle, for starters. Secondly, the men here labored together as team, like cowboys before them did when they made the work their sole source of income.

Outside of his newfound love for wide open spaces, he and Macon had settled in well, becoming close friends with the men they worked with. They also spent their day of rest together, able to comfortably and without angst lie down in a bed next to each other without fear of gossip or prying eyes. More and more Wade found himself loving the new closeness of their relationship. He gave serious thought to taking Zander up on his offer. Macon had already said he was in but would respect Wade's decision if he chose not to, and leave with him after the rodeo.

Day after day had passed and not once had Wade's parents bothered to contact him. He supposed the line went both ways, but it bothered him just the same. Thoughts of returning home to a place he no longer felt welcome didn't sit well. He also couldn't be sure if he could trust Zander and the deal he outlined. He'd always heard that if a deal seemed too good to be true, it probably was. Outside of being a little quiet, the man seemed honest. But could Wade really know someone well enough after two weeks to join a partnership with him? If indeed the provisions were accurate and the figures as well, he and Macon could make a lot of money. Not that money was everything. The peace of mind and atmosphere here were worth so much more.

Macon exited the bathroom with a spring in his step. "Today is the day, man. You ready?" He pulled his belt through the loops of his jeans. "First rodeo of the season and I'm hard just thinking about it."

Wade pulled on his boots and chuckled. "Save the thought, we're quickly running out of time. We need to get downstairs for breakfast and then out the door to load up."

"Oh, we'll be doing some celebrating tonight. We're gonna win, baby!" Macon shouted, and almost trembled with excitement. The guy performed better with adrenaline coursing through his veins. Wade called him an

adrenaline junkie. Macon was the type of guy who'd perform crazy stunts just for the high.

"Simmer down." Wade walked over to him and put his hand around his neck, pulling him close in order to kiss him. "Don't burn off all that energy yet." He smiled against his lips. "You'll need it later."

Macon growled and wrapped his arms around Wade's waist. His tongue slipped between Wade's lips, insisting on entrance. They fell into a deep, sensual kiss, slow and loving. Wade traced the line of his jaw with his thumb, urgency flourishing deep in his gut. Heaven help him, how he wished for an extra hour. Their kiss heated up. Macon's firm mouth pulled his, teeth scraping Wade's bottom lip as he inched back.

"I want you." Macon pecked his lips. "I know we don't have time and I'll have to wait as usual, but I just wanted you to know."

"Mmm, I'd love nothing better than to get back into that bed with you." Wade inhaled a sharp breath through his nose. The scent of Macon's clean soap and skin flooded his senses. The guy always smelled rich and sinful. Wade always figured Macon let off a chemical only he could sense, and its sole purpose was to drive Wade crazy with lust. "We better get a move on."

"I know, I know," Macon complained as he backed away. "I'll get my boots on and meet you downstairs."

As Wade opened the door the noise of loud voices, lots of voices, floated up the stairs. It sounded like the whole damn ranch was in the dining room. It would be a feat, even in such a large space, and he jogged down the stairs to see what the ruckus was about. In the dining room, the large table had been moved and now sat against the far end of the room, covered with platter after platter of food. Other tables had been placed on adjacent walls, with even more food and drink on them as well. Men stood in line with plates, working their way around the room and heading out the back sliding door to the large deck where tables and chairs lay in wait.

"Mornin'," Zander greeted him as he entered.

“Good morning. Wow, you know how to put on a spread.” Wade looked around again and noted extra help was there for Marjorie. “Extra help, too?”

“We’re a family. I do this before every rodeo, and once a month so we can all catch up. Most other times, everyone likes to go home and rest in the peace and quiet of their own places. This is how we stay connected.” Zander nodded as if agreeing with himself. “Better get in line. These men have voracious appetites.”

“I will when Macon comes down. Thank you.” He meant what he said. In two weeks, Zander had shown him more respect and good will than he had received in a very long time.

“My offer still stands. We’d like to have you and Macon on board,” Zander added.

“Yes, sir. I appreciate it.”

Macon bounded down the stairs. “Holy shit!” he nearly yelled when he hit the landing. “Marjorie isn’t the only one trying to feed everyone, is she?”

Zander belted out a loud laugh. “She’d hang me by my ball sack if I didn’t hire her help.”

Macon looked around at all the extra hands helping out. “They are using her recipes, right?”

“No need to worry, Macon. Marjorie is in charge. She’s too stubborn and bossy to let anyone else.”

“I heard that, Zander James Wesley.” Marjorie walked by and stuck her tongue out at him. “I’m not bossy or stubborn.” She lifted her chin defiantly. “Things just run smoother when I’m in charge.” She ignored Zander’s laughter and went about her duties.

“She really is stubborn. Don’t let her fool you.” Zander offered a wink and left them.

The pair filled their plates and walked out to the deck, and ended up having to lean against the deck rail. Apparently someone had miscalculated how many

seats were needed. That suited Wade just fine. This way he could talk to Macon with relative secrecy.

“What do you think about the ranch?” he asked before he shoveled in a mouthful of biscuits and gravy.

“I really like it here,” Macon admitted, stopping to sip his coffee and place the cup on the rail.

Wade nodded and continued to chew. For him, it wouldn't be hard to stay. His only worry was how his mother would take it. Being the only child, a son at that, meant he was due to inherit his father's ranch one day. Really, he didn't want it, not if he had to live the type of life he had been recently. Here, here he could be himself. He would have to admit he was still trying to get comfortable. Seeing other men kiss and grope one another in front of him was different, to say the least. Before coming there he hadn't known a single gay man, nor knew how they acted when together.

With him and Macon, their relationship was strictly a “when no one's watching” kind of union. Out here on the ranch though, the men had no qualms about kissing or touching. Even though it made him uncomfortable, it also gave him a sense of peace. He and Macon weren't alone after all.

“What are you thinking about? You look constipated or something.” Macon nudged him in the ribs.

“I'm not constipated,” Wade growled but had to smile. “I'm just thinking. That's all.”

Macon grinned. “You're thinking of staying, aren't you?”

“Yeah, the place is really growing on me, but I worry.”

“Bout what?” Macon asked between bites.

“Can you leave Kansas and never look back?”

Macon choked on his food. “Of course I can.” He coughed. “And it isn't like we'll be sequestered here and unable to go home to visit if we want to.”

“True.” Wade sipped his coffee. His other worry was how his family would take the news if they knew where he’d moved to. Likely his father would say, “Don’t let the door hit you in the ass on your way out.” Or something equally as sarcastic. The man wouldn’t be pleased, but hell, he hadn’t been happy with him during the last eight months. It was time for Wade to make his own decisions and not feel compelled to please his father.

Men finished up and dropped their paper plates in a large trash can. They filed out toward the barn, all getting ready for the day ahead. Wade and Macon finished up as well and joined the ranks. As they walked, Wade laughed. “I feel like we’re heading into battle. The only problem is we don’t have a flag.”

Macon snickered. “I’m going to laugh my ass off if we get there and they’re flying a rainbow flag.”

Wade shook his head. “I may be what society deems gay, but I’m not ready to ride around with a rainbow flag declaring it.”

“Everyone knows and I say fuck ’em. I’m tired of worrying what others think about me. If they don’t like it, they can suck it.” Macon spoke with anger lacing his words.

“No, they can’t.” Wade’s lips curved into a grin. “That’s my job.”

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Enthusiasm continued to build as they pulled into the rodeo grounds. Macon stared at all the trucks and trailers, noting the men from the ranch weren’t the only ones participating. This rodeo was bigger than Zander had let on about. He expected a small-town rodeo, and this was anything but small.

“Motherfucker,” Wade whispered as he pulled up into a spot and parked.

“What?” Macon looked around to see what he was so bugged about.

Wade pointed and Macon bust up laughing when he noticed a rainbow flag flapping in the breeze. “I told you so.”

“Shut up.” Wade allowed a chuckle to erupt. “Not funny.”

Macon bounded out of the truck. His laughter rang across the parking lot. “I can hear you.” Wade pitched his voice so Macon could hear him.

“And it’s still funny!” Macon shouted as he walked to the back of the trailer.

Wade opened a small door on the side of the trailer and slipped inside, in front of the horses. He untied Diablo, and waited for Macon to finish opening the rear door and move the butt bar out of the way so he could unload. As Wade backed Diablo out, Macon was still laughing.

“My father would shit golden Twinkies if he knew I was competing in a gay rodeo.” Wade shook his head.

“If he does, just think, we’d make a bundle of money!” Macon teased as Wade tied Diablo to the side of the trailer.

“Yeah, well, I suspect he’d be less interested in the money and more worried about the pain in his asshole from doing so.”

“Yeah, a straight man would have trouble passing something that big I suppose.”

Wade shook his head. “Oh, wow, that’s a vision I wish wouldn’t have popped into my head.”

Once they finished saddling their horses, they set off to find the check-in where Zander said their number tags and everything they needed would be ready for them. They found the place and got in line behind half a dozen other cowboys. Macon looked for faces he recognized. Here and there he noted men from the ranch, but besides them, he only noted a few that seemed familiar. He wondered if the men in front of them were gay as well. Must be, he supposed, doubting a straight man would enter such a rodeo.

The line thinned until they were next. He overheard that the men ahead of them were here to team rope as well. Macon listened, already sizing up their competition. The men filled out the paperwork and were handed the entrant tags for the back of their shirts. Much to Wade’s approval, the tags looked much like any other rodeos’. Macon noticed his smile.

When it was their turn, they stepped up in line.

“Names and event, please,” the woman said.

“Wade Sutherland and Macon Sumner—” Before he could state the event, she interrupted.

“I have everything ready for you. Here are your tags, good luck.”

“Wait a minute.” Wade looked down at his tag. “This has rainbow colors on it. The other guys got a regular tag.”

She laughed as if very amused. “Honey, that’s because they’re not gay. You are.”

“So! Why do we need to point it out? I suppose we have separate drinking fountains, too!”

“Wade, calm down,” Macon whispered, and noticed eyes turn toward them.

“Sweetheart, this is a battle ground, not segregation. Zander Wesley makes the rules, not me. Are you competing or not?”

“Just take the number, Wade.” Macon let out an irritated growl.

“Fine, but I’ll be talking to Zander about this.”

Macon sighed and wondered if and when Wade would ever come around. He knew deep down he was gay, but he held a shield up, as if embarrassed by his sexuality. That bothered Macon, because it meant Wade was embarrassed by Macon as well.

“Fuck.” Wade growled, long strides covering the ground beneath his feet.

“It’s not that big a deal, Wade,” Macon told him, and Wade stopped walking.

“Yeah, it is. I’m not here for a social revolution. I’m here to rodeo.”

Macon nodded and looked down at the ground.

“What?” Wade asked, and Macon looked up at him.

“If you’re embarrassed by it, you’re embarrassed by me as well.”

“What? No, I’m not embarrassed by you.”

“Really? In the last two weeks, have you shown any affection toward me outside of the bedroom?”

Wade put his hands on his hips and scuffed the dirt under his feet.

“Answer me. You seem to be the only one with a problem. The others don’t hide their feelings for each other, but you, you do, and I have to admit, it hurts.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to hurt you, but this isn’t easy for me.” Wade looked down at the ground and didn’t bother to make eye contact.

“I’m sorry, too. Sorry that you can fuck me behind closed doors, only to act as if I’m just a friend anywhere else.” Macon turned and walked away, leaving Wade standing dumbfounded.

As he walked, Macon tried to fend off the acid brewing in his stomach. They had come this far and worked their asses off to be ready for this event, and here they were, in much the same situation as last year at the Nationals. He couldn’t let that happen again and wished he’d said nothing and ignored it, at least until after they competed. Now the worry he’d kept secured and tucked back worked its way forward, making his stomach a queasy mess, again.

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Wade wandered around looking for Zander. His irritation about the rodeo was less of a worry now than before he and Macon had their argument. He hated that he couldn’t shake the stigma associated with their relationship. He loved Macon more than life itself and would do anything for him, even leave Kansas to live on the XYZ Ranch where they could be themselves. Macon was right, though. Since they came to the ranch, he hadn’t bothered to show any affection outside of the bedroom, and he hadn’t really noticed until today. Maybe he was still living in Kansas in his heart, waiting for disapproving looks to follow. There was no way to know for sure, but the problem was more psychological than anything. His father’s own looks of disgust had lodged deep in his brain and often visited when he closed his eyes, reminding him of

his shame. The man shouldn't have that kind of effect on him. Whether Wade was right or wrong, it was his life to live.

Zander appeared, and the anger dissipated. Somehow it wasn't worth the fight anymore, especially when he realized the error of his ways. "Hey, man, you ready?" Zander asked with his charismatic charm and wide smile.

"Yeah, but I do have one question."

"Shoot."

Wade held up his rainbow colored tag. "Why the distinction between participants?"

"Ah, well, this is as much a statement as it is a rodeo."

"I really didn't sign up for a gay pride gathering," Wade replied dryly.

"Why not? Aren't you tired of the bullshit that follows you because your heart loves a man and you can't help it?"

The statement sank in for a moment.

"For me, this is a declaration to the rodeo world that we will not be shunned or ignored. We have just as much right to compete as any of these other assholes. Some, but not all, believe that because we're gay, we're weaker. I'm just here to prove them wrong and open closed minds."

*Fucking crusader.* He should have known, and he started to walk away.

"You know, I've been there," Zander called from behind him.

Wade turned. "And where's that?"

"Stuck between the family you seek approval from and what your heart desires." Zander closed the gap between them. "I see myself in you right now. I was in your same position once upon a time, and let me tell you, it can be a lonely damn road. What you and Macon have is something most of us dream of. Don't squander your future based on the ideals of a few." He shook his head as if thinking back. His dark eyes welled up with whatever he was reminiscing about. After clearing his throat and more than likely his mind, he returned his gaze to Wade. "Do what you love and love who you want. That's

all I'm saying. I'd hate to see you where I wound up by trying to please my family fifteen years ago."

Wade thought, and before he could stop his mouth, he was already speaking. "Where was that? I'd like to know. For some reason you think you can relate to me and my position. So tell me."

Zander got a faraway look in his eyes and scrubbed his jaw. "I lost my best friend. The one person I could always count on. I hid away our relationship, kept him at arm's length. He got tired of waiting, and it wounded him beyond repair. When the dust settled and my father found out about my little secret, he kicked me out. He said he never wanted to see me again. So in the long run I lost my family anyway, but what broke my heart was losing Seth. Either way, I'm the biggest loser."

"Oh, man." Wade turned to keep from looking into the face of a man who had lost it all. His eyes showed the pain. "I'm sorry to hear about that. I meant no disrespect." He looked at him again. "Have you ever contacted your family again?"

"Oh, yeah. I've contacted them many times."

"And they still feel the same?" Wade couldn't believe someone could be so cold, until he thought about the blank stares his father offered him. His mother seemed sympathetic, but far from happy about their relationship.

Zander nodded. "I can't help how I feel or who I am. It took me a lot of years to realize that the one person I need to please is me. I could spend the rest of my life trying to earn the respect of my father and more than likely still come up short. I'm the one who has to look myself in the mirror at the end of each day. I need to be true to myself and I'm happy with who I am. When I was hiding away with Seth, I hated the person that reflected back at me in the mirror." He stopped and kicked the ground. Dust flew up. "And I fucking ignored my heart. Didn't matter though." He offered a sarcastic chuckle. "They ended up hating me anyway, and I lost him."

Wade thought he himself had it bad. Not. At least his family knew, and although they weren't pleased, they still spoke to him.

“I see the similarity between Seth and Macon. I also see me in you. Think about it.” Zander tipped his hat and walked away, leaving Wade in a stupor.

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The horses were ready, and chute time was fifteen minutes and counting. Macon looked around, wondering where Wade had taken off to. He hadn't seen him for the last two hours. When Wade took a mind to be pissed off it was easier to give him space, and that's what he was doing. He wondered if Wade had forgotten their time or, worse, had decided not to compete after all.

Macon sat down on the fender of the trailer and leaned back. The sun shone on his face, warming it. A cool breeze blew, reminding him of so many years ago when he and Wade played as kids. He smiled while thinking back. The scene was surreal, when all was right with the world. They were young with their lives ahead of them, kids really, playing and dreaming, each in a pair of Wranglers that was a little too big. Wade had thought he was big shit with his shiny, silver spurs. He chuckled. They were so naïve about the world outside of that front yard. Little did they know, the world wasn't all fun and rodeos.

“Hey, no sleeping. We ride in ten minutes.” Wade interrupted his thoughts.

“I was just resting my eyes.” Macon stood and squinted in the bright sunlight.

Wade just grinned and walked closer. “Likely story.”

Wade's approach, with that gleam in his eyes he got when lustful thoughts entered his mind, made Macon shudder in response. Of course they were out in public, so likely Wade was messing with him. Before he could smart off, Wade stood just inches away. His heart beat faster, hoping maybe—

Then Wade's lips were on his, and his arms pulled him close. Fear and exhilaration spiked through his veins at the same time. He didn't know what had come over Wade, but he loved it as their kiss deepened. He moaned with delight as their tongues pulled and tangled. Wade slowed, kissing him

leisurely as if they had all the time in the world. Their last kiss at a rodeo wasn't this hot, or in broad daylight.

“Mmm.” Wade hummed and broke away but kept both his hands wrapped around Macon's neck. His eyes opened and glimmered in the sunshine.

“Wow.” Macon exhaled and glanced around. “Someone could have seen us.”

Wade laughed. “Let 'em.” He kissed him once more as if they were sharing a first kiss. It was raw and sensual, heated yet heartwarming.

Desire swirled in Macon's gut as delight made his heart race. Wade ended their kiss and backed away. Macon swayed as if drunk. “What time is this rodeo over?”

“Not soon enough.” Wade winked and walked over to his horse to untie him. “Get your horse, man. We have a competition to win.”

As they entered the arena and took their places in the boxes, a newfound sense of determination hit Macon. Where it came from, he couldn't pinpoint exactly, but he was damn glad for the rush of adrenaline that had him ready to roll.

Diablo was prepared under him, nervously pawing the earth, with his muscles contracting and releasing as he shifted his weight. Somehow Diablo knew this was more than a practice and acted as if he had something to prove as well.

Macon looked over at Wade. God, the man was even hotter on horseback. His long, muscular legs flexed in the stirrups when he pushed down and adjusted. The crowd faded away and it was just the two of them. Wade glanced over with a wide smile and mouthed *I love you*. Macon replied in the same fashion and felt his stomach quiver. Wade's gaze was intense, yet loving and warm. Something big happened in the two hours he went AWOL, but Macon decided not to ask questions. Instead, he'd thank whatever deity was responsible for the amazing reversal in Wade's attitude.

The men manning the chute loaded a calf, and the tension built. Diablo snorted, summing up Macon's feelings as well. He ran the ride through his head, nodding to himself and remembering his timing.

The announcer boomed over the loud speaker, introducing them. All Macon caught was his name. The rest couldn't be heard through the blood rushing through his veins and pounding in his ears. *Thump, thump, thump, thump*. He took a deep breath and shifted in the saddle. Everything seemed to move in slow motion, clicking by as tunnel vision took over. He peered out of the corner of his eye and waited for the tip of Wade's hat.

With Wade's nod and a click of the chute, impulse took over. Wade shot out of the box, and as if knowing when to go, Diablo followed, leaping forward, pouring his energy into his legs. Time sped up and all thoughts turned to basic instinct. Macon's rope rippled through the air, leaving his fingers just a fraction of a second after Wade's, and snagged both of the calf's back legs. He tugged hard and shook from head to toe. He didn't know what their time was, but he could feel it was their personal best.

Wade bounded off Caesar, pulling his rope behind him. Macon dismounted and felt his legs tremble and buckle beneath him. With purposeful strides, Wade came closer. He tossed his rope to the ground and grabbed Macon, pressing his lips roughly against Macon's. The crowd roared with cheers and whistles.

"Lord, have mercy!" the announcer shouted. "Four seconds, folks. These men came with a mission. That mission was to not only set a new record at this rodeo, but win!"

Wade laughed as they broke their kiss. The usual serious man Macon always knew had disappeared, leaving behind a man that was full of life with purpose. This moment would stay etched in his mind forever.

"Come on. I'll buy you a beer, cowboy." Wade smacked him on the back before picking up his rope and getting back in the saddle.

Macon just watched, in awe of what had transpired. “I don’t want to know.” He spoke out loud to himself. Not that anyone could hear him over the deafening cheers of the audience.

“Give it up one more time for these men!” The announcer got the audience rowdy again.

After taking care of their horses, Macon and Wade stopped at a vendor for a beer before settling into the audience to watch the remainder of the show.

Wade held his cup up. “No regrets.”

“To no regrets.” Macon smiled.

As the rodeo continued on, they relaxed. The day had been emotionally draining and Macon’s adrenaline had worn off, leaving him on the sleepy side. Wade scooted down in his chair and leaned his head back. He motioned for Macon to come closer and directed Macon’s head to his shoulder. With his feet kicked up on the rail in front of them, Wade laid his head against Macon’s and put his hand on his leg. They shifted a little trying to get comfortable and finally found a position that worked for both of them.

Macon yawned and pulled the brim of his ball hat down to shade his eyes.

“Hell of a day, huh?” Wade whispered.

“Best day ever.” Macon grinned and closed his eyes with a contented heart.

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## CHAPTER 6

Back at the ranch that night, a party ensued. Wade missed most of the rodeo but understood their team won every competition. Zander was in high spirits, hooting and hollering as the beer flowed freely. Wade was glad he and Macon caught a little shut-eye earlier. It looked like the night would be long and very rowdy.

The smell of barbecue wafted through the air. When his stomach complained, it didn't take him very long to realize he hadn't eaten since breakfast. Already tipsy from the beer on an empty stomach, he meandered through the crowd with Macon to get a bite to eat. As they walked, men congratulated them and slapped them on the back. A few high-fives later, they made it to the buffet table.

"I'm so hungry I could eat the stink bag out of a skunk," Macon complained, and loaded up a plate.

"Forget the stink bag. I'd eat the whole son of a bitch," Wade replied, and they broke out in laughter.

They finally found a place to sit amongst the exuberant crowd. Dean and John came over and sat down with them, both wound up and mouthy as ever.

"Hell yeah! We came, we saw, we kicked ass!" John shouted before turning up his beer. He swallowed and sobered some, leveling his gaze toward Wade and Macon. He shook his head with disbelief and smiled. "I had my doubts, I'll have to tell you, but Zander said you two were the ones, and by God he was right."

Dean catcalled beside him and pounded the table. "We're gonna do it, boys. We're gonna do as Zander predicts. We'll win the whole fucking thing."

"Damn right, we will!" John showed his enthusiasm as well as his inebriation.

Zander strolled over and sat down next to Wade. As the other men got caught up with their bragging and carrying on, Zander nudged him. "That was one hell of a show today."

Wade didn't have to ask what he meant. He already knew. "Thank you." He looked at the man who had changed his outlook on life. "Thank you."

"You know, if I would have done things different all those years ago, I might not be here, in this moment." He looked over at John and Dean. "And I wouldn't have those two." He chuckled. "Sometimes life directs us on a new

path no matter how much we protest or how much it sucks at first. In the end, there is a rainbow.”

Wade nodded and understood exactly what he meant. “By the way, we’re in.”

“I’m damn glad, and proud to have you two.” Zander gave him a smack on the back and stood up. “Damn proud.”

Dean caught Zander standing and chanted, “Speech, speech.”

The words caught fire and within seconds all the men joined in. “Speech, speech.”

Zander beamed with a wide smile and looked out at all the faces. Wade could see the pride in Zander’s expression, and it warmed his heart.

“Okay, okay.” Zander motioned for them to settle down. The horde of cowboys grew quiet while waiting. Zander looked at all of them. “I must say, I’m looking at the best damn bunch of cowboys to ever assemble. Each and every one of you made this night possible. What started out as a dream has now become a reality.” He wiped his eyes. “I am so damn proud and honored to have each of you as a part of this ranch and team. May this only be the start of our happily-ever-after and the beginning of new found riches for the XYZ Ranch. I couldn’t have done it without you, any of you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” He picked up his cup and raised it high. “To you, my friends.”

The men responded loudly, shouting and whistling.

“Music!” Zander hollered above the noise, and the band began to play an upbeat tune. John and Dean rose, making an exit with him.

“I bet I know what they’re going to do.” Macon snickered and resumed eating.

“Don’t you know it.” Wade shook his head, not understanding the threesome completely, but realizing love had no bounds. “We’ll be following them shortly.”

Macon peered up at him with a sensual smile. “Hell, yeah.”

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The partying was short-lived. Macon couldn't control his enthusiasm any longer. He and Wade made their way through the crowd and into the house not long after Zander, John, and Dean departed their company. Before they even reached the top of the stairs, their hands were already touching each other, seeking flesh.

They stumbled down the hall, boots clunking on the hardwood floor. Wade grabbed Macon at the threshold and pressed him against the wall. His eyes gazed into his. "You're my rainbow, Macon."

Macon felt his eyes get misty and his erection grow. "And you're mine."

Their mouths crashed together as their hunger grew. Wade's hands yanked Macon's buckle loose as they stumbled into the room. Macon tugged at Wade's shirt. The intensity in Wade's gaze sparked a new fire in his gut. He moved his tongue over the planes of Wade's chest and kissed his skin.

While Wade tried to walk backward and open the fly of Macon's jeans, he tripped and fell, pulling Macon down with him. They laughed and continued on, not letting their fall inhibit their desire.

"Son of bitch, we have too many clothes on," Wade complained, and kicked off his boots.

"That ain't no shit." Macon continued to unbutton Wade's shirt. His mouth was hungry as he opened the last button. He spread Wade's shirt open wide and leaned down to place kisses on Wade's chest. Wade tasted salty and sweet on his tongue.

"Oh, God," Wade moaned, and sifted his fingers through Macon's hair. "I love it when you do that."

Macon flicked his tongue over Wade's taut nipple. He moved lower, leaving a wet trail as he descended. Wade wiggled when he hit a ticklish region on his stomach. Macon's tongue dipped into his belly button, furthering the torture.

Wade laughed and gripped handfuls of Macon's hair. "You're killing me."

“I bet I can turn that laughter to moans in under five seconds.” Macon smiled against Wade’s stomach and pulled his fly open.

“I wish you—” Wade’s words stopped as a loud moan erupted from his lungs.

“I told you so.” Macon’s teeth grazed over Wade’s length through his gray cotton boxers. He grabbed Wade’s jeans and yanked them down, leaning back to remove them completely. A sense of pride overwhelmed him. He watched Wade’s chest rising and falling quickly as his anticipation built. The moonlight entered the room, highlighting their bodies and giving the room a dreamlike quality. It was a dream for Macon, a wonderful dream come true.

“Man, I love you.” Wade grinned. His hand encircled his cock, working slowly. He knew Macon loved to watch him touch himself.

“Is that an invitation?” Macon teased, as he worked his belt loose and shimmied out of his jeans.

“Absolutely.” A coy smile stretched across Wade’s face.

Macon stood and his erection flopped out, hard and completely at attention. Wade could make him hard with little or no effort. Just being around him was enough.

“Mmm, mmm, boy. Mighty fine hardware.” Wade stood and followed him to the nightstand. “I have a better idea.” He pulled Macon close and kissed him. Then he led Macon to the bathroom, closing the door behind them.

Macon watched with curiosity as Wade turned on the water in the large shower. At one end of the long tiled unit was a bench. Steam rose in the glass-enclosed shower as they entered. Wade grinned, mischief playing in his eyes. He pushed Macon under the spray and retrieved a sponge and the soap.

Wade lathered the sponge and slid it over Macon’s chest. He gazed upon him lovingly as he took his time, gently scrubbing away the dirt and grime from the day. He took extra time, fondling Macon’s package with loving strokes. Wade worked methodically down Macon’s legs, picking up each foot

to wash them as well. When he stood, he moved behind Macon and scrubbed his back. His dick slid across Macon's ass, the suds running down his back making it a slippery surface.

"That feels great." Macon closed his eyes and enjoyed the intimacy. Gentle hands massaged his back, moving lower to tease and squeeze his rear end. "I think it's my turn." He turned and pulled the sponge from Wade's hand, and started at his chest.

Wade caressed Macon's face and stared into his eyes as if they had been apart for weeks. Macon knew something profound had happened earlier that day and relished the new closeness and openness their relationship had gained. Today was the start of a new life, a life they would share despite all those who believed they were wrong. His heart swelled. Nothing so wrong could make him feel this alive or wonderful.

He worked around to Wade's back, taking extra time to enjoy the view. Soapy suds outlined the rigid muscles. Pressing his chest against him, Macon wrapped his arms around Wade and allowed his fingers to drag over his defined pecs. He stopped to tease his nipples, eliciting a satisfied groan before moving south and taking Wade's thick pole in his hand. "Bout ready to use this?" he whispered in Wade's ear, and nibbled his lobe.

"I'm past ready." Wade's hips moved, pulling and pushing his cock through Macon's grip.

The water washed away the remnants of soap and Wade reached for a bottle of massage oil. He pushed Macon out from under the water and against the wall. When he flipped the lid, he grinned. "I've always wanted to do this."

Oil drizzled over Macon's chest. Wade smeared it, coating every square inch. He moved lower and squirted his cock and massaged the oil in there as well.

"Mmm." Macon purred with approval and watched Wade's contented expression. "My turn." He removed the bottle from Wade's hand and coated him in the same manner. When he was satisfied, he set it aside.

Desire flourished as Wade pressed against him, his mouth seeking his lips. Their kiss was deep and tender as their oiled bodies rubbed together. The moment heated and raged into a passionate hunger. Moans erupted with the heat of the shower making the men hot. Wade's hand touched and caressed Macon's chest, moving lower to gather their cocks together in his large hand.

"Remember this?" He spoke against Macon's mouth and smiled. He moved as their shafts rubbed and slid effortlessly over one another. Wade leaned back to watch. "We started with this." He seemed to be reminiscing, a wide grin showcasing his dimpled cheeks.

"I remember," Macon said with a raspy voice, already so overcome with emotion and desire he could barely concentrate.

"I think of that night often, of how our relationship started." Wade looked serious for a moment. "It shocked me, but thrilled me. I remember I couldn't breathe. If you didn't make that bold move, we might not be here, together now."

Macon touched Wade's face, and adored the love that reflected back at him. They continued, sliding with oiled hands and bodies to a steady rhythm. "I'd always wanted you, but was too scared to tell you. The moment that night seemed right and perfect. I knew I'd regret it if I never showed you how I felt for you."

"I'm so thankful you did," Wade admitted before kissing him. They swayed, lightheaded from the heat and the desire that continued to build. "I need to be inside you now, Macon." He directed him to turn around.

The cool tile of the wall felt refreshing against Macon's cheek. Warm oil trickled down his back and Wade massaged it in, moving lower to apply a liberal amount between his cheeks. Macon whimpered with the excitement coursing throughout his body. He needed Wade like he needed his next breath.

He worked to relax and calm his racing heart. Wade inched inside him, the oil making it easy and effortless. Macon cried out and grasped at the tile wall. His oily fingers bumped and glided over the slick surface. Wade grunted and

wiggled his hips. The invasion burned, burned so damn good. “Oh, God, Wade.” Macon took a deep breath.

“I can’t get enough of you. This,” Wade said with a growl, and thrust in deeper.

Their lovemaking became a series of grunts and groans. Hands slid over Macon’s chest as Wade held him tight. His hips pumped with a steady rhythm, making Macon cry out over and over again with pleasure. He fisted his cock and matched the momentum. He ached to release, the pressure building to a painful level. “Wade, I’m going to come.”

Wade thrust harder and faster, his hands holding Macon’s hips tight. “Oh, yeah, I’m right behind you.” He pulled out abruptly and turned Macon around. Their lips met and Wade held their shafts together, bucking insistently. “Come with me.”

Macon’s eyes rolled back as his release burst forward. “Fuck!” He hissed as a tingly sensation swept over him, come shooting out as Wade unloaded as well.

Wade trembled with his hands still holding them together. He looked down at their spent cocks and grinned before returning his gaze back to Macon’s eyes. “Kiss me.”

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Late that night Wade held Macon in his arms, wanting for nothing more than what he already possessed. Zander’s words earlier that day had prompted him to make a decision that had been a long time coming. He knew he could spend the rest of his life trying to please his father and making amends for what the man perceived as immoral, only to come up short in respect and understanding in the long run. By no means would he write his parents off, but he’d make a stand. The day had taught him so much, but the most important lesson was to follow his heart. They might be wrong in the eyes of society, but he couldn’t dream of being any happier or more content than at this very moment.

“We’re staying,” Wade whispered to Macon, who had begun to drift off.

Macon's hand caressed his arm. "I can't imagine being anywhere else, with anyone else."

Whether or not Zander's prediction came true concerning the Nationals, Wade didn't care. He'd always love the rodeo, but he loved Macon more. No matter what came at them or what the future held for them, he knew he could face it as long as the two of them were together. He had found home in the embrace of another man, his best friend, and his lover.

**THE END**

## Author Bio

*Hennessee enjoys the journey love takes. Whether it is a heterosexual romance or an alternative romance, the heart is in control and each story to her deserves to be told. Writing has become Hennessee's passion, and she fills her days listening to the voices in her head that demand to be heard. Some view her as kooky and maybe weird with the historical facts she likes to interject into daily conversation. She may be a geek at heart, but more so a romantic, and hopes one day for people of the world to be able to love whom they choose without repercussions. In her eyes, love is a commodity that is in short supply and if someone is fortunate enough to find it, they should hang onto it. Her books can be found at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, BookStrand, Evernight Publishing, and All Romance Ebooks.*

## Contact Info

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