



Solid as Gold

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Chayce Fall just wants to play music, but someone out there has real problem with him. At least that's what he assumes when the shooting starts at one of his concerts. Then the real problem shows up in the form of Waylon Hudson, a bodyguard hired by his mom.

Waylon expects Chayce to be a spoiled brat, but he finds a hot, decent man who isn't necessarily the safest big name on earth, but he can't imagine what Chayce has done to attract a stalker or a killer or whatever it is that's going on here.

When he gets the chance to take Chayce into hiding, Waylon goes to ground, and he finds himself falling hard for the man. Can he keep Chayce safe and wrangle the fact that they have it bad for each other, or will he lose his shot at this solid gold man?

This is a fun and hot bodyguard MM romance. Previously published in a charity anthology.

Total Pages (Source): 11

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Chapter One

“T hank y’all!” Chayce Fall waved at the crowd and jogged off the stage, nodding to his band leader, who played him off into the wings. Falin was a kick-ass lady who kept the stage musicians organized and working, and she would close it out while he made his escape. His guys knew how to take it home.

He had to show up in tight jeans, shake his booty, hit the right notes, and let his love for performing shine through. It was so much better hearing the crowds roar because he was singing their favorite song than because he’d been thrown off the back of a bull. Which, hell, who was he kidding? He’d loved that too. He’d just gotten too old and too beat up for it.

He grinned at the stage manager, who gave him a thumbs-up. No second encore tonight. This was a tight show, and he had a plane to catch. He took the towel someone handed him, mopping sweat. “Thanks, y’all. Vicki, I got to get home.”

His tour manager and all-around controller of the schedule nodded to him. “Your jet’s waiting for you. Limo is right here.” She waved him through toward the big black sedan, which had been pulled into the back bay of the venue. He could still hear the faint cheering of the crowd, the band taking their moment in the limelight, and for a second he wanted to run back out there.

No.

No, not tonight.

His momma was having her birthday party tonight, and he'd promised her he'd be there before the last hurrah. She'd even started the shindig late for him.

He tugged on the jean jacket someone handed him, ready to hit the road, and started toward the open limo door.

Which was when all hell broke loose.

Chayce heard the gunshot before he saw the weird flash when the bullet ricocheted off the limo. The pinging sound was also a dead giveaway that the damn bullet had come too close for comfort.

"Chayce! Get down!" A line of fire creased his cheek, and the security guys tackled him, burying him under ten thousand pounds of sweaty muscle as they took him to the floor.

Oh. Blah.

Really, wouldn't it be better to shove him in the car than to lie on top of him? He wondered about these guys sometimes. Big, but not a lot of bright...

Jesus, if they were going to make him late, they might as well just shoot him. His momma would chew his ass up and spit it out. She was already furious he'd scheduled a date on her special day.

Yeah. Shoot him now.

He'd take that over a furious, scared momma bear who was celebrating her sixtieth birthday any day.

"Y'all get off." Chayce shoved and wiggled, trying to get some air.

“Someone is shooting at you, sir!”

“I’m suffocating in here. Shoot him back or something. You really want to deal with my momma?”

He knew better. No one wanted to mess with the Queen of the Oilfields. She was... fierce, his momma, and he would tear the nuts off anyone who kept her from getting what she wanted.

And she wanted her baby boy, and the pair of diamond ear-bobs he’d bought her. Thank God for personal assistants that talked to each other and made him look good.

“No sir.” One of the bodyguards, a big old boy who had played football for his hometown team, hopped up to yank him to his feet, his boots actually dangling for a moment. “Time to go.”

“Yep. Everyone in the audience safe? My band?”

“You know it. That shot was for you.”

Excellent. Only not. “Let’s hasta.” He assumed someone had called the cops. He didn’t really care. He had security to deal with that. He wanted out of wherever they were and on the plane where -- while maybe it was more likely he’d get hit -- it was way more difficult to be shot at.

“Yessir.” Someone shoved, and he stumbled into the car, no more bullets pinging, thank goodness. He righted himself, someone slammed the door, and they were off and running.

He leaned back, and his driver Kenny glanced back at him, dark eyes looking like nothing more than holes burned in a blanket.

“Okay, man. That sucked.”

“No shit. Drive.” The let-down was bad after a show, but this? This was brutal. His body already ached, and shivers were starting, as if he had the flu. Adrenaline was a bear, and when the crisis was over, it left a guy limp as a noodle.

“On it.” They roared off, and he figured they took the first corner on two wheels. Which in a limo was precarious.

Now all he had to do was fly across country and make it to the party on time.

Hopefully, the plane would move faster than the police.

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Chapter Two

“How many times has he been shot at?”

Waylon Hudson wanted a Marlboro Light 100. Bad. And he hadn't smoked since high school. But there was something about this Chayce Fall job that was giving him a bad vibe. Like there was something he wasn't being told. And he hated not having all of the information he needed.

Mrs. Melinda ‘I Will Bite Your Head Off and Serve the Leftovers to My Rottweilers’ Fall stared at him down her perfectly done nose. “Too many. Obviously, he needs private security. My dear friend recommended Elite. You might have heard of her. I believe she goes by Governor.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Shit. He needed to remember that folks like this expected him to keep his mouth shut, no matter how much he wanted the intel. He wasn't slow. He was just too damn into his job to give a shit about rich folks and their protocols. “I just need to know if there's been an identified threat, or if I'll be looking into who's after him.”

“If there has been, my son has decided to keep it from me. He doesn't want to stress me out.” The air quotes were accompanied by an eye roll. “He seems to believe I'm delicate in some way.”

His lips curved in a wry grin. “You do have a lovely illusion going on, ma’am.” There was nothing delicate about this lady, from her too-big jewels to her too-white teeth.

She snorted, her green eyes twinkling. “I like you. I’m made of Teflon, son. Trust me. My son has a cut on his face. The media will see. I do not approve.”

“Oh, I trust you, ma’am. All the way. I’ll look into it with my main eye to positioning him to be safe at all times.” Lord save his happy ass.

“Good. I did not watch him survive flinging himself off the back of bulls to have him gunned down singing silly songs about rodeo.” She waved a beringed hand. Jesus, she had to have wrist muscles like a gorilla. “And his security now are all local men, none of them true professionals.”

“Understood.” He’d heard all of Chayce’s discography, and after four albums, he was climbing the charts with every release. Traditional country was making a comeback thanks to the popularity of a few western TV shows, and it was good to see. Especially since his name was Waylon. “When do I meet him?”

“He’s due downstairs in five minutes for lunch. He didn’t get in until incredibly late. He almost missed the cake cutting due to the incident. He has a room here, of course, but he mainly stays at his house up in the mount?—”

“Senora! Senora, Mister Chayce is no esta aqui!” An older woman trotted into the room, her face red with the effort. She waved her hands in the air as if that was going to make Chayce appear.

He reckoned that was the housekeeper, and she seemed a little fluttery and panicked.

Shit. Chayce had disappeared already? How far could he go on this damn ranch? It was the size of some small countries.

Waylon looked at Mrs. Fall, knowing if anyone had a bead on her son, it would be her. She was sharp. “Where would he be?”

She rolled her eyes, her fake eyelashes leaving shadows on her mostly-invisible eyebags. “He’s either in with the horses or the dogs, I guarantee it. He just can’t stay where he’s meant to be.”

“Then I’ll go have a look-see.” He wasn’t gonna crowd the guy here at his home, but at the same time, if someone was shooting at the man at shows, he needed a set of eyes on him. And that was Waylon’s job. Stay with the primary. Period.

“Good. Until further notice, you crawl up his ass and protect him. He’s not allowed to fire you. You’re not on his payroll.” She winked at him, but underneath the glibness was a real concern for her son, and he admired her for just taking the bull by the horns, so to speak.

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll remind him about lunch.” She did seem to want to see her kid, too, so why not be pushy about that one thing? That way Chayce could have more freedom around the place. Mommas got what they wanted, no matter who they had to shout at.

He headed outside. Waylon had oriented himself last night with maps and aerial pictures on the flight in, so he had a good idea of the lay of the land. And he’d been chosen for this job partly because he’d grown up on a ranch, so he wasn’t stupid about animals. If he ended up in the wrong pasture, things could go very wrong in a big old hurry.

From what he understood, Chayce had a home in Colorado, a hidey-hole in Santa Fe and another one up in Maine, but that he spent a ton of downtime on his mother’s ranch, playing cowboy. And why not? This place had all the comforts. The house was... damn. Like something out of a TV show. Dallas , maybe. Or Yellowstone . There was a lot of wood and whiskey and antlers and money. It all smelled like money.

He assumed both dogs and horses would be at or near the barns, and he was rewarded with being right. There was a group of cowboys hooting and laughing out by a corral, and in the ring was one of the top-rated country singers on earth, riding a big, gray bull.

Not the most energetic bull on earth, but that was probably a good thing. It was still a massive old brahma, and Waylon put that on the list of things they needed to discuss when he told Chayce he had a new bodyguard. No more trying to get himself killed when someone else was happy to do it for him.

The crowd around him was hooting and hollering as he jumped off, and Waylon saw at least three guys filming it, the ever-present cowboy accessory of a smart phone in full array.

Christ on a sparkly purple crutch, this man... Where was his regular security team? His assistant? He was supposed to have all of those things, even at his mom's house.

Waylon slid into the crowd, working his way through, silent and pretty much unnoticed. He was just another cowboy hat, and he wasn't jostling to take pictures or hooting for Chayce to go the eight seconds.

At the shout of eight, Chayce bounced off the bull, landing ass-first in the dirt. Then Chayce popped up and brushed his butt off, those mossy green eyes laughing at them all. "Okay, y'all. Pay up. I won the damn bet."

"C'mon on, boss...one more ride? Double or nothing?"

"Like I know y'all won't video it all and sell the footage. You're getting your pound of flesh. Put your money up." He held out a hand, and the guys slapped bills into it.

Waylon smiled, picking Chayce out of the crowd like he was a steer and Waylon was

a cutting horse. The guy didn't even realize it until they were walking away, he didn't think.

Then he got a sideways look, the expression on Chayce's face way more knowing than he would have expected. "Where we headed?"

"Your momma wants to see you for lunch," Waylon replied. "She sent me on a mission to find you."

"You one of her new guys? I haven't met you yet." Chayce grinned at him, and damn, this son of a bitch sparkled. Just fucking shone with joy and charisma, topped with a gimme cap that read Fall Oil, blond curls just barely peeking out around the edges. The cut though, that sliced right across one razor sharp cheekbone, that was just wrong. That didn't belong there. "First thing you need to know is she lies. I am not seventeen still."

"I have your dossier." He let himself smile back. Let himself. Shit. He couldn't help it, and wasn't that irritating as hell. "And I'm usually the soul of discretion. I'm just here to keep you from getting shot again. But I wouldn't put it past your momma to take a pot shot at you for missing your first meal back."

"I had breakfast in the kitchen this morning. She assumed I slept in. Victor made me an omelet. He's got a good touch."

"Yeah? I'll keep that in mind." To be fair, Chayce walked along with him, clearly willing to go to lunch, which kind of surprised him. He'd expected a brat. This guy read way more easy in his skin.

"Trust me, Victor can make or break you with her. Just kiss up to him. It'll make your life easier."

A huge dog started galloping across the yard, howling like he was coming for their souls.

Was that a wolfhound? Seriously?

The dog hit Chayce hard enough that he rocked backward on his bootheels. “H-hey, Bubbles! How are you?”

“Good lord. He yours?” Waylon stared. That was a lot of drool. And hair. And dirt. Not that he couldn’t handle all that, but damn.

“Yep. When we ride on the bus, he comes with, but he hangs with Momma a lot when I’m flying. He’s good for her. Usually, she just has purse dogs around.”

“He’s huge.” He’d never seen a dog that big, and he’d had Pyrenees.

“He’s friendly. You might as well get to know him. Bubbles. This is...”

“Waylon.”

There was that wicked grin again. “Like Jennings? Too cool.”

“For all I know, I got picked for this job just for that.” It was a joke. Kinda. Maybe not. Who the hell knew with his employers. Employer. Whatever.

“Job?” Chayce’s head tilted like he’d heard a whistle. “What do you mean?”

“I’m your new bodyguard, Chayce. Your momma isn’t happy with your current team.” What had Chayce thought he meant?

Chayce stopped, one hand on the dog’s back, and he blinked, then the laughter

started, pure music. “What? Oh, fuck. I thought you were one of Momma’s boy toys. My current team is cute and enthusiastic. They’re good guys. You’ll fit in with them.” Okay, that was unexpected. He’d imagined a temper tantrum, a fit, a complaint, but no.

“Cute...” No one had ever associated that word with him before. Huh. “Well, uh, thanks.”

“Sure. Have you met Chris? He’s my assistant. He’ll get you set up and all in the rotation. Tall skinny bald dude? Looks a little like Lurch?”

“I have not. I’ll check in with him, but I’m not in a rotation. I’m your shadow until the imminent threat is taken care of.” Might as well start out like he could hold out, get the guy used to the idea.

“Okay, but that’s going to get exhausting. I won’t tell on you if you slack.” He got a wink, then the green eyes went wide. “Man, you get shot at a couple times...”

“It does tend to make people worry.” Okay, so Chayce was far and away from the spoiled, entitled asshole he’d expected.

“So, seriously. Talk to Chris. He’ll introduce you to the guys—I think there are three for the tour, maybe?—and slot you in.”

“Mmm.” He kept it noncommittal as he opened the door to the big house, letting Chayce precede him. He wasn’t on a rotation. He got paid to be there. Period.

The momma bear was right there, eyes flashing. “Where were you? You were supposed to meet me for lunch.”

“Hey gorgeous.” Chayce took her hand and kissed it. “I’m only a few minutes late.”

“You’re dusty.”

“That happens when you play in the dirt, Momma.”

“Well, what are you doing rolling around in the mud?” She was smiling, though, clearly ready to kiss and make up.

“Playing cowboy, as I do. So you hired me another bodyguard? You know I have a team, right?”

Mrs. Fall’s eyes rolled like thrown dice. “I do. This company is exclusive. Highly recommended. Your team is shit, son.”

“Mother! Language!” Chayce rolled his eyes and wrung his hands, playful and teasing.

“Well, it’s true.” She waved Chayce to a chair, and Waylon slid into one that sat back by the wall.

“Have you had lunch?” Chayce asked, swiveling to stare right at him.

“No, sir. I flew in on the red-eye.” And he’d listened to Chayce’s momma for a good hour.

Chayce blew his lips like a fractious horse. “Well, come on and sit, Mr. Waylon. Everyone deserves to eat, right?”

“Of course.” Mrs. Fall raised her eyebrows at him. “We don’t stand on ceremony.”

“And we rarely starve folks.” Chayce’s smile was wicked. “Well... sometimes she starves Chris.”

“Chris deserves it.” Mrs. Fall sniffed, a very ladylike sound. Then she guffawed, and that made him laugh.

“She’s prejudiced. He’s my stepbrother from my dad’s third marriage.” They both laughed together then, and he had to admit, these two were... strange bugs.

Waylon just put on a polite smile, but he did like them, oddly enough. That would make his job easier. It sucked to think his boss was a dick.

A young woman came in with a platter of tacos, along with bowls of salsa, guacamole, and sour cream. “Mr. Chayce.”

“Hey, Zee. You doing okay?”

“I’m good. Staying busy. Taking classes.” She grinned at Chayce, obviously proud. “I got an A in my poli sci class.”

“Good deal. That’s a tough one. Lots of stuff to remember, and lots of nuance.”

“Yeah, but I’m loving it too, so... thanks for everything. You rock.” She gave Chayce a one-armed hug.

“No problem, kiddo.”

So had Chayce paid for this kid’s college?

“Would you like iced tea, Mr. Hudson?” Mrs. Fall asked. “Or Coke?”

“Iced tea would be great, thank you.”

“I’ll get that,” Zee said after leaving the tray on the table.

Mrs. Fall gave her son a glare that read pure alligator. “You spoil her.”

“Yep. Most fun ever .”

Mrs. Fall rolled her eyes. “I swear, you are a menace.”

“Yep.” Chayce said it easily, and it was clear they had this discussion a lot.

“What do you have next? Can you stay a bit?” After all the banter, this was the question that mattered to her. Any fool could see it.

“Just until Thursday. Then I’m heading out for eight weeks, twenty-four shows.”

“Eight whole weeks?”

“Yes, ma’am. You know that sold-out tour? That’s me.” Chayce grabbed a taco, slathering it with salsa.

“Oh.” She pressed her lips together. “Well, can I get you to commit to supper Wednesday night?”

“Sure. I’d love to.” Easy as that. Just sure.

It was impossible not to respect this guy.

“Thank you.” She beamed, looking ten years younger, and suddenly Waylon could see why Chayce had thought Waylon might be her new boy toy. She was an attractive woman. She didn’t do it for him.

Not like her son did. That way was madness, though, so Waylon shut it down.

“Eat up, man. Those tacos don’t eat themselves.”

“Thank you.” He took a plate, loading up.

Chayce’s phone started blowing up, and the man sighed. “It’s Chris. I bet the police want to talk to me about last night...”

“Tell him to set a time this afternoon,” Waylon said. “I want to chat with you about it.” He needed to know what had happened, and he also wanted to coach Chayce some.

“Yeah? I mean, I didn’t do anything wrong by leaving, right? I had to get home.”

“Of course you didn’t, son. You didn’t shoot anyone.” That woman was pure haught. Was that a word? Haught. Waylon reckoned it had to be. If she could be haughty, she could have haught.

Some haught.

Whatever.

“Right.” Chayce nodded, then sent a flurry of texts rather than answer the phone.

“Okay, I have a call at three.”

“Good. That’ll work.” Waylon munched his taco, humming at the taste of the salsa. That was good shit.

Chayce ate quickly, but the man’s mind was elsewhere, and he stood before everyone else was finished. “Love you, Momma. I’m going to get some work in. Mr. Waylon, I told Chris to get you on the schedule, but he needs your contact info. I’ll be in my studio.”

“Sure.” And he would be right outside the studio, wherever it was, making sure no one else got in.

“Cool. Love you, Momma. Having supper with Trent and Randy tonight, possibly some beers and a jam session. I’ll see you in the morning.” And then the Energizer Bunny was off and running.

“Have fun. Watch out for Chris. He’s a flake, but Chayce adores him.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” He stuffed down the rest of his taco, then followed Chayce, feeling a little like a cartoon skunk, bouncing along. This was kinda fun.

Now, once they got on tour and he was getting shot at... Well, that was when he would be useful.

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Chapter Three

The crowd was rocking, and everybody knew the words. The band was feeling it, and Falin was in a fabulous mood, driving them with her lead guitar, pushing everyone to give a little more, just that tiny bit extra.

Chayce ran off stage to change shirts and get a bottle of water after the last note rang out. His first encore was acoustic, and he wanted to make it amazing.

“It is going on out there, man!” The stage manager for the venue, Leo something, clapped him on the back and handed him a water bottle with no lid on it.

Which the new guy, Waylon, stepped in like a choreographed backup dancer and took away, handing him one with an unbroken seal.

Huh. Weird, but cool. The man was sort of like a ghost, just appearing when he least expected it. “Thanks. Hot out there. I need the tank top, y’all. Now.”

“You got it.” Wardrobe rushed around like mad, and he stripped out of his shirt to shrug on whatever they handed him. He sure hoped it was the white tank that the fans seemed to think was hot as hell.

“I’m going to get your limo ready,” Vicki said, as someone touched up his makeup. “We’ll make a corridor and beeline you out before the band’s off the stage after the second encore. Then you’ll go with security to your bus.”

“Okay, but I’m giving that encore.” Dammit. His fans deserved it all.

“Of course. You’ll be alone on stage now. Then with full band for encore two.”

“Excellent.” He winked at Waylon, who was standing by, looking stony. “I’ll be okay.”

“You will.”

Did that man ever crack a smile? He was a machine.

He ran back into the stage and settled, strumming a few times so the guys knew to bring up the spot. The crowd went nuts when the lights went up, really giving him energy.

God, he was a lucky son of a bitch. Blessed, and he knew it.

Chayce played a cover of Dancing in the Moonlight and he ended it with his personal anthem, Down in the Well . He shook hands and took stuffed animals and roses and signed what seemed like a thousand hats and t-shirts and pictures as he sang.

He made it through the encore without missing a lyric and stepped off, handing his guitar off to a roadie. He started to get ready to head back out on stage, when his shoulders hunched up around his ears, and the hair rose up on the back of his neck.

Something felt off. Weird.

Waylon stepped up next to him, just right there the moment he looked around. “What is it?”

“I don’t know. Nothing. Just paranoid.” There was nothing he could put a finger on, so maybe he was just off his game.

“Nope. I don’t believe in that. You know what you know.” Waylon took him out the wrong way, sneaking him past the back door guards, not letting him walk the line they’d set up for him.

“What about the second encore?” He tried to look back, but Waylon kept him moving.

“We’ll cancel it.” Vicki was making a ton of noise. “The band can play something just theirs.”

“But—” He didn’t know what to say. He felt like shit for not following through on his obligations.

“No. We go now. You did an amazing encore for those fans. They’ll never know they missed anything.” Waylon took his arm.

Vicki nodded, hustling along with them. “I want him gone. Hurry up. Now I’m nervous.”

Waylon just nodded back, and they didn’t head for the limo. There was a big black town car parked off to one side of the underground garage, and that was the car Waylon pushed him into, sliding into the driver’s side seconds later.

Just about that time, there was a pop pop pop noise, and he jerked, instinctively reaching for the door handle. He didn’t want to be trapped in a car if he was being attacked.

“Nope.” Waylon pulled out, bypassing the crowd neatly, slipping them out the service entrance. “It’s firecrackers, not bullets. Someone’s trying to distract your team.”

“How do you know that? What the fuck is going on? Is my band okay?” This was not how the end of a concert was supposed to be, dammit! He needed to decompress, let himself deal with the energy of the crowd and the music and all.

Not this rush-off and dead silence after all that noise. Not even the radio was on.

“Because I know what a gun sounds like. And I have an earpiece. Your band is fine. But just in case, the venue is being evacuated now. Those folks will dine out on this for weeks.” Waylon maneuvered the car out, and before the traffic could get bad, they were on the road and flying away from the venue like their asses were on fire.

“Make sure someone tells Kenny you’ve got me. He worries.”

“I’m on it.” Waylon met his gaze in the rearview mirror. “Someone really is pissed at you.”

“Who? I mean, seriously, I’m not the kind of guy that folks get mad at.” He just wasn’t. He didn’t engender that sort of wild fury. His mom might, but he was easygoing and simple to get along with. Just a cowboy.

“We’re going to find out.” Waylon sounded pretty grim. He kinda felt bad for whoever got in this guy’s way.

Not super bad. But a little.

“I sure hope so. I can’t do this shit my whole tour.” He didn’t want to sound like a spoiled brat, but dammit. “These people pay to see me. I want to give them their money’s worth.”

“Well, not at the cost of your life, Chayce. Keep that in mind.”

“Uh-huh.” He tilted his head as they bypassed the downtown hotels. “Where are we headed?”

“Safehouse Air BnB rental. I have alternatives set up in every city.”

“My bus isn’t safe now? I don’t have my things. My guitar.” He needed his guitar.

A puff or two of green wouldn’t go askew either.

“Your crew has it all, but no. It’s not safe. That was why I asked you not to bring your dog.”

Yeah, Waylon had convinced him to leave Bubbles at home this time, and he was super glad he had. His poor baby would have been terrified by the fireworks. And by being separated from him while they waited to rendezvous with the band.

“I don’t like this.” He didn’t like it at all. He wanted his routine.

“No. No, I can see that.” He actually got a sympathetic smile. “But we’ll get this ironed out. I got you.”

“Yeah. So... am I going to fly to the next venue? Because Kenny drives overnight, usually.”

“Yes. We have a jet standing by.”

He blinked. He had a family jet he could use, sure, but he hadn’t planned this. “Shit, how much is my mom paying you?”

“Enough that we have a jet standing by in every venue.” Smartass.

“Lord, can’t we just go to my bus? That would be easier.”

“We’ll have an alternate bus arranged for you by the time we get to the next venue, and your driver will be there. The other bus will become a decoy.”

The guy had all the answers, he had to admit, except that they weren’t just busses . That was his home on the road. That was his safe haven for months at a time. They weren’t just interchangeable.

Waylon glanced at him again. “I know it’s not the same, but your main bus is emblazoned with your name. We can’t take the chance.”

So... he didn’t have a choice? Seriously? He was an adult. He had a headache, and he needed to eat and relax. Wind down.

“Do you want me to stop for food?”

“What are you, a mind reader?” Chayce didn’t mean to snap; he was just on the edge of losing his shit.

“No, but you worked off a ton of calories.” Those weirdly clear gray eyes met his in the mirror again, and there was something so...steady there, so strong. “You put on a hell of a show. Reminds me of Chris LeDoux.”

And that was a huge compliment. He worked his ass off to give the fans what they came for. “Thanks, man. I appreciate it.”

“Seriously.” Waylon’s wide shoulders moved in a shrug. “I mean, you’re a better singer, God rest him.”

“He was a way better rider than I was.” And charisma. Jesus Christ. The man was a

force of nature.

“He was the champ, huh?” Waylon laughed softly. “Man, I had such a crush on him.”

He shot Waylon a quick glance. Oh. Well, he hadn’t seen that coming. Momma was a good woman, making sure to hire family. He didn’t hold with homophobes. “He was a special man. I miss him.”

“Yeah. I hear you.” Waylon fell silent, and he wondered if it would be shitty to put in his earphones and sit back. He was still buzzing too hard to just sit in silence.

“We got about half an hour’s ride, you want to take a nap or something. I can hit a drive-through.” There went that mind reading again. Or maybe Waylon just knew how to read the room. Or the car, so to speak.

“Yeah. I’m okay with water until we stop. If you get hungry, holler. I’m going to zone.” He needed his time.

“Sure.” Waylon just drove and, while he hated not being with the band and the bus, he tried to relax and go with it. It was probably safer for them if he wasn’t around right now.

Whoever was doing this, they couldn’t follow him everywhere. That would cost a fortune. So they had to back off as soon as the shows weren’t so close to home, right? He sure as fuck hoped so.

That meant only one more show close, then he’d fly to the East Coast and the bus would follow in a couple of days.

Yeah. He could work with that. Chayce leaned his head back and closed his eyes. And Waylon would have to deal with it too. End of story.

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Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:41 am

Chapter Four

Chayce was well on his way to a revolt. Waylon could tell.

They were eight dates into the tour, and Chayce had a break coming up, two weekends off that culminated in some sort of an award show appearance.

What was really grating on Chayce was there had been no new incidents after the fireworks, which the cops had called an isolated event unrelated to the attempted shooting.

That was utter BS, but Chayce was using it as an excuse to be a little reckless. He was pushing to try to get some freedom, and Waylon didn't even really blame him.

Hell, to be honest, it was more than a little hot.

"I'm going to the bar with the guys," Chayce informed him as soon as he ran off stage, the last encore really leaving everyone pumped up. The energy in the air was electric, and he couldn't stop his inhale, the burn in his lungs a real thing.

He didn't let it show though.

No, Waylon just crossed his arms, raising an eyebrow.

"You know how long it's been since I got laid, man?" Chayce blew him a kiss, batting his eyelashes, teasing him but good. "I'm fixin' to explode."

“Hmm. I guess I’m just of the better-safe-than-sorry camp.” Waylon knew he was going to have to give in and let Chayce blow off some steam though.

“I promise not to be sorry. Hell, I just want out of this fucking room. I want to enjoy tonight.” Chayce stripped off his shirt, baring that flat, ripped belly, a set of music notes trailing all the way from collarbone to... well below the belt.

Jesus. The guy was sex on a stick with his clothes on, but like this... Waylon turned his back so he didn’t jump on the guy immediately. “Sure. Let me know where you want to go, and I’ll clear it ahead of time.”

“Clear it? With who?” Chayce ran water in the sink, cleaning himself up.

“I just mean I’ll check the exits, the security, and the temper of the crowd. That’s all.” Personally, he liked the way Chayce smelled as he was.

“The temper. I like it. Hand me that white button-down, would you?” Chayce asked.

“Uh-huh.” He grabbed it off the hanger, careful not to wrinkle it.

“Thanks. I appreciate it. I love that one. It’s super soft.” Chayce turned around, jeans and belt undone, that sweet cock half-full.

He was going to just stroke out. No doubt about it. Waylon handed over the shirt, thinking about baseball scores. Rotting fruit. Anything but Chayce and how he wanted to reach into those jeans and get a handful.

“You know, I wouldn’t be mad if you wanted to have a few drinks, loosen up. I’m not doing anything dangerous. Just relaxing.”

“I’m fine. I might have some chicken wings.” He tried for a smile, not wanting to

push or seem like a starving wolf. “I’m just along for the ride.”

“Chicken wings? Cool. I’m going to have a beer and keep my shirt clean.”

“You ready to go, buddy?” Chayce’s best friend and... something... walked in, sliding one hand around Chayce’s waist. “Where are we going?”

“Grizzly Rose?” Chayce suggested.

“We can’t make out there.” Chris seemed disappointed, but Chayce’s expression was more confused.

“We don’t make out, full stop, man. I just want a beer, and Waylon here wants chicken wings.” Chayce waved a hand toward him, which seemed to come to a surprise to Chris.

“Oh.” Chris deflated visibly. “Waylon is going.”

He kept his face immobile. “Where he goes, I go.”

“So, I’ll give you the night off. I’ll keep him safe.” Chris turned his back to him dismissively.

Chayce gave Chris an astonished glance, then turned wide green eyes to him. “Dude...”

Waylon couldn’t help it then. He laughed.

Like full-out belly laugh, Jesus this kid isn’t serious laughed.

Chris’s cheeks went red, and he whirled before he leaned into Waylon’s space.

“Don’t you dare laugh at me. I’ve known Chayce forever!”

“Hey. Hey! Stop. Just... fuck. Give me the car keys.” Chayce sidestepped Chris and held out a hand to Waylon.

“Nope.” Waylon gave Chayce a look that he hoped said Hang in there . “I’ll drive. That way you can unwind looser than that King George song.” One thing he and Chayce could bond over was music.

“Chayce!” Chris frowned deeply. “What’s going on?”

Chayce shot Chris a disbelieving glance. “I want to go have a fucking beer. In a bar.”

“But—”

Waylon was getting tired of this dick-measuring shit. “You’re welcome to come if he wants you to, Chris. But I’m his security detail right now. Full stop. So I drive, and I stay until it’s time to go home.”

“I’m not leaving him alone with you, man. I’ve talked to his security team; they don’t like you.”

“Huh.” He knew better. The guys all told him how nice it was that Chayce was his responsibility right now that there was an actual threat. The guy was still getting regular death threats, even if nothing else had blown up...

Chayce stared them both down. “I’m going to beat you both to death.”

Waylon didn’t laugh at that one. “You about ready to go?”

“I’ll ride with the band.” Chris turned on his heel. “See you at the Grizzly Rose.”

“What the hell got into him?” Chayce asked, staring at the door as it slammed.

“I think he wants me to think you’re taken.”

“Chris? Dude, no. Just no.” Chayce sighed and shook his head, and it was like he could see the enthusiasm leak out of the man. “Look, let’s head back to the bus. I don’t want any shit to go down in public.”

“I’ll be the soul of discretion.”

“But Chris won’t.” Chayce’s shoulders slumped. “I have some whiskey on the bus. I’ll order tacos, have an edible, and go to bed. We’re not on the road until tomorrow morning, so I’ll just sleep.”

Waylon tilted his head, not liking this one bit. “You sure? I’m not here to keep you from doing things.”

“I know. Let’s go.” Chayce seemed like he was shrinking.

“Dammit, Chayce. Do you want to go out or not? I won’t fight with your assistant. I’ll just sit in the back and keep an eye on things.”

“Don’t you fucking snap at me. I’m trying to do my goddamn job, just like you are. My fucking life is out of control, and all I wanted was a second of peace!”

He took a deep breath, then let it out. “You’re right. Come on. I’ll walk you to the bus.” He just wanted to get Chayce settled for the night and call the boss about reassignment. He was clearly not helping the situation.

“Thanks.” Chayce grabbed a guitar and then headed for the bus, stopping short when a group of fans surrounded him.

Waylon stayed close, trying not to twitch. He didn't like this at all, but the fans needed to have access. The man had a career.

Chayce started signing autographs, and Waylon saw the flashes of phones, and suddenly the floodgates opened, the crowd doubling in size.

Nope. He moved in, cutting Chayce out like a surgeon. "Night, folks. Thanks for your time. Night." He moved Chayce toward the bus, shielding his back.

"Stay with me, man. Everyone else left."

"I got you. I promise." He wasn't going to let Chayce get hurt. Not only was it his job, but he liked the guy.

"Okay. Okay, yeah. Come on in. We'll send Kenny out for food." They got to the bus, finding the door unlocked.

"Dammit! This is my house!"

"Shit. Stay back. Kenny, where the hell are you?" He barked that into his throat mic as he keyed it up.

"Sitting in the cab waiting for the boss to load. He won't want to stay here."

"Why is the door unlocked? Was that you?" He wasn't letting Chayce on until he cleared the whole bus.

"Fuck no. I'm coming back. I got my gun."

"Be careful. Come right out and stand with Chayce. I'll go in and clear the bus then." God knew he didn't need Kenny getting shot or stabbed.

Chayce was vibrating next to him, and the son of a bitch was two seconds away from total breakdown.

Waylon gave him a clap on the back. "It will be fine."

Kenny popped out of the bus, thankfully his gun not in hand, and came to stand by Chayce.

"Be right back," Waylon said, and he did draw his weapon on the way in.

The bus had been rifled through, and he wasn't surprised at all to see two teenagers hiding in the bathrooms. Dammit.

"H-ey. You two need to get the hell out of there." He scared squeals out of them, and they would have run, but he stopped them in the little hall taking up all the room there was to take. "Empty your pockets and bags."

One of the teens gasped, heavily lined eyes going wide. "No way. That's our stuff!"

"Jenny..."

"Shut up. We got rights. Just shut up."

"Then I'll call the police." He pulled out his cell, dialing 9-1-...

The shorter of the two, a blonde with big blue eyes, shook her head. "Jenny! My mom'll kill me! I'll get thrown off the cheer squad!"

Eyelinor Jenny turned on her friend, snarling. "Oh my god, you are such a little bitch."

Christ, was he ever that young? “Y’all can settle your personal issues later. I want your pockets, purses, and phones.” He wasn’t budging.

“Can I have my phone back? I can’t lose it. I’ll be in so much trouble.” Not-Jenny handed it over. “I just wanted to meet him.”

“You can.” He checked it for pictures, deleted a few of the inside of the bus but left the ones of the concert. “There. See? I’m not that bad. You next.”

“C’mon, Jen. If you do, we get to go home. I’ll buy Denny’s even.”

God, he remembered when life was that simple.

“Jenny” slapped her open phone into his hand. He was able to check the bags and pocket contents too, and he could see, without being pervy, that there was nothing tucked into bras or tiny denim shorts. He keyed his mic.

“Take the primary around the back, please. I’m escorting out a couple of intruders.” He gave them a stern look. “Don’t come back and make me call the cops.”

“We won’t. Christ. We just wanted to meet him. Gawd.”

He was not going to laugh. Not.

“Come on.” He took them out, escorting them back beyond the barrier. “Night, ladies.” He knew Kenny would have Chayce on the bus.

“Night!”

“Jesus, Sophie! Shut. Up.”

He chuckled, heading back to the bus. Jesus, if Kenny got them moving, he would have a damn beer too. Maybe not an edible...

“Just a couple of kids. Is anything missing?” he asked as he climbed onto the bus. The girls might not have been the only visitors and it never hurt to check.

“Not that I know of. Why the hell wasn’t someone watching?”

“I don’t know. I’m going to find out.” It was time to bring in some reinforcements. Just a few trusted guys. Something was going on within Chayce’s team, and he didn’t have time to find out what it was and keep the man safe at the same time.

“Okay. I trust you.” Chayce gave him a long look, then sighed like he had a slow leak. “Take me somewhere safe?”

“You got it, Chayce. Kenny, you good to go?”

Kenny’s dark brown eyes flashed. “I am sick of this shit, Waylon. Let’s get him somewhere he can relax until the next show.”

“Let’s roll.” The band could take the other bus right to the next town and spend time blowing off steam. He sent Kenny coordinates on his phone. “Take us there.”

“On it. I’ll get us all Burger King on the way. We need salt and grease.”

“Good man.” Kenny he thought he could trust. He’d had no idea those girls were on the bus, and he was ready to throw in with his handgun to protect Chayce. “Come on, Chayce. On the bus. You need to rest.”

“I need to hang out and watch bad TV. You in?”

“I am.” Since he didn’t have to drive and, on the bus, didn’t have to be on guard, he could just zone.

“Cool.” The bus was cushy, designed for downtime and relaxation, and?—

Chayce stripped off his shirt, leaving him to stare at that naked back and the guitar inked across the back.

Fuck him raw.

Waylon was just so damn screwed with this guy. He was good to his crew. Nice to his fans. Hot as the Fourth of July in Houston.

“You want a pair of sweats? A T-shirt? I can hook you up.”

“Uh.” What was the question? “Sure. Thanks.” If Chayce went to get clothes, he could pull his shit together.

“Cool. Come on. I got things that ought to fit.” Chayce led him into the bedroom that smelled like grapefruit and musk and tobacco and black pepper. That was Chayce, bone deep.

He looked around, the guitars and deep blue bedsheets and weird tchotchkes from all over the country just what he would expect.

“Just a sec.” Chayce stepped out of his boots and jeans like it was nothing. So, boxer-briefs worn low. Pretty. His cock perked up at the vision in front of him, and Waylon was back to thinking of unpleasant stuff to get it to go down.

Chayce handed him some soft loungewear. “This should be more comfortable.”

“Thanks.” He wasn’t modest. Never had been. He still headed for the bathroom to change. He didn’t want to be waving a hard-on in Chayce’s face.

By the time he got back out, Chayce was curled up on the sofa, room left for him. “I got you a beer.”

“Oh, man, that sounds great.” He grinned, echoing the verbal with his expression. He grabbed the beer, popping the top.

“What do you like on TV? You have a thing for reality shows?”

“Honestly? I like cooking shows. I see enough shit not to want to watch the cop ones, you know?” He settled on the couch next to Chayce.

“Cool. Cooking it is. I love the ones where they decorate shit.” Chayce found a channel and relaxed, the bus toodling down the highway.

Chayce’s phone rang. He glanced at it, then turned it off. “Not interested.”

“Chris?” he asked.

At Chayce’s arch look, he nodded. “He’s very worried about me being around you.”

“Well, shit, it doesn’t get much more my type.”

“Yeah?” He glanced sideways at Chayce. “That’s nice of you to say.”

“Still true. I like a broad-shouldered guy.”

“I like all you got, honey. I just have to be careful not to get distracted or you could get hurt, and I take that seriously.” Real serious. In this case, not just because it was a

job.

“Yeah. I get it. Still. I wouldn’t throw you out of bed for eating crackers.”

“Well, we could always have some crackers here.”

“Nah. We’re getting Burger King.”

He had to laugh at that. “Abs like yours, and you expect me to believe you eat Burger King?”

“Keto, man. Keto. I get the triple bacon burger with a lettuce wrap. It’s the easy way for me to keep off any weight.” Chayce rolled up, abs rolling like a dream.

“Ah. See, I’m a carb fiend. So I run a lot. Treadmill. Street. All over.” A lot of folks were shocked that a big guy like him could move so easily, but he worked hard to keep his body in half as good a shape as Chayce. Now, he needed a little more bulk for both stamina and strong arm technique, but still.

“Mmm... you do. There’s a barbell setup in the back too. I do a lot of weighted crunches while doing vocal warm-ups.”

“That explains the abs.” He grinned, because damn, that body was impressive.

“Right? It’s work, but the fans expect it.”

“I can see why.” Was he flirting? He hadn’t even had his beer yet. This was probably stupid.

“Good. I want to turn you on, man. Even if you don’t want it, it’s nice to be seen.”

“Trust me, I see you.” He set his beer aside, turning to face Chayce. “And I only want what you’re willing to give me.”

“You’re off work, right? Not on duty? Not being paid to keep me busy?” Chayce’s expression was serious as a heart attack.

“I am totally off the clock.” That was important for Chayce to know. He was absolutely not getting paid to do this, and he would never use sex to “keep a client in line.”

“Me too. And you are gay and are fully aware I am too.” Chayce moved into his lap, the move smooth as silk, and how the hell was he supposed to resist that?

“Yep.” He grabbed Chayce’s ass, squeezing against the tight muscles he found there. “You’re built like a brick house, honey.”

“Skinny and solid. You are a friggin’ jungle gym.” Chayce pinched one nipple good and hard, utterly unafraid.

“Uhn.” His nipples both drew up, and that was all the encouragement his cock needed to rise hard and hot, too. No more bad thoughts to keep it down. He was going to give it what it wanted.

“Mmhmm. So much more fun than a bar.” Chayce cupped his cock, rolled his balls with those clever fingers.

“Definitely.” He leaned close. “Do you kiss, honey?” He wanted to make sure. Some guys just didn’t.

“Not strangers.” Chayce arched into him, bringing their mouths to almost touching. “Are you strange?”

“Not anymore.” He figured they knew each other just well enough. He kissed Chayce good and deep, slanting their mouths together at the perfect angle so they could breathe together, taste each other.

Chayce groaned for him, tongue sliding against his, teasing him and making him achingly hard. They moved even closer, his hands on Chayce’s back, pulling them until they were chest to chest. He needed more. Like no air getting between his skin and Chayce’s.

Chayce rocked up into him, rubbing them together with a hard, needy little sound. That cock pressed to his belly, and it was impressive for such a pocket cowboy.

Waylon approved.

“Want you, honey,” he moaned, his body just on fire.

“It’s been a little bit. I’m picky.”

“Yeah? I’m honored.” He was. That wasn’t a line. Chayce was so much more than he’d been expecting.

“I’m horny.” Chayce snuggled right in, a musical moan on the air.

“Well, yeah.” He chuckled and shut Chayce up with another kiss. He wasn’t all moonlight and roses, but he wanted to keep the mood going.

Chayce’s hands were callused, and they made him want to sing. Which he wasn’t all that good at, so Waylon kept it to himself, but those guitar ridges and scars from bull riding were damn fascinating.

Especially with the way Chayce kept working his nipples. Fuck, that was erotic and

wild. He'd never given them this much damn thought.

He pushed his hand inside those loose sweats and wrapped a hand around Chayce's cock, wanting to make this man just as crazy as he felt. Because Chayce deserved to feel good.

"Oh, damn." Chayce's eyes crossed, and Waylon got a firm pinch to his nipples in response.

"What the hell, man?" He jerked, his body sawing back and forth. "No one's ever even touched me there."

"No? Hot, huh? Not just decorative."

"Yeah. I— damn." He was getting kind of incoherent, which Waylon wasn't used to. His job was to make his lovers lose their minds, not the vice versa. But he still had the best handful ever, and he rubbed up and down, massaging the tip with his thumb.

Chayce humped up at that touch, baring his teeth. "Right there."

"Here?" He pushed against the slit, getting the feeling that Chayce liked it to sting a little maybe. And why not? That felt hellacious good.

"There. Fuck me, yes. Right there."

"Hot as fire, honey. I love how your skin feels." And the way Chayce looked at him, you would think he hung the moon.

"My skin's pretty tickled with you too."

"Don't make me actually tickle you." He danced his fingers over Chayce's cock,

laughing.

“Evil bastard.” Chayce chuckled with him, willing to share the joy.

“You know it.” He let Chayce kiss him again, arching up so he could rock against Chayce’s ass. Damn, he was ready to go off like a rocket, but he still wanted more. He needed to feel it when Chayce came for him. Smell it.

“Uh-huh.” Chayce’s eyes rolled back in his head, and he shot, entire body convulsing.

“Fuck.” He held on as long as he could, watching Chayce in his pleasure. Then Waylon lost it, too, coming so hard he saw stars.

“Damn, that is fine as all get out.” Chayce’s words made him shiver, another jolt of pleasure hitting him.

“Mmmhmm.” Now he had babyhead. “Freaking amazing.”

Chayce snorted against his neck. “Damn.”

“Okay, guys,” Kenny said over the intercom from the front. “I’m about to stop. What do you want to eat?”

Waylon shook his head. “Perfect timing.”

Chayce chuckled softly. “He knows my order. I don’t have to pretend I didn’t just shoot.”

“I’ll call mine up.” He picked up the radio. “I’ll take a double bacon burger and onion rings, man. And a big Frosty.” He’d worked off enough calories, right?

“You got it. I’ll bring it back. I’ll need you to keep an eye out when I go inside.”

“Can do, man. Thanks.” See him pretend not to be out of breath.

“Oh, very nice.” Chayce was laughing at him, eyes just dancing. “You almost sounded suave.”

“Thanks. I mean, I’m just the muscle.”

Chayce sobered, meeting his gaze, that mossy green gaze serious. “Not just anything, man. Thank you.”

“Anytime.”

And he damn well meant it too.

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Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:41 am

Chapter Five

Chayce peered at his phone.

Fifty-four calls from Chris.

Sixteen from Mom.

Seven from his band manager.

Man, this sucked.

He started with Falin. “Yo, what’s up?”

“Chris is having a stroke. I’ve blocked him. He’s a shithead.” Oh, Falin was pissed, and that woman could be snake-mean when she had to be.

“You had to block him? What the hell, lady? I mean, he’s left me dozens of messages, but I was busy.” Very busy. The only reason he wasn’t still in bed with a very warm and happy Waylon was because he needed to work out. Twice a day, every day.

“You left with the bodyguard instead of going to the bar with him. He’s like, ranting, man. Like, telling everyone he’s gonna take that guy’s head off, and that you’re his Chayce. It’s nuts. I mean, I knew he was a loony tune, but do you think he’s been shooting at you?”

“No. Why would he do that? That doesn’t make any sense.” If they were right, he wanted Chayce, didn’t want Chayce dead. “He’s family, lady, not a?—”

Whatever.

“I know. It’s just, he’s unhinged.” Falin wasn’t fazed by much, and if she thought Chris was that bad, he needed to tell Waylon. He guessed he’d call Momma first, then listen to a few of Chris’s messages for the whole picture.

“Just avoid him. I’ll deal with things. You just stay safe, and I’ll get the executives to deal with it.”

“Are you sure, man?”

“Yeah, he’s still family.” He shuddered, because didn’t that make it worse. “But yeah, I don’t need him in the way, causing troubles.”

“You got it, man.” She was a stud. She would handle it, and if she couldn’t, the tour manager Vicki would. Vick was a vicious harpy. A wonderful one.

“I’ll talk to you in a few, lady. Take care.”

“You too, babe.” She hung up, and he shook his head. He might ignore Chris, but he really ought to call his momma.

“Hey, Momma. I’m fine.”

“Uh-huh. You turned your phone off.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He wasn’t going to lie.

“I was worried!” Her voice rose, and he heard her take a deep breath. She hated shouting in any situation. “Chris has been making an ass of himself.”

“So I hear. What’s up? Is he drunk?”

“I don’t know. I think he might be on drugs, honey. He’s so erratic. Should I have him taken to rehab?”

“I’ll talk to him and figure it out. Later.” Not today.

“Okay. Well, if he gets worse, I’ll be forced to deal with it.”

“Mom. I have this. Don’t worry.” It was his career. His family. His problem.

“Okay, love. How’s the bodyguard?”

Hot as hell and imminently fuckable, thanks. “He’s good at what he does.”

“I was told he’s one of the best. I’m glad.” She sighed softly, and Chayce could see her smile in his head.

“Yeah, me too. Thanks, Mom. You did good.”

“Wow.” She laughed out loud. “Listen to you. Be careful, son.”

“Always. I’ll talk at you later. Love you.”

“Love you, son.”

He hung up, proud that they hadn’t fussed. They progressed.

He turned the speaker on and then listened to Chris's voice mails while he went back to working out.

Jesus. They started out with, "Hey, man, that sucked about the club. What's with the new asshole?" Then they progressed to, "Why are you ignoring me, Chayce? We're better than that. Come on." Which led to shouting, "Don't you ignore me, you fucker! I'm not just some roadie or fan! You'd be jack shit without me!"

Creepy fucker. What the hell? What was Chris thinking? They had been tight once upon a time, sure, but he literally paid Chris to do not much and they had a beer, like, once a month.

Waylon poked his head around the door, checking in on him, then disappeared again.

"Hey, you—" Weirder out. "—okay?"

"Yep. Just making sure I knew where you were." Waylon hummed, and he could hear the guy moving around. The song was... King George? Yeah. George Strait, for sure.

"I'm getting emotionally assfucked while doing crunches," he muttered, knowing that Waylon couldn't hear him.

Honestly, what the hell was going on? One day, he'd just been singing his songs and touring with his band and now his assistant was losing his shit, people were shooting at him, and he was sleeping with his bodyguard.

It was like he'd slipped into an alternate dimension, topsy-turvy land. Some of it was good; some of it sucked.

All of it was weird as hell.

Waylon came wandering back in carrying a cup of McDonald's coffee and a bag that smelled like sin. "Kenny brought breakfast, then went back to the hotel. How many more crunches you reckon you have to do before you get to have some?" He waved the bag in the air.

"Stress burns a ton of calories. Gimme." He rolled up, wiping off his chest.

"Mmm. Come get it."

He grinned, liking a man who could play. He stalked over to sit on Waylon's lap, taking the coffee to set it aside. "Is it still romantic to feed each other if it's a sausage biscuit?"

"It is if you're from where we are."

"True that." He popped a bite of biscuity goodness into Waylon's mouth.

"Mmmm." Waylon chewed, then returned the favor, and oh, that awful American cheese was so good. Just the kind of comfort food the doctor ordered. "So what's on the agenda today?"

"I'm avoiding the phone again. We're resting. Possibly fucking."

"So it's a day off altogether?"

"Yep. Tomorrow, I need to rehearse, but today is all ours."

"Damn." Waylon's grin stretched wide. "No treadmill for me today. Just you."

"Perfect. I'm all over the whole just-me thing." And he wanted to distract himself from Chris.

“Good.” Waylon tilted his head before feeding him another bite. “What’s wrong?”

“Huh?” He tried for innocent, chewing slowly.

“You look pissed, and I know it can’t be me. So what’s up? Is it that Chris guy?”

“Maybe.” He swallowed. “Definitely.”

“Damn.”

“And I’ve had to talk to my mom already.”

“Which means I’ll get a call from her too.”

“And my band leader blocked him. It got ugly, you know? Some serious shit.”

“Shit, man.” Waylon looked right into his eyes. “I’ve got your back, okay?” He stroked Chayce’s cheeks, leaving a few crumbs. “I promise.”

“I know. It’s your job.”

“It’s a sight more than that now, but I’ll give you that one for free.”

His heart thudded a little, even if he knew it was ridiculous. This was emergency-situation adrenaline sex. That was all. But it sure felt good. So he wasn’t going to kill the mood by saying that.

“Well, I appreciate it. And breakfast.” He stole the last bite.

“Hey!” Waylon’s warm chuckle made him grin. “Good thing there’s another bag.”

“Mmhmm...” He swooped for it, laughing as it almost went crashing to the ground.

They did end up on the floor, sharing more food, hash browns and biscuits and laughing. And they didn’t spill the damn coffee, which was a crime against nature.

“How do you drink this shit?”

“Do I have a choice?”

His eyes went wide and he grabbed his phone. “Dude. Starbucks. Someone will deliver us lattes.”

“Oh. Now that I can get behind.” Waylon reached up to pinch his nipple, returning the favor from last night.

He flexed for his lover. “Sex-ay.”

“So it doesn’t do it for you?”

“Not like playing with yours does.” He had to admit, he loved how that simple touch excited Waylon. “Now, touch my cock where you did last night, and I’m zooming.”

“I will do that anytime you want. But not on the floor. It’s too damn hard.”

Chayce felt those words, in the best of all possible ways. “True that. We need to explore my bed again.”

“We really do. While we wait for Starbucks or after?”

“After. Let’s shower while we wait.”

Waylon nodded easily. “I do like the way you think, honey.”

“I’m a brilliant bastard. Just ask me, I’ll tell you.” He stood and held one hand out.

Waylon took it, following him back to the bedroom, getting handsy with his clothes once they got there. Good thing he didn’t have very many...

That made things way easier.

And God knew he could use some easy today.

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Chapter Six

Waylon ran on the treadmill, getting in his workout time while Chayce jammed with a couple of the band members, the songwriting session impromptu but welcome as far as he could tell. These guys had passed the background checks Waylon had run personally, so he felt pretty safe with Kenny and the football-player guy watching the bus from outside while he ran.

Chayce had surprised him in damn near every way. The son of a bitch was stable, happy. He loved his job, loved his music and his fans, and he was generous with his band.

A bit of an adrenaline junkie, but that was the breed.

Chayce was also—surprisingly—low risk. He had a drink or two, but he didn't get drunk. He didn't seem to care for drugs. His big addiction was music. There was never silence. Never.

So why was someone after him? And why hadn't Waylon been able to track down the son of a bitch? It wasn't Chris shooting at Chayce. Sure, the assistant guy had cracked his nut over Waylon joining the crew and gotten himself canceled, but he was pretty much all hot air.

No, the shootings were a more serious type of crazy. And they were so damn random. Although he was fairly sure that whoever was doing this was based in the south.

Was it bigotry? Chayce wasn't out of the closet, but he wasn't in. He made sure that

his music and his soundbites were all positive and supportive, focused on love and having fun.

So it could be. Hate crimes could be super unpredictable.

It could be personal too. Someone who felt slighted, someone from the past who didn't like where Chayce was at now in his life. Chayce seemed the type that simply moved on, no question, no worries. So maybe someone was pissed at that. Or it could be an enemy of the mom. She sure blazed a trail through life. And she had more money than God.

He had a few feelers out with some of his information people, but so far, nothing was getting a nibble, and it was frustrating as hell.

Waylon liked simple, dammit. This complicated shit was for the birds. Still, he wouldn't trade this time with Chayce for anything. The man was special. Special and his, all the way to the bone.

Now he needed to make sure Chayce was safe.

Waylon turned up the speed on the treadmill, running a sprint. He would do that for a minute, then off for three. His heart pounded, and sweat ran off him, the heat in the bus kind of intense. It was basically a tin can for all its plush feeling.

He wondered what Chayce's place in the mountains was like.

All he had to do was search it—the dossier had the information—but he really wanted Chayce to offer it over, to volunteer the information. Maybe they could go up once this leg of the tour was over. It was only another four dates and an awards show. Then the man would have a break until the second round of big rodeos in July. Waylon was actually looking forward to those shows. They had way fewer moving

parts, and a much more orderly crowd experience.

Waylon was happy any time the danger zone was reduced.

It was fucking weird. He'd guarded his share of celebrities, he'd been attracted to a few, but this attraction was harsh. Wild.

Breath-taking.

"You still running?"

He almost flew off the treadmill. He'd been so distracted by his thoughts he hadn't heard Chayce. He turned down the speed going back to a steady jog. "Yeah. You all written?"

"I am. Had a good session." Chayce went to the mini-fridge and grabbed two bottles of water, tossing one over.

"Thanks, babe. Well, good. I been sweating it out." He slowed everything another notch, heading toward cool down. He didn't need to keep on if Chayce was free now.

"I can tell. I appreciate the view." He got a long, slow once-over.

"Do you now?" He puffed up a little, because who didn't like to be appreciated? Waylon knew he did.

"I do." Chayce leaned against the treadmill, watching him. "You've run your butt off."

"I do have to run off the biscuits." Waylon shut down and hopped off the machine.

“Yeah. I don’t get another cheat day for a week.” Chayce gave him the drama face, eyes huge and wide.

“No shit? What if we worked it off? I’m craving DQ.” He could murder one of their burgers and a peanut buster parfait.

“You are a cruel man! Ice cream is my kryptonite!” Chayce laughed and plopped down on the love seat, bouncing a little.

“Soft serve for the win. What’s your favorite thing?” He figured a guy could learn a lot about someone from their ice cream order.

“Are you kidding? Banana split, all the way!”

“Ah. That way you have fruit and fudge sauce.” He chuckled. “See I go all protein.”

“Peanut buster man, are you?”

“Unless you’re allergic to peanuts.” That would so suck. He loved his peanut butter.

“Not. I’m allergic to eggplant.”

“No shit? Any other nightshades?” A lot of people developed more sensitivities as they got older if they started out with eggplant.

“Not that I’ve found. I don’t need any bonus issues, though.”

“No. No, I reckon you got enough on your plate.” It was bad enough someone was trying to kill Chayce. He didn’t need food doing it too. “You carry an Epi?”

“No. Eggplant isn’t that common, right?”

“Not really, no. I just wonder who knows you’re allergic.” He added that to his list of things to get.

“I guess about anyone that’s ever read my rider.”

“Shit.” Okay, damn. Anyone could use that against Chayce. And he hadn’t even known about it. “I read your dossier front to back. It wasn’t in there.”

“No?” Chayce tilted his head. “What is on there?”

“Basic capsule life story. That you have a little issue with impulse control. That you tend to change plans at the last moment. Things a bodyguard should know.”

“That’s not true! I don’t have any issues with my impulse control.”

“When I met you, you were riding a bull on a bet.” He kept it deadpan, staring at Chayce, but his lips kept twitching.

“Right? No issues!” Those gorgeous eyes held him, naughty as fuck.

“Uh-huh.” He took a kiss because he wanted to, loving how Chayce clung to him, how strong that grip was, keeping him up close and personal.

Those fingers climbed up into his hair, massaging lightly, making his scalp tingle. He closed his eyes, luxuriating in the contact. God, that felt good.

“Mmm... You like that.” Chayce pushed a little harder, deeper.

“I do. That’s like heaven, honey. Giving me goosebumps.” Waylon shivered, because that felt so good he might just die.

No, scratch that. He was going to hang out right here and be alive and let Chayce pamper him a little if that was what the man wanted to do.

“Good. I know how to make things feel good.”

Oh, there was zero doubt about that.

“You’re kind of a master, honey.” He slid closer, letting Chayce lean on him, his hands sliding up and down Chayce’s back. If Chayce didn’t mind his post workout self, well, who was he to complain. He would just go with it.

Chayce moaned, kissing him hard and deep, all but crawling on top of him again. The couch could take it, he figured. No need to move to the bed. Kenny wasn’t going to come interrupt them. That guy was a class act, and he didn’t venture into Chayce’s territory.

“Mmm... I like this. Want round one out here?”

“Uh-huh.” He turned so he could lie back and let Chayce crawl up on top of him.

“Oh, hell yeah. Now I have you where I want you.”

“So what are you gonna do with me?” he teased, daring Chayce to do his worst. Or best.

“Ride you like a prize pony.” He got a wide, wicked grin. “That work?”

“Uh, hell yes. You got anything in here we can use?” Did the guy have a stash of condoms next to the couch? He was selfish enough to hope so. And jealous enough to hope not.

“No, but I have some in the bathroom.” Chayce chuckled and shook his head. “Come back to the bedroom. The lube lives there.”

“I can do that.” He lifted Chayce to his feet, letting him land on the floor, before getting up and grabbing Chayce’s hand. He had to admit, Chayce’s bedroom on the bus was a damn fine thing. It was almost all bed. He could just crawl in there and sleep for a week if someone brought them food.

Especially knowing that he got to touch that hard little body at will. It was an embarrassment of riches.

“You thinking naughty thoughts?” Chayce let him go as they reached the bedroom, shaking it for him a little bit as he headed for the bathroom.

“You know I am.” He stripped out of his sweats before hopping on the bed, feeling like someone in a porn movie, all stretched out and waiting for his lover.

“Mmm... pretty.” Chayce turned on some music, something driving and hungry, tossing slick and condoms on the bed before stripping down.

“Nice.” He agreed. That was a hell of an eyeful. He wanted to touch and taste and let Chayce ride him as promised. His body was tight with need, his cock rising up hard. It was time to work out a whole other way.

“Mmhmm... I like it.” Chayce grabbed his cock and started stroking, base to tip, over and over.

“Oh, I do too, honey.” His toes curled, his body bowing up at the hips, just his shoulders and heels on the bed. His asscheeks clenched, his skin on fire. “You are so damn fine, Chayce. Don’t stop.”

“Not going to. Not even for a second.” Chayce’s lips twisted. “Even if I have impulse control issues.”

“Yeah, I might not be responsible for my actions if you had the sudden impulse to quit.” He had to laugh, because those mossy green eyes were just full of mischief, and he loved that look. Chayce was so much more relaxed today than he had been since Waylon had met him, and he felt damn good about that fact.

He intended to take credit, at least some, for the fact that Chayce was making music, making love. That Chayce was smiling down at him, hands on his chest, ready to play and kiss and touch.

Yeah, he’d done that.

“You look like the cat that got the canary.” Chayce traced a lazy circle around one of his nipples.

“I feel like it. You’re quite the song bird, honey. You do it for me. In a big way.” He stroked a hand over Chayce’s belly, sliding his shirt up.

“I bet you say that to all the stacked little singers.” The words were followed with a wicked wink.

“No, sir. In fact, I’ve never gotten involved on a job before. Ever.” Chayce was a first for him. Waylon wasn’t sure it was wise, but it was sure hot, and Chayce amazed him, tempted him, made him a little nuts.

“No?” That smile went straight to his balls. “I’m not mad at that.”

Then one hand circled the base of his cock, tugging him in a long, lazy pull.

“Damn!” He bucked like one of Chayce’s prize bulls, his body tingling like he’d touched a live wire. So damn fine. “More.”

“Uh-huh. I want to ride you, see if you last more than eight seconds.” Little shit.

“I can totally do that. Glove me up.” He grabbed his cock and squeezed the base while Chayce turned to grab a condom and the lube.

“You going to slick me up, babe?” Chayce eased the rubber down his shaft.

“I am.” He grabbed the lube, struggling until it popped open. Oh yeah, he was suave.

Chayce didn’t seem to be worried. In fact, he was dancing, humming softly to some melody Waylon didn’t know. It was hot as hell and twice as tempting.

Then Chayce slid up to kneel tall, quads working to keep him upright and stable. The man was a damn stud. Waylon could watch him for hours. In theory. In reality, there was no way he was gonna last that long. Not when he slid a hand around to press a finger to that hot hole.

A long musical sigh escaped Chayce, lips parted and hungry.

“So fucking hot, honey. Look at you. I could eat you right up like the big bad wolf.” He leaned up and bit one nipple, just to prove his point.

“You gonna huff and puff and blow me down?”

“Mmm. More like turn you inside out, honey. No blowing this time. Maybe next time.” He pushed in another finger, stretching Chayce as gently as he could with his balls up tight like they were.

“You got what I need.” Lord, that smooth as silk voice went low and rumble, and fuck, that left a burn scar on his soul.

“Then come get it.” He hoped Chayce was ready, because he was out of patience. He pulled free, laying back to let Chayce take what he needed. It didn’t take but a few seconds and Chayce was rocking on his prick, hips rolling, pelvis bucking and taking him in deeper.

He grabbed those lean hips and pulled, wanting more, wanting Chayce seated all the way down. That slick heat slid down his shaft, and even through the condom, he knew this was the best, most amazing thing he would ever have. Damn, he was going to be ruined for life.

Fuck, he shuddered, shoulders leaving the mattress as he dragged Chayce down onto his prick.

“Uhn!” Chayce arched back, his body a stretch of nothing but strong muscle and gorgeous tanned skin. “Hot. Fuck, man, come on. Fuck me.”

“Yes.” He stopped fighting the urge to squeeze down on Chayce’s hips and drive into that tight body. He just did it, and slammed up, letting Chayce feel every inch of him.

“Yeah...Yeah, I need it. You. This. More...” Chayce wasn’t being real coherent, and that made him feel ten feet tall and bulletproof.

“More,” Waylon agreed, rocking back and forth, up and down. Giving it all he had.

Chayce began jacking himself off, and Waylon felt every single stroke around his prick. It stole his breath and made him ache. He watched, his hips stuttering, his ass clenching.

“Damn, honey. That’s fine. So fine.”

“Uh-huh.” Chayce grabbed his shoulder with his free hand, gaze catching his. “Help me, dammit. I need to come.”

“Oh, fuck.” He wrapped his hand over Chayce’s, squeezing and giving more friction to that hot cock.

That worked. Chayce’s lips popped open, and he arched, grinding down on his prick like a mad man. That body was bending in ways that just didn’t seem possible, but it was stunning, and finally, Chayce shouted, coming hard for him.

And squeezing down on him until there was no way Waylon could control his orgasm one moment longer. He shot so hard his teeth rattled.

Dammit. All he could do was hold on and let the wave take him.

He panted, flopping back on the bed, just wrung out as hell.

“Fucking A.” Chayce’s moan was pure satisfaction.

“Uh-huh. I like this day-off shit, honey.” He pulled free just so the condom situation didn’t get gross. “Shower?”

“Yes. Then you want to play some Fortnite?”

“Hell, yes.” He loved that stupid game. And he would kick Chayce’s ass. He was looking forward to it.

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Chapter Seven

Chayce smelled something... weird.

He sat up, frowning deep. Fire? Was that fire?

The logical thing was to run, but he couldn't leave Waylon. That wasn't part of the deal, at all.

"Hey, babe. I smell smoke." He reached to shake Waylon awake, but no one was there.

He looked around, smoke filling the room, and panic spurted through him. Where was he? This wasn't right.

He reached over, patting the sheets. "Waylon? Waylon, where are you?" He coughed, trying to breathe. Chayce shook his head. No. Waylon wouldn't leave him, so where was he? In the bathroom? He would get down on the floor and crawl there. That was what he was supposed to do in the smoke, right?

"Waylon!" He hit the floor with a thump, shaking his head, so confused. "Waylon!"

"Chayce! Open the door." He heard a door shake as Waylon hit it. From outside?

"Waylon, help!" He was confused, scared, and he simply wasn't sure where he was.

"I'm coming, Chayce!" The door slammed open, the smoke clearing like magic. "Did

you fall?" Waylon came to kneel next to him.

"There's a fire! We have to run."

"No, baby. There's no fire. But I couldn't get the door open. Even with the key. I had to bust out the jamb."

"But the smoke?" He didn't understand. Not at all.

"I think you were dreaming." Waylon frowned, peering into his eyes. "Did someone give you something to eat or drink?"

"I—There was water and a plate of fruit? Strawberries and pineapple."

"Shit. Your eyeballs... You've been drugged, baby."

Huh. He'd gone from honey to baby. He wasn't mad at that.

"Let's get you water that I know is safe and get you in the car. I want you out of here."

"Where?" He was... where was he? A benefit thing. No. No, an award show? Something. That was why he was in a weird dressing room. "I don't like this."

He wasn't happy happy drug drug boy.

"I know. Upsy-daisy." Waylon lifted him to his feet, and he could feel the tension in that strong body.

"Is anyone watching? No press?" He wasn't going to have him dancing around like a drunken bear.

“No. That pop star lady is doing some kind of snake dance on stage right now. Everyone is watching her.” Waylon half carried him out, and they were back to the big black SUV. He heard the squeal of tires, and Kenny was burning out in the decoy limo, some photogs following him.

He leaned down, resting in Waylon’s lap, so confused.

“I got you.” Waylon stroked his hair with one hand. “I do.”

“I feel gross.” But at least the smoke had stopped.

“Well, you tell me if you’re gonna puke.” Waylon sounded amused, and he kinda wanted to bite one muscled thigh.

“Not gonna.”

“Good.” The engine changed pitch, the vehicle speeding up.

“Where are we heading?”

“You’re officially on break. I’m taking you to your place in the mountains.”

“The mountains. Okay. Okay, that’s good.” He didn’t have his things, but he ought to be able to buy new ones. He closed his eyes against the headache that was threatening to drown him.

“You need some of that water, honey.”

“Not baby?”

“Huh?” Waylon’s laughter voice was back.

“You called me baby earlier.” He’d liked it. A lot.

“Did I?”

“Yes. Do it again?”

“Anything you want, baby. Just stay with me, huh? No sleeping until the drug wears off. I don’t want you getting super sick.”

“I’ll be good.”

A husky laugh was his reward for that. “Oh, baby, you’re always good. I swear it. But I want you healthy and whole. And when I find out who did this? They are going down.”

“Oh, good deal.” A wave of nausea swept over him. “Lord, Waylon, you’d better stop.”

“Okay.” Waylon pulled off immediately, and he spilled out the driver’s side rather than the passenger one as soon as Waylon opened the door. He landed on his knees on the gravel on the side of the road, and he heaved up every bit of fruit and water he’d taken in. Jesus lord, that was nasty. Whatever they’d given him, he hoped it came back to them tenfold and made them barf it up just as violently as he had.

“Here, come on.” Waylon got him up and helped him rinse his mouth out.

“Thanks. Ugh.” Though he felt better now. A little clearer and a lot less sick to death.

“You want to just stay here in the air a minute? We’ve made some distance.”

“Just let me catch my breath.”

“Sure, baby.” Waylon was just so damn accommodating.

“Aren’t you even curious what happened?”

“Shit, yes. And I called the police and had them send someone down to sweep the room and collect anything that might help us figure out who did it.”

“Cool. I don’t... I don’t like this. Not at all.”

“I don’t either.” Waylon stayed close, but his eyes were on the road, watchful, protecting him from anything that might come their way. “I should never have left you alone in that damn dressing room, but I was trying to set the cars up.”

“No stress. It was supposed to be secure.” He felt dizzy as hell.

“It was. Come on and sit.” Waylon took him back to the car but left the door open. “There’s a Sprite in the cooler. I’m the only one who’s touched them.”

He took the bottle Waylon handed him, but he couldn’t get his fingers to work to open it. So Waylon did it for him, and oh, God, that was good. The fizz cleared his throat, and it was cold and crisp.

“Thank you. Fuck. Fuck, I thought you were on fire.”

“No. No fire.” Waylon stroked his back. “Though I about a heart attack when I heard you shouting for me. I thought someone had gotten in there with you.”

“I thought we were in the bed on the bus. I thought... I thought we were in a fire.” It was confusing, upsetting to have been so far off.

“Well, you were fighting being drugged. I bet whoever it was didn’t expect you to

lock the door. They thought they could swoop in and carry you off. I'm also having the cops check on where your assistant was." Waylon's voice took on a grim note.

"No swooping in. No way. Nope." His heart pounded hard, rattling his ribs.

"No. Nope. A, you're mine. B, I've never lost a primary. So whoever it is who wants you? Can fuck right off." Waylon leaned down to kiss his neck, which was somehow more comforting than sexual. "Better?"

"Yeah. Let's hit the road." He wanted to get to the mountains; he wanted space between them and the bad guy. And Waylon's little possessive speech was hot as hell.

He got back into the car and buckled up, leaning back and opening the window. He was going to be okay.

He was.

Because if nothing else, at least the world wasn't burning down.

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Chapter Eight

Waylon drove through the night, and once Chayce dropped off to safe sleep, he made a shit-ton of calls. He started with a cop friend of his in Virginia, which was where they'd been for the damn charity event.

"Someone drugged him," he snapped. "What the fuck happened?"

"It was the fruit. It had been taken out of the container and put on a platter, and we think it was injected."

"They roofied his fruit?"

"It could have been worse, man. It could have been fentanyl or something."

Shit. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

"Cameras?"

"They were off for twenty minutes."

"How? How the fuck did that happen, man?"

"Hell if I know. I have someone going over all the footage to see, but it has to be an inside job."

"Damn it, Rob..."

“I’m working on it.” His buddy blew out a breath. “This is some fucked-up shit. Deranged fan?”

“Maybe? How would they get in, though?”

“Well, if it’s someone in his organization, you’re not as good as I think.” Rob blew out a harsh breath. “I’ll keep you posted. If we find anything else.”

“And the chemical work-up on the drug.”

“You got it.”

“Thanks. I’ll call when I get where I’m going.” And that was his secret. No one was going to know.

“Okay, man. I’ll keep in touch by text between now and then.”

“Sure.” He’d turned off location services on his phone and Chayce’s. That would make them just that much harder to trace, and if he had to, they would both go off grid completely and he’d grab a burner phone.

He had a single job, and more than that, he had a single focus. Chayce’s safety meant everything to him in ways that he couldn’t even express. So Waylon would put in the time.

“Hey. Did I miss supper?” Chayce sat up, blinking hard.

“Nope. I was waiting for you.”

“Thanks. Where are we?” Chayce’s hand slid over his leg, just a chaste caress.

“Uh. Somewhere between St. Louis and Kansas City.”

“Shit, I slept a while.”

“You needed to recover.”

“I feel so ridiculous. I didn’t even think about it, you know?” Chayce shook his head, sighing at himself.

“I didn’t either. I’m sorry, baby.”

“No. This was supposed to be safe, dammit. This was supposed to be a closed set.”

“It was.” And he was going to rain hellfire over the organizers for that. “So we know it has to be someone on the inside.”

“Yes. So either the psycho got hired or hired someone himself.”

“That’s what it sounds like, yeah.” Okay, he could see that, rather than it being someone who’d been there all along.

“Well, then. We sic my management on the venue, dammit.”

“I’ll call Vicki.” He would let that woman loose and she would rain down hellfire.

“Yes. Tell her they were mean. They let me think I was on fire.”

“I will.” He bit back a grin on that. “What do you want to eat, baby? There’s plenty to stop at.”

“Mashed potato-y something? Is that an option?” That little caress happened again,

stroking his thigh.

“Sure. Let me see what’s around and you can order so I can just pick up?” Too many people would know Chayce around here. It was still too urban and yet country music forward. But they could stop at a diner and grab food.

“Do you want to stop? We can get a room somewhere and order for delivery.”

“You want to?” He gave Chayce a sideways look.

“I want you to rest.”

“I’m used to less than optimal sleep.”

Chayce rolled his eyes at him, making him grin. “I’ll wear a hat, sunglasses, whatever I need to.”

“Okay, baby. I’ll find us a place, and you can just hang out in the car while I check in. Okay?” It wasn’t perfect, but they had good tinted windows.

“Works for me. I will just pretend to be napping.”

“There you go.” And he could get Chayce had volunteered to put his sunglasses on.

Waylon hunted a place that he could be happy with on the GPS on the console. He settled on a Fairfield Inn that had a White Castle and a TGI Fridays nearby. Surely the Fridays had mashed potatoes if nothing else did.

“Perfect. Just right. Thanks.”

“No problem, baby. I’ll check in, and then we can grab a shower and order some

food, huh?” He wanted Chayce safe, but also comfortable and happy. It wouldn’t hurt to stop for a break.

“Yeah. Mashed potatoes and a Sprite. That sounds perfect.”

“You got it.” He parked where he could easily get to Chayce from the check-in, then ran in to get a king bed, non-smoking room. No problem. And the key would open a side door by the elevators, so Chayce didn’t have to come in the front.

Perfect. That just left the food.

“Come on, baby.” Waylon moved the car around so they could go right inside. “Just up the elevator to two.”

“Perfect, thank you.” Chayce moved fast, sliding up the stairs like a dream. Even better. He got to watch that ass move, and he didn’t have to worry about getting stuck. He cleared the room, then looked up Fridays. Hoo yeah. Mashed potatoes. He got himself the steak and ribs combo and ordered a few drinks extra. And some cake.

It had been a long twelve hours.

Chayce headed for the shower, stripping himself down and turning on the water.

Waylon wanted to join him, and as long as they didn’t get ambitious, they would have time before the food arrived. He pulled off his shirt on the way to the bathroom.

“Can I come in, baby?”

“You can. I’m not feeling all sexy, though.”

“Me either, baby. I just feel gritty.” He patted that wet butt after he stripped his lower half and stepped into the shower. He moaned, hot water so good on his skin.

“Yeah. We’ll need to get some clothes, deodorant, that sort of thing.”

“Yep. I’ll make a Walmart order, but some stuff I can run get from the gift shop.” The little area behind the desk had deodorant, toothpaste, drinks, chips. That kind of thing.

“You rock.” Chayce pushed into his arms, forehead on his chest. “Hey.”

“Hey, baby. What a day.” He held Chayce close, letting the water rain down on them.

“Yeah. It started okay, but it went a little hinky, didn’t it?”

“It did. But you’re safe, and that’s all that matters.” He got to washing Chayce, wanting him to feel more relaxed. Clean away the weird drug haze.

“I was scared you were lost in the fire,” Chayce whispered.

“It takes more than that to get rid of me, baby.” He kissed Chayce’s cheek. “I’m sorry you were frightened though. I should have been with you.”

“What if you’d had a bite of the fruit? Then it would be all over for me.”

“Yeah, and I can’t resist watermelon...” Waylon wondered if he’d been more the target, in fact.

“Me either.” Chayce shook his head. “I’m freaking out a little.”

“Hey.” Damn. Chayce was always so confident. Centered. “I got you.”

“Just the drugs, right?”

“Yeah.” Maybe the smart move was a hospital, but it had been more important to move Chayce, almost a compulsion. “They’ll leave you feeling shaky and vulnerable for a bit. Real food will help.” Shit, he was shaky that way himself. It had been twelve hours on a couple of granola bars that he’d had in his go-bag, and a drive-thru Coke.

“Thank you.”

He rinsed Chayce off, smiling a little. “Don’t get all mushy on me now, Fall.”

“Oh, shut up.” Chayce’s laughter was muffled against his shoulder.

“Come on. The food will be here soon.” He turned off the water so he could dry Chayce off, and he pulled two pairs of sweats out of his go-bag. The rest they could pick up early in the morning on the way out of town. That shit where they put it in the back of the vehicle for you without anyone having to get out was lit.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m ready for this tour to be over, man. I want to go to the mountains.”

“Yeah, well, you’re on break for a few weeks, anyway.” But he could totally just go hide out with Chayce. Like in a semi-permanent way. Not that Waylon had any idea how that would work.

“I am. But I’m tired.” Chayce leaned as he dried the man off, then let him lead him to the bed and stuff him into the sweats.

“Well, you rest and watch TV or something. I’ll wait for the food.” He wanted Chayce to relax. Those lean shoulders were like frozen rope.

“I’ll wait with you.” Chayce curled on the bed, chin on his knees.

“Okay.” He sat, pushing right up against Chayce so they could lean, all those hours on the road taking their toll on his muscles. “This good?”

“Better than.” Chayce kind of... curled around him like a big cat. Someone needed reassurance.

He took the hint and started petting, stroking Chayce’s back and side. He stroked easily, just giving what Chayce seemed to want most. Contact. Comfort.

A knock on the door caught them both dozing, and he approached from the side, then peered out. This wasn’t the kind of place where they brought food to the front lobby and called up. A bored-looking kid stood there with their Fridays bags, and he grinned, opening the door to grab it.

“Thanks, man.”

“Have a good night.” The kid had been tipped on the app, so he was gone in a flash.

“Mashed potatoes, baby.” He locked the door and put in his security wedge. They were in for the night.

“You rock. This is comfort food extraordinaire.” Chayce was beginning to relax; he could see it.

“I know. I got all the things if you need a nibble of anything else.” He’d been damn hungry. Steak, ribs, fries, salad, onion rings. “I got cake.”

“You did go all out.” Chayce gave him a faint grin. “We’ll see where we are after this.”

“We will.” But for now, they were safe and fed and they had a place to sleep.

That worked for Waylon.

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Chapter Nine

Chayce remembered that he was going home about three hours away from the cabin, and his tension went from ten to three.

He had guitars there. Music. Clothes. A good bed and shower. He wasn't sure how Waylon knew where it was, but he didn't really care. He was gonna be fine there, and if whoever was doing this knew about it too, his money in any fight was on Waylon.

The man was hell on wheels. Hell on wheels who was singing with the Eagles on the radio.

Chayce loved the low timbre of Waylon's voice, rumbling softly through the car while Chayce pretended to sleep. He could listen to the man sing for hours. It wasn't even that he was all that good; he was just sexy as hell.

Maybe he was biased. Again, what did it matter? All that mattered was Waylon was with him, and he got to spend two weeks with the man before he had to keep on out on the road for another month.

Then he was done, and he was seriously going to rethink doing a tour every year. Maybe the next few years he would just do rodeo concerts. One night each, fly in, fly out, do an hour show and make a ton of money.

That could work for a while.

Then again, maybe that was just the "someone is shooting at me" talking.

“You mind if we pull off, baby?” Waylon asked. Shit, he should have known he wasn’t fooling anyone with his pretending to be asleep.

“Where are we?”

“Colorado border-ish. But it’s a big truck stop, so we should be able to get in and out without being seen.”

“I hate all this hiding.”

“Yeah, I know. But I would rather we get where we’re going without the tabloids finding out.”

“I’ll wear my hat and glasses and look like a local yokel.” His Wally world clothes reinforced that idea, with the Wranglers and snap-front shirt that cost less than the underwear he usually wore. His mom liked him to represent the more affluent rancher set.

Chayce didn’t much care unless it was a sponsor who provided the boots or the hat.

He needed a drink and some beef jerky. Maybe some pecans.

A chocolate bar.

“Cool.” Waylon grinned. “No singing, and no chatting about rodeo.”

“You’re no fun.” Chayce stuck his tongue out at Waylon, playing along. “Can I sign my CDs?”

“Nope. Sign the Boxcar Willie ones.”

Chayce hooted. “This is just the kind of place that would still have his CDs.” The truck stop was big and well-lit, but not exactly new. The restaurant still had one of those neon signs with the hanging coffeepot on it.

“Did you want to have a meal, or just shop, babe?” He could eat. He needed to do crunches. Thousands of them.

“Let’s see what it looks like in there. If we have to, we can get it to go.”

“Sure.” Though he hoped it wasn’t crazy. He and Waylon had never gotten to just sit and have a real meal together. This was the middle of nowhere and most everyone seemed to be minding their own business. Plus it was an off time for folks to eat.

“Hey, we’ll try.” Waylon grinned, waggling his eyebrows, but he could see the tired lines around the corners of Waylon’s eyes and mouth.

“I can drive the rest of the way. I know how.” And he was capable. He hadn’t been acting like it, but he was.

“I know, baby. I’m all right. But I think you have a point. If we can stop and have a meal...” Waylon pulled in, parking just off to one side of the entrance.

He clapped his gimme cap on his head, putting on his sunglasses. With his two-day scruff and the Walmart shirt and jeans, he figured he looked just like another traveler. Waylon wasn’t gonna blend, as big and intimidating as he was, but everyone would just assume they were a couple of rednecks.

Or maybe a daddy and his boy...

God, he would bet Waylon would lose his mind at that thought. He chuckled, making Waylon glance his way.

“No being evil, baby. This is very small town.”

“You a mind reader or something?” He never got to have fun.

“No, but I am getting to know you pretty well.”

“Mmm.” He took a deep breath as they got out of the car. Diesel layered with hamburgers. Yum. “I wasn’t going to be too terrible...”

Really.

Mostly.

“Uh-huh.” He got a sideways look and a caress to his ass as he passed in front of Waylon. Oh, naughty man.

“Don’t make me call you daddy ,” he teased.

“I will beat you within an inch of your life. I’m all about an equal power dynamic.”

He pondered that, and it made him glad. “Me too. Though you do take good care of me.”

“Well, yeah, but you know, someone is trying to kill you.”

They hit the head, washing up before heading to the cafe, which was just deserted enough to hide in a corner booth.

“I want a club with fries and a chocolate milkshake.” He didn’t even really have to look.

“Okay, baby.” Waylon ordered for him, then got a blue plate breakfast special with coffee and a glass of milk. The man could put away food.

They didn’t talk much. He thought maybe Waylon needed to just quietly rest. Or maybe the man was worried his voice would be too distinct. It wasn’t weird or awkward, though. Just— Waylon was the one person who didn’t want anything from him. Like in a pressure-y way.

He thought Waylon wanted at least a little something from him.

“Here you go, guys.” The food came, the bored dude serving them clearly not a country fan, thank goodness.

“Thanks.” Waylon grinned, and started buttering and syruing and otherwise condimenting.

They were eating hard, when Chayce overheard one of the little waitresses talking to her friends at the bar. “They say he just ran out of the venue. That maybe he was kidnapped.”

That pricked his ears right up, and he thought it did Waylon’s too. They didn’t dare look, though.

“Damn. I hope not. I have tickets to see him in Kansas City.”

“Shit. That would suck, huh? My great-granny had tickets to see Elvis the day after he died.”

“What do they say on TikTok? Anything?”

“That someone took him to the hospital. That he was super sick.”

He wanted to sink down under the table, but he knew that would just draw attention. So he sipped his shake and ignored the chitchat, at least in theory. But he would keep his mouth shut, because if one of those ladies was a fan, she would recognize his voice possibly.

Waylon seemed to think the same, giving him a slight warning look.

He nodded in response. He got it. No jabbering.

He waited until Waylon was done eating, then left two twenties and a ten on the table. “Going to the car. Give me the keys.”

Waylon handed over the fob, and he rose, sauntering in a casual way. He heard Waylon strike up a conversation with the server as he paid, asking about someplace down south, which would serve to throw anyone off the scent.

He slipped in the driver’s side, turning the engine over before heading to fill up with gas. He kept his head down, not wanting to get on cameras and have that get sold to the tabloids.

Waylon joined him a few minutes later. “We need to get your team on PR. We need to think how to spin this to draw out your stalker.”

“Okay. I’ll call... Mom? She’s the one most likely to know who to get hold of fastest.” He let her deal with a lot of the business part.

“You got it. Let’s get on the move first. I set up a burner phone on the Wi-Fi in the truck stop while you were in the bathroom. You can use that.”

“Wow. This is super-spy stuff.” He started heading them toward his cabin, not keeping off the gas.

“It is. Just don’t get us flung off the mountain.” Waylon didn’t look worried though. Not a bit.

“I’ve done this a couple times. I won’t. Promise.”

“I trust you, baby. I’ve seen you ride a bull. You’re a thrill seeker, but not a deathly one.”

“Nope. And I like all my parts.” He pushed it to the edge, but he wasn’t stupid, no matter what his mother said.

“I love your parts, baby.” Waylon’s wicked little growl made the bad restaurant experience better. He should have gotten pie to go.

“Love, huh? I can handle that.” He navigated some hairpin turns easily.

“Yeah. I’m into them. And you as the sum of them.” Waylon sat back, eyes on the horizon. “This whole running-away thing I don’t like though.”

“You mean not having the upper hand?”

“Exactly. I want to know what I’m up against, and you mean a hell of a lot to me already.” Waylon’s hand slid over his thigh, sweet as pie.

“Are you gonna decide to find another job once this whole hunting-me thing is over?” He hadn’t meant to ask that, but he did it, didn’t he?

Waylon looked at him, that little grin coming back. “Depends on how busy you keep me.”

“I know how to find trouble. You need reasons, I’ll invent some.” That was easy and

gratifying.

“Now, I just said you weren’t that reckless.” But Waylon’s hand kept moving on his leg, warm and firm but not too distracting.

“I’d do a lot to be with you,” he admitted, and then felt dumb again. God, this was weird. Usually he just had a fling.

“I know just what you mean. I’m gonna go with it, Chayce. See where it takes us.”

“Well, right now, toward Western Colorado...” His place was on the other side of Vail pass.

“Butthead.”

“I know. It’s a great condo. I love it.” There was an infinity pool, a hot tub, and a sauna.

“Cool. Why did I think it would be a cabin-cabin?” Waylon’s wry tone had him grinning.

“I am not staying anywhere I have to be on septic.”

“No? Damn. There goes inviting you to invest in that little place I want to buy in Northern New Mexico.”

“You got it. I love little places. I love the mountains. I love artsy towns where the musicians are thick on the streets.”

“Cool. You’ll like this then. What do you want to listen to?” Waylon’s fingers hovered over the touchscreen. “Driver’s choice.”

“Let me call my mom first.”

Waylon dialed her number in, then put it on speaker when she answered.

“Who is this?”

Oh, she was pissed .

“Me, Momma. My phone is offline right now. Sorry.” He hated that she was worried about him.

“What the hell is going on? Where are you? Where is that bodyguard?”

“I’m fine. I’m with him. We’re heading... to a safe house.”

“But you haven’t been kidnapped or injured?” She was sounding suspicious now.

So he gave her some sass so she would believe him. “No, Momma. I’m not that much of a screw-up.”

“Don’t you talk back to me.”

“Then quit being evil and listen to me, Momma.” God, how often did they have to go over this?

“Son, I am trying, but so are you. Trying my patience to the thinnest line.” She took a deep, audible breath. “Are you all right? Really?”

“I am. Really.” He winked at Waylon. “A little wigged out, but safe.”

“Okay. Well, you get somewhere secure. How do you want me to spin this?”

Now he looked to Waylon again.

“That he has a stalker. That the threat has forced him to take a break while he’s on his short tour hiatus. Thank you for your concern, yadda yadda.” Waylon’s drawl was so pronounced.

“You’re not serious. You don’t want people to know about this.” She actually sounded shocked.

“I do.” Waylon’s tone went hard. “I want to draw this asshole out and get him arrested before the tour resumes. I am sick to death of this bullshit.” Waylon paused, then grinned. “Ma’am.”

“Are you telling them where Chayce is then?” Oh, Mom was loving this.

Waylon nodded as if she could see him. “If it’s someone in Chayce’s camp, which I think it is, they’ll know. But it’s defensible, and the only two people who should show up there are me and Chayce. So, we’ll get the bastard.”

“I don’t want my little boy in danger! Dammit, you’re supposed to be protecting him.”

Oh, for fuck’s sake. “I’m not little, Momma. I got this. I swear.”

“Chayce.”

“Ma’am.” Wyatt’s voice was calm as a deep pond. “You know who I work for. I’m the best. I will keep him safe. I swear it.”

“You work for me.”

“Momma. I love you. I’m heading out of range. Gotta go. Put out that press release please!”

Waylon hung up. “Lord. She is a tornado, that woman. I can see where you get your charisma.”

He wagged his eyebrows. “But not my charm.”

“Baby, I’m sure your momma can be charming, but she’s had no reason to show that to me.”

Oh, that was diplomatic. Not “she’s been a bitch” just “Circumstances haven’t warranted it.”

“She’s a tiger. She’s a strong tiger in a tank of sharks. I respect the fuck out of her.”

“I bet. So do I.” Waylon sighed, rolling his head on his neck. “Now let’s just hope I got this right.”

“If we did, we’ll step back and punt.” He wasn’t a worthless tit. He could defend himself.

“We will. You’re a smart cookie, and I have the brawn.” Waylon chuckled, putting his head back. “Thanks for driving, baby.”

“Of course. I know where I’m going.” And he was getting a little grr about being babied.

“Are you pissed off?” Waylon asked. “I’m not trying to do that.”

“Oh, not at you. Just in general. I want to bring you here to relax, not because I’m a

giant target.”

“We get to spend plenty of time together. I call that a win.” Waylon was just determined not to let him be in a snit. “We can play twenty questions.”

“We can. We can play strip poker. Strip Trivial Pursuit...” He had to grin. Had to.

“Oh, I warn you, I am a geography champion. I can also spell weird words if you decide strip Scrabble is more appropriate.”

“I bet you also ride a mean mechanical bull.”

“Only if I have tequila,” Waylon shot back. “And that wouldn’t be fair. I’ve seen you ride already.”

“Yeah. My career there wasn’t very long.” His mother had been grumpy about it.

“It’s not a long-term career sport. Unless you’re Ednei Caminhas.”

Chayce scoffed. “That Brazilian has nine lives and the picture of Dorian Gray in his closet.”

“Yeah.” Waylon shook his head. “We should have gotten pie to go.”

“We totally should have.” Okay, so he was still out of sorts, but being holed up with Waylon was never going to be boring. That he believed. “I bet there’s a grocery store on the way. I usually have delivery.”

“Then we’ll get pie.” Waylon’s twinkling grin was perfect. “And whipped cream.”

“And ice cream and maraschino cherries.” He was starting to have a lot of cheat

days...

But then Waylon gave him a good workout in addition to his weights and cardio. Hopefully soon he'd?—

He'd what? He wasn't settling into a rhythm, not really, not by any normal person's measure. He wasn't any normal person.

He was... Chayce.

“What's wrong, honey? Waylon asked.

“Why?”

“You got all closed off.”

“Did I?” He nodded. He could see that. “I was thinking about how I'm not a normal person with a normal schedule, but since I have it all the time, it's normal. You get me?”

“I do. There's shit that's all in a day's work for me that would singe other people's nose hairs.”

That tickled him. “Exactly.”

“Looking forward to some downtime?” Waylon asked.

“Looking forward to hanging out, writing some, maybe just chilling. Enjoying you.”

“Oh, good. I have plans.” Waylon stretched long, his muscles sliding under the cloth of his shirt.

“Fun plans? You going to occupy my time?” He slowed down, looking for his turn.

“I am.” Waylon sat up straight. “Almost there?”

“Yeah. I just need to get us to the church now. So to speak.”

“Okay, cool.” Waylon started watching the sides of the road. Maybe memorizing landmarks? He had no idea.

“It’s a tiny complex. I own it, and I rent out the other three units.” For the most part, he just let his people use them.

“Is there anyone in them right now?”

“Not that I know of. Chris would know if anyone is supposed to be there, but I guess he could lie if he’s been doing this.” He still hated that idea so bad.

“Yeah. Well, I’ll just check in on them.”

“Sure. Sure.” He pulled around the back of the condos, keeping the car hidden as best he could. The place was private, luxurious, and his—all of which suited him.

“Hang out while I clear it?” Waylon said. “That way you can burn out if anything happens.”

Like he would leave Waylon hanging like that. “I’ll be right here.”

“And I’ll be right back.”

Waylon punched in the door code, and went in, and Chayce started organizing all the random bags and sacks of crap they’d collected over the road trip. Lord have mercy.

For such a short trip, they sure had packed in the weird stuff.

Good thing he liked that kind of thing.

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Chapter Ten

Waylon cleared the condo while Chayce waited in the car. He whistled when he got inside. Luxe hardwood. Leather couches. A kitchen to die for. And a huge king-size bed.

He could live like this happily.

It was clear, and he did a visual sweep for devices like cameras and bugs, but he would have to go over the place more in depth later.

He didn't like leaving Chayce out there alone.

By the time he got out, Chayce was unloading the car, bringing bags up to the door. That wasn't exactly staying put.

"Car was supposed to be running."

"Yeah, yeah. You can tell it's a ghost town." Chayce handed him his go-bag. "There are always signs if someone is around, even if there's no cars."

Waylon tilted his head. "How's that?"

"The vents up there would be throwing out steam if someone was here with the air on. Hot or cold."

"Good to know. Smart cookie."

“That’s me. Brilliant.” And Chayce had proved too interested in how things worked, so it was a win-win.

“Well, your primary place is clear, so come on. I’ll grab the rest of the bags.”

“There’s not much. Maybe your Slim Jims,” Chayce teased.

“Then you got the condoms.” Oh, he was in rare form. He loved matching wits with his lover.

“And the heating lube. Go team us.” Chayce slipped in. “You like my condo?”

“I do. The bed looks amazing.” Waylon headed off to the car, locking it after pulling out the last bag of snacks.

They walked into the condo, and he left all the bags on the kitchen counter. God, his back was stiff.

“We should fire up the hot tub,” Chayce told him.

“Hell yes.”

“Oh.” Chayce blinked at him, then grinned. “I expected you to say no.”

“You said it was inside, right?”

“Yeah, it’s in the greenhouse room. Keeps things warm and humid for the plants.”

“Well, then we’re golden.” He could totally soak the last few days away. His whole body would thank him for that.

“Yeah, come see. It’s sort of hidden back here. The person I bought the place from was growing marijuana back here, I think, but I just have houseplants, a pool, a sauna, and the big hot tub.”

Just.

Jesus.

The hot tub was like... heaven. Waylon would spend all his time right in this room if he could. This was not the kind of setup he thought of when he thought condo. “This is stunning, honey.”

“Yeah, that’s why I don’t rent to strangers. This is like a compound, a songwriting think tank.”

“I bet. I can see y’all jamming.” Waylon checked all the sunroom windows, but it was all secure. “When do we get naked?”

“You’re the boss. I’m just the artist in residence.” And Chayce was stripping down already.

“Oh, woo-hoo. Me the boss.” He flung off his shirt.

“Yep, you’re it, and—” Chayce stopped, stared to one side. “What the hell are you doing here? I haven’t rented the place out.”

Waylon whirled around, pushing in front of Chayce and backing him toward the door they’d come through. “Who the fuck are you?”

The guy was unkempt, skinny, short hair sticking up all over. All Waylon saw was the revolver, pointed at him. “You kidnapped my lover. I’ve been waiting for him to

come home, and you brought him to me.”

“Your what?” Waylon started calculating, his mind racing. .22 revolver. Unless the guy got him in the head or right through the ribs, he would probably survive, but this was close quarters. Chayce needed to just get to the doorway, and he could run. “I’ve never seen him with you.”

“He’s with me every day on tour! He asked me to be with him!”

He heard Chayce draw in a breath to speak, and he put a hand back to warn the man not to say anything. “Well, he’s with me now, buddy. Like all the way. And you know you can’t measure up to this.” He flexed, hoping the kid saw all his hard-earned muscle and saw red. Made a bad move.

“I don’t know him,” Chayce whispered.

He nodded once to show he’d heard, but he had to watch the kid’s eyes and hand.

“Tell him. Tell him before I kill him that you’re mine.”

“You hurt him, I’ll kill myself. I’m serious. If you know me, you’d know I’ll do it.”

“No!” Spit flew as the guy screamed. “You told me! You told me at that bull riding in Kansas City! You said you liked my style. You signed my shirt!”

Oh Jesus fuck, save him from demented fans!

“He’s not yours, man. You give it your best shot and then I’m gonna take that gun and shove it up your ass.” He pushed Chayce back one more time, and Chayce cleared the doorway. “Go!”

“No!” The stupid fucker followed Chayce with his eyes and the gun.

And that was all he needed. Waylon leaped, locking his fingers around the guy’s wrist, pushing the gun away from him and Chayce both, then locking that skinny arm into place while he turned the guy and wrapped an arm around his neck.

“Chayce, call the cops.”

“On it.” Chayce had his phone in hand, even as he ran in and picked up the firearm, getting it out of the way.

“How could you betray me?”

“I don’t even know you, asshole!”

“Get me something to tie him up, baby?”

“Uh-huh. Hey. I’m at a condo at...” Chayce rattled off the address. “I have a stalker who broke in and tried to shoot me.”

“I’m his lover!”

“This son of a bitch is insane. Hurry, please. My private security has him.”

Waylon knew they had to be getting more information, because Chayce was answering questions with yes or no, and hunting around for something to tie up their overwrought nutbag.

“You don’t understand...He’s just scared. He loves me. He hired me!”

“Shut UP!” Chayce screamed. “I did not such fucking thing, you motherfucker!”

“Buddy, I hate to do this, because I don’t want to damage your brain...” Not that he really cared. He squeezed with his arm until the asshole passed out.

“I don’t know him. I mean, he looks vaguely familiar, but it’s nothing... amazing.”

“Send your show manager a picture.” That way they had an ID for when the cops arrived. As private security, he wasn’t going to rifle through the guy’s pockets and risk getting accused of stealing.

“Okay. Okay, yeah.” That took about a minute before Chayce’s phone buzzed. “Motherfucker. He’s a bass slinger for the band. Hired on at the start of the tour.”

“I knew he had to have access.” The guy had a backstage badge. He could throw fireworks, shoot things. But he’d signed on long enough before Waylon to have passed the early background checks. Dammit. “Why was he here?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been here since the tour started.” Chayce found an extension cord. “Does this work?”

“Perfect.” He secured the kid’s hands and feet after he cut the cord in half. “Thanks. You okay?”

“Great. It was a fucking psycho. I thought it was Chris! I ghosted him!”

“He was acting pretty sketchy, baby. You can apologize but tell him he pushed the boundary.” Waylon was just damn glad his lover, and his primary, were safe.

Chayce shook his head, sitting down on the edge of the hot tub. “Where are the cops? I want him gone.”

“They should be here soon. This isn’t a thriving crime area.” He heard sirens a few

second later, in fact. “Thank you for going with me on that.” Chayce could have made it hard.

“I wasn’t going to leave you. I was drawing his fire.”

“I know. I know you too well by now. But it worked, and I’m grateful.” His hands were shaking. His hands never shook. So he grabbed Chayce up and kissed him silly the moment he was on his feet. “Let’s not do that again,” Waylon said when they broke for air. “The gun and stalker thing.”

“Fair enough. No more. I want this fucker gone. I’m going inside. No media. Fair?”

“Perfectly. If they need to talk to you, I’ll make it short, and you’ll never be without me.” But he knew better. He would be able to give the statement. Waylon could be persuasive.

“Thank you. I’ll be inside. I’ll call the folks.”

“I’ll be in as soon as I can.” He checked the perp’s bonds, then went out to meet the police, tossing his shirt back on before he did.

It took nearly an hour to answer all the questions, but he managed to spare Chayce the grilling for now, and the cops finally left with the stalker, hauling him off in cuffs and a spit collar wrapped around his head.

“Baby?” He stepped into the condo. “You in here?”

“I am.” Chayce was in the center of the bed, blankets piled around him. “It was Erik. My drummer. He came out for a couple of weeks before the tour started, and he was recognized by a fan that worked out in Atlanta when he was renting a car to get up here.”

“That’s how he knew about this place, you mean?” He would send that info to the detective he’d spoken to. Waylon moved to perch on the bed.

“We all think so. I’m flying in and out for the last bit of the tour. I just want it over with. Do you know which condo he was in?”

“They found evidence that he was squatting in the one-bedroom.” He reached out to take Chayce’s hand. “You want to go to your place in Santa Fe or something instead of here?”

“No. No, this is my home. I may just have a contractor in, make it a single-family dwelling, instead.”

“Sure. I bet you could do that in pretty short order and just make the courtyard a central wonder.” He wasn’t sure what to do. Was he still just an employee? Was he a lover?

“Would you like that? I mean, we’d have visitors, but I want something special for us to share...”

Relief flooded him. “I would love that. I mean, I need a home gym.”

“We need to plan. You’re going to stay with me, though, right?” Chayce seemed vulnerable. “Not because I need security...”

“I am.” He scooted closer so he could pull Chayce into his arms. “In fact, I’m off the job market and intend to become a kept man.” Not that he wouldn’t be Chayce’s security head. He would. He knew his shit.

“Yeah? Oh good.” Chayce met his gaze, worry there, a layer of stress. “I think... I think you and I need a couple of days to relax.”

“We do. I want that hot tub bubble tomorrow. I’ll call in a cleaning crew in the morning.”

“I have one I trust,” Chayce told him.

“Good deal. Are you good here tonight?”

“If we lock up, and you stay with me, yeah. I’m not letting him ruin my home.”

“Then we’ll just snuggle and watch movies after we get a shower. I want him off me.” He kissed Chayce hard. “I wasn’t lying. You’re mine now.”

“Me either. I love you, and I want you to stay. Full-time.”

“I love you too, baby.” As wild as it sounded, it was true. Then he laughed. “Man, this is really gonna piss off your mom.”

“That’s just a bonus, lover. Trust me, she’d be madder if she had to keep paying you.”

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Chayce bowed and ran off the stage, the roar of the crowd following him.

Two encores were more than enough, and he had a private plane waiting for him to take him to the Aspen airport.

“Hey, you.” Waylon met him at the car, standing by while he slid inside, then pushing in next to him. “Nice one tonight.” He got a kiss that curled his toes.

“You two are gross,” Kenny called, getting the limo rolling.

“Shut up, Kenny. Are you picking us up in Atlanta next week?”

“You know it, boss. I’ll be at the airport Friday morning.”

“Good deal.” They had a pattern going now, a rhythm for touring. Same driver, same small security team, same pilot. It worked for them, and he had Waylon to thank for most of it.

Kenny had been his hire, though, dammit. Years ago.

“We’ll take you to the Waffle House, Kenny,” Waylon said.

“Promise? You’re buying?”

“You know it.” He snorted and changed out of his concert clothes and into comfortable jeans and a T-shirt. It took a hot minute, because Waylon kept touching, poking and tickling and sneaking in a grip of his ass.

“You ready to get home, baby?” Waylon asked. “The new gym is finished, and the recording studio is online.”

“Then let’s get it. I want to swim and bubble and write new songs.” He was so ready to just be with Waylon for a while and recharge. Learn more of his lover than he ever had before.

His world was different—fewer long bus rides, more long lovemaking sessions, fewer restaurants, more cooking disasters. His mom loved Aspen, so she was pleased that they were spending their time there, and she and Waylon had a truce.

It had come in the form of a bulletproof Hummer. Waylon was over the moon.

“Man, I’m happy to go home,” Waylon said, and he was glad to have done that. He’d given Waylon a home.

And Waylon had given him a reason to want to be there and not do reckless, wild shit anymore.

That was pretty much as solid as a gold record.

End.