
Chapter 1

Reed Coleman got out of his truck and loosened the grip his bolo tie had on his neck. He hated wearing ties. They were, to him, the bras of the male world, because no woman he knew liked to wear a bra, and no man liked ties.

The last six months had been a whirlwind of activity for Reed and his family. Two of his brothers had gotten married, one would be a father in a few more months, and now they'd all had to go to a funeral—that of Steve Beaumont, a beloved “retiree” who hung out at Barker’s Bakery, owned by Reed’s new sister-in-law, Jessica. Coach Beaumont had been the football coach at Bookman Springs High School for forty years before he’d retired.

Reed had played football for four of those years, three of them as starting quarterback. He had trophies at home, and plaques hanging in the school with his picture. He’d been the catch of the town for years, but he’d never found a woman that caught his attention. It didn’t help that he was the middle of triplets, with two older brothers, and a younger one. The

Coleman boys, he knew, grabbed the attention of a lot of women around town.

But now Holt and Hawk, the two older ones, were married. Kyle was taking it slow with Mercy, Wyatt was still looking, and Austin had his eye on Lizbeth, one of Jessica's bakers.

And Reed? Well he had been seeing a lawyer who made him want to drop his briefs... a lot. The only problem was Leslie lived in Amarillo, which was a little more than an hour from Bookman Springs. Which meant they could only see each other on the weekends, and sometimes not even then if she had a lot of work.

Much to his surprise, though, Leslie had shown up at the funeral this morning. True it was a Saturday, which meant she technically had the day off. But he didn't know that Leslie knew Coach Beaumont well enough to attend his funeral, which had been packed. He'd been shocked to see her there. Reed was a pallbearer, and had been at the front of the church when he'd seen Leslie, who had sat down near the back. He'd cocked his head in her direction and narrowed his eyes as if to ask her a question. In return she'd winked at him. Or at least that's what he'd thought he'd seen. She'd been quite a ways from where he sat.

There had been a gathering at the high school gym after the burial, and now the Colemans were hosting a dinner for Coach Beaumont's family at Jessica's bakery. The parking lot was already full; Coach Beaumont had a large family.

As Reed took off his suit jacket and tossed it in the truck, Leslie drove into the lot. She parked her convertible near the back and got out. The smile on her face made his cock stir. She was, without a doubt, the sexiest woman he'd ever seen. He hadn't even had sex with her yet, but every time he saw her he felt as if the room would explode.

Now, as he watched her walk toward him he couldn't help but admire her clothes. She wore a skirt that hugged her thighs and ended just above her knees, and a silk blouse covered by a

jacket. The only thing colorful was the blouse, which was a light blue. Everything else was black, including her heels. His cock hardened and he felt a little guilty. He'd just left a funeral, and here he was thinking about plowing into Leslie until they both came.

"Hey Cowboy," she said. She lifted her face and gently kissed him.

"Always good to see you, Counselor." He put his fingers on her chin and lifted her head toward him so he could return the kiss. She tasted like caramel, and he wondered what sort of coffee drink she'd had on the ride from Amarillo to Bookman Springs.

"Tit for tat," she said with a laugh. Then she stroked his arm. "Are you doing okay?"

"A little shocked," he said. "I didn't expect Coach to be the one who died. He wasn't even sick. Marty's the one who is sick."

The look on Leslie's face was hard to read. "We never know how much time we have left."

"True." He kissed her once more. "We should go inside before all of the goodies Austin and Lizbeth made last night are gone."

"Sounds yummy."

Reed put his hand on the small of her back as they made their way to the door. The room was crowded, and Reed scanned it for an open seat. There were only a few, but the one that caught his eye was near where Marty sat, by himself, with a cup of coffee in front of him. Marty was the oldest of the retirees, and Reed knew he and Coach had been close.

"Over here," he said as he guided Leslie toward Marty's table. Without asking for permission, he pulled out a chair for Leslie. She sat, and Reed patted Marty on the shoulder. "I'll go get food and drinks. Be right back."

Marty didn't answer. He continued to stare at his coffee, and Reed went to where the food had been set out. He filled three

plates with the bite-sized treats, juggling them as he went. Once he'd delivered the plates he went back and filled two glasses with sweet tea and returned to Leslie and Marty. Leslie had eaten a few things off her plate, but Marty hadn't touched his.

"Looks delicious," Reed said as he picked up a brownie. He popped it in his mouth and ate it in one bite. "Wow, my compliments to my little brother."

"They are good," Leslie said after she'd taken a bite out of one of hers. She put her hand on Marty's. "Would you like to try it?"

Marty shook his head. They ate in silence and finally Marty said, "It should have been me. I'm older. I'm the one with cancer. How does a perfectly healthy man have a heart attack out of the blue?"

"He was seventy-two years old," Reed said. "And according to Bitsy he had a heart condition that he kept to himself."

"Then she should have told me!" Marty said. Several people looked in their direction and Reed waved them off.

"She was loyal to her husband," Reed said. "She told me about it at the funeral this morning. He asked her to stay silent, and she did."

Marty didn't answer. Leslie reached and covered his hand with hers. Reed was moved by her empathy. She barely knew the man, but she wanted to comfort him.

"If he'd asked you to keep something secret you would have too," Leslie said.

"True," Marty said after a moment. "That doesn't make it any easier to take."

Leslie gently squeezed and Reed moved his hand on top of hers.

"Death is a part of life, but that doesn't mean we have to like it," Marty said. "I want my friend back."

"Have a brownie," Leslie said. "It will sweeten your day."

Marty gave a half-hearted smile, but he did pick up a

brownie, which he nibbled on before he popped the whole thing in his mouth.

Reed smiled. "I suppose I should say something trite like remember the memories you shared."

"It's not trite," Leslie said. "It's the truth. You won't get new ones, but you can remember the old ones and laugh."

"So they always say," Marty said. He picked up another brownie, but instead of eating it he picked off tiny pieces and let them fall to his plate.

"Not to push things, but we're reading the will tomorrow at eleven at The Rescue Ranch," Leslie said. "It's a video will, so you'll get to hear from your friend one more time, as if he were in the room."

"Sounds ghoulish," Marty said. "I'm not going."

"But you're named in the will," Leslie said.

"Don't want money," Marty countered.

"Maybe it's not money," Reed said. "Maybe it's an antique watch or something. Maybe it's a treasure map."

"Maybe you've lost it, boy," Marty said.

The room fell silent and Reed turned his attention to the doorway where the widow had just stepped inside. Bitsy Beaumont looked perfect as always. There was not a hair out of place, and her dress looked as if she'd bought it at a high-end boutique. She was surrounded by her four children, three sons, Jesse, Frank, and Sam, and a daughter, Bella. All three boys had played pro football, and Bella was a champion barrel racer. Now the boys ran area ranches, and Bella was publisher of the weekly Bookman Gazette, which was owned by her father. Reed knew Coach Beaumont had stressed physical fitness to his children above all else.

At one point, Bella and Wyatt, one of the triplets had a thing, and Reed thought the two of them would get married. But something had happened, Wyatt wouldn't say what, and they'd had a big blow-up. Despite any amount of prodding, Wyatt wouldn't

give up any info on the break up. Until now they hadn't seen each other in ten years.

Reed turned his attention to Wyatt, who stood next to the other triplet, Kyle. The brothers were talking, but Wyatt's attention was on Bella.

"Hope he keeps his mouth shut," Reed said.

"He will," Marty said. Reed was surprised the retiree knew what he was talking about without being told.

"What? What?" Leslie asked. "Is something about to happen?"

Reed looked back at Wyatt, who took a deep breath, then turned away from the new arrivals. Reed was glad to see his volatile brother keep his emotions under control.

"I'll explain it later," Reed said.

"Okay." Leslie didn't sound happy about being put off. Reed turned and winked at her. She flashed him a smile in return.

"I'm going to give my regards to the widow, and then I'm leaving." Marty stood.

"See you at the ranch tomorrow," Leslie said.

"Maybe," Marty said.

"I'll come after you, old man," Reed said.

Marty laughed. "Something tells me you would." He donned his cowboy hat. "I'll be there. Have some whisky waiting for me."

Reed watched as Marty approached the family. Leslie tugged on Reed's shirt.

"What's going on with Wyatt?"

"Coach's daughter is his ex," Reed said. "You know Wyatt, he can be, well... he doesn't always have a filter, shall we say."

"What about you?" Leslie asked.

"I have a filter," Reed answered as he picked up a cookie. There was enough sugar on his plate to choke a horse. He needed to watch his intake. He dropped the cookie and picked up a square of cheese.

"I mean exes," Leslie said. "Are there any of yours here?"

"Nope."

"Does that mean you don't have exes, or there aren't any here?"

"I'm not on the witness stand," Reed said.

"If you were I'd treat you as a hostile witness," she said.

"You do that and I'll take you over my knee," Reed said.

"Promise?" Leslie stole a brownie off his plate and ate it.

"Someone's being naughty," he said. "This is hardly the time or the place."

"So you say." She winked at him, and Reed held back a laugh. "But so far you're all talk."

She got up before he could answer, and he focused on her hips as she walked toward Bitsy. Leslie had the perfect swish to her hips as she walked, not too slutty, but slutty enough to attract attention. His cock stirred as he watched and he glanced at his crotch.

"Down boy," he whispered.

"Talking to yourself?" Wyatt took the seat Marty had vacated, and Kyle slid into the one next to him.

"Reed has always been the weird one," Kyle said. "Banged her yet?"

"This is a funeral," Reed said. "Show some respect."

"Please, Coach would have asked you the same question."

"So, banged her yet?" Wyatt asked. The two of them were rapidly plucking food off the plates left by Marty and Leslie.

"You're a pig, you know that?" Reed slapped his brother's hand away from Leslie's plate.

"I'm not eating off yours," Wyatt said. "Or am I a pig for asking if your cock is back in service? It's been so long you might have forgotten how to use it."

Wyatt popped a grape in his mouth and Reed slapped his hand. "Go get your own food."

"Sounds like you're sexually frustrated, Reed," Kyle said. He

shrugged in Wyatt's direction. "I think you're right, he's not getting any."

"You two are a royal pain in my ass," Reed said. "At the risk of being rude and people hearing your inappropriate questions, get away from me."

His brothers chuckled and, surprisingly, got up and left, but only after they'd picked every piece of food off the plates. Reed snorted out a chuckle, then took a sip from his tea.

They were right, of course. He was taking things much too slowly with Leslie, and he knew she realized it, thus the comment about him being all talk so far. He needed to ramp it up, kiss her, touch her—fuck her.

But he wasn't exactly Romeo. He'd had four girlfriends in his life, and each one of them had ended in disaster. Not Titanic disaster, but enough that they walked away without looking back. He'd been painfully shy in his younger years, with no one but his brothers for friends—until he'd discovered football. When he'd become star quarterback he'd attracted girls like bees to honey, but he'd never followed through on the offers. He'd found out after graduation, before he and Kyle had left town for A&M that there'd been a rumor going round that he was gay, and that was why he never made a move on the ladies.

Kyle had told him that on the drive to College Station during their sophomore year.

"Wyatt beat the shit out of the guy," Kyle said. "Nobody ever said anything about it again."

Wyatt's temper got him into fights quite a lot in high school, and Reed had remembered the incident where it had taken two coaches to pull him off Jackson Smith. Wyatt had been suspended for two months, and Jackson had spent the weekend in the hospital. There had been no formal charges, which was not surprising in a small Texas town. But people had steered clear of Wyatt after that, and not said anything bad about any of his brothers.

Reed had never been in a fight. He'd put all his energy into football, breaking school records for most thrown touchdowns, and most rushing touchdowns. His picture hung in the trophy case at the front of the school, surrounded by several UIL trophies he'd earned, both for himself and as part of the team.

The team was what had made Coach Beaumont his mentor. He'd talked Reed up when he was down, and kept him centered. After Reed and Kyle had graduated from veterinary school at A&M, and come home to open their practice, Coach had been their first customer. He'd shown up at the office door the Monday they'd opened with a stray dog he'd found on the side of the road.

"Clean him up, neuter him, and I'll find him a home," Coach had said. After that first one, Coach had shown up regularly with strays, and Reed often wondered if he'd driven around in search of animals to rescue.

Sort of like the Rescue Ranch, Reed thought as he toyed with a crumb on one of the plates his brothers had emptied. The brothers took in horses that had been abused and ran a state-funded home for ladies seeking asylum from abusive husbands. The townspeople only knew about the horses, not the other part of the ranch. The ladies there needed time in private to rest and think.

But that was a family thing, not something one person, like Coach Beaumont, did. Reed turned his attention toward where Leslie stood talking with Bitsy. He wondered if they were discussing the reading of the will tomorrow. The looks on their faces were serious. He thought about going over and butting in, to see if there was something he needed to help with, but his phone rang before he could follow through on the idea.

He pulled it from his pocket and checked the screen. He didn't recognize the number but it was his day to take calls from the office.

"Reed Coleman," he said once he'd pressed accept.

“Dr. Coleman, I need your help. Now.”

“Terry?”

“She’s in labor, and it’s not going well,”

Reed didn’t need to hear anymore. *She* was Terry Shaw’s cow, who was having twins, something that rarely happened in the bovine world. Reed and Kyle had watched over her for the last eight months, and according to his calculations, Lovely was not due for another twenty days at least.

“How far apart are her contractions?” Reed asked as he stood.

“Fifteen minutes,” Terry said. “And she’s sweating profusely.”

“Be right there,” Reed said. He hurried over to where Kyle stood and explained the situation. They headed for the door, Kyle through it before Reed.

“Is something wrong? Where are you going?” Leslie asked from behind him.

“To deliver twins,” he said. “Wanna come?”

She grimaced and said, “Will there be blood?”

“Some,” he said. “Lovely is a cow who is having twins, a rarity.”

“Count me in,” she said. “I’ll say goodbye to Bitsy for us, and see you at the truck.”

At the truck, Reed went to the passenger side and opened the door. He checked to make sure it was clean, then glanced at the entrance to the bakery. She’d said us, he thought. She thought of them as a couple, which meant it was time for him to take things to the next level, and he planned on doing it tonight.