

Sweet Springs

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Sweet Springs

by [Tarlan](#)

Summary

When his life falls apart, Bryan decides to pick up the pieces in a new town and forges far more than friendship with the town's deputy.

Notes

Written for McSheplets #106 Bond

"Fuck! Sorry!" Bryan grabbed a wad of napkins and started to dab at the puddle of hot coffee that was spreading across the counter. Of all the people he had to stumble into, it had to be the town's deputy, who was now looking pissed. He could hear Heather's sneering voice in his head saying, "So fucking clumsy, Bryan."

Except Heather was a long way away, and not just in miles. After the disastrous birthday weekend and his own stupidity in fucking his best friend's wife right under Vaughn's nose--and being discovered in the act--Bryan had arrived home to find his bags packed on the doorstep. When he tried to beg for forgiveness, all he gained was a slap round the face to match the punch Vaughn had thrown a day earlier. Except Vaughn had told him not to tell Heather about the affair. He had weighed up the bonds of twenty-three years of friendship against his wife's machinations and Bryan's weakness, and had forgiven him. Heather couldn't or wouldn't forgive him, and to be honest, Bryan knew he deserved her anger because she'd already figured out that the only person he had ever truly wanted to fuck was Vaughn. Renee was simply the closest he was ever going to get to having that particular fantasy come true.

Bryan wondered if *straight-as-an-arrow* Vaughn had figured it out too, even though Bryan had stayed in the closet despite Jon coming out to them months earlier. Perhaps that had been Vaughn's reason for originally telling Bryan to share a room with Jon. Perhaps he thought he was doing his definitely-gay and probably-bi friends a favor, except Bryan didn't fancy Jon. A good friend--yes--just not his type.

Renee had been waiting in a car just up the street so it was easy to guess how Heather had found out about the affair. The triumphant twist of her lips as she popped the trunk and opened the passenger car door for him might once have made him meekly stow his bags and climb in but he recalled Vaughn's parting words: *Be a better person*. So he had straightened his shoulders, turned and walked on with nothing but two suitcases and the clothes he was wearing. Behind him he had heard Renee calling his name but he never looked back.

The divorce settlement went through quickly, mostly because he didn't contest any part of it, allowing Heather to take everything. The bank owned most of the house anyway and his landlord had said, "No dogs." Life didn't simply go on though. It was stifling, seeing the reflection of his betrayal in his friends' eyes whenever they met up. What he needed was a fresh start even if that meant leaving a familiar city and twenty-three years worth of friendship behind him.

The bank where he worked had associations as far as Pennsylvania so when one of the provincial banks offered an Assistant Manager position in some small township outside of Bangor called Sweet Springs, Bryan leaped at the chance to get away. He packed what few possessions he had reclaimed from Heather and set out by car. Over four hundred miles later, and having been on the road for nine hours--though that also included a short break in a diner outside Syracuse--he had seen the signs for Sweet Springs and decided to pull over at the roadside diner. The plan had been to freshen up and get directions to the cheap boarding house he'd booked into until he could afford a place of his own.

So fucking clumsy.

When he attempted to dab at the coffee on the deputy's uniform, the deputy pushed his hand away in annoyance.

"It's okay. Leave it!"

"Fuck." He swore again. "At least, let me get you another cup of coffee."

"Look. Just. Just sit down and wait here while I go get cleaned up."

He watched as the deputy headed towards the restroom and seriously debated on making a run for it but who was he kidding? It was a small town and if he wanted to pay the rent then he had to take that Assistant Manager position in town, so hiding out wasn't going to work. He dropped his arms onto the counter only to feel the coffee seeping into his jacket.

"Fuck," he sighed softly and dropped his head onto his arms.

"Are you okay, mister?"

Bryan raised his head and looked at the kind-faced woman serving behind the counter. "Not been a good year."

He sat up and turned when he heard the restroom door open, swallowing hard when he saw the deputy walking towards him. So unfair. The guy had to be the hottest man Bryan had ever seen.

"Thanks," the deputy stated softly, and it took a moment for Bryan to realize he was talking to the lady behind the counter, who had mopped up the coffee and placed a fresh cup down in front of both of them.

"Why don't you boys sit down and have that coffee while I go get your dinner, Doug."

Bryan waited until she had moved away before turning to the deputy; he drew in a breath.

"Look. I really am sorry. I had a long drive and I'm pretty tired..."

"Then it's a good thing you decided to take a break." The deputy looked at him fully for the first time and stared hard before blinking and clearing his throat. "So." He cleared his throat again. "Where are you headed?"

"Eh...here? Sweet Springs. I needed directions to the Spring Water...eh...Boarding House."

"You're Bryan Philips?"

Bryan blinked. He knew it was a small town and he'd heard of gossip traveling faster than the speed of light but how could the deputy possibly know about him before he'd even fully arrived?

"I live at Spring House." He leaned in. "We tend to leave out the *water boarding* due to its new and less desirable connotation."

Bryan snorted and sipped at his coffee, which was good.

"Doug. One Chicken Cordon Bleu."

"Thank you." The deputy glanced at him, smiling almost shyly. "Look. We kind of got off on the wrong foot here. I'm Deputy Brady...Doug. I'm heading home now so you can follow me. Just, if you haven't yet eaten then I'd suggest getting a take home from Rose and Hec too. Best Chicken Cordon Bleu I ever tasted." He leaned in again and whispered softly. "Just don't ask Hec where he got the recipe unless you have a few hours to kill."

"Uh...sounds like a good idea."

A few minutes later, Bryan was following the deputy along the empty highway and into town, with the aroma of chicken filling his battered car. He parked up beside the deputy when they reached the boarding house and followed Brady...Doug...into the reception area.

"If you want to join me, I'll be eating in my room. Second floor, at the end of the hallway."

"Eh...sure."

He had to fill in the register before Mrs. Howard showed him up to the second floor where he'd been given the empty room next to Doug's. As soon as Mrs. Howard left him to settle in, he knocked on Doug's door.

"It's open."

Bryan felt incredibly nervous as he pushed open the door and stepped inside to find Doug seated on the edge of his bed at a small table with a spare chair set opposite. Doug nodded his head towards the chair and, for once, Bryan got the hint and sat down. Eventually the silence became too much.

"So, you been the deputy for long?"

Doug glanced at him from under dark lashes. "Ten years."

"Is it dangerous?"

This time Doug winced. "You could say that. But mostly it's local kids trying to spy in the girls' locker room or sneak into Andy's bar. A few domestic disputes. Nothing too sinister."

"Huh!"

When they parted company an hour later, Bryan closed the door of his room behind him and sank down onto the bed. He closed his eyes for a moment as the unfamiliarity of the place settled around him, only slightly abated by the small friendship he had forged with Doug despite their disastrous beginning. Taking a deep breath, he pushed to his feet. This room would be his home for the next few months at least, so he might as well go grab his few possessions from the car. Fifteen minutes later, he had his two suitcases on the bed and his guitar standing by the door. He unpacked methodically and as he finished putting away the last of his underwear, he caught sight of himself in the mirror. Tomorrow he would be facing a final interview for the Assistant Manager position. Back in the city he was just a back room banker, handling a multitude of transactions and disputes. No one but other office staff ever

got to see his face, but here he would be representing the bank, facing customers and trying to earn their trust so they'd let the bank look after their money. He ran his fingers through his shoulder length hair and sighed, knowing it was time to put childhood dreams of being a famous musician behind him and look more like Vaughn with his short hair and professional demeanor. He hung his garment case on the hook behind the door, smoothing out the suit that was as much a uniform as the one worn by the deputy next door.

Despite the unfamiliarity of the place, Bryan slept well. He was pathetically grateful when Doug invited him over to share a breakfast table in the small dining area downstairs, always hating to eat alone. The food was good, far better than the Egg McMuffin's he had lived on for breakfast since Heather kicked him out, and the company was even better. Doug introduced him to everyone, and from the easy conversation it was obvious that they genuinely liked Doug rather than simply respected the uniform he wore.

"So the interview's today?" Doug asked dubiously, even though Bryan must have mentioned it a couple of times yesterday evening, but Bryan noticed his eyes glancing at the long hair. Self-consciously he pushed his hair back from where it had flopped over his eyes.

Nonchalantly, he asked, "Is there a barber in town?"

Doug gave a soft smile. "Harry's place on main street, two doors down from the bank. Only one in town." Doug glanced at his wristwatch. "Should be opening up about now."

Half an hour later, Bryan sucked in a deep breath as Harry began to cut off his hair. To Bryan it felt as if he was casting away the past with each lock that fell to the black and white checkered linoleum. He watched himself transform in the mirror from the class clown who wouldn't grow up, into a man who reminded him perhaps a little too much of his father. But was that such a bad thing, he thought. With each shorn lock, he felt the counterweight of a new future pushing down onto his shoulders even as he let go of the past, and yet it was still strangely freeing. By the time Harry had finished, Bryan felt lightheaded, and he pushed his fingers through short strands and gave Harry a tight smile and a few dollars extra as a tip. With less than fifteen minutes to go before his interview, he stepped out of the barber's and was surprised to find Doug leaning against the outside of his patrol car. Doug straightened, his eyes widening a fraction.

Self-consciously, Bryan pushed his hand through his short hair. "You always hang around outside the barber's?"

"Only when there's something interesting going on."

Bryan felt a smile tug at his lips. "So it's that dull around here, hmm?" Doug shrugged with one shoulder and Bryan felt some of his interview jitters slip away. "Wish me luck?"

"Sure! Good luck." But Doug had a smug expression that implied that luck would have little to do with it, and the way his eyes flicked over Bryan bolstered his confidence even further.

"Once more into the breach, dear friend," Bryan uttered dramatically, feeling like a giddy school boy as he walked the short distance to the bank. He paused on the threshold, turning slightly and raising his hand to waggle his fingers at Doug. Doug laughed, shaking his head

as he climbed behind the wheel, and Bryan waited until the patrol car pulled away before squaring his shoulders and entering the bank. He walked over to the small reception desk set alongside the three cashiers' windows.

"Hi, I'm--"

"Mr. Philips," she stated happily. "Mr. Gartner is expecting you."

Bryan wished all interviews went as easily as this one. Gartner's opening line was, "So when can you start?"

When Bryan replied, "Immediately," Gartner smiled even wider, took him out to meet the rest of the staff and showed Bryan to his new office. He left him with a pile of paperwork to sift through, mostly staff notices and requests but also a rundown of the bank's major clients. A sharp rap on the door brought his head up hours later and he was surprised to see Doug standing there, grinning at him.

"Lunch? Mavis does a mean tuna sandwich."

That set the pattern for his working days. When Doug was on the day shift they met for lunch, and Doug picked up two meals from Rose and Hec in the evening. On the days when Doug worked the night shift, they would meet up at the roadside diner and share a table there. Days passed into weeks, and then into months.

Eventually, Bryan figured out that Doug had everything to do with his bank interview being so easy. In a small town like Sweet Springs, everyone seemed to know each other, and Doug had vouched for the stranger standing at Gartner's door, which apparently counted for more than the Bank's letter of recommendation. Of course, holding onto the job was a different matter but Gartner seemed more than happy with Bryan's work.

The sheriff turned out to be Doug's uncle, who was grooming his nephew to take over once he retired next year, and it wasn't long before Bryan was being greeted with strange, knowing smiles, and hints of how friendly he and Doug had become over such a short time. It was a little disturbing in a weirdly pleasant sort of way.

Three months after he arrived in the town, Bryan headed out to work as usual after having breakfast in the small dining area downstairs with Doug. He could already tell that it wasn't going to be a great day after the shower ran cold two minutes into his daily routine, though at least it shocked his usual morning hard-on into submission. Problem was, he had finally worked Vaughn out of his fantasies only to replace him with Doug, and his morning shower masturbation session took care of that problem to some extent. Now, he was sitting opposite Doug, trying not to embarrass himself when Doug made those little humming, pleasure noises as he ate that went straight to Bryan's groin.

"This is good!" Doug exclaimed, holding up a piece of bacon that Mrs. Howard had cooked just the way Doug liked it.

Bryan felt his cheeks heat as he watched Doug lick his fingers and lips, far too aware of the tightness of his growing erection.

"FUCK!" he exclaimed softly between clenched teeth as he spilled his coffee down his best tie. He dabbed at it uselessly, before escaping from the dining room with his dignity barely intact. Bryan raced back up to his, swearing again when he discovered his one and only spare in a messy crumple at the bottom of his wardrobe. It took fifteen minutes to dab the coffee stain from his tie and get it dried using Mrs. Howard's hair dryer.

"Fuck. This is so unfair," he cursed when his car engine refused to turn over. He was already late after the tie incident, and he jumped when Doug tapped on his driver window. Bryan wound down the window.

"Car problem?"

"Won't start...and I'm late!"

"Need a lift?"

For a moment Bryan was torn by his desire to get to work before the bank opened its doors to the public and his equally strong desire to keep some distance between him self and the object of his uncontrollable lust. Work won the battle, and he nodded gratefully. It seemed strange riding up front in a patrol car. His only experience before today was from the time he had run away from home at age six and had sat in the back of a patrol car with his angry mother when the police officer took them home from the station. He remembered the bars separating them from the police officer, and the locked doors that could only be released from the front. Doug smiled across at him and Bryan sighed, aware that he did at least have an opportunity to take in Doug's profile while Doug's eyes were focused on the streets ahead. He just wished he could have dealt with the problem tenting his suit pants in the shower that morning. Instead, he left his hand draped casually across his lap to try and hide how he felt.

Bryan darted out of the car with a quick thanks and a promise to pay for today's lunch, heading straight to his small office.

"You're late, Mr. Philips."

Bryan winced. "Sorry. Sorry. Car trouble."

Gartner narrowed his eyes as he looked over Bryan. "And tie trouble too, I see." Bryan looked down and noticed his ineffectual cleaning. Gartner shook his head but smiled. "I have a spare in my office."

Bryan nodded and dutifully followed. He was standing in front of the mirror in the staff restroom, trying to straighten the ugly tie that Gartner had handed over when the first gunshot rang out. Bryan froze, locked in place staring into his own scared, wide blue eyes as shouts and screams followed the gunshot. When a masked man appeared in the doorway behind him, reflected in the mirror, Bryan swallowed hard as he raised his hands, feeling them shake with fear.

The man indicated with a shot gun. "You. Get out here with the others."

He cried out when the man shoved him hard, knocking him to the ground using the butt of the shotgun between his shoulder blades.

"And stay down," the masked man ordered.

Bryan glanced to his left and saw Chrissie, the receptionist, sobbing quietly with her black mascara bleeding down her cheeks along with her frightened tears. Beyond her was Staunton, the local grocery store owner, who was always here at the same time every morning with the previous day's takings. Bryan guessed his takings wouldn't be deposited today as one of the four-man team of robbers had the small bag in his hand. Some commotion from Gartner's office had him raising his head a little to see Gartner being forced towards the safe in the back. Bryan heard him trying to reason with one of the robbers.

"It's on a timer. It won't open for another twenty minutes."

It was partially the truth but Gartner had the 12-digit numeric code for overriding the in-built timer, and because the older man couldn't keep up with the weekly change of the code, Bryan knew it too. It was written down on a piece of paper inside Gartner's top right-hand desk drawer.

From where he was lying, Bryan could see the tiny flash of light beneath the reception desk that told him the silent alarm had been tripped before everyone was ordered out front and on their bellies. It should have filled him with relief but Sweet Springs boasted only seven deputies and the sheriff, and one of those deputies was Doug. Through the large glass panes of the bank's main doors, he caught a flash of movement and the brown and beige of the local cops' uniforms. Moments later, he heard a voice he recognized all too well on a bullhorn.

"This is the police. You are surrounded. Come out with your hands up."

Robber Two's response was to open up the door a fraction and fire two rounds at the police. "Try to take us and the next bullet goes into one of the hostages," the man yelled.

Bryan was relieved when he heard Doug's voice, not realizing until then that he had been holding his breath in fear that Doug had been hit.

"Okay. Let's just calm down and figure out how to end this without anyone getting hurt."

Bryan heard a sharp cry of pain and looked round to see Gartner holding his head. Blood pooled between his fingers. "I said get the money, old man." When Gartner collapsed to his knees, the robber raised the butt of his gun ready to strike Gartner again.

"Stop! Don't hurt him. I'm the Assistant Manager. I can do it," Bryan called out.

He had a gun jammed into his face and froze as he stared into the open end of the barrel but the robber standing over Gartner yelled out, "Bring him."

He swallowed hard as one of the robbers grabbed Gartner and dragged him back into the main area, dropping him down next to Chrissie before reaching down and grabbing Bryan's

arm. He was dragged to his feet and shoved towards the back room. The phone on the desk began to ring as he entered the third digit, so he paused, unsure whether to continue or not. The robber slammed his open palm hard against the side of Bryan's head. Bryan cried out in pain, his ear ringing from the blow.

"Open it!"

Bryan punched in the final digits and once the indicator had clicked to green, he began to turn the heavy wheel that would draw back the bolts. The door swung open smoothly, and Bryan was shoved aside roughly as one of the robber's entered while the other--the leader--picked up the phone.

"I want a car. **Your** car, Deputy Brady. We'll be taking one of the hostages with us, and if I see so much as a single patrol car or helicopter between here and the airport, I swear I'll kill him." Bryan could make out a nasty smile in the leader's eyes as he looked straight at Bryan. "Looks like you're taking a ride with us, Assistant Manager..." His eyes darted down to Bryan's name tag. "Philips."

They dragged him towards the front door, holding him tight in front of them as a human shield, with an arm wrapped around his throat and a hand gun pressed up against his spine. He glanced at the patrol car that someone had pulled up outside the door. Less than twenty minutes ago, he had been sitting in the front passenger seat trying to hide his physical response to the man driving. Now he was forced into the back seat with two of the masked robbers. He pressed his face up against the window and saw Doug, their eyes meeting, and Bryan could see Doug was just as scared as him. Bryan squeezed his eyes closed as the leader, who was in the front passenger seat, turned and pressed the barrel of his hand gun against Bryan's forehead.

"Drive!" he ordered.

It was the longest thirty minutes of Bryan's life, terrified that the man would pull the trigger at any moment. When they reached the small airport, the driver went straight to a plane standing ready outside the only hangar. The car door opened and Bryan was dragged outside.

The snap of three gunshots reverberated around the small airfield and Bryan watched in horror as three of the robbers dropped. Before he could even think, Bryan was grabbed around the throat and pulled back against the leader's hard chest. The hand gun was pressed against his temple as the leader dragged them both towards the plane.

Bryan's eyes widened as Doug stepped out from behind cover, his gun raised and seemingly pointed straight at Bryan. He saw the resolve filling Doug's face, as if he had faced a similar hostage stand-off situation before.

"Nobody has to die here," Doug stated softly but firmly to the man holding Bryan. "Just let him go."

"Ain't going back to prison." The man's breath was warm against the side of Bryan's neck, and the words sounded ominous, suicidal. Death by Cop suicidal.

It all happened so fast after that. One moment they were frozen in a tableau, and the next, Bryan was falling, his ears ringing from the loud gunshot so close to his head. He had felt yet barely registered the splatter of warm liquid against the side of his face and neck, it tasted metallic against his lips. Blood. Oh God, it was blood. From the ground he watched in shock as Doug lowered his gun, registering the sudden paleness of his face and the shake of his hand as he holstered his weapon. In a few strides Doug was by Bryan's side, and Bryan's ears were still ringing as Doug's hands seemed to map his face and upper body.

He couldn't hear but he saw the words form over and over on Doug's lips. "Not your blood. Not your blood."

An hour later, Bryan blinked as the local hospital curtain pulled open a fraction and Doug looked in.

"Hey," he called softly. "Ears any better?"

Bryan gave a half-shrug.

"Want to get out of here?"

Bryan nodded more strongly this time. He'd already given statements to the police and had checked in on Gartner, who they were keeping in overnight for a mild concussion. Now he wanted to return to the bank so he could check up on the rest of the staff, and send them home for the day. Perhaps a large city bank would have kept its doors open but in the last few months he had grown to understand the small town differences. This was a close-knit community. A bank robbery would not just be a small column buried in the back of tomorrow's newspaper. It would be front page news and the talk of every person.

Even knowing this, Bryan was overwhelmed by the amount of attention aimed his way. There was a time when he had envisaged himself as a musician, performing for the adoration of hundreds if not thousands of fans. Until today, he thought he craved the limelight but number of people descending upon him had him almost in a panic, wishing he could find a bolt hole. His only anchor was the strong arm around his shoulders. Doug, pushed his way through the well-meaning crowd, making a path for them to his patrol car and pushed Bryan into the front passenger seat before making his way around to the driver's side. yet, with every step he reached out and touched people, reassured them that their town was safe once more, that the bad guys were dead. The people moved back and let the patrol car pull away.

"I feel sick."

Doug glanced over with concern written across his handsome face. "It's shock. Just take deep breaths. We'll be back at the boarding house soon."

"No. I need to go to the bank. Close up and tell everyone to go home."

"Already done. Sheriff took care of that."

Bryan looked up in surprise. "He did?"

They pulled up in Doug's regular spot but Bryan's arms and legs felt like they were weighted down. He felt exhausted, similar to the way he had felt after Trev almost died beneath the iced-covered lake on that fateful birthday weekend. It was the crash after a fear-filled adrenalin rush. The car door opened and Doug leaned in.

"Come on. I'll help you up to your room."

When he awoke it was dark, and yet he could barely recall placing one step in front of the other as he climbed the stairs to his room, supported by Doug. He thought he remembered Doug's hands; long fingers drawing off Bryan's suit jacket, pulling off his ugly, borrowed tie and unbuttoning his shirt. He recalled those hands pulling off his shoes and socks, unzipping his pants and tugging them off too until he was clad only in his boxers. He remembered Doug's soft drawl explaining everything before tucking him up in his bed and urging him to rest.

A gentle tapping on the door brought him upright in the bed.

"Come in," he called, still groggy from sleep, but managed to snag the soft t-shirt that he preferred to sleep in from the edge of the bed where someone--probably Doug--had left it.

The door opened and Doug stood on the threshold; the aroma of two chicken dinners filled the room and Bryan's stomach rumbled.

"Figured I'd go fetch some of Hec's Chicken Cordon Bleu."

Sitting on the edge of Bryan's bed with dinner trays on their laps, they ate in uncanny silence, and Bryan wondered if Doug felt the same awkward undercurrent of words lying unspoken between them. Doug broke first and set down his knife and fork, sighing heavily as he rose to his feet and placed his tray aside on the dresser with his meal only half-eaten. Doug turned back to Bryan and his eyes seemed to map Bryan's face like a man trying to commit a last sight to memory.

"I thought he was going to kill you," he whispered hoarsely.

Bryan laughed with an edge of hysteria. "So did I." He sobered. "I was scared you'd get yourself killed trying to save me."

"Bry?"

Bryan blinked because the shortened version of his name sounded strange falling from Doug's lips. It was the name Vaughn called him, an intimate contraction, and yet Doug's voice held more than mere intimacy. It held affection, desire, and a little desperation. It was the way he had always wanted to hear his name fall from Vaughn's lips--until the day he met Doug and discovered that what he felt for Vaughn was just a silly crush. He didn't resist when Doug took away his dinner tray, and when Doug cupped Bryan's upturned face in his hands,

leaned in and kissed him, Bryan felt dazed, licking his lips after Doug pulled back in an attempt to recapture the tingling sensation. It was so different to the kisses he had shared with Heather and with Renee. They had always overpowered him with their kisses, forcing themselves onto him, making demands and dictating the pace and passion until it was more about the physical act than the emotional connection. Doug's kiss was tentative; wanting an equal response from him, wanting to share rather than take.

He had a choice now, and he could see that it was a choice Doug would honor should Bryan choose to back away. But the tingling sensation in his lips persisted as he licked across his lips again, and he felt the pleasure coiling through him, low in his belly and groin. It was scary and new, and once he took a step down this path he knew there would be no going back.

Bryan pushed up from the bed and faced Doug square on. Slowly, he reached out, and this time when their lips met, he kissed back with equal pressure. He felt warm hands push beneath the worn cotton of his t-shirt, gliding over his sides before gathering up the hem and pulling his t-shirt up. They broke the kiss for only a moment as the cotton was dragged over his head and discarded. His own hands were shaking as they reached for Doug's uniform shirt but the buttons slipped through their holes easily enough and it took only a few moments longer for the shirt to fall down Doug's arms. When finally naked, he felt a little shy, wishing he had taken Stevie up on the six month's gym membership that Steve had given him for his thirtieth birthday. He could see Doug kept in shape judging by the lean muscle and trim stomach. Not quite a six-pack but certainly more in shape than Bryan, who spent too many hours sitting behind a desk. His self-consciousness faded the moment Doug's hands touched him almost reverently, pulling him in close until their dicks were lined up against one another, pressed between their bellies. Even the gentlest rocking motion of hips sent ripples of pleasure through him and he held on tighter, hands on Doug's hips to pull him closer as the sensations built.

"So good. Fuck. So good."

It took a moment to realize he was babbling, and another moment to realize his words were being echoed by Doug, whispered against his ear as Doug pressed his face against Bryan's. Strong fingers were digging into Bryan's ass, increasing the tight press of cock against belly, and his knees threatened to buckle when he came, pulsing between them. He felt a falling sensation arrested by the firm mattress, hissing in pain, but refusing to allow Doug to pull back until he felt the heat and slipperiness of Doug's release. Doug rolled off him immediately, eyes caught between the heaviness of sated pleasure and the concern for the pain he had caused.

"You okay?"

"Just a twinge in my back."

"Let me see." He pushed gently but insistently at Bryan's hip until he rolled onto his side, facing away from Doug, and heard Doug hiss in sympathy. "That's some bruise."

Doug felt fingers gently trace the area where the robber had struck him between the shoulder blades with the butt of his shotgun. The gentle fingers were followed by the soft press of lips

before Doug drew back.

"I'll get a washcloth to clean us up."

Clean and dry, they moved under the covers, spooned with Bryan's back to Doug's chest. It seemed strange to be the one being held rather than the one holding, but it felt good too. As the toll of the day weighed upon him, he felt the change as Doug drifted into sleep behind him, his arm lying heavy over Bryan's waist and the hairiness of his thighs tickling against the back of Bryan's legs. Bryan thought back a few months, to his decision to leave his old life behind and start somewhere new. He had dreaded the loss of the familiar sights and sounds of the city, of leaving behind the well-known and well-loved faces of close friends, scared by the changes he was making if only to a dull life.

He thought of the bonds of friendship, of twenty-three years orbiting the same three boys as they grew into men. He saw the disappointments and entanglements that had filled his life until only a few scant months earlier, and the claustrophobic relationships that had caused him to act so stupidly. Self-destructive. Cutting himself on the inside and hiding his pain behind a clown's mask.

Yet now, as he wrapped his hand around Doug's wrist to hold him close, Bryan understood the knowing smiles and the small hints pushing him towards Doug. He saw a new bond forging between him and Doug that went beyond friendship. Suddenly, Bryan could see his future lying before him in this small town, and it was exhilarating.

END

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