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Boxer Falls: Episode 21

By Ellis Carrington

"Motherfucker!"

Oz ran. He pushed through the well-dressed crowd and ignored the startled shouts and dropped plates full of Waldorf and potato salad as he raced full-tilt towards his brother's screams, punctuated by the unmistakable growl of a chainsaw. Oz barreled by a professionally draped table full of side-dishes and a chocolate fountain, slid through a spilled pile of baked beans just as he got near the chaos, and kept on going toward the ice bar where a leery band of folks had formed a half-circle and were trying to talk Rider off a ledge.

Holy, holy shit. His brother had gone right off the deep end.

After all the recent tragedy, their father had really wanted to do it up big for the Memorial Day celebration. Party planner. Decorations. Everything catered, Sheriff Neale's extraordinary potato salad being the exception. The pièce de résistance? A specially sculpted sixteen foot bar made out of massive slabs of ice, guaranteed to stay intact for hours, even outdoors.

Unless your family member goes psychotic and takes a chainsaw to the damn thing.

"Rider, what the fuck are you doing?" Oz edged closer than anyone else had dared. Including the deputy, who hadn't yet drawn his gun but was talking rapidly into his radio in a way that put Oz's entire system on high alert.

He had to get his brother to calm the hell down before something serious happened.

The chainsaw whirred.

"See what I think of your fucking fancy-assed bar, Dad?" The blade sank into a chunk of the bar.

Quinn, who'd been casually cleaning a glass on the other side of the thing, and apparently the one person in the area who wasn't taking Rider seriously, dropped the glass and took a healthy step back. Behind Oz, the crowd shuffled and murmured.

Oz cut his gaze over to where their father stood, arms crossed over his chest, and his stare icy. What in the holy hell was going on? He took another step, carefully measuring the reach of the blade arm, just in case Rider turned on him.

"Come on, Rider. What's going on?"

"Found a doctor who can do Yoshi's surgery. Guess who's the only person in this town with access to a helicopter?"

Their father. That was an easy one. It was a recent addition to the resort, to rent out for tourist rides. Local talk was, the hospital board had cut their's some time ago for budget reasons.

"And this asshole doesn't want to let me use it." The statement was punctuated by another rev of the chainsaw, and another swing at the bar. More flying ice shavings.

"Rider." Their father's voice was low and stern. "The helicopter isn't suited to carry an injured body, and Yoshi's medical care isn't your concern. His family has the means to care for him."

"Bullshit!" The blade whirred, the ice flew, and the peanut gallery murmured and speculated behind all of their backs.

Well, fuck them.

Oz's head swam. Yoshi? This was about Yoshi? The cop inched closer with his hand on his gun and Oz held up a hand, for what little good it would do. He needed to diffuse this--now.

"Rider, you gotta put the fucking saw down. Put it down, and I will help you fix this. I didn't get it before, how serious you were about Yoshi. I didn't understand you guys had a history." He tried to suck in a breath, but something heavy sat on his chest. "So now I do, and we'll work it out. I'll help." He aimed a pointed glare at their father. "We'll all help. All right?"

Rider hesitated. The chainsaw motor still ran but he took a step back. A tear slipped down his face. Rider. The guy who emailed compromising photos of himself to people as a hobby. "His family hasn't even come to see him."

"So let me help." Oz's stomach rolled. "But you gotta put that thing down. You've gone past your standard wacky behavior and right on toward psycho, bro. You get in trouble for this, I can't help you, and you can't help Yoshi."

In the wake of the ignition being cut, the rumble of crowd chatter was deafening. He put one hand over Rider's and grabbed the handle. With his focus on his brother, thing was surprisingly unwieldy as he carefully swung it behind his back. Whoever the hell took it, he wasn't sure. The deputy, probably. He wasn't paying attention. His eyes burned. "What the hell is going on, man?"

"I promised him I'd help," Rider mumbled into his shoulder. "You guys think I'm such a fucking fuckup, but I said I'd help and when I make a promise, I fucking follow through."

Jeez. "All right. All right. We'll see what we can do, okay?" Jesus, he hadn't realized. Things had been such a mess lately, and Rider was...well, Rider *was* the family fuckup. The perpetual class clown. Only thing the kid ever took seriously was having a good time. At least, that was how it always looked.

Then again, Oz could admit he'd had his head a little too far up his own ass to notice much of anything lately, anyway.

Oz's fingertips tingled, on the verge of going numb. He looked over Rider's head to see how Quinn was doing. Not too surprisingly, Quinn was just freaking great. Quinn was... Oz's heart skipped and

thumped hard like it had tripped and fallen over something. The copper top had prodded the other servers back into action, was cracking jokes, and getting everyone distracted and back to partying. Guy just kind of had that way about him, didn't he?

Oz hugged an arm around his brother's shoulders and tried to ignore the way his chest got tight over the sun glinting off the hair on Quinn's bare forearms. Today, he was dressed in a nice short-sleeved polo and Chinos much like what Oz himself wore, and he had to say the guy cleaned up nicely.

Oz swallowed. He wasn't just staring, but salivating. How...base.

Quinn paused from slinging drinks to give a small wave of acknowledgement, and then Oz couldn't ignore things anymore. The guy's hand was bleeding. That was a health and safety issue. Moreover, if Oz were being really honest with himself, he'd been looking for an excuse to talk to the guy alone since the event started. Now, he had one.

He glanced over at Rider. "Come on," he said. With his arm still hooked around his brother's shoulders Oz walked over to where their father stood, nursing a Merlot and reviewing things on a clipboard with the party planner, Jessica. With her ample breasts and strawberry blonde hair, Oz couldn't help but think of that cartoon bombshell who had been married to a bunny rabbit.

"Dad, a word."

Conrad Cotten held up a finger.

“Dad.”

Their father put a hand on the small of Jessica’s back, guiding her forward. “Oz, have you met Jessica?”

Oz knotted his fist. So. Not. The time. He tightened his grip around Rider’s shoulder. “Dad, you need to help Rider figure this thing out with Yoshi.”

His father sighed and scrubbed a tired hand over his face. “I hardly think it’s appropriate—“

Rider spun around, ready to storm away. “This is such bullshit—“

Oz grabbed Rider and forced an about face. “Dad. It’s very fucking appropriate. C’mon, how often does Rider actually try to do something responsible, huh?” He turned to his brother. “No offense.”

Rider shrugged sadly and toed at a discarded watermelon kabob on the ground.

“Besides,” Oz said. “It would go a long way toward showing some goodwill in this town, don’t you think? Things have been a little off the rails around here lately.”

“That was the whole point in shelling out a ton of cash for this frou-frou holiday celebration,” Conrad hissed through gritted teeth.

Across the way, some perky brunette with bobbed hair leaned so far across the frozen bar to flirt with Quinn, her tits practically fell out of her dress. Oz’s already amped-up pulse climbed higher. He leaned in close to his father’s ear, and dropped his voice. “I’ve got to go take care of a bleeding bartender over there, but keep this in mind, Dad: I’ve got power of attorney over more than one of the business accounts. So I’m gonna leave Rider here with you, and you’re gonna be a good guy and fix this, okay?”

He’d only taken a few steps when Rider caught his arm. The wild look on his brother’s face was gone, replaced by one of shame. An equally foreign expression, on Rider. “Look I’m sorry. I don’t know what got into me.”

Oz forced a laugh. “Not like you to apologize for making a scene.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Yeah. I do. You know,” He squeezed Rider’s shoulder. “I feel like I owe you an apology. We’ve been so busy with our own problems, we haven’t noticed yours.” He glanced at Quinn, laughing at



something the brunette said, and the angry thing in his chest thumped harder. “Call me later, all right? If Dad doesn’t help you smooth this over, I will.” He turned and stalked away, wondering who he hated most right then: his father for being an asshole, Quinn for reciprocating the busty brunette’s advances, or himself for actually being jealous at all.

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Phil pulled into the drive of the B&B and rested his head against the steering wheel. God, he was exhausted. Already, it had been a trying, total wringer of a day. He’d sent a text to Tony telling him never mind about talking to Conrad, and gone into the sheriff’s office ready to confess to killing Brant for blackmailing him. Too much guilt to handle, tying his gut in knots. He’d already wrecked his marriage, least he could do was let Tony off the hook.

Only his phone kept giving him error messages and the sheriff broke the dubiously good news that the angry slam Phil had given the guy’s head into the wall behind Slappy’s Bait Shop when they fought had probably only given him a really good goose egg. Turned out the ME went over the body before it went missing from the morgue, and the skeevy worm been stabbed to death by some fakey magic knife or something. The head, at least, was back in custody. Weird, totally, but not Phil’s doing.

On the one hand, Phil had been utterly relieved. He hadn’t wanted to believe himself capable of murder even the accidental kind. His doctor had confirmed it’d likely been the tumor affecting his ability to control his angry impulses, but still... The drain of unspent adrenaline after walking out of that police

station...Dear Lord, he could have slept for a week. He'd been about to park his truck somewhere and do just that when he got the call from Zach.

A bang on the window startled his head up. He cut the engine as Zach pulled the door open.

“‘Bout fuckin’ time you got here.”

“I came as soon as I could,” Phil mumbled.

Clumsy fingers ran over his stubbly head. He kept forgetting he didn't have hair anymore. He'd slept in his truck the night before, not sure where to go. Surely he looked a mess. Heading back to Tony hadn't seemed the right answer though. Back to Grady didn't either. The guilt gnawed at him, and anger at knowing Tony had fooled around with Zach followed close behind.

Damn, talk about awkward.

He followed his son into the house they'd shared. Zach turned to glare at him, and Phil almost thought jail time would have been easier to deal with than his son's disapproval. “He keeps drinking since you left, and we had an out of town couple show up looking for a room this afternoon. I figure we needed the money so I checked ‘em in, but he's not fit to handle things and I can't stick around. I have to get to work.”

Phil stopped in the foyer. “You have a job?”

“Don’t seem so surprised, Dad.”

“Sorry.” Phil, once the hard-ass between the two fathers, suddenly felt like he stood about three feet tall next to his son.

Zach nodded. “It’s nothing big. I’m helping Adam refinish the floors over at the restaurant while the big Memorial Day thing is going on. And, uh…” He scratched his ear a little. “That ranch outside of town, they needed housekeeping help and I start over there next week.” He gestured inside. “I put the guests in one of the deluxe rooms. You know where to find him.”

A smile tugged at his lips. “That’s great, son. Proud of ya.”

As Zach headed back out across the street without a word, Phil stepped slowly and quietly through the house, careful not to disturb anyone. He supposed he shouldn’t have expected much more than he got from Zach just then. When he reached the master suite he found Grady passed out on top of the covers of their sleigh bed, one arm being used for a pillow.

He huffed a quiet breath. Poor man looked so tired. Sad. That would be Phil’s fault, wouldn’t it?

He ran his hand over his head again. Greasy. Grimy. Turning toward the bathroom, he decided to go ahead and get cleaned up while Grady was passed out. It was getting on toward evening. Maybe after he showered he could get his husband to rouse, and they could talk. Maybe Phil could at least stay and help out long enough to make things look good while the guests were around. He owed Grady and Zach that much.

In the shower, a strange flood of emotion overtook him. The familiar scent of almonds from the soap, and Grady's kiwi-lime shampoo. For a brief moment his eyes burned with grief and unshed tears.

He missed this place far more than he'd realized.

He slapped off the water and ran a self-conscious hand over his prickly head. Grady might not even want him anymore, for all he knew. With a towel around himself, he went to check on Grady, who was still sleeping. He poked his husband's shoulder. When that didn't work, he grabbed hard and gave it a good shake. "Grady."

Nothing.

"Grady. Wake up."

Grady shifted and rolled onto his back.

Charged now with a mix of impatience and concern, Phil got on his knees by the bed and put one hand on each shoulder, shoving him hard like Grady used to do when Phil overslept for work. “C’mon dammit, how the hell drunk are you?”

Grady’s sucked in a sharp breath and his eyes fluttered. “What—oh my God, what’s going on?” His breath sawed in and out, his mouth was slack and his eyes were wide and full of confusion.

“I wanted to make sure you were okay. We’ve got guests checked in and you’ve been passed out here on the bed for I don’t even know how long.”

“Oh God. Phil.” Grady’s arms went around him, pulling them chest to chest. Grady’s body was warm, and with the lingering moisture of his shower, cool air of the overhead fan blowing on them and the top few buttons of Grady’s shirt open, Phil was surprised to find his body responding for the first time in a long time to his husband’s touch. Very pleasantly surprised.

It wasn’t at all clear where they stood after everything that had happened, though. Phil’s body was a mess since the accident, and—

Grady’s lips brushed across his. The kiss was simple and undemanding, but it anchored Phil and reminded him for the second time in only a handful of minutes, that they had so much history together.

Phil's brain was still fuzzy in places, but his body remembered Grady with crystal clarity. If he reached out and touched the man, every hill and valley would be familiar to his fingers.

But Phil pulled away from the satisfying scrape of stubble against stubble. "Grady, we need to talk."

"Later. Please. God, I'm so sorry. About everything." Grady's hands rubbed alongside his jaw. "The shit with Conrad, not being there for you like I should've been..." He shook his head. "God damn, Phil, I've fucked up so badly. I still love you so much..."

"I'm sorry, too." Wasn't like Phil hadn't made his share of the mistakes. Grady kissed him again, pulling their bodies together and licking into his mouth. The taste of whiskey lingered in his mouth, and Phil groaned and pushed against Grady's chest. The man's heart thumped fast and reassuringly against Phil's hand. Less authority behind the shove, this time. "You're still drunk." This wasn't right. Talk first. Get on the same page. That was what they needed.

"Hardly drunk at all."

Phil's tired arm wobbled a little, and when Grady refastened his mouth against his and kissed him like his soul was in it, it was far too easy to give in. With the afternoon sun coming in through the parts in the drapes, Phil's towel fell away. Divesting Grady of his clothes was both comfortingly familiar and breathtakingly brand new. It all happened so fast he could hardly take in what was happening.

The blood rushed in his veins. Every nerve ending lit up like Christmas and the Fourth of July rolled into one. It was amazing to be so alive again.

That day he'd driven to Tony's, thinking that he was making a new start, the excitement had been of a different kind. A heady, giddy thrill like a kid sneaking away from his parent's house to attend that rock concert they kept saying no about. He'd been angry before, about Grady not being there when the seizures came. But now? He had been so stupid. Spiteful, to throw all those years away. They had both made mistakes.

Phil was no kid anymore. And as Grady trailed kisses down his neck and over his collarbone, careful to worship the leftover scars from his accident as he sucked at one nipple and then the other. Worshipful of the muscles Phil had worked hard to hone at the gym—the ones Phil had come to think maybe his husband wouldn't so much appreciate anymore now that he was injured and out of shape from his hospital stay... As Grady did those things, as the man applied firm, hot suction to his—holycowyesGLORYhallelujah!—achingly hard cock, and then scissored Phil's legs and motioned for him to roll onto his stomach so he could lick a trail up Phil's back, thread their fingers together, and whisper “God, I love you. I'm gonna show you just how much,” into Phil's ear...

Phil was already home. And he wanted to stay there.

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Quinn tapped his feet impatiently in Oz's dim office. Damn, but the place was as big as his whole apartment. Talk about different worlds. "You wanna tell me what we're doing in here, college boy?"

Oz flicked on a desk lamp—nice desk—big and dark and covered with one of those glass covers and a huge-assed blotter thing with nary a stray doodle on it. He sat down in the desk chair adjacent to Quinn's and swiveled until their knees were touching. A first aid kit plunked down in-between them. "I'm helping you clean up your hand. Can't have you bleeding into the drinks."

Quinn raised his eyebrows. "Mighty nice of you, but I'm a big boy, and I've been bandaging my own boo-boos for quite some time."

Oz's nostrils flared and he dug his thumbnails into Quinn's palm harder than necessary to push the cut closed.

Ow. "Hey, watch it, asshole!"

Oz pressed his lips together. "Trying to help you out here. If I don't put a butterfly on it then you're gonna need stitches. What happened, anyway?"

"Your brother happened. He went all murder-me Ken Doll, I dropped the glass, got cut picking it up." *Yanno, cuz I had a major case of the jitters thinking maybe you were about to meet up with the business end of an implement used for beheadings in most respectable slasher films, but never mind that.*



Oz swabbed some antibiotic ointment over the gash. “You should be more careful next time,” He murmured. Had his lips been so full when they kissed that night? Must have been.

“Yes, Mister Cotten, sir,” Quinn mumbled. Goddamn, fuck this *feelings* bullshit already.

This time, Oz kicked him in the shin. “You’re so fucking juvenile.”

“You’re a fine one to talk, you just kicked me in the fucking leg.”

“I don’t know why it is you’ve got such an attitude but it’s grating as almighty hell.”

“That’s real rich, coming from a guy whose daddy just bought off everyone in town so they’d forget about that big car crash.” Quinn squeezed his eyes shut. Instantly, he hated himself for spitting that shit out. He was an asshole, sure, but that was a low blow even for him.

For a breath or two, Oz was quiet. He slapped a square bandage over Quinn’s palm and pushed the chair back. “Look I get it, okay? I was just some rich jerk who hadn’t had a dick up his ass before and you seem on a constant mission to take me down a peg since then for some reason. Whatever. Not so hard to do these days.” He rolled his eyes up to the ceiling. “But you try driving on an icy road with one crazy fucker pointing a gun at you from the backseat and another one in the passenger’s seat losing his marbles because

he tried to steal a body in the morgue to protect you!” Oz stood in a huff and started pacing the room with his hands jammed into his usually neat head of hair.

Ho-lee dancing Jeebus. Quinn pressed his brows together. “You didn’t actually…”

“God no, are you fucking kidding me?” Oz stopped pacing and perched on a small table nearby. “No. Yoshi’s...a sweet guy. A *really* sweet guy.” He cocked his head to the side. “Seriously though, a little nuts. We were trying to get the body back to the morgue when Tripp threatened us with the gun, and that’s how the accident happened.” He breathed a dry laugh. “I’m sure my dad and my lawyer would both shit hockey sticks if they heard that. I’m not supposed to talk about what happened. Part of the settlement.”

Quinn found his fingertips digging into the arm of his chair at the wistful tone in Oz’s voice when he talked about Yoshi, not to mention the reminder that the guy could have been killed not too long ago. Fuck it all to hell. He sank lower in his chair and rubbed a hand over his forehead. “Look, Oz, I—*‘I’m sorry I was a dick that morning you wanted to hang out in bed. I’m glad you weren’t hurt worse in that wreck. I’m being a tool right now because the thing is I keep thinking an awful lot that maybe I was wrong when I said no second dates. Only, it’d be nice if I actually thought you’d be willing to be seen with me in public and stuff. Looking around this huge-assed office and your dad’s massive fucking mansion, I don’t see how I’ve got the first thing to offer that would possibly make you wanna do that. Sure as hell I ain’t gonna magically grow a set of bangin’ D-cups.*” “I think it’s real manly sounding when you talk about sports equipment like that.”

Oz laughed. A real, deep, rumbly laugh that Quinn liked the sound of more than he should have. He stood and it was like the office had gotten smaller and darker. His clothes rubbed and constricted uncomfortably. He wanted his T-shirt and his kilt and his boots back.

He jerked a thumb toward the door. "I'd better get back out there. Thanks for patching me up, Oz." He held out a hand, an effort to be well-mannered and civil.

When Oz slid his palm against Quinn's and blue eyes met green, the spark between them was back again. Undeniable.

"You don't have to go yet do you?" Oz's voice was almost a whisper. A dangerously low, guttural, sexy as all fucking hell whisper.

"Oz." Quinn glanced at the door. "You're down a bartender out there, and after that stunt your brother pulled, the folks are gonna wanna get soused. Trust me. Besides, I'm still on the clock."

But somehow their bodies got smashed up together and Oz was snuzzling his neck. Warm puffs of air against Quinn's throat and ears made his cock throb, hard and furious. "I'm the boss. If I say you don't have to go back yet..."

Ah, yes. "Ding, ding, ding! Yeah, see, that's not cool, Oz. Actually, it's a little creepy-sounding." Only, Quinn didn't pull back like he meant to. Why that knowledge wasn't wilting his stiffy, he couldn't have said. It was dirty, and strangely hot, all at the same time. Like one of those get-it-on-with-the-boss pornos or something. Maybe that was it. For some reason, he'd wound up not really taking any offers for tail since he'd last visited the land of Oz, as it were. Too much porn. That was his excuse and he was sticking to it.

*Come to think of it, I bet we could fuck on top of that really choice desk over there...*

That it was a stupid idea didn't stop him from grinding against Oz and pushing his tongue into the guy's mouth. Oz groaned and deepened the kiss, thrusting back. Quinn's hands stroked up the man's arms—he'd forgotten how great those arms were, all toned and hairy—and pulled up his polo shirt to expose the golden, ridged skin of Oz's abs. He worked his hands up to a pair of hard pecs dusted with dark, curly fur, and before long Oz was going for both their belts, and had their pants and boxers halfway down. Dicks out and sliding together.

Oh, *hell* yes.

Quinn wasn't sure if Oz had locked the door, and as he jacked both of them furiously, the realization that the lock might not be set excited him even more. And when first one, and then another of Oz's hands slid down Quinn's back, parting his cheeks...

"Holy. Shit. Oz..." Quinn breathed out hard air at the burn of two wet fingers pushing into his ass. See normally, he didn't go for that. But before he knew what was happening, he was biting down on the crook of Oz's neck. Losing it, knees shaking, spilling over his hand and both their cocks.

"Aww," Oz breathed. "I wasn't done yet. I've been doing research. Kinda wanted to see what I could do with my tongue down there."

Aw, shit. Quinn shuddered and worked Oz faster. "Next time, baby," he growled. Holy fucking Montezuma, did he really just say that? Oz was getting off with a shaky breath and a litany of curses and a smile that Quinn could admit lit up the room a little, and Quinn could hardly think. In his confusion he stumbled back to pull up his khakis, grabbing the edge of the desk chair with his other hand. "Ow, hell."

"Careful," Oz, said. "Be nice to keep you in one piece for a little while." He came forward and lifted the hand to kiss the palm. Quinn was transported back to that watery, cold morning after they'd first fucked. When Oz had kissed Quinn's palm, and tried to curl up in bed, and Quinn had kicked him out.

He clamped his jaw shut and scanned the office again. The elegant, dark, masculine, and very expensively furnished office. The desk alone probably cost more than any car Quinn had ever paid for. And Ganesha knew, Daddy Cotten would never approve. Far as Quinn could tell, Daddy Cotten didn't approve of much of anything. That thought alone almost made it tempting. Almost.

He looked back into Oz's blue-eyed gaze and a weird lump formed in his throat. "Yeah," he said quietly. "You too, huh. No more car rides with crazy psychos." They both smiled, and Quinn realized they hadn't let go of each other's hands.

Maybe Quinn was being a dipshit, here. Maybe if he'd stayed in bed that morning instead of flipping out like a douchey asshat, Oz wouldn't have had that wreck. Maybe a second date was worth considering. Maybe—

Banging on the door brought both their heads around.

"Yo, Oz, you in there? It's Vic Neale. Need you to answer some questions for me."

Or maybe it was too late.

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Tony was busy picking up discarded plates—the fancy plastic kind that were made to look like they weren't really disposable—and throwing them in the trash, when a hand landed on his shoulder.

Conrad Cotten, the big man himself, smiled at Tony warmly. "You don't need to do that. You're not working today."

Tony shrugged. “The catering folks seemed busy, and I don’t mind helping.” He’d given up on looking for Phil, truthfully, and was using the picking up as an excuse so he didn’t look like a total idiot. People knew. It was a small town, of course people knew. Folks saw him looking around, they’d know who he was looking for. Not that picking up trash was much in the way of saving face, but at least everyone knew that was usually one of his jobs.

Conrad reached forward, brushing a finger along the sleeve of Tony’s button-down shirt. “You’re dressed up today.”

“So are the caterers.”

Mr. Cotten made a small nod. “True. So…” He looked around. “Your man isn’t here, is he?”

“I don’t have a man, Mr. Cotten.” Seemed true enough at this point. He thought about Phil’s request to talk to Mr. Cotten about Tripp’s blackmail, then thought better of it. Not now, not yet anyway.

The Cotten patriarch made a sympathetic “hmm” noise, and nodded slowly, putting an arm around Tony’s shoulders. “Yes, I do believe we’ve both been ditched.” The man’s hand squeezed Tony’s reassuringly. Word around was the guy had a dirty old man vibe, but Tony wasn’t picking that up at all. Guy actually seemed kind of…nice. “So. Wonder why it is both of us were busy wasting our time with unavailable married men, Tony.”

Tony shrugged slightly. “I like older men. Dad issues. Plus, Phil made me feel special. Everyone’s nice to me here, but I’m kind of just the friendly guy who’s an easy fuck. Who’s sort of smart enough not to be the village idiot but not smart enough to take home to Mom. Guess I thought I finally had a shot at being something to someone.” He clamped his mouth shut and frowned. What in hell’s name had possessed him to spit that shit out? To his boss, no less. No wonder everyone thought he was sort of a moron. He never thought before he spoke. No filter at all.

Up above there was a splash of bright red and green in the dusky sky, and Tony sighed in gratitude that there was something to focus on other than his stupidity.

“Dad issues, huh?”

“Guess so.” Tony’s face got hot. Apparently they weren’t done with the subject after all.

Another rocket, this one white with a fizzy tail shot into the sky.

“What time you due to work ground crew tomorrow, Tony?”

“Eight a.m., sir.”

Conrad Cotten pulled his arm away, taking a drink of the dark wine in his glass. His eyes were blue and intense when he stared at Tony. “Well. Seeing as how we’ve both been stood up tonight, and I’m not your boss again until eight o’clock tomorrow, what say we check out the excellent view of the fireworks from my office and make each other feel better for a little while?”

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*\*Will Rider get Yoshi the help he needs? What history between them is causing Rider to go haywire?*

*\*Is Phil home for good?*

*\*Will Oz and Quinn ever get to snuggle in bed together? Can their budding relationship ever catch a break?*

*\*What does the sheriff want with Oz?*

*\*Will Tony ever get Phil's message? Will he try to talk to Conrad about Brant's blackmail, or will he and Conrad wind up using each other for something else entirely?*

**TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!**

**Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...**

**Author Bio:**

Ellis Carrington was born after the Christmas of 2010 when she was gifted a Kindle and discovered the gay romance category on Amazon that same day. Sometimes her heroes are human and



sometimes they aren't, because angels and vampires deserve love too. Her favorite things are great friends, great music, and books she can get lost in. Find out more at <http://EllisCarrington.com>