None So Blind

by elwinglyre

Summary

Jack and Ennis learn to live together after Jack loses his sight.

Notes

This is a sequel to Love is Blind. Currently a WIP that I haven't updated in sometime; however, I do love this story and that I do intend to complete this one day. Beta is by Judy Blue Cat.

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Chapter 1

Jack kept still on his back, lettin' the easy rise 'n fall of his man's breathin' lull his achin' mind. Ennis still slept despite the heat of the sun and the noise of the home. And filled with noise it was: Benito's home teemed with life-- echoes of barks and chirps and voices and song. Lureen was here, Bobby too along with animals in Benito's care-- all under one hospitable roof. This noise was welcome.

It was over, most of the nightmare was, except for the darkness.

And there was Ennis.

Jack worried on him. Wasn't like him ta still be sleepin'. He was always the quiet type, but with Jack, he'd always told him how he felt-- if it weren't with soft words, it was with soft touches. Since they'd been back in Benito's home, Ennis'd been more quiet than usual. Hadn't talked about much, but Jack knew Ennis was a man filled with worry. It was them soft touches what gave it away. Killin' that man weighed on Ennis mighty fierce. Was times he'd catch Ennis, know'd he was starin' out the window or inta space at nothin'. Could tell by the way Ennis' feet shifted like cattle before a storm. Jack'd ask, "What's wrong?" and Ennis'd brush it off, sayin', "Nothin'," like sayin' it would make it so. Knew Ennis. No sense tryin' ta talk to him until he was ready ta spill his guts but the waitin' was hard. Until then Jack just counted his blessings, 'cause after all, they had each other, that was a hell of a lot more than either of em had before.

Jack had a lot on his mind too. Most likely the same troubles that Ennis had. Like wonderin' how they was gonna live. Hell, bein' with Benito was only temporary. Had ta make their way. Do somethin'. Together. And that was the final worry. All them doubts, childhood ghosts and whispers. Knew Ennis heard em all just like Jack done-- and Jack knew Ennis' ghosts and whispers was hard to ignore. Yet, look how far they'd come. Ennis was in bed-- with him. Somethin' Jack'd hoped and wished fer more times than he could ever count. Bein' blind was hard, but shit, wakin' up without Ennis all them years was a hell of a lot harder. Reckoned Ennis thought the same. Problem was, them ghosts and whispers had a way of jumpin' out and screamin' boo when ya least expected.

Jack kicked the sheets. Was thinkin' on gettin' up but couldn't. Not yet. Let his foot rub Ennis' ankle. Made Jack's heart lighten. Let Ennis' early mornin' snorts and snores embrace him too. Recalled all them nights with both of em snug in one bed roll when Jack'd listen ta Ennis snore like this. Could feel, even in this heat, the chill of the mountain mornin' wrap around em. Jack rolled closer ta Ennis like he done then. Ennis rolled around. Held him. Yep, them mountains wrapped around em both almost as tight as Ennis' arms. Still, Jack thanked the heavens for the soft mattress. Was many a mornin' that his poor back cursed the unforgivin' ground. Loved this old mattress with a dip in the center, cupped em together.

Jack gently kissed Ennis' cheek, and he felt Ennis' smile. Jack slipped his hand careful-like, so's not ta wake him. Brushed his fingers in them curls near his ears. Recalled just yesterday that Ennis told him that he needed a haircut. Jack didn't say nothin', but he hoped Ennis'd keep his hair longer. Liked the feel of him-- every part, every curl, every callus. Didn't tell Ennis that. Reckoned he should though.

The morning sun warmed his face, and Jack haltingly sat up, shiftin' his legs off the edge of the bed. He sat there a spell, listenin' to the sounds of morning inside Benito's old home. Welcome sounds they was too although too many for Ennis' likin'. Jack had to chuckle a bit-- with all Ennis' pissin' and moanin' over the ruckus last night, it didn't seem ta bother his rest none now. Jack didn't
mind. Unlike Ennis, Jack cottoned to the chaos. Those yips, barks, meows and hisses risin' up from the doc's first clients was like a livin' alarm clock. Jack liked the noise-- let him know he was alive, let him know there was a world out there.

Seemed everyone was up but them. Bobby's boom box vibrated the walls. Heard his son singin' along off-key ta Mick Jagger. Jack smirked. Nothin' changed. And seemed Bobby couldn't "get no satisfaction." Was a time Jack woulda agreed with his son-- but crazy as this place seemed, it gave Jack a sense of warmth deep inside. Yep, Jack had satisfaction.

And this was the kind of mornin' a body had ta take advantage of. Jack got up, got dressed, leavin' Ennis ta dream. Nina followed, tail battin' the air and Jack's legs. Jack counted off steps to the door, through the hallway then down the stairs. First stop, kitchen and coffee and then great outdoors for Nina's morning constitutional. After, had to attend to Nina's insistent tugs to his jeans ta git her breakfast. After fillin' her bowl, Jack sat at the kitchen table fer a spell, sippin' his coffee. Finally, Nina pawed his leg, signalin' she was ready for the day. Jack moseyed on to his true destination: Benito's library.

Time ta do some of that studyin'.

Nina, ever the eager scholar, was at his side, steppin' in time so precise with her master that Jack wondered who really was the master.

Jack set his coffee careful-like on a napkin he picked up in the kitchen. Didn't want ta mar Benito's old desk in the study. Although others hadn't been as careful, he felt the old circles that warped the surface. Imagined plenty of people worked behind this old desk.

The study smelled of dust and, this morning, of dog. Also smelled of something else, something sweet, spicy and familiar. Not cinnamon or cloves. Jack couldn't recollect what it was, but reminded him of his mama bakin' on Mondays.

Jack eased into the old captain's chair and opened one of them books Benito had set out for him. Jack's fingers danced over the dots. Just the alphabet. Were other books here in this room. Some complicated. Works like Paradise Lost and Treasure Island. All belonged to Benito's daughter, Isobel. The doc had shown him the collection three days ago. A good portion of the south wall and all of the west held Isobel's collection. The day Benito showed him, Jack'd run his hands across the shelves filled with the thick volumes. Rows upon and rows. Benito left out some easy ones fer Jack. Set them on the old captain's desk. Even had Dick and Jane in Braille. Jack chuckled. Go, Spot, go.

Jack suppressed another laugh. Fingers tickled. But he was startin' ta get the hang of this whole readin' with his fingers. He'd had serious doubts at first since he'd had a time with readin' as a kid. Readin' never came easy. His ma worked with him for long hours on his studies although his pa never saw no use for any of that readin' and writin' nonsense.

But Jack took to it. Grew to like it. Readin' took him places he never reckoned he'd ever see. Still, he stumbled. Never could read aloud worth a damn. Reckoned he missed a lot readin' to himself too, but readin' these bumps-on-a-page was different-- this touchin' and learnin' ta read with the hands. Doin' things with his hands was somethin' Jack Twist was good at. Seemed this was the way for him to read that his eyes had cheated him out of.

He got lost. The world disappeared. Never knew that a body's fingertips could differentiate between them tiny dots on a page, but Jack found he could. Bobby's music faded as he read the simple words. Nina's sighs were ignored as he read each sentence. She warmed his feet, but he didn't notice. All the little feelin's and noises Jack'd normally tuned into, all those triggers, were
tuned out learnin' this new task.

He was lost until Lureen broke his concentration.

"Turn that danged thing down," she shouted. Her bellowin' was followed by that quiet laugh Jack loved so well. Jack turned. Never'd miss that laugh no matter how deep he was concentratin'. Ennis moved in the doorway, boots tappin' the frame. He swore he could smell him-- knew when Ennis was in the room. Ennis.

"Mornin', yer up early," came that quiet voice.

"Been beatin' ya outta bed a lot lately. Yer gittin' lazy in yer old age."

Heard Ennis' harrumph along with his boot steps echo louder as he come up next ta him, thigh touchin' Jack's arm. Had his boots on. Meant he was goin' somewhere.

"Where ya off to?" Jack asked.

"Gonna help Benito with some large animals today. Drive him there ta make the call and lend him a hand-- thought maybe you could lend a hand too."

"Don't know much I could do 'cept stand there and take up space. I'd do better here, learnin' this here Braille stuff."

"Might need some help. Benito said this old stud bull always puts up a fight. Thought maybe you'd have some pointers."

Click, click of Lureen's heels came up behind them. Ennis jumped away like a startled calf. Moment later, Jack felt Lureen's arm go around his waist and her lipstick smear across his cheek as Nina's tail banged welcome on the hardwood floor. Heard a second peck. 'Bout floored Jack. She'd kissed Ennis!

Jack never woulda known-- the way Lureen'd changed. She told him it was findin' them postcards that made her, forced her, to open her eyes. She'd always known, she'd told him, she just didn't want to know.

Considerin', Jack thought, she was mighty forgivin'. Jack supposed though that maybe there wasn't much to forgive. Wasn't like they'd ever belonged ta each other. Still-- amazed Jack how Lureen had taken ta Ennis. Liked him right off. Didn't seem ta hold no grudges fer a women who had ta have known that Ennis had always been first in Jack's heart.

"Hey, how's my favorite men?"

"Doin' well," Ennis mumbled. Jack imagined he was blushin' about now.

"See that," Lureen said. "At the books again, Jack? Until now, only thing I ever seen Jack read was them Sports Illustrated magazines or maybe TV Guide."

"Times change." Jack actually didn't get Sports Illustrated for readin', but for lookin'. At men. But he wasn't gonna tell Lureen that-- or Ennis fer that matter.

"Was jest askin' Jack ta go along with Benito on his calls."

"Be good for you ta get out of the house." Lureen turned. She had ta be lookin' at Ennis. "Just wonderin' if you need this. This meanin' the books, the learnin'. Could tell 'cause her voice got all
choppy. Jack'd known Lureen long enough ta know when she was gettin' ready to bring up a subject that Jack wouldn't like. Hell, she'd get them pauses between words like swings between splittin' logs. Used to do that whenever she'd bring up LD or work. Right now was one of them times.

Jack waited.

"Just wonderin'," she said, more ta Ennis than ta Jack, "if maybe this can be fixed. You should find out, ya know, from another doctor-- one that my daddy ain't payin' for."

Ennis sucked wind.

"By 'this' ya mean my eyes?" Jack pointed, fingers an inch from pokin' them. Jack heard similar words from Ennis, from Benito. 'Course, they'd been more straightforward. Still, the whole subject, he was sick of it. Made him angry, then sad. And hell, why was she addressin' Ennis, like Jack weren't even in the room? Pissed Jack off even more. Should be used ta people ignorin' him. Or maybe Lureen talkin' ta Ennis was part of some plan they cooked up-- gang up on Jack Twist.

Knew Ennis was waitin' for the cussin' and yellin' ta begin. Truth was, he didn't have it in him this time to rail on and on. Truth was he was beginnin' ta think they was right, and that upset him more. Maybe he didn't want to know 'cause there was nothin' to know. Doctor'd told him that this was it. You're blind. Paid with LD's money or not, them doctors were good men. Competent. And deep down Jack knew the truth. This was it. He'd done the hope and pray thing once before. But again? He was askin' more than the good lord could grant.

Knew Lureen and Ennis was on pins and needles waitin'. Jack just thought.

He was just gettin' to accept his lot in life, why'd they need ta stir up all these feelin's?

And then there was Bobby. Didn't want him to go through all that same shit, get his hopes raised ta have them crushed. Hard enough thinkin' his daddy was dead.

"Ain't gonna change a thing," Jack said finally.

"No, it might not, Jack Twist," she said. "But I want to be able to say ta your son's face that we done everything."

"That's exactly who I was just thinkin' of," Jack said, shiftin' in his chair. "Not right to make him think his daddy's gonna see again and then find out it ain't gonna happen."

"You're so sure."

Jack didn't tell her what he wanted ta say-- Do you think I want to be blind?

Instead he said, "Yes, I'm sure."

Jack heard the boards groan under Ennis' feet as he shifted his weight. Here it comes--

"Jack," Ennis said, "I think ya should do it too."

"Damn it, I'm just startin' ta accept this myself. Why can't ya all do the same?"

"We need ta be sure, Jack," Lureen said, squeezin' his shoulder. Lureen's mind was set. He heard it in her voice. No way he was gonna win this one in the end. Not with Ennis and Benito sidin' with her too.
Jack sighed, resigned. "Alright. I'll do it. Go find some new-fangled doctor. But when he tells ya this is it, no more."

"Sure, Jack," she said. Ennis grunted. "We can keep it from Bobby and wait ta tell him until after it's over."

Jack's first reaction was to agree with Lureen, but he recalled LD, and what he done. Then there was their marriage. Jack shook his head. "No," Jack said, "too many secrets in this household over the years, too many. Don't need to keep another. And Bobby's growin' up. He's not no boy anymore. Better tell him."

Could tell by the way Ennis moved closer ta Jack that he agreed.

"Fine, then," she said. "Yer boy is growin' up. Don't think we could lie to him and get away with it anyway."

Jack nodded.

"So, what do ya think, Rodeo? Comin' with us?" Ennis asked. "Might be good, take Bobby with us."

"Yeah," Jack agreed.

Maybe that'd give him a chance ta tell him. Make sure he didn't get too optimistic about it all.

"Get yer boots on. The doc should be gettin' done with the sick Cocker Spaniel in a few."

Jack shut the book and stretched, back poppin'.

"Nutmeg," he said.

"What's that?" Ennis asked.

"That's what this here room smells like-- nutmeg."

"You're one crazy son of a bitch, Twist."

"I'll call Bobby down--" Lureen said. "Have him get ready."

Jack smiled. Oatmeal cookies with nutmeg.

"Think you could bake some cookies, Lureen?"

"Since when have I baked cookies?"

"Just thought, I'd like some oatmeal cookies."

"Guess I could. Have ta check and see about ingredients."

"Be nice," Jack said.

"Don't believe this," Lureen said to herself. "All them years, never baked a cookie and now he wants some."

"Don't think she's doin' it out of sympathy, do ya?" Jack asked Ennis.

"Course she is," Ennis laughed.
"Good." Jack smiled. "Bein' blind's gotta be good fer somethin'.'

Ennis slapped Jack's back as he heard Lureen holler up the stairs for Bobby ta come down.
Chapter 2

Bobby helped Benito load up the truck. Didn't need much, few supplies was all-- along with a whole lot of bags of M&Ms. Ennis didn't see why Benito needed candy for curin' a bull with bloat. Although he trusted Benito's judgment, Ennis had ta ask. Alls Benito said was they was a gift. A gift. Benito sure gave plenty, and Ennis reckoned Benito gave a lot more than he got. Seemed ta him that givin' made for a happy man-- leastwise it did in Benito's case. Still, Ennis knew his friend probably gave away more than he could afford at times-- that's why guilt gnawed at Ennis soon as he seen Benito's spankin' new truck. Ennis was pretty danged sure that Benito never would have bought this new truck if it wasn't for Jack and him.

"When'd ya get this?" Ennis asked, brushin' as his hand over the smooth surface like he was inspectin' a brood mare.

"A recent purchase. It is not new, but new to me," Benito said.

Ennis patted the hood and looked around, wonderin' where his old truck was. "Looks new."

"Not to worry. I put your old girl out to pasture in the back barn."

"My truck didn't make it far fer ya, I suppose." Ennis leaned against the fender and Benito chuckled.

"If you must know, Señor Ennis, my old bones didn't make it that far in your truck."

Ennis wiped his brow with the back of his hand. His old truck did have bad springs. And bad tires. And a cracked windshield. And backfired somethin' fierce.

"Can't thank ya enough for givin' us the use of your truck to go after them hombres." Ennis squinted his eyes. "Sorry ya had ta go off n' buy a new one."

"Ahh, well, I can't complain--this one has one important extra that my old truck did not--air conditioning."

Ennis opened the cab door and turned ta Jack. "Comin'?" he asked.

"Think I'll ride in the back bed with Bobby and Nina," Jack said. Nina wagged her tail gleeful-like, and Bobby looked almost as excited as she did, way he bounced and grinned. Seemed to Ennis his son was actin' more and more like his pa.

"We really gonna get ta see some buckin' bulls?" Bobby asked.

Benito smiled over the top of the cab. "I do not think it will be buckin' but there will be a bull."

"Yippeee!"

Ennis opened the tailgate for Jack and Jack and Bobby climbed in the back, although they didn't seem ta need his help none. Nina leaped in behind with a bark. Yep, Jack done just fine 'n let Bobby help him to the back so's he could lean against the cab. Had ta say that Jack took it well, better than he did a few weeks ago when helpin' him was more like hurtin'.

Ennis walked around the truck thinkin' about the way things was and the way things was gonna be. Never would have thought that he'd be here with Jack and have family acceptin' them like this.
Them first few days was shaky, Ennis had ta admit. Both Lureen and Bobby did the eggshell walk. Didn't take long for a new kind of normal ta set in. Lureen was nothin' like Alma, that was for sure. Never cottoned much to comparin' women ta fillies but if ever a woman was like one, it'd be Lureen Newsome. Woman had the same fire. Yep, Lureen was a feisty filly: she'd rear up instead of lope, then toss her mane right pretty. Right then he knew what a young Jack Twist saw in her. She's the kinda filly that kicks and nips and never gets completely tamed, yet had them kind, wise eyes. Ennis seen the look in so many fine young mares. Nurtured her colt damn fine too.

And Jack did have a fine son. Yes, sir, had a lot of Jack in him. Same forgivin' ways. And the way Bobby treated him--Ennis still couldn't believe it. He reckoned that all them months thinkin' on his daddy dead had a heap ta do with Bobby's attitude toward Ennis.

And Jack, he was full of surprises, too. Risin' early, readin'. And although dodgin' bullets and out-foxin' hombrers were right admirable tasks, meetin' with doctors was like askin' Jack to roll around with a mess of rattlesnakes. Fact was, Ennis was damn surprised this morning when Jack agreed so easily ta goin' for that second opinion. Still couldn't believe Lureen and him got Jack ta go.

Ennis turned to Benito. "Gotta thank ya, doc, it worked. Jack is gonna go ta one of them specialists." His friend smiled at that. "Was Lureen who done it-- pulled the Bobby card."

"Never underestimate the power of a woman to induce guilt," Benito said.

Ennis recalled how he had skittered around the issue fer days, knowin' it was a sore spot with Jack. Every time Ennis hinted of seein' another doctor, Jack's arms would cross and his jaw would twitch. Ennis was more of a direct-route kinda man, but there were times when direct routes got ya nowhere. That's when Ennis decided ta talk ta Benito about it. Talked to the Sister too. Seems they was all in agreement-- Jack should git a second opinion. Knew they was workin' on him. Went ta Lureen last. Truth was, talkin' to her was plumb easier than he expected.

So Ennis left it up to Lureen, and she'd told Jack straight-out. When Ennis came up on 'em and added his two bits, made Ennis' day when Jack agreed. Seemed quick but Ennis knew better. Knew all them friends 'n family's words had weighed on Jack's mind. Yep, Ennis reckoned Jack's mind was already made up, and Lureen's words was the last step.

Was a long, dirty ride. Imagined that the back of the truck wasn't such an easy ride, but sittin' in the cab next ta Benito, Ennis could hear Jack wrigglin' around in the truck bed with Bobby and Nina. Ennis glanced back at 'em numerous times. Weren't checkin' up, just makin' memories. Made him feel warm inside the way father and son got on together. Way they played, they was like two pups most times. And his daddy bein' blind didn't stop Bobby from wrestlin' or jokin'. They was that way on the ride there and despite the heat 'n dirt they frolicked around.

Soon they found hills covered in lush Bermuda grass and followed the road to a wide wooden threshold.

"Name of the place is El San Luis," Benito said.

For the most part, the house was weathered but well-kept. The rest of the place was the same-- the barns, the livestock. The tidy home looked inviting with old rockin' chairs and wood on the steps shiny from wear.

They were greeted by seven children in an assortment of sizes all dressed in the same worn brown pants and yellowed shirts. All of them ran along side the truck shouting, "Señor Benito! M&Ms! M&Ms!" Their faces seemed as bright as the sun ta Ennis. A short, scruffy man with thick white hair limped up behind them. He was dressed pretty much the same and wore a proud smile on his
face as he took in the band of children. Ennis reckoned that he must be their grandfather.

Benito parked the truck and reached over and opened the glove compartment, and the bags of candy plopped into Ennis' lap. Ennis and Benito climbed out bearing candy-coated treats. But the children had a new interest. Nina. And she loved it—ear-scratching, tummy-rubbing, face-licking fun.

Jack and Bobby were right behind, laughin'. Ennis climbed out of the cab only ta find himself circled by gigglin' and skippin' children. Ennis couldn't understand a word they was sayin' to him, but it didn't matter none—their glee was contagious. The old guy started conversin' with Benito while the children chased Nina. Ennis watched the doc patiently nod and look over to the corral that the old guy pointed to— he seen the bull then. Big bull, had ta be over 2,000 pounds, with head lowered, eyes bulgin' and one side distended.

Jack turned ta Ennis and kicked the dirt. "Imagine ya worked with bulls o' plenty," Jack said.

"Imagine." Ennis shifted his weight. "Beef bulls and some dairy, used for stud. No ridin' ones. This here is a stud. Benito said it's a damn valuable one, too."

"So's the bull was raised in a herd," Jack stated. "That's good. They ain't so damned confrontational when raised with other bulls. You'd think it'd be the other way around."

"Don't know, seems ta me if ya ain't never been 'round somethin' yer whole life, puts the fear in ya. Makes ya rear your head."

"Makes sense."

"Bull's got bloat. Problem is he keeps gettin' it, and Benito can't figure where he's gettin' it from since they been keepin' him on dry hay. Only put him out in dry pasture."

"The cure sure ain't no fun," Jack said, thrustin' his hands in his pockets.

Benito and the old guy stepped over, makin' introductions. The old guy's name was Luis, and he didn't speak English. Ennis and Jack's knowledge of Spanish was damned limited, although they had been pickin' up a bit bein' around Benito. Ennis took in some of what was said. Seemed the bull was right sickly, and Luis was worried he might lose his best bull.

He shooed his grandchildren into the house out of harm's way. They begged ta take Nina with 'em, but Nina wouldn't leave Jack. The children went inside reluctantly, wavin' to Nina and munchin' on M&Ms. Luis then led the doc out ta the bull.

Ennis took Jack's elbow with just enough of a touch ta let him know where they was goin'.

When they got to the bull, Benito, Luis and Ennis got the bull in the pen while Jack and Bobby stood off ta the side. Ennis knew the bull was goin' bad, way its mouth was all frothin' and side blown up almost twice the size of the other.

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Didn't matter ta Jack. No way that Ennis needed his help so he hung back with his son as they herded the bull into the pen. Couldn't walk completely away, instead he counted off the 14 paces—Nina followed next ta him at his heels and sat right at his feet when Jack leaned against the gate. Jack found that countin' steps was comin' more and more natural. Sometimes he didn't realize he was doin' it. Bobby stood not far from him, but Jack kept himself between his son and the bull. Damn things were so unpredictable, didn't matter that the bull was sick— damn things move fast.
Lots of animals in this world you can trust but one of them ain't a bull.

Remembered when he could have helped them get the bull in the pen. Now he felt like he was in the way.

Heard the day move 'round him like a thousand whispers. Was like that sometimes. Time slowed and the wind and sand and sun became part of a swift rush of sound that Jack had to separate. Listened to Bobby's boots kickin' dirt, listened to the bull stompin' and gurglin' as Ennis and Benito slipp ed the hose down the bull's throat. No small task. Then Jack had one of them feelings. Thing was, Jack understood now that nothin' came without a warnin' in life. Sounds and movement and scent. There was always a sign, just that most people never noted 'em. Jack felt it before the bull spun. Smelled the bull. Felt it in the air. Jack's only thought was gettin' Bobby outta harm's way -- it came an instant before the loud crack of the boards as they snapped under 2,000 pounds of pressure. "Bobby! Get over the fence!" he yelled, then pushed his son out of the bull's sights ta safety.

He knew his best change was to go low: he done a 180, then rolled to the ground -- right under its legs. A sharp pain bit through him as a hoof clipped his side. Everything slowed suddenly. His arms and legs were light like air. Heard every hoof echo. When choosin' between hooves and horns, Jack'd take hooves any time. As time slowed more, he felt the bull's froth splash in his face and knew the horns were right behind. One caught him, felt the white-heat as it grazed his side, felt the warm, wet gush of blood. He rolled and rolled. Like in one of them slow motion dreams a his. Ennis hollered, but Jack yelled more, tellin' Ennis ta get back 'cause he heard him climbin' off the fence. Heard Bobby's voice too along with Benito's and Luis', but they was a safe distance away. It was Nina's bark right next ta him that made him jump. His only thought was to keep rollin'. The fence. Had ta get under the corral fence and away; it had to be only inches. Knew he wasn't hurt bad, yet. Had ta get under the fence and away before somethin' bad did happen. And there it was, there, his hand touched it, and under he went, slippin' beneath the worn boards with the bull's horn whistlin' behind him. Face down in the dirt, Jack moved a bit, testin' ta see how he was. Benito and Ennis were right there, hoverin' over him.

"I'm ok. Nothin' broke," Jack said, as much to himself as to the others. Nina was lickin' his face, makin' Jack laugh, half out of crazy relief and half 'cause it tickled.

"Yer bleedin'!" Bobby croaked out.

Jack patted his side. No use kiddin' himself. It hurt fuckin' bad, still, "Just a nick," Jack said between clenched teeth. "Been hurt lots worse than this rodeoin'."

Benito inspected the wound closer.

"Señor Jack is right. He is not gored; it is only a graze, but he will need stitches."

"I take it that the bull's fine from that stinkin' burp I just heard in my ear," Jack said. "Must be all that activity got the gas out."

Benito laughed. Jack heard the doc speakin' ta Luis in Spanish.

Ennis got down next ta Jack. Felt Ennis' hand brush his forehead, then his mouth close, breath like a whisper. "Shit, Jack. Don't go scarin' me like that. Thought I was gonna lose ya again."

"Take more 'n an old bull ta do that," Jack groaned. "You should know that. Now help me up."

Ennis gave him his hand.
"Can I go to the doctor with ya and watch ya get stitches?" Bobby asked as they headed for the truck. "I watched when I got stitches in my foot. Remember? When I stepped on that broken glass. Can I, Dad?"

"Sure ya can," Jack said, stoppin'. "But don't need ta go to a doctor. Benito can do it here."

"Let's get you home to my office," Benito said, helpin' him into the truck, "then I will clean you up and see."

Bobby climbed behind the seats in the cab. "That was so cool, Dad, the way you saved me."

"Happened so damn fast," Ennis said, sittin' next ta Jack. "Was holdin' the bull's head by the horns, and the doc had the hose down its throat, next thing I knew the bull twisted. Boards busted apart like twigs, and the bull went chargin' at Bobby."

"That's when ya pushed me," Bobby said.

"Damn, Jack, ya moved faster than that damned ol' bull."

"Knew a lot of rodeo clowns in my life. Reckon I learned me a trick or two from 'em." Jack leaned back into the seat and groaned as they began the bumpy ride back to Benito's.

"You are sore now," Benito observed, "but you will be more sore tomorrow."

"You got that right," Jack said. "What I need is a drink. Ya got any whiskey at that place a yers?"

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Jack relaxed on the bed. The stitches Benito gave him didn't hurt much; it was his side where the bull stepped on him that bothered him most. He heard Ennis movin' round the room, gettin' ready for bed. Was times like these that Jack missed seein' most. Remembered how he used to watch Ennis sheddin' his clothes near the campfire.

"Excitin' day," Jack said. "Done good for a blind man."

"Ah, Jack--"

"It's ok. I was thinkin', 'bout the specialist--"

"Hell, Jack. Thought that was decided."

"Don't worry none-- I ain't goin' back on my word. Guess doctors are good for somethin'," Jack said, rubbin' his side. "Benito did a good job sewin' me up. Besides, goin' to the specialist is a good idea. Maybe they do know more. Never know. Maybe I will be able ta see again."

Ennis got all quiet.

"Yep," Jack repeated, "it was an excitin' day. Didn't know veterinary medicine was so dangerous. 'Course guess I should a knowed since they work with sick animals. Sick big animals. Imagine Benito's been hurt more than a time or two. He's a good vet. Did a right nice job sewin' me up too."

"And the bull got relief," Ennis laughed.

Jack licked his lip. "More than I'm gettin' right now."

Jack felt the bed dip as Ennis settled in beside him.
"Think I can do somethin' about that," Ennis murmured, gettin' on his knees next ta him. "But gotta
go easy on ya, 'cause I know you're mighty sore."

"Hell, Ennis, not that sore. Shit!"

"How 'bout a mouth full 'o Jack Twist?"

Although Jack didn't believe that the doc would order that prescription, had ta think what Ennis
was doin' was just what the doctor ordered. Felt Ennis movin' between his legs and his lips slip
tight around his cock. Bed bounced in time ta Ennis' head. Best feelin' ever havin' his man's mouth
wet and slick bobbin' up and down hot and hard on his dick. Bit his lip ta keep from cryin' out so's
he wouldn't disturb Bobby. Came fast, like a rocket. Ennis crawled in next to him when it was over,
nuzzlin' his neck and kissin' his lips nice 'n tender-like.

"When was the last time I said I loved ya?" Ennis whispered.

"Think it was about two nights ago," Jack smirked, "when I was puttin' it to ya good."

Ennis chuckled against his neck. "Well, guess I'll say it again: Love ya, Jack Twist."

"Feeling's mutual, cowboy."

Jack closed his eyes ta go ta sleep. Jack wondered on that before. Funny thing closin' yer eyes ta
sleep when yer blind. Habit, he guessed.
Chapter 3


It was mornin' at Doc Reymundo's, and Ennis was already up and pacin' the room. Jack felt Ennis fall back beside him into bed. He tumbled in next ta Jack, breath hot against his neck. Jack loved it when Ennis nuzzled in close. Loved the feel of him pressed to his backside.

"Love ya, no matter where, no matter when," Ennis said quiet-like.

Jack felt the pad of Ennis' thumb trace his lips, and when he licked it, Ennis groaned. He sat up then pushed Ennis into the mattress, ignorin' the hitch in his own side. Was still mighty sore from where the bull stomped him but was more than willin' to ignore it ta feel Ennis under him.

"Sometimes there ain't no words ta put the way I feel 'bout ya. It just is."

"Keep talkin' like that, and I ain't gonna be able ta call ya my silent cowboy no more."

"I kin stop."

Loved feelin' him hard. Put his hand between em and gave Ennis a squeeze. Loved hearin' him moan, but loved hearin' them words more. "No, don't." Jack shook his head. "Don't want ya ta stop."

Knew it was hard for Ennis ta say such things. Was damn sweet that Ennis could say all them words he always wanted to hear. And the way Ennis kissed and rocked up against him, hard against hard, felt so good. If Ennis kept doin' it, was gonna shoot off in no time.

"Think this would work better with less clothes between us," Jack suggested. Didn't take but a few seconds fer Ennis ta comply, and Jack didn't think once about his achin' side. Both of them were stripped down out of their underwear and ready ta go, then Jack climbed back on top and moved his hand between em. Loved feelin' Ennis' chest heave as their cocks met. Felt the heat from him radiatin' up. Never felt anything as right as this.

"What you want?" Jack waited patiently for an answer. Wanted to hear Ennis ask for it. Wanted it so bad. Knew it was hard fer him ta say them words. But he done it. Finally whispered it to him, slurrin' his words all drunk on bein' close.

"Wanna be inside ya."

Jack rolled off and over on ta his stomach, bare ass stickin' up in the air.

Felt the bed dip. Felt them fingers all slicked up movin' down his crack and teasin' his hole. "Now" was all Jack could say. And Ennis done what he asked. Pushed inside him all the way in one thrust. Felt the pain with the push and his breath came short and fast. Was a pain so good he never got over it. Started slow and steady, ridin' him, hands holdin' him tight in place like he was gonna buck, but ridin' careful too. No spurs, gentle but firm. Ennis knew he was sore. Way he moved inside him, made Jack moan. Had to stifle it. Jack tried ta be quiet fer Bobby and Lureen's sake and bit back another moan and buried his face in the pillow.

But the old box springs in the bed moaned for him. And louder.

Ennis thrust harder, faster and Jack pushed back into him, savorin' it. Was like heaven, way Ennis
moved inside him, way his fingers dug into his hips. Didn't take much more before Jack swore into the pillow and came.

Ennis collapsed on top of him, but still careful of his side. Kissed his neck and chuckled. "You was right," Ennis said, "was better without the clothes."

Jack laughed back. "Sure was."

"Didn't hurt ya none, did I?"

"Ya aren't gonna break me. I'm fine." Truth was he was sore as hell, but he wasn't gonna admit it. Ennis curled against him, layin' his head on Jack's chest. Jack was quiet, listenin' to the morning and his own heart beatin'. After awhile heard Ennis snore.

Worried him that Ennis was havin' trouble sleepin'. Jack'd hardly knew that the same head restin' on him belonged ta the same man who'd been mumblin' and tensin' up in his sleep. Last night, heard him callin' out, but couldn't understand much. Damn, Ennis even mumbled when he yelled. One word he did catch though was Earl. Shit. Ennis was shakin', and Jack tried wakin' him. But he calmed down, so Jack let him be. Wondered what brought that on. After that Jack laid flat on his back, thinkin', not again. Last night was one of them moments when Jack was afraid he'd lose it all. And that terrified him. Only thing that calmed him was that gentle snore. Always did it for him.

Some things never change.

But some do. Some for the good, some for the bad. Problem with lyin' awake in bed and blind was it made him think about the bad more than the good.

Damn it. For a long while Jack was in the dark. Just survived. Then the Sister showed up and made him see another way. At the time, he didn't appreciate it much. Was damn ungrateful. He seen now that what she done, she done out of love. Hell, if it weren't for her, Ennis never would have found him. When Ennis came, Jack found his way. Hell, he swallowed in enough self-pity, and no way he was goin' that route ever again. This was real. Ennis was next ta him. Better than most of them dreams he had since most of them dreams Jack had were just that-- dreams. He'd dreamt and wished for this thousands of times over the last twenty years. There was a lot of disappointments along the way. After that call from Ennis, Jack thought of nothin' but the sweet life on that long ride ta Riverton. Singin', laughin'. Got knocked down flat. One of the sorriest days of his life. Once upon a time Jack thought it could come true. Then he stopped believin'. But now? Ennis snored beside him. Yep, some things do change. Some people do too.

These last weeks was real. Dirt and blood and lovin' and cryin'. Never thought he'd ever have that with Ennis, and now that he did, Jack was half scared. Jack worried on how they was gonna live, what they was gonna do. Most of all he was worried that he'd wake up ta find this was all a dream. But it weren't. He'd wake up and the world was still dark, but there was somethin' else there with it. Ennis.

Took a lot of self-pity before he finally accepted that he was blind and blind ta stay. Now Ennis and the others wanted to go and give him more dreams-- just when he was startin' ta find his way. Readin' Braille, gettin' around. It was a heap easier with Ennis at his side: he helped to show him the world physically and spiritually. And it wasn't just Ennis that made life not all dark anymore. Thanks ta Benito and the Sister and Bobby and Lureen, he'd felt at home in his own body. But most of all, it was knowin' Ennis loved him. Jack reckoned that no matter how it come out in California, he'd still have Ennis, and that was a sight more than he had when he did have his sight.
"Mom, you shoulda seen Nina, nippin' at the heels of that big ol' bull," Bobby said, passin' the pancakes. "And the way dad pushed me outta the way. I love this place! This is way more excitin' than Texas."

"Jack, you sure you're ok?" It was the third time Lureen had asked the same question. Ennis could tell that Jack was gettin' plumb tired of it although his appetite sure wasn't hurt none. Six pancakes, four slices of bacon. At this rate he'd be gettin' that paunch back. Jack seemed fine, dippin' a fork full in the syrup, but he reckoned it was Lureen rufflin' Jack's hair that sent him clean over the edge. Truth was, her dotin' was gettin' ta Ennis too, but for completely different reasons.

"Quit fussin'!" Jack said, pushin' her hand away. "Ain't nothin'. Got stomped plenty worse ridin' bulls." Ennis could tell Jack wanted to say more, but he knew Jack was holdin' his tongue fer Bobby's sake. Wasn't just Lureen that had been dotin' on Jack-- Ennis had been doin' it as well. Coddlin' him, askin' if he was fine. Helpin' him put on his shirt 'n the like this mornin'. The last straw fer Jack was when Ennis asked if he needed help with his boots. Jack grabbed Ennis by his shirt, got smack-dab in his face and told Ennis where to stick them boots. Among other things. Ennis smiled as he recollected how Jack demonstrated not only where to stick some of them other things but how. Three times in one mornin'. Ain't done that since their early fishin' days.

"And you!" Lureen said. "Why you got that shit-eatin' grin on your face?"

Damn, that woman wasn't lettin' up none-- still heard her like a mosquito buzzin' in the background. Took a moment fer Ennis ta realize she was talkin' ta him. Ennis snapped to, all confused at first, then he realized and blushed three shades of red.

Damn box springs always gave em away.

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Ennis called Junior that mornin'. He'd been callin' her and Jenny regular. Junior knew about Jack. First he thought Alma took it upon herself ta tell her all about their supposed sinnin'. Come ta find out that Alma did tell her but was only after Junior pushed-- and she left out the burnin' in Hell fires part. Junior's reaction was somethin' he hadn't expected. All she said was that she wanted her daddy happy. Fuckin' brought tears to her old man's eyes. Although Junior said that Jenny still didn't know, Ennis told her that he'd like ta be the one ta tell her. It was somethin' best done face to face, not over some phone.

Was good ta hear her voice all cheery. Married life was treatin' her kind. She didn't sound like she had a trouble in the world although Ennis knew that Junior was always good at puttin' on a good face no matter what. Still, it was nice ta know that life was good with his daughter. Didn't keep her from worrying about none, but still good ta know.

A lot of things was weighin' on his mind. Most had ta do with what Jack and him was gonna do now. Couldn't stay with Benito forever. Fact was, Ennis felt like he was puttin' the doctor out. Did his best ta help the doc wherever and whenever he could 'round the place, but still felt like he was in the way at times. Then there was them dreams. Hadn't had them in a while. Nightmares about Earl, about Jack. Ennis wasn't a superstitious man, but he worried that the dreams might mean somethin'.

Ennis walked into Benito's study where Jack spent his mornings porin' over Braille books. Nina laid at his feet, her tail slappin' the floor, welcome'n Ennis in. Seein' Jack all engrossed made Ennis proud. Jack straightened his back and stretched. Bein' here was doin' Jack a world of good. Ennis decided he'd best swallow his pride and take what the doctor had ta offer. For now.
Over the years Ennis had just gotten by, just survived until the next fishin' trip or the next time he'd see his girls. His whole world was centered around them two things, his girls and Jack. When he lost Jack, he lost half his world. The only thing he gave a damn about after was Junior and Jenny. Most people don't get no second chances. He knew this was it: a chance to have his world whole. But he could have more than that this time-- not just his world whole, but the whole world. They could be together. Benito thought so. The Sister did. Hell, Lureen and Bobby too. Even his own Junior.

He wondered if that was what part of these nightmares was about-- all them years fightin' against what he was rearin' up. Sometimes the face on the ground was Earl. Sometimes Jack. Sometimes himself. Now there was a new face. Was that man he killed. Nightmares started again after that night. Reckoned it was time ta deal with Earl's ghost and know who the real monster was. All them years, he denied it, what his father done. He couldn't deny it no more.

All them years of keepin' Jack away ta keep him safe didn't keep him safe at all. Rememberin' how he denied Jack the sweet life made him feel that he didn't deserve Jack. And that was his biggest worry-- that Jack would wake up one mornin' and realize that he was someone who'd walk away. That's why Ennis walked up behind his man and wrapped his arms around him and kissed his neck. And no way he was ever gonna shy away from tellin' him again.

That's why he'd keep creepin' up behind him, kneelin' down on one knee and whisper "I love ya" every damn chance he got. He done it now.

Jack smiled big. "A body could get used ta that, you sweet-talkin', devil-tongued cowboy, you."

"Get used to it," Ennis said as he stood up.

Jack laughed and swung around in the chair, takin' Ennis' feet out from under him and leavin' him ta fall, splat, into Jack's lap. Jack winced under the weight.

"Well looky here," Jack said, voice strained. "It's rainin' cowboys."

"Cowboy," Ennis corrected. "Only one."

"Only one fer me."

Ennis felt himself blushin' clean to his toes. But while he was turnin' red he noticed that Jack was turnin' an odd kinda green.

"Fuck, I'm sorry, Jack." He could slug himself for forgettin'! He jumped up and outta his lap.

"It's ok. Side's gonna be tender for a while is all."

"Sure ya don't need ta see a doctor?"

Jack's face fell. "Will ya quit coddlin' me?! I don't need ta go ta no doctor. Benito says I'll be fine. Sides, hate doctors' offices! Old men coughin', kids sniffin', babies cryin'! Bad enough you're makin' me go ta some la-de-da doctor in Californie. Sure ain't goin' ta another one. Hell."

Ennis stepped back, and Nina pawed at his leg. "Ok, I won't say nothin' again."

"Good."

"Good."
Ennis scratched Nina's head while he watched Jack grittin' his teeth as he shifted in the chair. "Need anything?" Ennis asked.

"Hell, Ennis! Didn't ya hear a word I just said?!"

"Just thought ya might want some aspirin or somethin'."

Jack rubbed his face with both hands, then sighed. "Fuck, I'm sorry. Didn't mean ta bite yer head off-- it's just havin' everyone ask me if I'm alright every time I breathe is gettin' on my last nerve-- yer the last person I want ta be short with."

"S-ok..."

"No, not ok. And yeah, I'd like a couple aspirin."

Well, that was a start-- Ennis reckoned they was both makin' progress. He was workin' on puttin' the past behind and Jack was admittin' he needed help. He turned and said, "Be right back."

*Now all I have ta do is get Jack ta California*, he thought.

Ennis went to the kitchen to get the aspirin and a glass of water, but as he walked through the door he stopped. He was mighty surprised ta see a young lady he didn't know standing by the counter, Her head was down, but as he stepped inside toward the table, she tipped her head up. Her long, dark hair was neatly braided and her fine features strikingly familiar. When she smiled, Ennis knew where he'd seen that face before. He'd seen it every day over the last month.

"Hola," she said, holdin' out her hand. "I'm Isobel, Isobel Reymundo."

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