

March 25, 1974 – Double M Ranch, Montana

“Get out of my way, Chief. That’s an order! I’m going to the barn to take care of my horse.” Jackson grabbed his coat and took a step toward the door.

“No, sir.” Chief held out both arms to block Jackson’s path. “You have a 104-degree fever from the flu and need to get into bed.”

“Get out of my way, Sergeant Blackwater.” Jackson growled low in his throat like a rabid dog. Spit dripped off his chin.

“No, sir.” Chief maintained his position in front of the door.

Jackson drew back his right fist and threw a punch at Chief’s jaw. It connected, snapping his head back in a violent twist.

“Still not moving, boss.” Chief wiped the blood from his split lip.

“Your choice.” Jackson twisted his hips and launched his fist into Chief’s stomach.

Chief doubled over while his hand gripped his side. “Ouch. I think you broke my rib, boss.”

“Don’t care.” Jackson latched onto Chief’s shoulders to shove him out of the way.

“But I do, sir.” Chief grabbed his friend with both arms and bent him backward into his bunk. “Mikey, get your ass over here and sedate him. I can’t hold him much longer.”

Jackson saw his opening with his feet still on the floor. He aimed his knee at Chief’s groin and connected with a loud pop. The vice grip over his chest lessened, but not enough for him to wiggle free. Someone pulled his right arm straight and rolled up the sleeve. The smell of alcohol filled his nose as a cold cloth wiped his skin. “Don’t touch me, Roberts.”

Mikey shook his head. “I have to, sir. Your fever is climbing.”

“Leave me alone, Sergeant Roberts. That’s an order.” Jackson wiggled like a worm to get free. A few seconds after the sting of the needle, the lights blurred, he fought against the darkness, then a dark hole swallowed him up.



Jackson opened his eyes. He wiped the sweat off his face and peeked under the blanket. Someone had removed his clothes. “How long have I been out?”

Mangus bent over the bed with a bowl in his hand. “Four hours. Do you want some of Sara’s chicken noodle soup?”

“I’m not hungry. Fuck all of you! I want to see my horse.” Jackson launched the container across the room. He climbed out of his bunk to put on his pants.

“Chief, stop him. He needs to stay in bed, not go see that infernal horse.”

Shooting his hands out like a wrestler, Chief locked his hands behind Jackson’s head with his arms under Jackson’s armpits.

Jackson squirmed to get out of Chief’s grip. He flailed around, kicking and screaming as Chief pinned him to the wall. Mangus held Jackson’s arm straight while Mikey slipped the needle under the skin. Jackson glared at Mikey. “Traitor.” He felt a warm feeling course through his body, his ears rang, his muscles relaxed, then everything went black.