



## Unconventional in Kansas City Anthology

*Carol Lynne, T.A. Chase, Stephani Hecht, Jambrea Jo Jones, Devon Rhodes*

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## **'Kiss Me, Cowboy' by Carol Lynne**

It isn't easy to cling to teenage promises when you become one of the forgotten.

For Eli Barron, Jesse Clooney has always been the one. From their first day of kindergarten through their high school graduation, the pair were inseparable. So, when a situation arises that splits the two men apart, it's up to Eli to keep the home fires burning as Jesse sets off to follow his dreams on the rodeo circuit. But how long can a man continue to stoke the fire before the flames die out?

## **'New Vocations' by T.A. Chase**

Two men who believe in second chances meet and their lives are never the same again.

Layne Daly comes to participate in The American Royal. He's there to show off the abilities of the retired thoroughbreds he adopts straight off the track. He wants people to know these animals can do so much more than race. He has three horses there to do exhibitions in reining, barrel racing and cutting. When his usual groom gets sick, he has to hire someone fast.

Carl Stewartson used to love coming to Kansas City for the rodeo. He'd ride broncs and hang out with his friends. But since his career-ending injury early in the year, Carl has been spinning his wheels, trying to find something to do with his life now that he couldn't rodeo anymore. He runs into Layne and offers to help him with his horses.

Together, they have to deal with not only the stress of the event, but starting a new relationship. Second chances are what Layne does best and he's more than willing to give Carl the opportunity.

## **'Stallions and Ice' by Stephani Hecht**

Sometimes you have to climb a mountain to see the future.

While Brandon loves to go and watch his friend, Nichole, at The American Royal every year, there is no way that he is ever going to climb on a horse. His feet belong on the ground or the ice. As one of the players of the local minor league team, the Wichita Thunder, all he dreams about is someday moving up to the major leagues. That is, until he meets Nichole's brother, Brandon.

Brandon grew up in a family that has always been in the rodeo circuit. There was no question that he was ever going to be anything else...until he's sidelined by seizures and can no longer ride. Then he meets Ethan and he begins to wonder, that maybe, just maybe, his life isn't over.

Will decades of traditions tear the men apart? Or can they overcome all their obstacles and be together?

## **'Playing with Fire' by Jambrea Jo Jones**

Ranch cook against restaurateur—who does it better?

Hayden McGrath has the formal training and know how to run one of the best farm-to-table restaurants in the city. This year he wants to prove his worth by entering the barbecue competition at The American Royal. It has nothing to do with a certain cowboy from the Flying P...

Amos Vasquez has been the ranch cook at the Flying P Retreat since it was an actual ranch. Now it's a place tourists flock to so they can have a taste of his food. This year he is going to win the barbecue competition and nothing will stand in his way, not even a certain sexy redheaded restaurant owner who has caught his eye.

This will be the BBQ competition to beat all competitions at The American Royal.

### **'Resuscitating Love' by Devon Rhodes**

If Hill keeps putting cowboys ahead of his marriage, even being a cardiologist won't help David fix their broken hearts.

Hillard 'Hill' Pearson, the new events director of the American Royal, has worked hard to get to where he is. This is his first year as director, and the huge responsibility of the more visible position has taken over his life. Yes, he could be considered a workaholic, but he's put fifteen years into the event he's loved since he was a kid, and now is his chance to shine.

When David Weinstein finally convinced his long-time partner, Hill, to marry him, he thought it would bring them closer together. Instead, they're not even to their first anniversary and their relationship is suffering. David's finally at a stage in his medical career where he has regular hours, but can't seem to connect with his husband when he's free. Now, with the event that he's sick of hearing about underway, he feels like he's making all the effort with no return.

Can Hill and David resuscitate their love before David gives up on the promise of forever?

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## **From Reader Review Unconventional in Kansas City Anthology for online ebook**

### **LeeAnn says**

**Whew!!**

Gotta love a cowboy story!

Every story in this book is excellent. You get all you could want . Hot cowboys, chef, or cardiac surgeon depending on the story. Lust, angst, slight heartache and at last love along with hot, hot HOT sex.

What more could a girl ask for? So well written I could actually feel what the characters are feeling which I LOVE in a book.

So people need to buy this book and have an amazing experience.

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### **Bronwyn Heeley says**

Overall 3.5 stars ?

I always like this annual anthology

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### **Yvonne Lazear says**

not my thing

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### **Lynnette Hartwig says**

#### **4.5 Stars**

##### **Kiss Me, Cowboy by Carol Lynne – 4 Stars**

This was a sweet story about two men who were best friends all their life who fell in love. Then Jesse left and Eli stayed to help his family after the death of Eli's father. I almost thought the author wasn't going to give these two men their HEA but she did. I immediately had a connection with Eli and Jesse and felt for them both in the struggle they dealt with to be together. A great story that centered on a rodeo event named The American Royal.

##### **New Vocation by T.A. Chase – 4.5 Stars**

I absolutely loved this story, but that didn't surprise me as it was written by a favorite author of mine. T.A. Chase writes wonderful story that are well thought out and exciting. I immediately fell in love with Layne and Carl. It was also great to see Les and Randy make a cameo appearance.

##### **Stallions and Ice by Stephani Hecht – 4 Stars**

This was another great story in this anthology and I really loved Brandon and Ethan. I would consider this a

HFN story as it never really had a full ending (which is why I only gave it 4 stars). But I loved how the author was able to bring two men together from two completely different backgrounds, especially when one of the characters is a hockey player (GO Red Wings). This author just hits the right spot in my reading about hockey players. No one does it better than Ms. Hecht whether its hockey or first responders.

### **Playing with Fire by Jambrea Jo Jones – 4 Stars**

This story was another great one by a new author for me. This author took a different approach and had this two men facing off in the kitchen not the rodeo circuit but it was still centered on the America Royal. I loved how the author brought these two men back together and the whole story surrounding the epic cook off. Great job!

### **Resuscitating Love by Devon Rhodes – 4 Stars**

This wasn't a story about new love but about reviving a love of established partners. This was a great ending in a great series of stories about the American Royal rodeo event. I really love reading these types of stories as it really just hit me start in the heart. I love reading about how two men are able to overcome their problems and get back on track.

Overall this was an excellent anthology and would recommend it to all my friends.

I received a free copy of this book to read for Inked Rainbow Reads in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Tailtiu says**

2,5\* Kiss Me, Cowboy by Carol Lynne

3\* New Vocations by T.A. Chase

2\* Stallions and Ice by Stephani Hecht

3\* Playing With Fire by Jambrea Jo Jones

3\* Resuscitating Love by Devon Rhodes

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### **Ro Dubose says**

Kiss Me, Cowboy by Carol Lynne - 4 Nymphs

Eli Barron and Jesse Clooney are best friends and lovers, but when critical circumstances changes their plan to be together, the two men go in separate directions. Eli stays at home on the ranch to support his widowed mother and younger siblings while Jesse escapes his homophobic parents by following the rodeo circuit.

New Vocations by T.A. Chase - 4.5 Nymphs

Layne Daly adopts and re-trains retired thoroughbreds. When his usual groom was unable to make it to Kansas City, Layne was in need of help. Carl Stewartson, whose recent injury ended his broncs riding career, offers to help Layne with his horses and more personal things.

Stallions and Ice by Stephani Hecht - 5 Nymphs

Following family traditions, Brandon has been trained from a young child to play the major hockey leagues,

although his skills only gained Brandon a position in the minor leagues. Ethan was trained to ride in the rodeo circuit. However, a medical condition has deprived Ethan of a rodeo future. The mutual attraction between Brandon and Ethan, upon first meeting, has both men thinking about possibly altering their plans for a future together.

#### Playing with Fire by Jambrea Jo Jones - 5 Nymphs

Hayden McGrath owns a farm-to-table restaurant and entering the barbecue competition at the American Royal gives Hayden a chance to showcase his cooking skills. Amos Vasquez is a ranch cook at a ranch repurposed into a ranch resort. Amos has two goals this year, win the barbecue competition and win back Hayden. Amos has decided that one night with Hayden is not enough.

#### Resuscitating Love by Devon Rhodes - 4 Nymphs

American Royal director Hill Pearson is still a cowboy at heart, but the long hours he spends making the rodeo events perfect is taking a toll on Hill's personal time. Dr. David Weinstein is Hill's husband. Married less than a year, David is discovering their marriage is going the wrong direction; they are drifting apart instead of growing closer together. It seems to David that Hill is really married to the American Royal and David is a live in partner instead of husband.

Overall, this collection of compassionate short stories is vastly impressive and enjoyable. I especially enjoyed the humor blended into Stallions and Ice as well as Playing with Fire.

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### **Lisa The Novel Approach says**

*Unconventional in Kansas City* is the work of five authors—Carol Lynne, T.A. Chase, Stephani Hecht, Jambrea Jo Jones and Devon Rhodes—who have released anthologies before during the annual GRL convention. Focusing on cowboys, and giving us wonderfully different stories of romance and love, these stories are unique in that they all center round the same rodeo taking place in the city. Overall, this was a wonderful compilation for GRL 2016 by some very talented authors. **Overall Rating: 4 stars**

### **Kiss Me, Cowboy by Carol Lynne**

Together from the age of five, Eli and Jessie were the best of friends. As they grew older, Eli and his family did everything they could to help shield Jesse from his abusive father and his unconcerned mother. Both the boys knew that the moment they could, they would leave together and make a life with each other. However, just as they were about to realize their dream, Eli's father died and he was stuck having to take care of the farm and his two younger sisters and mother. Jesse couldn't stay. He had to escape the town that had always looked down on him. As months turned into years, the love that Eli and Jesse had for one another seemed destined to end. But fate has a way of making the most impossible things happen, and when Eli's mother passes away, Jesse returns. Now the only question is, does Eli still love his cowboy?

This is a sweet and tender coming-of-age story that morphs into one disappointment after another for Eli. Jesse is determined to make a name for himself and somehow escape all the awful things his father told him, repeatedly, that he was. But that determination pulls Eli and Jesse farther and farther apart until it really isn't certain any longer that the love these two once had for each other could ever last the distance that now lies between them. These two characters were immensely likable and while this was a very short story, the love they have for each other felt quite real. Unfortunately, toward the end of the story there is some alluding to Jesse finding someone else during the years that he and Eli are apart. That plot point is dangled at one point

in the story and then never addressed again. It was the lack of a resolution to Jessie's possibly having moved on that made the ending to the story hard to believe. Instead, Eli and Jesse never spoke of it, and I think that damaged the story overall. **Rating: 3 stars**

### **New Vocations by T.A. Chase**

Layne Daly runs a ranch where he takes in horses and re-trains them for jobs they normally wouldn't be performing. When he goes into Kansas City to attend an exhibition, he's counting on one of his ranch hands to join him. Unfortunately, shortly after arriving he gets a call to let him know his employee is too ill to travel, so Layne is stuck with caring for three horses on his own, one of which is very high maintenance.

Carl Stewartson has been riding broncos most of his life. A bad injury has sidelined him and ended his career for good. Since his mother's death, Carl has been reluctant to return home to his dad's ranch knowing that his father and his brothers have real difficulty accepting the fact that he's gay. He figures that he'll stick around the stables at the exhibition arena to pick up some extra work before trying to find a more permanent job. Little did Carl and Layne know that both of them would leave this exhibition with a lot more than they came with.

This was a fast and hot romance between two cowboys willing to take a chance. I really enjoyed the initial reluctance from both characters, and their uncertainty about whether or not the other had any interest at all in getting together. What starts out as a potential one night stand turns into a bit more rather quickly. If you can put aside your disbelief in two men having such instant chemistry, then you'll really enjoy this short and sweet love story. Either way, this is a well-written romance piece that cowboy lovers are sure to enjoy.

**Rating 4 stars**

### **Stallion and Ice by Stephani Hecht**

Stephani Hecht gives us the next selection in the anthology, *Stallion And Ice*. Brandon is a hockey player who has just moved to Kansas City. Lucky for him he already has a friend there, Nichole, who comes from a large family of bronco riders. The two meet up at a show, and Nichole introduces Brandon to her brother Ethan. Ethan has felt like the odd man out in his family for a long time, not only because he is gay but also because he is unable to carry on the family legacy due to seizures which have left him sidelined. He also has a real knack for putting himself down, a result of being in a relationship where his ex hid him like a dirty habit. However, Brandon takes one look at Ethan and falls hard. Now all the hockey player thinks he has to do is take it slow so as not to scare off the skittish Ethan. Little does he know that Ethan is not only ready to move on from his former bad romance but doesn't intend to put the brakes on when it comes to winning over Brandon.

These characters are young and hip and when it started, I thought the story itself had great potential. The problem was I felt little to no chemistry between Brandon and Ethan. There was most assuredly lust, but that didn't communicate itself into any kind of real caring or deep emotional connection. Also, there was so little backstory about Ethan and his former boyfriend, Brian, which made it difficult to have any pity for Ethan and his nagging insecurities about whether or not he would be good enough for Brandon.

Alongside that issue, there seem to be some real plot holes within the story. For instance, Brandon had known Nichole for many years and yet seemed surprised to find out that she had five other siblings—one would think such good friends would have discussed their families. Then, there was a brief concern about an age difference between Brandon and Ethan, which turned out to be literally just a year, and yet Brandon worries that Ethan will be too young for him. All in all, this story felt incredibly rushed and shallow, and the

lack of chemistry between the two main characters did little to help that. **Rating: 2.5 stars**

### **Playing with Fire by Jambrea Jo Jones**

A cheating ex and a misunderstood text causes the failure of a single encounter between Amos and Hayden to develop into anything more. Hayden owns a successful restaurant, and his barbecue recipe is known far and wide. Amos helps to run a weekend adventure camp for urban cowboys where his own cooking skills earn him great praise. After their single night encounter, Amos is desperate to pursue more with Hayden, but when Hayden misinterprets a text he sees on Amos's phone, he runs away, determined not to be cheated on again. But Amos isn't taking no for an answer, and after making a bet with Hayden that his chili will win the cook-off, Amos realizes too late that if he loses, any chance he has with Hayden will be lost as well.

I really enjoyed this story. Yes, the premise was a bit far-fetched, and the fact that Hayden could lose it so quickly over a text that could've been easily explained away had he just asked the right questions seems like a pretty thin plot point to build a story on, but, in the end, that really didn't matter. What stood out in the story was the incredible chemistry between Hayden and Amos, and the fact that these two were so incredibly likable. Playing with Fire is a quintessential short story, giving you just enough to make you feel like you really have come to know the main characters in such an incredibly short time. This was by far my favorite in the anthology. **Rating: 5 stars**

### **Resuscitating Love by Devon Rhodes**

Hill and David had only been married one month shy of a year, but were partners for far longer. While David's practice as a cardiologist had finally settled into a routine, Hill's responsibilities at running the rodeo event of the year had only increased. In fact, Hill seems to spend less and less time concentrating on David and their relationship, and more time working in his office. When Hill once more forgets an important anniversary date, David finally lets loose with all his frustrations over how Hill has seemed to stop trying in their marriage. Even then, Hill refuses to admit that he may, in fact, have put work before the man he claims to love. It will take the rodeo itself to shake Hill up and to help him realize that he better make some changes before it's too late.

Once again, I was impressed by what seemed like such in-depth characters. They just came to life inside such a short story. David and Hill were a convincing couple who were obviously struggling to keep the magic in their relationship. They had reached a point where both had been taking one another for granted for far too long. I was impressed by the way I was immediately drawn into their story and invested in their relationship. Resuscitating Love is a great example of how strong a story can be when well written and fast-paced. **Rating: 4.5 stars**

Reviewed by Sammy for The Novel Approach Reviews

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