

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



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FALLING AWAY

Lisa Henry

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

FALLING AWAY

By Lisa Henry

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

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Photo Description

A young guy lies cuffed to a table. Exposed, debauched... and completely vulnerable.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Completely debauched, wrecked—he's floating now, but tomorrow the shame will come. Tomorrow he'll be disgusted all over again at what he's done. What he's allowed to be done to him. More than that... what he's begged for.

And the worst part? He's so stupid in love with the man he just keeps coming back for more. Because of this moment. This one, right here, when he can believe that he's loved in return, even if it is only for the night.

See, it's not the acts they engage in that shame him. It's not the bondage or the submission or the mind-blowing sex—he finds his strength there. It's his weakness for the man himself that's destroying him. Because tomorrow he'll be gone again.

He can't go on like this. He tells himself that every time, swears this time will be the last. He needs for there to be a tomorrow, and a next day, and a next day—for them, together. Not just another tomorrow of loss and heartache and picking up the pieces.

But he can't tell him that... can he?

Sincerely,

Kim

Story Info

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Dedication

To Kim, for the fantastic prompt, and for J.A. and Kaje for being awesome beta readers!

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Cuffs weren't a commitment.

Not to anything except the moment.

What Jason felt when Ben put them on him—wholeness, quietness, *hope*; like he'd been somewhere else for a really long time but now he was home for good—Ben never actually promised him that. Ben never promised more than a night here and there, and Jason knew that. Knew that it was his fault it meant more, that it was all tangled up in his mind like a lump of knotted, old fishing line, and he couldn't separate the strands. The things that fed his body and the things that fed his heart weren't supposed to get all twisted up together like that.

He *knew* this, but the pressure of the cuffs on his wrists told him differently. His pulse pounded against the leather, slick with his sweat, and whispered heresies that traveled over him like gooseflesh: *You're home, you're loved, you're his.*

“Please,” he whispered. “Please, Ben.”

No other words at this point, not ever. Just *please*. Just *Ben*. Over and over until it became like a mantra. A prayer.

Ben leaned over the table and placed his hand on Jason's chest. Splayed his fingers.

Jason arched his back into the contact.

Nobody had ever known every inch of Jason's body the way that Ben did. No other partner had ever taken his time the way that Ben did, tracing his fingers, his lips, over Jason's skin. Mapping every part of him by touch: the dip of his sternum, the soft, golden hairs on his abdomen, the veins snaking over the taut musculature of his extended arms. That was what he couldn't explain to anyone: that those moments when he had all of Ben's attention, all

of his concentration, made him feel like the centre of the universe. Jason wasn't sure he understood it himself. He only knew that his fingers followed the paths that Ben's had taken for days after, keeping the memory of that touch alive for as long as he could.

“Ben, please.”

“Not yet.” Ben leaned close and pressed his lips to Jason's ear. “Real soon though, okay?”

Jason closed his eyes and nodded as Ben moved away. Shifted his legs when Ben's touch coaxed them gently apart. Lifted his knees.

The first time, he'd hated this. This *exposure*. The awful, terrible moment when Ben was just staring at his cock and balls, at his hole, when he might suddenly *laugh*. Ben hadn't laughed, not that first time and not now, but Jason could never quite shake that worried voice in his head: *But what if he does?* Sick anticipation curled in his stomach. Jason clenched his fingers into fists, and tried not to squirm. Tried to remember that he trusted Ben. That Ben had earned that.

“Please.”

He was desperate for Ben to touch him again, because if he was touching then it somehow made his gaze less stark. It somehow made Jason less naked.

“I love it when you beg,” Ben murmured, and at last, finally, reached down.

Just the ghost of a touch, featherlight, a single finger across his exposed hole, but it was almost too much. Jason jerked, the cuffs tugging, his cock hardening and curving up toward his abdomen. “*Ben!*”

Ben's low laugh was full of pleasure. “You're so hot for this, aren't you?”
For you.

“Please, Ben.”

Ben slid his hand along Jason's abdomen, skirting his cock. “You want to try the clamps tonight, Jase?”

Jason moaned his assent. Anything. Anything that Ben asked.

“Put your legs down for a bit.”

Jason obeyed, the muscles in his thighs easing. He bit his lip as Ben rolled his left nipple between thumb and forefinger. Sucked in a deep breath as the chain slid across his chest.

Fuck. His eyes flashed open as Ben snapped the first clamp on. Every muscle tightened as he rode the sudden sting of it, his back arching off the table. His breath shuddered out of him.

Ben leaned down and dragged his thumb across his bottom lip. “You like that?”

“*Mmm.*” Jason unclenched his fists as the sharp pain settled into a familiar dull throb. He read the question in Ben’s face and nodded for the next clamp.

Ben attached it.

Jason bucked and twisted, a cry caught in his throat. He pulled on the cuffs.

“Okay?” Ben rubbed his stomach, soothing him as the pain ebbed away.

Jason remembered how to breathe. “I’m okay.”

“You look good like this,” Ben said. He leaned down and brushed his lips against Jason’s forehead, a tender gesture that made Jason ache in a new way. “You want me inside you?”

“Please,” Jason murmured. “God, please.”

Ben ran a hand through Jason’s hair. “So hot.”

Jason stilled, the clamps biting with every breath. His cock was still hard, leaking pre-cum all over his abdomen. He was so ready for this, so needy. Ben moved to the end of the table, running a hand down Jason’s leg. Jason shivered.

“Legs up again, Jase.”

Jason raised them.

“You ready for me?”

“Yes, please.”

Ben climbed up onto the table, into the space that Jason had made for him. Jason gazed down at him, at the hard planes of his body, at the heat in his dark eyes, and at his dark, erect cock. Ben took a condom and sheathed himself, squeezed some lube into his palm, and pumped his cock with his fist a few times. It shone, slick with lube, and Jason squirmed.

Ben shuffled forward on his knees, taking Jason’s legs and pushing them back. Curving Jason’s spine, tilting his hips up and then taking Jason’s weight on his thighs. Ben’s hot, heavy cock brushed against Jason’s balls, and Jason shivered and tugged at his cuffs.

Jesus. Ben’s fingers. Touching him inside. Jason dropped his head back on the table.

“Don’t close your eyes.”

I won’t.

Ben could ask him anything in this place. There was nothing Jason wouldn’t do. That realization was terrifying, exhilarating. He could spiral out of control, he could fall, except that Ben was there, always there, his voice and his touch anchoring Jason.

Fuck.

Jason moaned at the sting of penetration.

Ben’s eyes were dark. There was a crease like a frown between his brows. Holding himself back, going so fucking slowly, because this was how they both liked it. When Ben pushed Jason to the edge and held him there.

Time didn’t exist here. Seconds lasted a lifetime.

“Please, Ben,” Jason moaned. “Please fuck me.”

A smile broke Ben’s frown. “Yeah?”

Jason clenched his fists, digging his blunt nails into the fleshy parts of his hands. The sting wasn't enough. Not in his hands, not in his nipples, not in his ass. He needed more. "Fuck, hurry, please!"

Ben shifted, raising himself up. He hooked his elbows under Jason's knees and began to thrust. Jason moaned.

God. The cuffs, the clamps, Ben's cock inside him. He'd come. Any second now and he'd come, from that alone. His balls were already drawn tight, had been since Ben had touched him.

Jason bit his lip and fixed his gaze on Ben. Ben's eyes, the frown that was back. The muscles cording in his arms. His abs shifting as he thrust. His olive skin gleaming with sweat. Driving Jason closer and closer to that edge.

The coil of heat in Jason spiraled higher and higher, tighter and tighter.

Ben released Jason's left leg, and reached for the chain that linked the clamps.

"Come with me, Jase," Ben gasped, his dark hair falling in his eyes. "Come on!"

He ripped the clamps off.

Pain tore through Jason. Pleasure too. Both ramped up so high that he couldn't tell the difference. Too much and too fast for his brain to pick the signals apart. A wall of sensation.

Jason came, crying out. He arched his body toward Ben's, falling away from everything at the same time as Ben fell forward against him, their bodies shaking and trembling together.

Ben panted against Jason's throat. "Fuck. So good, Jase. So fucking hot."

Jason floated, his eyes fluttering closed at last.

Ben's lips brushed his, featherlight.

You're home. You're loved. You're his.

In that moment it was perfect.

In that moment Jason was complete.

Then Ben reached up matter-of-factly to unbuckle the cuffs, and the moment shattered.

His world did, too.

Every time that Ben shattered him, Jason wondered if he'd managed to pick up all the pieces again. Every time, he felt like maybe he'd missed one or two. That sooner or later he wouldn't have enough to put himself back together again.

His fingers were still trembling when he fastened his jeans and pulled his shirt on.

"See you next week?" Ben took a bottle of water from his night table, unscrewed the cap and took a swig.

"Okay, sure." Jason jammed his trainers on his feet. He didn't even wait to lace them properly, just shoved the ends down inside the shoes and headed for the door. Ben's voice stopped him.

"Jason?"

"Yeah?" He turned, swallowing down his irrational hope.

Maybe this time Ben would ask him to stay...

Maybe just this once

"You were great tonight." Ben said.

"Thanks," Jason managed. "You too."

Ben's answering smile, full of genuine delight—full of empty promise—was almost too much to bear.

Jason lost himself in the city; in the lights, the sounds, the people. Everything jarred. Greasy fast-food smells and exhaust fumes washed over his skin, stuck to it. He lost himself and he lost Ben too, by degrees. Jason wrapped himself in the smoke from a stranger's cigarette, the stench of beer and vomit outside a club, and of a dropped hot dog on the footpath smeared

into mush. The world stripped away the scent of Ben until there was nothing left. A woman's shriek of laughter stole Jason's memory of their silence, their breath, their hearts beating in counterpoint.

He stumbled once—his unlaced trainers almost bringing him down—and spun when someone said, “You right, mate?”

Jason mumbled something, like the drunk he appeared to be, and hurried on his way.

He could still feel that featherlight kiss, still see that smile. Those tiny touches of genuine affection from Ben that he ached for, and afterwards he hated. He wanted to fling it all back in Ben's face somehow. *What do you want? What does this mean? Tell me. Please just tell me.*

And knowing that he was too much of a coward to ask.

Like some sort of stupid, cheesy game show in his head.

Well, Jason, you've won The Best Sex of Your Life. You can go home with that, or you can risk it all on our final round: What's Ben Really Thinking? What's your decision, Jason?

Jason snorted.

At Fortitude Valley Station he waited for the last train. He eyed the other people on the platform, then looked away.

Counted down the minutes by circling his left wrist with the fingers of his right hand. Pressing, releasing, then pressing harder. He closed his eyes to try and recapture the feel of the cuffs, but it wasn't the same. It was Ben he needed, not the sense-memory of him.

When the train came, Jason sat in the middle row of seats in the middle carriage and let the rhythm lull him. It worked so well he missed his connection at Central. He caught up with it at Roma Street, half running, half hobbling in his unlaced trainers, to make it to the platform on time.

Played some stupid game on his phone, all the way to Keperra, just to keep awake.

“You *dirty whore!*”

Jason flinched. The screen door swung shut behind him and rattled in the frame.

Dylan looked up from his laptop. “Oh, hey, you’re home. Check this out, it’s some kinky shit!”

Sharing a house with his little brother while they were both at university was a trial.

“I don’t want to look at your straight porn, Dyl,” he said, looking around the small living room. The floor was covered in games’ controllers, beer bottles, and pizza boxes.

“Did your mates come over tonight?”

“Yeah.” Dylan’s gaze was fixed on the screen again. “Holy fuck! Clothespins, *really?* This chick’s tits look like porcupines!” He spun the laptop around.

Jason ignored it, and dumped his wallet and keys on the table. “Clean up. Mum and Dad are coming up tomorrow.”

“So?”

“So it’s their house,” Jason reminded him. “Their investment property, and you’re turning it into a fucking rats’ nest.”

Dylan made a face. “What’s up your arse?” Then he laughed. “Sorry, Jase.”

“And I can smell the pot,” Jason said. “Fuck’s sake, Dylan, you’re studying law!”

“So?”

“So you’ll never get a job if you get arrested, you tool.”

Dylan shrugged. “Eh. First offence, probably no conviction recorded.”

“Just...” Jason rubbed his forehead. “Just spray some air freshener around or something before Mum and Dad get here, okay?”

Dylan closed his laptop. “You all right?”

“Yeah.” Jason moved into the kitchen, separated from the living area by a breakfast bar, and dug around in the top drawer for an aspirin. He ached, and he knew from experience that if he didn’t take something now then in the morning he’d be sore all day. He found the blister pack, popped two pills free, and swallowed them down with a glass of water from the tap.

Dylan laughed. “Ouch! Fuck, bitch, *really?* That *cannot* be right. Hey, Jase, come and look at this. Do you reckon it’s photoshopped?”

“I don’t want to look at your porn,” Jason told him again.

“You sure? She’s moved on from clothespins to bulldog clips.” Dylan roared with laughter. “Holy fuck!”

Jason frowned, and turned the glass up in the dish rack.

You don’t get it.

It’s not about how it looks; it’s about how it feels. When your blood flows back, and it hurts and hurts and hurts, builds on itself over and over, and takes you someplace you’ve never been before. When the only thing you can hear is his voice.

“I’ve got you, Jase. Good boy. So good.”

When it hurts so much you don’t think you can take it anymore. When it hurts so much it turns into something else entirely, and the only thing you can do is come. Hard.

Jason wondered if he should have been more ashamed of that, but he wasn’t. After the first time, maybe, but he’d been too shell-shocked to process it in the beginning. And then the need he hadn’t even known was inside him had already overtaken that part of his mind that told him it wasn’t right. Wasn’t *normal*. That it was something to be laughed at by people like Dylan, who couldn’t see past it.

But it wasn’t the things they did—the things Jason had *begged* for—that ashamed him. It wasn’t the need for bondage, or pain, or submission that frightened him; it was the need for Ben. That was what left him exposed, what

left him wondering who he'd become and hating himself the next day. Because Ben hadn't promised him anything, not really.

It'll blow your mind, he'd said. Nothing about what it would do to his heart.

And there it was. *Fuck*. His *heart*? He was worse than a lovesick teenager.

"I'm going to bed," he said to Dylan. "This place had better be clean by the morning."

"Or what?" Dylan asked.

Jason rolled his eyes. "Or I'll show Mum your browser history."

"Evil fucker," Dylan said, with no rancor in his tone. "I'll do it."

Jason raised his eyebrows.

"I *promise*, okay?" Dylan said. "Just as soon as I'm finished here."

Which meant Jason would end up doing it, like always.

He headed to the bathroom, stripped off his clothes, and stepped into the shower. He made it as hot as he could stand. The water stung, but it loosened his aching muscles. Jason rubbed his wrists, hoping they wouldn't bruise. The cuffs had been thick... but imagine trying to explain that away to his parents. Or to Dylan.

He bowed his head, the water running off his eyelashes, his nose, his lips.

So fucking tired.

What would it be like if he didn't have to go home after? If, instead of walking to the station and then fighting sleep on the train, he could just fall into bed with Ben? Wake up the next morning curled under that thick comforter, with Ben beside him. Morning breath and bedhead. Starting the day together, instead of always leaving the night before.

Jason knocked his head gently against the tiled shower wall.

That was the one fantasy he wasn't allowed. The one that Ben couldn't fulfill. The crazy one. Not the one with chains and clamps and cuffs, but the one with... everyday things.

“I don’t do relationships,” Ben had told him the first night they’d met.
“Are you cool with that?”

“Yeah, that’s cool.”

Stupid stupid stupid.

It hadn’t been a lie at the time. But now it was, five months down the track.

Things changed. People changed. Jason had, because Ben had been the one to change him. He’d never known it could be like that. Never before found that place where sex was something more, something larger than the act. Where it became about trust, and openness, and belonging. It wasn’t just the ritual—the silence, the kneeling, the waiting for Ben’s voice and his touch—and it wasn’t just the toys. It was everything. Jason let Ben lay him bare, strip everything away, and he’d never done that before, not with anyone.

So much more than fucking. So much more than playing. So much more than some chick with clothespins bristling from her double D implants.

Every Friday he offered up his shame, his fear, his need, and Ben took them, like a holy confessor.

Jason closed his eyes as the water beat down on him.

So much more, but what if he was the only one who felt it?

The week dragged.

Jason didn’t know when the world had flipped; when those hours with Ben had stopped being the fantastical part, and had become the reality. It was everything else that slipped away now, strange and dreamlike. His studies, his job, the house, his parents, his friends. They were the things he couldn’t make sense of anymore. They had become unreal, *unnecessary*. Jason was sleepwalking through his own life, just counting off the hours, just waiting for Ben to wake him again.

He hated it.

He had never felt so—not miserable, but *adrift*—in all his life. When he was with Ben, when Ben’s gaze was fixed on him and Ben’s voice was telling him exactly what to do in that low pitch that made him hard just by thinking about it, he was complete. He knew who he was in those moments. He knew with utter certainty: he was *Ben’s*.

Without Ben: *adrift*.

Ben had become his lifeline in a black, wind-whipped ocean. Ben was the quiet in the eye of the storm. But Jason could never hold on to him—Ben wouldn’t allow that—and when he was cast *adrift* again, dumped into the next trough, falling away, he discovered that he was drowning.

Jason had never felt like this with anyone before. Thought it was bullshit the way his sister Amy, still in high school, got hung up over boys; the way she lived and died waiting for every text message, the way she overthought every abbreviation and smiley face, and hunted for every nuance in a medium so brief there was nowhere for nuance to hide.

And now Jason was doing it.

See u Friday? he sent to Ben on Wednesday morning.

I have a work thing. Don’t know if I can get out of it. Text you later in the week.

Jason read that and knew it was over. Knew that Ben was laying the groundwork for an excuse.

Then he read it again, and knew that Ben would try to make it. Understood that Ben was telling him that he would try to get out of his work thing, that Jason rated higher than work.

He wavered between the two for hours, never landing on one long enough to find his balance. Always falling away.

Miss u, he typed out, but didn’t send it.

Want u, he typed out, but didn’t send it.

Ok, he sent back, and wondered stupidly if Ben would try and discern any hidden meaning in those two tiny letters.

He wouldn't. Of course he wouldn't, because this wasn't a relationship. Ben didn't do those. This was a hook up.

He reread the text message: *I have a work thing.*

Jason felt the same prickle of unease he always did when Ben mentioned his work. Ben had influence in circles that Jason couldn't even begin to understand. What could he possibly see in a university student who lived in the suburbs and worked part time in a fast-food joint? And it wasn't like Jason would be in the same league even after graduation. He'd be a high school teacher, still paying off his used 2009 Mazda way into his thirties.

It worried Jason that he knew very little about Ben. And what he did know was hardly enough to convince him that they had anything in common at all. Sometimes, when Jason was flipping burgers, he tried to imagine what Ben was doing at the same moment. Chairing some departmental committee? Drafting government policy? Going to meetings with ministers and directors? Thinking of Jason?

No, not likely.

"My job is boring, really," Ben had laughed when Jason asked. *"How's uni going?"*

But he couldn't really want to know all of that. That Jason was doing his prac at Kelvin Grove, and his supervising teacher was really good, but Jason was worried that he couldn't control the classroom. Terrified, actually. That standing up in front of thirty kids who were all looking for a way to get the student teacher to snap was *awful*.

"Hey, sir!" one of the kids had said. *"Hey, I know you. You work at McDonalds!"*

And after that it was all *Hey, McTeacher! Can I get fries with that?*

And Marlene had said he was doing well, but she'd said it with such an encouraging smile that Jason knew she thought he wouldn't last a day on his own. Which wouldn't even be an issue if he fucked up his exams at the end of the year and couldn't get a job teaching anyway. Which was another thing he was terrified about.

Ben wouldn't get that. How could he?

Ben was clever, and confident and stylish, and everything that Jason wasn't. Jason couldn't shake the idea that, even if Ben did do relationships, that he wouldn't do them with someone like Jason.

Jason had never had a real, long-term relationship—three months was the record, and it had never been so *intense*, the way it was with Ben. That's all he was doing. Mistaking that intensity for something that didn't translate outside of the bedroom. That couldn't, probably, because something that intense would burn itself out in a flash if you opened it up to the world, wouldn't it?

And anyway, Ben didn't do relationships.

They connected when they fucked, at least Jason thought they did, and that was all they had, probably. It was just a casual thing, and Jason wished he could be casual about it. Not so desperately pathetic that he had no hope of hiding it.

"It's not like you to get so hung up on some dickhead," Dylan told Jason on Wednesday night, pointing his fork at him accusingly.

"He's not a dickhead."

"Ha! I knew it was a guy!"

"Shut up."

"You're fucked up, Jase," Dylan said, gesturing with his fork. A spiral of pasta fell off it and landed on the table with a splat. "This guy, he's got you all fucked up."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Jason said, but a panicked spark flared inside him. What if Dylan was right?

Shit.

Dylan *was* right. His irresponsible little brother, who last month wore the same pair of underpants for four days straight because he didn't feel like washing them, was right. And somewhere in hell they were complaining about the sudden chill.

“I’ll sort it out,” Jason said.

“You better,” Dylan said. “You’re supposed to be the sensible one, remember?”

Jason smiled bitterly at that.

Yeah, he was the sensible one.

“I’ll sort it out,” he repeated, his stomach clenching.

Ben liked him. It should have been enough. It had been, for a while, and Jason felt greedy, ungrateful, *unworthy* for wanting more. But every word of praise Ben gave him, every smile, broke something inside Jason. Something strange and intangible, but something Jason was sure couldn’t keep breaking. Not week after week. Not forever.

It was his hope, he thought. It demanded more. A quick death maybe, instead of these thousand cuts.

He’d thought that offering up his wrists to the cuffs had been the bravest thing he’d ever done, the bravest thing that Ben had asked of him. And then the clamps, and then the toys, and then the paddle... but all of that was nothing compared to what he had to do now.

He’d thought there was no part of him that Ben hadn’t laid bare, but there was his hope. There was his heart.

Ben texted him later that night: *See you Friday.*

Friday then.

He’d sort it out on Friday.

Ben was late. Jason sat in the foyer of Ben’s apartment building, and checked the time on his phone. Ten past eight. He thought about taking the elevator up to Ben’s floor, but that seemed pathetic somehow, waiting at his door like an eager puppy. Better to sit here with his phone and scroll through the news sites, pretending to be interested in current affairs, and which team had won the football.

It was the footy that had brought him and Ben together, five months ago.

They'd met on Caxton Street, after the game, in that press of people walking from the stadium, over the hill and into the city centre. Thousands of people streaming through the closed street, laughing, cheering, singing. That strange community made by shared experience, ephemeral, trickling away in tiny degrees as people slipped down narrower streets that fed off this one, carrying their laughter with them.

Jason had never seen the guy before, but they'd fallen into step together.

"Good game," the guy had said.

Jason had grinned at the guy's blue scarf. "Not for you."

The guy had laughed at that. "It was still a good game."

Ben had a place in the Valley.

Jason went with him.

That first time, Ben had bound Jason's wrists together with his blue football scarf and fucked him so hard he'd got carpet burn on his forearms and knees. The teasing sting of it had stayed with him for a week.

It'll blow your mind, Ben had said, and it was the truth.

Every time since, every time that Ben had introduced something else—clamps, a plug, the cuffs—a part of Jason had wondered if he was in over his head. And he was, of course, but it had nothing to do with the props and everything to do with the man wielding them.

The doors to the foyer rolled open, and a blast of warm air hit the cool inside. Jason looked up from his phone to see Ben, his tie loosened, his suit jacket folded over his arm, carrying his backpack by the straps.

That was one of the things he liked about Ben. That he wore suits for work because he had to, but still preferred a backpack over a briefcase.

"Hey." A smile lit up Ben's face. "Sorry I'm late. It turns out I couldn't get out of that work thing as quickly as I thought. I'm glad you waited."

"That's okay."

They walked to the elevators together. Jason's pulse was already racing. Just this proximity to Ben did it. The building need inside him. The anticipation. But for something else tonight.

"I smell like *hors d'oeuvres* and cheap white wine," Ben said, pulling Jason close as the elevator doors closed. "The fucking staples of the Press Gallery, but the minister says we must go along and play nice."

Jason heard the thud of Ben's dropped backpack on the floor of the elevator, and then Ben was pushing him up against the wall and kissing him.

Jason moaned into the kiss, rocking his hips against Ben, searching out the hardness of his cock through Ben's trousers and his jeans. Ben's mouth followed the line of Jason's jaw, his teeth nipping. His breath was hot on Jason's throat. "You like that?"

"Yeah," Jason said, hooking his fingers into Ben's belt loops. "Fuck yeah."

No.

No no no.

"Wait," he managed, his voice grating.

Ben pulled back, a quizzical smile on his face.

We need to talk.

Fuck, he couldn't say that. He was enough of a needy cliché as it was.

The elevator dinged, and the doors rolled open, saving Jason from coming up with something better for a minute or so more.

He followed Ben down the hallway, and stared at the carpet as Ben's keys rattled in the lock. Then Jason followed him inside, wanting so badly all the things that being with Ben in his apartment promised, but also wanting *more* this time. Needing more and, *fuck*, risking everything he already had. Knowing that he was about to do something monumentally stupid, knowing that he had to.

What they had was untenable. Unbearable.

Ben put his backpack on the kitchen bench. "Do you want a beer?"

“No, thanks.”

Ben opened the fridge and got one out for himself. He twisted the top off.
“Are you okay?”

Jason nodded sharply, and then shook his head.

Ben put his beer on the bench without drinking. “What’s up?”

Oh God.

“I know we’re not a *thing*,” Jason said, the knot in his gut worsening. “An item, or anything, I mean. I know you said we wouldn’t be, so that’s why I want to... I want to stop.”

“You want to stop?” Ben asked, raising his brows. “You want to stop because we’re not a *thing*? Seriously?”

Jason sucked in a shaky breath. “I know, yeah. But what we do, I want more.”

The blood roared in his skull.

“I can give you more, Jase,” Ben said coolly.

“Not more ways to fuck,” Jason said, his face burning. “*More.*”

“You’re not making sense.”

“More,” Jason said, his throat aching. “Like, um, like sometimes we could go out to eat, or see a movie, or I could stay over or something.”

Fuck. That sounded even more pathetic out loud than it had in his head.

Ben frowned. “You want to stay over?”

“No. I want you to *want* me to stay over.” Jason shoved his shaking hands in his pockets. “Because the stuff we do, nobody’s ever done that for me before. I just want it to last longer.”

He was so sick of coming down on the train, when he could have been coming down in Ben’s arms instead. So sick of being given so much, but craving more. So sick of hiding how he felt for fear of losing it. He drew a

deep breath, desperate to explain. “I love how you make me feel, Ben. I love what we do together. I love—”

Jason clamped his mouth shut.

You.

He didn’t have to say it. The look of horrified surprise on Ben’s face told Jason that he’d said more than enough.

Fuck fuck fuck.

“Sorry.” Jason wrenched his hands out of his pockets and headed for the door. Almost shoulder-charged Ben to get past him. “Fuck, I’m so sorry.”

“Jason...”

Jason didn’t wait to hear it.

Didn’t want to hear what Ben was going to say next, not when he’d said Jason’s name in that tone. That patient, gentle tone that wouldn’t have been out of place explaining to a naive child how the world worked. That they couldn’t have that puppy. That Santa wasn’t real. That this dream here—see it?—I’m just gonna step on that now for your own good.

Jason bolted.

He didn’t even wait for the elevator. He hit the fire stairs instead, his trainers squeaking on the concrete, his footsteps echoing in the stairwell, his breath rasping. He scrubbed at his face, and had his humiliating tears more or less under control by the time he made it to the lobby.

“Dude,” said Dylan when Jason walked through the door. “You look like shit warmed up. What happened?”

Jason shook his head.

Dylan got that same look on his face he had when Jason had come off his bike when they were kids. The one right before he’d picked his older brother up off the gravel and helped him limp all the way home. The stubborn *I’ve-*

got-you look. It was the last thing Jason wanted tonight. He was already so close to coming undone.

“What happened?” Dylan asked again, his voice low.

“I’m okay, Dyl. Leave it.”

“Sit down,” Dylan said. “You look like you need a beer.”

“I’m not in the mood.”

“Sit down, Jase.”

Jason sighed and sat on the couch.

One beer became two, became three, and Jason found himself telling Dylan more than he’d intended. About meeting Ben five months ago, and going home with him. And going back again every Friday night.

“So you were fuck buddies?” The look on Dylan’s face was one of confusion, and Jason didn’t need to ask him what he was confused about. *Fuck buddies... sweet! So what’s the problem here?*

“More than that,” Jason said. “Well, I thought more, you know?”

“Oh,” Dylan said, realization dawning.

“Yeah,” Jason said.

“You gave him an ultimatum,” Dylan said. “Rookie error, bro.”

“I didn’t even get as far as an ultimatum,” Jason admitted. “I sort of told him how I felt instead.”

“Jase,” Dylan said. “Really? *Really?*”

Jason smiled despite himself. “Yeah.”

“You’re such a girl,” Dylan told him, snorting as Jason elbowed him in the ribs. “But really, this guy...this guy is a *dick*, and you can do better.”

“I dunno. I’m making him sound bad. He never said...” Jason shook his head. “He never promised...” He trailed off.

“I don’t do relationships. Are you cool with that?”

“Yeah, that’s cool.”

It was his own fault, for thinking there was more. For wanting more. For building all his stupid hopes on nothing.

“I’m an idiot,” he said.

“You’re a good guy, bro.” Dylan enveloped him in a sweaty, smelly hug. “And you can do better.”

“Thanks Dyl,” Jason said into Dylan’s armpit. He extracted himself carefully. “For just listening and stuff. I’m wrecked though. I’m gonna go to bed.”

“Okay.” Dylan reached for his game controller. “I’ll be here for a while if you want anything.”

For the first time Jason looked at the TV screen. “You paused *Assassin’s Creed* for me? Are you sure *you* feel okay?”

“Dickhead,” Dylan said warmly. “Go to bed.”

Jason headed for his bedroom.

Three beers had him buzzing, and should have helped him sleep. Should have dulled the sting of his own stupidity. Should have stopped his brain from freeze-framing on that horrified look on Ben’s face, but it didn’t.

He fell into an uneasy sleep.

Dreamed he was swimming in a black ocean. Storm-tossed. And suddenly not swimming at all. Suddenly floundering. His hands grasping desperately for a life rope that wasn’t there. He was drowning.

“Jase!” Dylan shook him by the shoulder. “Jase, wake up!”

Jason frowned up at him in the darkness. Dylan’s eyes were as big as an owl’s. “What?”

“There’s some guy at the door,” Dylan said.

“What?” Jason squinted at the clock. “It’s one in the morning.”

“He wants to talk to you.”

“Who does?”

“The guy,” Dylan said. “The guy at the door.”

Jason, still half asleep, let Dylan drag him outside into the lounge room.

And there was Ben, standing at the open front door. Still wearing his suit pants and his perfectly tailored shirt. Still looking immaculate despite the hour.

Jason hitched up his old track pants and raked his fingers through his hair. “What—what are you doing here?”

Dylan, still owl-eyed, backed off.

Ben stepped inside.

“I’m not some emotionally retarded fuckup,” he said.

Jason blinked at him. “You’re not?”

“There’s no cheating prick of an ex who dumped me and broke my heart,” Ben said. “Just in case you’re wondering.”

“Okay,” Jason said warily.

“I don’t do relationships because I don’t have the time,” Ben said, sighing. “I work long hours, and when I get home I don’t want to put in the fucking effort, you know?”

Oh, so you’re not an emotionally retarded fuckup, you just don’t have the time?

He had no right to be angry, not when Ben had never made him any promises. It was Jason who had changed, not Ben.

Jason nodded, afraid to speak, afraid to *accuse* when he had no grounds for it.

“It’s a shit excuse. I know it is. And wasn’t an issue because I never really met anyone worth making the effort for,” Ben said. He wrinkled his nose. “And then you came along.”

“Me? What?” Jason stared at him.

Ben nodded. “When you ran out tonight, I was pissed off. At you, for springing that on me, and at me for letting it get to that stage.” He shrugged. “And then I took my head out of my arse and realized I didn’t want that to be the last time I saw you.”

Something flared inside Jason. It felt a little like hope, but he didn’t trust it. Not yet. “You didn’t?”

Ben nodded. “And maybe it would be fun to catch a movie, or eat out once in a while. And I do want you to stay over at my place. I want to... I want to wake up with you beside me.”

Jason’s breath caught in his throat. His heart pounded.

“I want more too,” Ben said. “More of you.”

Of all the times that Ben had taken Jason to the edge, this was the most exhilarating. This was the time that threatened to leave him breathless, falling into an unknown place. Without Ben guiding him, reassuring him, because this time, Jason knew, they’d both be falling away.

“Jase?” Ben asked, a worried frown and a dopey apologetic smile on his face at the same time. “Will you please go out with me?”

“Yeah,” Jason said, croaking out the word.

Ben’s frown vanished. His smile grew. He stepped forward and closed the distance between them. He reached out for Jason’s hand, tugged him close, and kissed him.

And they fell together.

THE END

Author Bio

Lisa lives in tropical North Queensland, Australia. She doesn't know why, because she hates the heat, but she suspects she's too lazy to move. She spends half her time slaving away as a government minion, and the other half plotting her escape.

She attended university at sixteen, not because she was a child prodigy or anything, but because of a mix-up between international school systems early in life. She studied History and English, neither of them very thoroughly.

She shares her house with a long-suffering partner, too many cats, a dog, a green tree frog that swims in the toilet, and as many possums as can break in every night. This is not how she imagined life as a grown-up.

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