

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

ONE WEEK

K. Mason

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

ONE WEEK

By K. Mason

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.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved worldwide.

This eBook may be distributed freely in its entirety courtesy of the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group*. This eBook may not be sold, manipulated or reproduced in any format without the express written permission of the author.

ONE WEEK, Copyright © 2013 K. Mason

Cover Design by Goodreads M/M Romance Group

This ebook is published by the *M/M Romance Group* and is not directly endorsed by or affiliated with Goodreads Inc.

ONE WEEK

By K. Mason

Photo Description

There are two men on a bed. One man lies on his back. His eyes are closed and one arm is held up over his head. The other man, who has a well-trimmed beard and a rosebud tattoo on his chest, leans over him, as though he is about to kiss him.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Please take inspiration from the song "[Flaws](#)" by Bastille. I hope it's okay to be so vague, but I would thoroughly enjoy a piece that embodies the heart of the song. Bonus points for any scenes involving dancing at a club or sports. Additionally, I would love to see some of these flaws perhaps being one of the characters denial, perhaps even involving the fact that he may have a girlfriend/wife when he feels attraction to the other? HFN/HEA preferred.

If any further clarification/suggestions are needed, please just ask! :)

(And here's to hoping I did this right! First time requesting.)

[Lyrics for the song Flaws are written of Dan Smith of Bastille]

Sincerely,

Samantha

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: infidelity (not *between* main characters), friends to lovers, gay for you, accountant, project manager, mutual masturbation

Wordcount: 17,151

Acknowledgement

I would like to offer a huge thank you to the members of the YA GLBT group on Goodreads for all their help, support and encouragement whilst writing this story, particularly Elci and Kat for beta reading for me.

ONE WEEK

By **K. Mason**

My eight-year-old, mud-splattered Ford Focus looked completely out of place as I parked amongst the pristine, top of the range Land Rovers and BMWs in front of the red brick office building. In worn jeans, T-shirt, and bright yellow high-vis jacket I felt very much the same way as I walked in the opposite direction to the 5:00 p.m. rush of professionally attired office workers who were heading out of the building into the warm sunlit evening. The immaculately dressed doorman gave me a polite nod and an amused look as he held the door open for me; the glass front of the building made the reception area feel like being in a goldfish bowl.

I headed towards the bank of lifts to the left of the main desk and hit the call button. My scruffy appearance gained one or two disapproving looks from those exiting the lift when it arrived.

“Lawyers,” I muttered under my breath as the doors closed behind me. It was a running joke that the law firm that occupied the first four floors of the building disapproved of us turning up to the office in our work wear. Although I, like the other project managers at the firm, worked mainly at the job sites and spent very little time in the office, it still annoyed them. Monday morning would, no doubt, bring another terse letter to my boss complaining of how unprofessional it was. The lift quickly rose to the fifth floor, where my employers, Anderson’s Architects, were based.

“Simon! Happy birthday!” A pair of arms were flung round my neck before I could step out the lift, the leather handbag she held in one hand clipping me on the back of my head.

“Hey, watch it, Amie! I haven’t got my hard hat on.” I laughed as I returned the hug briefly before she let me go and stepped back.

“What are you doing here? Why aren’t you getting ready?” she demanded.

“Getting ready for what?” I said with a slight shake of my head and what I hoped was a confused expression.

“Oh stop it, you know exactly what. You’re here to collect Nick?” she asked.

“Yeah, he’s stopping at mine tonight. Michelle is away visiting her parents this weekend, so it’s easier to go to my house to get ready and crash there afterwards rather than having to get a taxi to and from their house.”

“Well good luck dragging him away. When I stuck my head round his door to say I was going home he was giving someone a right bollocking about sticking to their budget. I don’t think he even noticed me.”

“That’s probably a good thing. If he’s really wound up about it he’d probably have made you stay and rework the figures.”

“Not a chance. I may be his assistant, but come five o’clock on a Friday he’s on his own. The table at Salvatore’s is booked for half past seven,” she said as she stepped past into the lift. “Don’t be late,” she warned as the doors shut between us.

The heavy steel toe-capped work boots I wore made my footsteps echo through the deserted open plan space as I headed towards the small office on the far side. The only other sounds were the background hum of the air conditioning and a single raised voice. Reaching the open office door I leant on the frame and waited.

“Thirty thousand pounds!” Nick paced up and down behind the desk as far as his headset would allow him to move, all the time his arms gesticulating wildly. “You call that a little over budget? Tell me, did you even look at the costs before you okayed the purchase?”

There was barely time for whoever was on the other end of the phone to answer before he started ranting again. I couldn’t conceal my smile. Whoever believed the stereotype that accountants were dull, boring, mild-mannered number crunchers had never met Nick.

“Fine, you go enjoy your weekend,” he snapped angrily. “I’ll just spend mine recalculating the entire budget, and whilst I am at it break the news to the client that their project has just leapt in cost.”

With that Nick ripped the headset off and flung it on the desk, his angry pacing coming to a sudden halt as he caught sight of me standing in the doorway.

“Why is it of the ten project manager’s we employ, you are the only one who can ever stay within budget?” he demanded.

“Quite possibly because I am the only one you’ve ever threatened to castrate with a rusty spoon if I should go over it.”

“Very true.” He nodded in agreement. “And never forget, it’s not just an empty threat.”

It was an old joke between us. I’d been working for the firm for three years as an assistant project manager when Nick first started as a trainee accountant. Although we’d spoken occasionally, the first time we’d worked together was when a large potential contract to convert a set of industrial buildings into modern apartments had been offered to the firm. We tendered for the contract on my plans and Nick’s budget. Six weeks of long hours arguing back and forth about the costs and what was needed had started a friendship that, despite our differences, five years later had only grown stronger.

He had made his infamous rusty spoon threat as we sat in the pub celebrating my promotion to project manager. In a round of congratulatory toasts, Nick had stood up and with a completely straight face told me what he intended to do to me if I ever went over the budget he’d set. The memory of the shocked silence from our colleagues that followed this announcement still made us laugh today.

“You finished?”

“Yeah, just let me switch off and get my stuff together.” He started to log out of his computer and gather the papers that were spread around the desk. “Looks like I’m going to be working this weekend!”

“Poor overworked thing,” I said with mock sincerity.

“Shut it, you, or I’ll make you help me with all this tomorrow.”

“You’d really let me near your budgets?” I raised my eyebrows. Nick was extremely territorial about his work.

“Not a chance. You can supply me with coffee and biscuits.” He finished sorting the papers into his briefcase, shut the lid, and clicked the locks shut. “Ready,” he continued, coming round the desk towards me.

My mouth went dry as I looked him up and down. The pale blue shirt under his navy Cerruti suit was tight enough to accentuate a set of defined pecs. The jacket, although unbuttoned at his narrow waist, hid an abdomen I knew to be marked out by just shy of a six pack, the slim hips led to long, well-muscled, legs. In the suit, he was as sexy as hell. In my mind though, I slowly removed the suit to reveal the body underneath.

“Si!” Nick waved his hand in front of my face. “Anybody home?”

“Yeah, sorry.” I shook my head slightly to clear the mental vision. “Miles away.”

I really had to stop thinking about him like this. Not only was Nick my best friend, he was also straight and had been in a relationship for as long as I’d known him. Anyway, even if he wasn’t straight, I wouldn’t want him to become a one-night stand, or a friend with benefits. As I didn’t do relationships, and that would be the best I could manage.

“Come on then.” He picked up the sports bag next to the office door and led the way out.

Thankfully, traffic wasn’t heavy and just thirty minutes later I pulled into the quiet, unadopted road where I lived. The car bounced over the uneven road surface as I drew up to park at the kerb in front of my mid-terraced house. On the low wall between my red painted front door and that of my neighbour, my large, occasionally grumpy, cat Roger paraded impatiently up and down.

As I unlocked the front door, Nick put out his hand to stroke Roger, only to withdraw it quickly as a large paw—claws extended—swiped at him.

“Evil critter,” Nick muttered under his breath. The cat, taking no notice, pushed his way in front of me as I opened the door and ran in the direction of his food bowl complaining loudly.

“The taxi is booked for seven,” I said over my shoulder as I followed the cat. “Do you want a drink or anything, or do you want to grab a shower first and get ready, I’ll jump in after you.”

“I wouldn’t say no to a beer if you’ve got one.” Nick dropped the bag on the bottom of the stairs and followed me through to the kitchen. “I need to unwind. This week has been one thing after another.” He removed his jacket and loosened his tie. Stretching his arms above his head, his shirt rode up, coming free from the waist of his trousers, and let me catch a glimpse of the smooth muscles of his stomach. My fingers itched to reach forward and touch.

Instead I turned to the fridge and dug out two bottles of Peroni. Stepping back from the fridge I found myself standing flush against Nick’s body, where he’d silently walked up behind me.

“Steady,” he laughed, putting his arms around me. I could feel the hard planes of his chest against my back. A hot flush crept up my neck to my face at his touch. What I really wanted to do was twist round in his arms and hold him, but I stepped quickly away.

“Sorry,” I muttered as I turned, holding out the bottles in front of me like a shield.

“No problem.” He smiled easily as he took one of the bottles from my hand. “Opener?”

“Top drawer.” I pointed across the kitchen before ducking down to another cupboard and fishing out the cat food.

I heard the bottle tops come off with a slight hiss of gas and my bottle being put on the table before I stood up.

“I’ll take mine up with me,” Nick said as he left the kitchen whilst I finished emptying the revolting, smelly pouch of cat food into Roger’s dish.

I heard him cross the landing above me, the boiler on the kitchen wall kicked on just seconds before I heard the first splatters of water hitting the bottom of the bath. Looking up, my imagination went into overdrive as I pictured Nick stripping off the rest of his work clothes in preparation for getting in the shower. I growled at myself and tried to force my thoughts elsewhere. Grabbing my own beer, I took a large mouthful of the cold liquid. Maybe a drink or two would take the edge off. It was either that or trying to pick someone up tonight for some relief.

“Shower’s free,” Nick yelled from upstairs as I finished my second beer. Placing the empty bottle into the recycling box I headed up to get ready.

At the top of the stairs I pushed open the door to my bedroom, pulling my T-shirt off over my head as I did.

“Nice!” Nick said unexpectedly from in front of me.

“What the hell?” I asked tossing the T-shirt into the laundry basket. “The guest room is the other side of the landing.”

“Yeah I know, but Roger’s in there.” My eyes wandered up and down his body. Little rivulets of water ran down from his wet hair and across his chest, before being absorbed by the towel that was wrapped loosely round his hips.

“Sorry?” I shook my head.

“Your cat, the stropky one, he’s in the guest room and he won’t share,” Nick said with a smirk. “Anyway, it’s not like I’ve got anything you haven’t seen before, we share a changing room at football every week.” With that he turned his back to me and opened the towel from around him, before lifting it to his shoulders to reveal his smooth, biteable arse.

I stood and stared at him, unable to move as the blood rushed south from my brain to my dick.

“So are you going to shower?” he asked, turning his head over his shoulder to look at me.

“Yes,” I snapped, turning on my heel and heading across the landing. Shutting the door behind me I leant heavily against it trying to catch my breath.

Stripping off my jeans and boxers was hampered by my hard-on. Leaving the discarded clothes in the corner of the bathroom, I stepped over the edge of the bath and under the soft spray of water from the shower. I let the hot water fall over my head and shoulders, trying to relieve the tension, but even after I had washed my hair I knew there was only one way that my cock was going to go down.

Squirting the shower gel into my palm I began to wash myself. Tracing the muscles in my arms and chest I imagined that it wasn't my own hand but Nick's that caressed my body. Moving my hands down, across my hip bones I knew where this was heading. Leaning forwards, my left hand braced against the cool tiles of the wall, I wrapped my soapy right hand around my cock and started to stroke. Gently at first, teasing the foreskin back and forth across the glans, twisting my wrist to rub around the corona. As my need for release increased so did the pressure I used, moving my hand up and down the entire shaft, squeezing and pulling as I went. Looking down I imagined Nick on his knees in front of me with his mouth wrapped round my straining cock as he sucked and licked along my length—his sparkling eyes looking back up at me through his long dark lashes. My breath came faster, my hips rocking back and forth as they followed the motion of my hand. My nuts drew up towards my body and I turned my head to my left, biting into the soft tissue under my arm to prevent me calling out as I came in short spurts that covered my right hand and splattered on the rim of the bathtub.

My knees trembled as I caught my breath in the aftermath of my climax. Removing the shower head I quickly washed any trace of my spend down the drain before finishing my shower and stepping out the bath. Pulling the bath towel from the rail I dried myself carefully before poking my head out the bathroom door.

“Nick?” I called, hoping the coast was clear for me to finish getting ready.

“You're safe, I'm downstairs.” I could hear the laughter in his voice.

I legged it across the landing in the nude, not daring to look down the stairwell in case Nick was looking up, and shut the bedroom door behind me. I laid out my clothes on the bed: black fitted jeans that I knew would draw attention to my backside, green Armani polo shirt that matched my eyes, and my favourite worn black denim jacket. My vintage Doc Martens boots would finish the outfit.

“Taxi’s here,” Nick shouted from downstairs as I finished running the styling wax through my hair.

Grabbing my jacket I headed to the front door where he was waiting. As I stepped into the front room the sight of him took my breath away. He was wearing skin-tight leather trousers the colour of rich cinnamon, a cream shirt hung loosely over the top, and a deep-chocolate-brown leather jacket finished the outfit. He looked totally edible, and a greater part of me wanted to stay home and peel him back out of those trousers.

“Will I do?” he asked, a quirky smile playing across his lips, his eyes alight as though he were dying to laugh.

“Yep.” I nodded, not really sure what else I dared say out loud.

“Bye Roger, have a good evening,” he called back over his shoulder as I followed him to the front door and down the path to the waiting taxi. A gentle breeze blew the scent of his aftershave in my direction, which didn’t help the battle I was having with my libido.

The taxi dropped us directly outside Salvatore’s. Pushing open the door of the restaurant we were assailed by a gust of warm air, scented with garlic, basil, and tomato. Most of the tables were already filled with diners enjoying the home-cooked Italian food the restaurant was renowned for.

“Good evening, table for two?” the hostess asked as we stood in the entrance.

“No, we’re joining another party. There should be a table booked in the name of Shaw,” Nick replied.

“Of course. This way.”

We followed as she wove her way through the tables towards the back of the restaurant. The other members of our party were already seated, leaving two empty chairs, side by side, with their backs to the rest of the diners.

“Finally!” Amie grinned at us. “We were about to send out a search party.”

“We’re only a couple of minutes late,” Nick replied as I pulled out one of the chairs and offered it to him. As he slid into the seat he patted my hand where it rested on the back. “Si’s fault, I’ve never known anyone take so long getting ready.”

Shucking off my jacket I draped it over the back of my own seat, before taking my place at the table.

“All lies. Don’t believe a word of it.” I shook my head as I replied, trying not to blush as I remembered why I’d taken longer than usual in the shower.

Aside from Amie, around the table were her boyfriend Jai, my sister Paula, her husband Mark, and my oldest friend James with his partner Harry. They had already started on a selection of antipasti, olives and breadsticks whilst they’d been waiting.

“Well you’re here now.” Mark picked up one of the open bottles of red wine from the table and offered it in our direction. Both Nick and I pushed our glasses towards him to be filled.

“So how does being thirty feel?” James asked with a smirk.

“You can tell me in ten days time,” I replied dryly, reaching for a breadstick before taking back my now full glass.

“Sadly true,” he conceded, as he lifted his own glass in mock salute. The ten days that separated us had turned into something of a joke, with him always finding the most insulting age-related card he possibly could for my birthday.

“Anyway, they say thirty is the new twenty,” Amie added cheerfully. Both James and I groaned.

“Oh God, I hope not,” James replied darkly.

“Well, it’s either that or admitting you’re old,” Jai added philosophically.

“I’m not old,” James protested with a sly glance at his partner. “I will never be old in our house.”

“Okay, rub it in,” Harry replied with a laugh. “Just because I’m officially the old man at the table. You can all sit around and moan about getting older, but it does have its good points. And I am sure the saying goes you’re only as old as the man you feel up.” He ran his hands over his partner’s shoulders. “See, I’m only twenty-nine now too.”

Our waitress returned to the table, handing round four overly large menus and reeling off a list of the evening’s specials. The table fell silent as we considered what we wanted. Nick leant towards me as we read from the same card, our shoulders brushing together, our heads almost together. His closeness distracted me completely. I scanned the menu but nothing was registering at all. Giving up trying to make a decision, I sat back and, without thinking about it, laid my right arm along the back of Nick’s chair.

I needed to focus. I couldn’t afford to let the feelings I had for him get out of hand. Picking up my glass and taking a deep swallow of the dark red wine, I met my sister’s eye across the table where she sat watching me, her head tilted to one side with a quizzical expression on her face.

“Are you ready to order?” the waitress asked as she returned to our table. Quickly we told her what we wanted and ordered a couple more bottles of the red wine.

“About ten minutes for your starters,” she advised before taking the menu cards from the table and heading away. Nick sat up and leant back in his chair, as he did I quickly dropped my arm down behind him. He turned with a slight frown as I did.

“Sorry,” I muttered.

“No problem, you could have left it there. I didn’t mind.”

I shrugged but didn't reply. I couldn't decide whether I was getting mixed messages from him or whether my own lust was making me see things that weren't there.

I tried to concentrate on the conversation around the table as we ate, but was constantly distracted by Nick sitting next to me. It didn't help that occasionally his leg would brush against mine, or our arms touch as we ate. The wine flowed throughout the meal, and by the end of the meal I felt warm and more than a little intoxicated.

"So, are we going on?" Nick asked as we began to split the bill.

"No, sorry, we've got to get back for the babysitter," Paula replied. At the same time Jai said, "I'm working tomorrow."

"What about you two?" Nick asked Harry and James.

"I'm afraid not; the old man here needs his sleep," James replied and then ducked out the way as Harry went to smack him on the arm.

"Looks like it's just us then, Si." Nick's look at me held a hint of challenge.

I wasn't sure if it was the look he gave me or the alcohol that made me take up the challenge.

"Fine by me. You up for going to Honey Trap night at Affinity?"

"What the hell is Honey Trap night?" Amie asked.

"Men only my dear," James replied in a totally camped up voice.

"Meat market," Harry added.

"We don't have to. We can just go grab a pint from The Tap before closing," I suggested.

"No, Affinity it is." Nick pushed his chair back from the table and picked up his jacket. "Just off to the bathroom first. Meet you at the door."

As I put on my own jacket, I watched him head across the room, the bottom of his shirt swinging just above his leather-clad arse.

We headed towards the entrance and Paula tucked her arm through mine, pulling me away from the others as we reached the pavement.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Nick.”

“Nothing, I’m not doing anything with Nick.”

“Simon.” Her tone was exactly the same as our mother used to use when we were kids.

“Sis, leave it. There’s nothing going on. He’s straight. He’s with Michelle. Hell, he might as well be married to her. We’re just friends, enjoying a bit of banter and a night out.”

“Really?” She raised an eyebrow as she asked.

“Yes, really.”

“Just be careful little brother. I’m not so sure he sees things the same way,” she cautioned.

“I’m a big boy now, Paula. This isn’t the playground. I don’t need my big sister to look after me.”

“Oh Si, I will always look after you, whether you need me to or not.” She hugged me and stepped away as the others came to join us. Tucking her arm through her husband’s she continued, “We’ll see you tomorrow at Mum’s for lunch.”

I nodded and shook Mark’s hand. James and Harry both hugged me before heading into their waiting taxi, leaving Jai and I together whilst we waited for Nick and Amie, who had gone to fetch her coat.

“Ready?” Nick said as he reached us.

“Have fun boys.” Amie grinned mischievously and then winked. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” Both of us laughed at that. Jai took Amie’s hand in his and asked, “Does that go for me too?”

“Yes, you can take me home and ravish me,” Amie told him as she started to pull him towards the taxi rank.

Nick and I walked down the cobbled side street towards Affinity, neither of us speaking. Paula’s caution played in my mind and all of a sudden I wasn’t sure this was a good idea.

“Are you sure you want to go clubbing?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said definitely. “I don’t get a chance much; it’s not Michelle’s thing, and well, I’d really like to.” He laid a hand on my arm as he spoke.

“Okay.”

“Good.” He smiled as he tucked his arm through mine and pulled me towards the entrance of the club.

Two bouncers stood on either side of the doorway. They made no move to stop us as we passed them.

“I guess we look too old to ask for ID,” I said, somewhat ruefully.

“Well, you are thirty, are you sure you aren’t too old to be clubbing?”

“Wait till we get on the dance floor, then I’ll show you who’s too old for clubbing.”

I pulled my wallet, phone, and door key out of my jacket pocket and tucked them, with some difficulty, into the pocket of my jeans before handing the jacket through the hatch to the cloakroom. Nick’s leather jacket followed suit, then we headed through the double doors into the main part of the club.

Inside it was both hot and noisy. There wasn’t a seat to be had among the dimly lit booths that surrounded the packed dance floor. I could feel the soles of my boots sticking to the floor as we threaded our way through the crowd of clubbers towards the bar. To make himself heard, Nick stood on the metal rail that ran around the base of the bar and leant forward over the counter top. Standing behind him, my eyes were drawn to his leather-clad backside. I wasn’t the only one looking. The bloke next to him at the bar gave him a once-

over with lingering eyes. Jealousy flared and for a second all I could think was “mine.” I moved up behind him and placed a hand on his back, glaring at his admirer. Nick turned his head briefly at my touch and grinned at me. Seconds later he stepped back into me and straightened up. Turning, he held two bottles of lager in one hand, in the other two shot glasses filled with at least a double measure of clear spirits. Taking a drink from each hand, I carefully sniffed at the shot glass. Tequila.

“Down in one?” He shouted as he raised his own glass in a toast. Nodding I tossed back the drink, the raw alcohol burning my throat.

“Cheers,” I coughed as I watched him down his own drink. He shuddered as he ran his tongue around his lips. I had to fight the urge to lean forward and chase his tongue with my own, tasting the alcohol on his lips. This wasn’t good. My attraction to him was getting out of control.

We pushed our way out of the crush of bodies around the bar. I pointed to an empty section of wall to one side of the dance floor and headed in that direction. It was too noisy to talk, so we leant against the wall side by side watching the mass of heaving bodies on the dance floor. I’d thought earlier when Nick had suggested going clubbing that I would see if I could pick someone up—not to take home, but to at least relieve some of the frustration I was feeling. Looking round the club, despite the amount of naked flesh and handsome faces, my mind was made up. The only person I wanted was the man next to me.

“Dance with me?” Nick asked suddenly. Without waiting for my response, he removed the almost empty bottle from my hand and leant over to put it with his on a nearby table. Taking my hand in his he led me out into the crowd of gyrating bodies that packed the dance floor.

The lights overhead were brighter, the electronic beat of the music louder. He didn’t drop my hand as he closed his eyes and started to sway rhythmically to the music. I could feel the beat vibrating through me as I began to move with him. Slowly the moving crowd around us pushed us closer together until our bodies came in contact. Being a couple of inches shorter than me, one of

his thighs nestled against my crotch. It seemed only natural to slip my free arm around Nick's waist as we continued to move.

I could have tried to blame the music, the alcohol, or the testosterone-fuelled atmosphere of the club for it, but it I knew it was my attraction to Nick that caused my dick to rise as his body pressed against mine. I tried to pull away, unsure what his reaction would be to my arousal, but rather than let me go, he dropped my hand and reached up to hook his arm around my neck, pulling us closer together. Unconsciously, my hand roamed over Nick's back, from his shoulders to the curve of his arse. As we swayed together he turned slightly and pulled his hip tighter against my crotch. I was slow to realise that I wasn't alone in my arousal as I felt his hard length digging into my hip. My own erection hardened fully in response.

Cautiously I looked down, trying to gauge whether he'd realised how turned on I was, or whether he knew that his own attraction had been noted. He was looking up at me, his expression uncertain but at the same time hopeful.

Leaning down until my mouth was level with his ear, I whispered, "What do you want?"

One arm uncurled from my neck, but he didn't step away. Pressing his forefinger to my chest he kept eye contact and said simply, "You."

I nodded and tightened my hold on him. His head turned slightly until our mouths met. Gently at first, he pressed his lips to mine. Still swaying to the music, our kisses deepened, mouths opening and tongues dipping in and out of each other's mouths. As the song ended, I pulled away.

"Home?" I suggested. He nodded and I led him across the dance floor towards the exit.

As we waited in the queue for our jackets I kept my arm around his shoulders, whilst his roamed over my back and arse. Outside though we let go of each other and headed towards the taxi rank.

Ducking my head to get into a black cab, I settled on the bench seat and gave the driver my address as Nick climbed in next to me and shut the door.

The lights in the back went out when the driver pulled away from the kerb. Nick's hand slid over my hip and into my lap, gently stroking my denim-covered crotch. In return I nudged him forward, my hand sliding up the back of his shirt and caressing the smooth, warm skin, dipping my fingers into the small gap at the top of his trousers and gently teasing the crack of his arse.

Moving my hand round to his front I quietly unzipped his trousers. Parting the fly and running my fingers up and down, teasing his erection through the thin cotton of his underwear.

He hissed an indrawn breath, letting his hand fall from my lap and grasping the edge of the vinyl seat. He leant over, bringing his mouth to my ear so he wouldn't be overheard by the taxi driver, and whispered, "Keep that up and I am going to come in my briefs before we even get home."

"And?" I asked, smirking at him. "Surely you can get it up again."

"Yes, but..." He bit down on his lip rather than finish his sentence as I applied more pressure, stroking with the heel of my hand against his length. The damp patch under my hand was spreading as he leaked precum.

"Si!" he gasped, his hips jerking against my palm as he forced himself to try and keep still. Turning my hand I rubbed my thumb over the crown of his cock. He tensed suddenly, twisting in his seat and burying his head in the neck of my jacket as he came. Pulling my hand away and wiping it on the edge of his shirt, I sat back in my seat waiting for Nick to recover and sit up.

"I can't believe you did that," he whispered as he tried to rearrange himself and zip up the tight leather trousers. Despite sliding down in the seat, he couldn't make the zip go up, and resorted to resting his hand across his crotch.

"If you'd have told me to stop I would have."

For a minute he didn't respond. Looking away from me, his bottom lip caught in his teeth and a frown crossed his brow. Without turning back to me he admitted almost bashfully, "I didn't want you to stop."

Nick paid the taxi driver and followed me up the path towards the front door. As he stumbled up the steps I put my hand back to steady him, grabbing the sleeve of his jacket and hauling him closer to me. He pushed up behind me as I tried, without much luck, to get the key to fit into the lock. For some reason we both found this funny. By the time we got the door open and almost fell through the door way, we were laughing.

I turned to close the door, caging Nick with my arms as I reached over his shoulder with one hand and slid the bolt home. Pressing closer I brought my body up flush against his. I leant forward and captured his lips with mine. His mouth yielded with a gasp as his lips parted, our tongues danced and tangled as the kiss deepened. Nick's arms snaked round my back, under my shirt, caressing the bare skin. I ground my still-hard cock against the open crotch of his trousers, and smiled into the kiss as I felt him harden in response.

Pulling my head away I looked directly into his eyes. "Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yes, I've never been surer."

I slid my hands down his arms, past his shoulders and took him by the hands. Walking backwards I headed towards the stairs. Letting go of one hand I led him up the narrow, steep staircase. At the top, I stopped and pulled him to me, stealing another kiss.

"Too many clothes," I suggested, moving him into the bedroom. He shrugged out of his jacket, letting it fall to the ground with a dull thud. My own followed suit almost immediately after. I peeled my shirt off over my head and let it join my jacket on the floor. Nick moved in closer, one hand tracing the muscles of my upper arms and moving down across my chest, brushing my nipple, which hardened in response. With his other hand he reached for the zip of my fly. As he slowly teased it down past my hard shaft, I gasped at the changing pressure. With the zip all the way down, he pushed his hand through the open material and caressed my length.

"Not yet," I whispered, reaching up to run the palm of my hand down his cheek, leaning in to kiss him again. His arms dropped as I reached to peel his

shirt over his head, moving forward as I did so our chests came together, skin on skin. Tossing the discarded shirt to the floor I put my arms around him and pulled him closer. Starting just below his ear I placed little biting kisses down the length of his neck. I could feel him shudder, goose bumps rising on his skin. I bit down harder on the cord of muscle between his neck and shoulder, worrying it with my teeth then moving back up his neck. All the while his hands explored my skin. Slowly caressing my back, his hands moved down to grasp my arse through my jeans, pushing my hips into his and rocking back and forth.

I gradually manoeuvred him towards the bed, until the back of his knees met the mattress. Sliding my hands down to the top of his trousers I began to inch the tight leather down past his backside, taking his damp briefs with them. I took my time to run my hands over his buttocks as I revealed them. As I moved my hands back up his chest to his shoulders I applied a little pressure until he fell back to sit on the bed. Falling to my knees in front of him I was eye level with his groin. His now-free cock pointed upwards, curving slightly to the left, the foreskin drawn back over the crown. As I ghosted a breath over the tip of his shaft his stomach muscles quivered.

Leaving his trousers, I sat back on my heels and carefully removed his shoes and socks. I ran my hands over his bare feet, grinning to myself as he flinched away—obviously a ticklish spot. Slowly I moved my hands up his legs, tracing the muscles through the leather until I reached skin at midthigh. I sat up and leant forwards over his crotch, running my tongue up the thick vein on the underside of his cock before circling the crown, as I continued to push his trousers down his legs.

Laying my forearms on the bed on either side of his hips I looked up into his face. His eyes were closed, his bottom lip caught in his teeth.

“What do you want?” I asked. His eyes opened and he gazed down at me.

“I don’t know.” His voice shook slightly. I wasn’t sure if it was down to arousal or nerves. “You naked,” he added.

I rose to my feet and turned away from him and took a couple of steps away. Bending at the waist I leant forwards to unlace my boots before toeing them off. With my back to him I slid my jeans down past my hips and wriggled them down the rest of the way, then stepped out of them, leaving my socks with them. Just clad in my briefs, my erection straining against the front of them, I turned back to him and walked slowly towards him. Using my knee to part his legs, I moved between them. My navel was at his eye level, but his gaze had moved further down.

He licked his lips as his hands moved to my briefs. Dipping one hand beneath the stretched material he cupped my balls, rolling them gently in his fingers. The tip of my cock peeked over the top of the elastic, a bead of precum leaking from the slit. Slowly he slid his hand up my shaft while his free hand began to peel down my briefs. I used my own hand to help lower them from the other side while he continued to stroke, until they fell past my knees to the floor.

He let go, shuffled back up the bed, and lay down; I crawled up over him until our hips were level. Bracing my hands on the bed above his shoulders, I gently lowered my body onto his. As the erect lengths of our cocks pressed together I leant forwards and captured his lips, pushing my tongue between them; our kisses deepened as I began to grind against him. I could feel him rocking his hips against the building pressure, and he groaned into my mouth. Dropping onto my right elbow I moved my left hand down his body, slipping it under his hip and rolling him towards me so we lay side by side.

There was less friction this way, but I moved my hand between us, coating my fingers in the fluid leaking from our pricks before grasping both our lengths and squeezing them together. I started to stroke, finding a rhythm that complemented the rocking of our hips as we thrust against each other. Slowly I began to increase both the pressure and the speed. Nick pressed forward into the kiss we shared, biting gently down on my lip and panting slightly. Suddenly his leg quivered and he pulled away, giving a strangled gasp as he spilled over. I kept stroking, chasing my own release, my hand now slick with his cum.

“Nick!” I gasped as I followed him over the edge.

In the aftermath of our climax we held each other, sharing leisurely kisses as our heart rates returned to normal and our breaths no longer came in shallow pants. Releasing him, I rolled over and grabbed the box of tissues by the bed to clean us up. When I turned back, Nick had collapsed onto his back, his arm raised with the back of his hand shielding his eyes. Gently, I wiped his sweat from his stomach and groin before turning my attention to myself. I tossed the used tissues into the bin and shuffled back over to him, lying on my side and running my fingers up and down his chest.

“You okay?” I whispered.

“Yeah,” he said. A tired smile crept across his face and he lifted his hand from his eyes. Looking directly at me he added, “More than okay.”

“Let’s get into bed before we fall asleep on top of it,” I suggested, sitting up and tugging at the duvet. Nick slid sideways so his legs dangled off the bed before standing.

“Whoa!” He grabbed for the headboard, unsteady on his feet. “Head rush!” I couldn’t help laughing as I folded back the duvet.

“Get in,” I suggested as I tucked my own legs under the covers and lay down on my back. He slid back across the mattress, curled into my body and resting his head against my shoulder.

“Night,” he said sleepily, pressing a final kiss to my chest.

I reached for the bedside light and plunged the room into darkness.

Carefully, I leant over him, studying his familiar features. His eyes were closed, a faint smile brushed his lips. One arm was thrown up above his head, resting on the pillow. This was my best friend. My straight best friend. In the cold light of day I should have had regrets at what we’d done. What I’d done. At the very least I should have felt a little guilty; but that was not what I was feeling.

I bent my head lower, my stubbled chin grazing his. I could feel his breath on my skin. Slowly his eyes opened. I found myself holding my breath, waiting for his reaction. He didn't speak, but his smile widened. I pulled back slightly as he brought his hand down, gently skimming the side of my face and for a second cupping my chin. His eyes remained locked on mine as his hand kept moving down towards my chest, where his fingers came to rest, tracing the rosebud tattoo over my heart.

Suddenly his expression changed. His smile faltered and his eyes widened with panic. In seconds he had rolled out from under me and was halfway across the room, picking up his clothes as he headed towards the bathroom.

As he slammed the door behind him I flopped down onto my back. My stomach churned unhappily. Had last night ruined everything? Lying in the sweat-stained sheets, the scent of him around me, the guilt finally caught up with me. I felt like a complete shit. No matter what I felt about him I should have kept my hands off. Even if he had been the one to come on to me, the one who started things, I should have said no.

A heavy thump as Roger landed at the end of the bed pulled my mind away from the regrets and recriminations that were keeping my mind busy. He stalked his way up my body and stood over me, his whiskered nose against mine, glinting green eyes looking accusingly at me as he meowed loudly.

"What do I do, Roger?" I asked, pushing my fingers into his thick ginger coat. His only response was to meow again. Not getting any further response from me he tucked his front legs under him and settled down, starting to purr as I kept stroking him.

After a while I realised I couldn't hear the shower running, or any other sound from the bathroom. Glancing at the clock I realised Nick had been in there for the last half hour. I dislodged the cat, who gave a disgruntled yowl and glared as I sat up and swung my legs out of bed. Pulling on a pair of boxers and an old T-shirt, I padded barefoot over the wooden floorboards towards the bathroom. Pressing my ear to the door I could hear nothing from within.

“I’m going down to put some coffee on; come down when you’re ready,” I called through the closed door. Not waiting for a response, I headed for the kitchen to busy myself with the kettle and then fished about in the fridge to find something edible for breakfast.

As I poured water into two mugs, I heard the sound of a car horn beep in the road. Seconds later came the sound of the bolt on the front door sliding open, followed by the gentle click of the door closing. I reached the lounge window in time to see Nick, bag in hand, duck into the waiting taxi. He didn’t look back.

For the rest of the weekend I felt like I was treading water, and not very successfully at times. Somehow I managed to get through a raucous family meal for my birthday, a fake smile plastered across my face. Thankfully, my niece and nephews garnered most of the attention from the older members of the family.

I spent much of my time carefully refusing to meet Paula’s eye, or to be cornered by her. After her warning last night and from the expression on her face, she knew something had happened.

The whole time I kept checking my mobile, but it remained silent, devoid of the usual stream of inconsequential texts that Nick and I usually exchanged.

Saturday night was spent sitting morosely on the sofa in the company of the cat, wondering what the hell I’d been thinking. My mood became bleaker as I dwelt on my own stupidity: allowing one drunken night when I couldn’t keep my hands or dick to myself to ruin my closest friendship. I must have dialled Nick’s number a dozen times that evening, wanting to talk to him, to check if he was all right; but I chickened out each time before placing the call.

Eventually, I crawled into bed. Nick’s scent still lingered in the room, despite the clean bedding, and each time I closed my eyes, my mind replayed scenes from the night before. I slept eventually, only to be taunted by dreams of what I’d lost and what could never be.

I woke early, determined to keep Nick out of my head. Throwing on my running gear I warmed up in the back garden before heading out to the park. At that hour my only companions were dog walkers and a group of birdwatchers. I spent the rest of the day in the garden, digging out the lawn mower and tackling the overgrown grass before trimming the beech hedge that separated my house from my neighbours. By the time I fell into bed that night I was exhausted, and slept deeply with Roger perched precariously on my hip.

The drumming of rain on the windows woke me. Opening the blinds revealed a heavy grey sky, in sharp contrast to the sunshine of the weekend. As I headed for the bathroom I glanced at my phone, where it lay on the dresser recharging. Four voice-mail messages all from my sister, which I deleted without listening to. There was nothing from Nick.

As I showered I tried to get myself together. I had to see him today; the working week always started with a breakfast meeting to review the current projects. I needed to hold it together, to be professional.

Monday morning traffic was a bitch, and I arrived just in time to grab a coffee and slide into an empty seat at the long table in the boardroom. Graham Anderson, the company's director, sat at the head of the table, with Nick on his right-hand side. From my position I could see that he looked paler than usual, dark circles stood out under eyes which lacked their usual shine. His hands were in constant movement, either tapping the side of the white coffee cup, shuffling the papers in front of him or aimlessly twirling a pen between his fingers. At first I kept glancing at him, trying to make eye contact, but he never looked in my direction.

As usual we went round the table, each of the managers reporting on the position with the current projects. I kept my own report short; it was a miracle that I got it out at all. Afterwards, I hadn't a clue what I'd said.

The meeting started to wind down and I glanced again at Nick, who was still carefully studying the paper in front of him.

"Which brings us to any other business," Graham's tone lightened. "I have just one item. On a personal note and on behalf of the firm, I'd like to

congratulate Nick on his engagement. It's about time that Michelle made an honest man of you." He paused to smile at Nick before adding, "Now if no one has anything else, I suggest we get to work."

Graham clapped Nick on the back, as he headed towards the door. The other project managers offered their congratulations while they gathered papers and pushed back chairs ready to leave. I sat motionless, my chest felt tight; each breath was an effort.

"Simon, you all right?" Brent asked as he pushed his chair back from the seat next to me.

"Yes, fine," I lied. Rising from my chair I looked to where Nick still sat, accepting the good wishes of the others. I walked over to him and put one hand on his shoulder.

"Congratulations." The single word was all that I could get out, but even that sounded hollow. Insincere.

"Thank you." Nick flushed slightly as he spoke. Although he looked up at me, he couldn't meet my eyes, staring over my shoulder instead.

I headed for the door without looking back.

I'd got as far as the lift when I realised I needed to talk to him. I needed to clear the air between us at least. With a sigh I turned and headed towards his office.

Unusually, the door was closed. Just outside, Amie sat at her desk, partially hidden by the computer screen. She looked up at me over the top of it with a worried expression.

"Is he in?" I asked

"Sorry Si, he's busy." She winced as she said it. "Conference call." Amie couldn't lie to save her life. I raised an eyebrow at her and waited. Eventually she sighed and admitted, "I'm sorry, he specifically said he didn't want to see you."

“Fine,” I said curtly, turned on my heel and stalked away. I could hear her footsteps as she followed me out of the office. Grabbing me by one hand, she pulled me into an empty meeting room and closed the door behind us.

“What the hell happened?” she demanded. Standing in front of the door, hands on her hips, she glared at me.

“Back off,” I warned. “It’s nothing to do with you. If you really must know, you need to ask Nick. It’s up to him if he tells you.”

“You think I haven’t? I can’t get him to talk to me at all. I only knew about the engagement because Michelle changed her status on Facebook. When I congratulated him this morning he just shrugged, said he didn’t want to be disturbed and that included if you came by. Then he barricaded himself in the office.”

“Amie, I can’t.” I shook my head. “Look, it’s complicated. Just, I don’t know, give him some time.”

“And that’s what you’re doing? Giving him time?”

“Yes, no, he doesn’t want to talk to me at all, I am just going to have to live with that.”

“Si, what happened?” she asked more gently.

“I made a mistake,” I sighed, closing my eyes and rubbing my forehead. “A horrible, drunken, mistake which I don’t think Nick will forgive me for. I’ve probably ruined our friendship completely.”

“Hey.” Her hand gripped my forearm. “If this mistake is what I think it is, then chances are you didn’t make it alone. You can’t turn back time and you can’t undo what’s done. You just have to live with it. Maybe you’re right and giving him time is the way to go. But, seriously, you’ve got to remember you aren’t responsible for him, he’s an adult and he can make his own decisions.”

“I know, I just...Amie, what if I’ve ruined everything?” Not for the first time since Saturday morning tears pricked my eyes and I blinked rapidly trying to chase them away.

“I don’t know. It’s a mess—that’s for sure, but whatever happens you move forward. Now, we’ve both got work to do. I’d give you a hug, but we both know that’s not proper office behaviour.” She squeezed my arm again before she left, shutting the door behind her and giving me time to pull myself together before I headed out to the job site.

The week dragged. I didn’t go near the office and instead of just supervising the project I got involved with the renovation work, everything from hauling bricks to plastering. I did anything to keep myself from brooding, doing enough hard work to tire myself out so that I didn’t even have the energy to think. Evenings were the hardest, and most nights I ended up settled into a silent sulk in front of the television with a beer or two for company. Roger, having gauged my mood, gave me a wide berth, save for his regular demands for food. I’d given up checking my phone. The one person I wanted to hear from didn’t want to talk to me, or even text.

Leaving the site on Wednesday evening, Pete, the banks man responsible for ensuring safe movement of vehicles on the site, leant into the open window of my car.

“You’re playing tonight aren’t you? We’ve got a pitch at six o’clock.”

“Sure,” I agreed. The physical exercise would help wear me out if nothing else.

“Great, Ryan’s playing, Jim from accounts is in, and Nick. That gives us enough players and a ref. We can have a full five-a-side game with fifteen minutes each way.”

My heart sunk; I wanted to change my mind but he’d already pulled away from the window. Before waving me on, he tapped his hand on the roof of the car and called out, “Later.”

I cursed under my breath just about all the way home. There was just enough time to change into a clean tracksuit and throw my football kit into the bag before heading back out.

The men's locker room in the sports centre was crowded. A combination of swimmers, those using the gym, and the evening football crowd meant there was little space to change. All the private cubicles were already occupied. Moving to the far corner, I chose an open locker on the lower tier and toed off my trainers before kicking them inside. I pulled out my football kit and began to change. I settled my jersey into place, bent and picked up my boots, then turned as I straightened up.

Nick stood motionless on the opposite side of the changing room, staring at me, like a rabbit caught in the headlights. The colour in his face drained away as his expression changed from his initial shock to something that was a mixture of embarrassment, guilt, and fear. Obviously Pete hadn't told him I'd be playing. For all I knew Pete had no idea of our falling out. For a second I thought Nick was going to turn and run. I wanted to go over, to talk to him, tell him everything would be okay, that we could forget what happened and just be friends, but it felt like my feet were glued to the floor.

The door opened behind him and a hand landed on his shoulder, making him jump.

"Come on Evans," Jim's face appeared over Nick's shoulder. "Get a move on, pitch is ours in five minutes."

Nick was given no choice as he was propelled forwards to the central bank of benches. I turned back and stuffed the rest of my things into my locker. Then I headed, as fast as I could in my stocking feet on the slippery floor, towards the exit that led to the outside pitches and tennis courts.

Outside in the cool evening air I leant with my back against the brick wall of the building, berating myself for my stupidity and cowardice.

By the time the rest of the guys had reached the pitch, I'd put on my boots and was going through my warm-up routine. I barely looked up from where I was sitting on the Astroturf, bent forward with my hands round my left foot, stretching out my hamstrings and calf muscles. Around me everyone else got on with their own warm-up routines, until Jim, who was acting as referee, blew his whistle.

Pete and Ryan, who were acting as captains, picked out their teams. I was the first person selected by Ryan, and found myself holding my breath waiting to see whose team Nick would be on. Usually I played a defensive role, whilst he played attack. On opposing teams we would be marking each other, which wouldn't be easy for either of us. Pete called Tom, a short and stocky but effective forward with a good turn of speed. As Tom made his way to stand by Pete, Ryan called out Nick's name. He didn't look at me as he came to join us. The rest of the teams fell into place quickly and we headed to opposite ends of the pitch.

“Okay,” Ryan said as we huddled round him. “Square formation. Hitesh and Nick take the forward positions; Si and I will be the back pair. I'll take the right side as Tom's a left footer and will be my opposite number, and he's not fast so I can keep up with him. Dave, you okay taking goal?”

“Yep, fine by me.” Dave accepted his position as the rest of us nodded our agreement as Jim blew his whistle again.

“Good luck team,” Ryan said as we all jogged off to take our positions.

Nick got first touch of the ball and headed up the pitch, passing between himself and Hitesh, trying to dodge the defending players. For much of the first half of the game our team had possession, I only got to touch the ball twice, both times to kick it wide away from our goal. Which was probably a good job as I was spending more time than I should watching Nick play. By the time Jim signalled a five-minute break for half time, Nick was flushed and short of breath and our team were two nil up. Wordlessly, I handed him my water bottle and he accepted with a tight smile. Head tipped back, his Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he swallowed, sending my mind to places that I was trying so hard to avoid. I bent down to fiddle with the laces of my boots to stop myself staring.

The second half was very different, Pete had obviously spoken his team at half time and their play was much more aggressive. Ryan and I were kept busy, but it was Dave's goal-keeping skills that kept us ahead.

Jim blew the whistle again and called out that he was adding three minutes of extra time. Nick had possession of the ball, but the other team's defender was directly in front of him and Hitesh was blocked on the other side. Feinting and turning, Nick passed the ball back to me. Looking around I steadied the ball under my foot, before drawing it back to pass it to Ryan who was free on my right side. I hadn't realised how fast Pete was closing in. As I moved to strike the ball away he dived, sliding towards me across the turf with both feet. I got the ball clear before the studs of his boots collided with the inside of my left ankle. The impact sent me tumbling forwards. I flung out my left arm, braced to try and cushion the impact of the fall.

Lying with my face planted in the ground, my legs tangled with the opposing player's, I swore deeply as pain radiated down my leg from knee to ankle. Carefully, I began to push myself up, taking my weight on my left arm. A flicker in the corner of my vision was the only warning I had as Tom, who had been running over, slipped on the artificial grass, his arms wind milling around as he fell. The impact knocked the breath out my lungs as the full weight of another player landed on my shoulder. There was a loud popping noise and then pain, white-hot pain, shooting down my left arm. My vision blurred and everything went grey.

"Can you hear me?" The voice was distant, as though someone was speaking from the end of a tunnel. "Si, open your eyes for me."

My stomach rolled as I tried to sit up, bile rising and burning the back of my throat.

"Gonna throw up," I muttered weakly.

"Okay, lie still. Jim's coming back now with the first aider."

After explaining that the problem was with my shoulder, I was helped gently to a sitting position. Pain radiated out from my shoulder, my left arm hung useless by my side, and even the slightest movement sent sharp spikes of pain down it.

"I think we'll need to get you to hospital," the first aider advised without even touching me. "Your shoulders are uneven and I can see a lump there."

She pointed to where the top of my arm met my body. “Can anyone take you up to casualty or do I need to call an ambulance?”

“I’ll take him,” Nick volunteered before anyone else could speak. I wasn’t in any state to raise objections. It was all I could do to stop myself from either throwing up or passing out.

Pete went to get our things from our lockers as Ryan and Hitesh gently helped me to my feet. Nick grabbed his car keys out of his bag as soon as Pete returned and ran off to bring his vehicle round to the pitch. Carefully I was assisted into the front seat of the car. With care Nick reached around me and pulled the seat belt across my body.

“Let us know how he is,” Ryan said as he slung our bags onto the back seat and slammed the door.

“Will do,” Nick replied as he put the car in gear and slowly drove away. Although Nick drove carefully he couldn’t avoid the uneven road surface or sleeping policemen. Each time the car jerked, pain pulsed in my shoulder. I tried to keep quiet but occasionally it became too much and I cried out.

“You doing okay?” Nick asked as we pulled up at a set of traffic lights, and took his eyes from the road momentarily to look at me. I could only manage a weak smile in response. “Okay, couple more minutes and we’ll be there.”

Nodding in a response was a mistake. Pain flared again in my shoulder and shot down my arm.

“Fuck!” I swore. I couldn’t stop the tears that leaked from my eyes.

Nick pulled the car into one of the drop-off bays outside the Accident and Emergency Department, switched off the engine and ran from the car into the entrance. He returned with a porter, who pushed a wheelchair. Carefully they transferred me from the car into the chair.

“I’ll be back shortly. I’m going to go park the car properly,” Nick said as the porter wheeled me into the hospital.

The waiting area was crowded, a sign above the main desk advised there was a two-hour wait and recommended patients attending with non-urgent

issues see their own doctor. The porter wheeled me straight past reception to a series of curtained cubicles.

“Triage,” he said, pushing me through an open curtain and parking the wheelchair by an empty bed. “Can you get up yourself?”

“I think so.” Using my right hand to grip the arm of the chair and push myself up, I staggered to my feet. The porter steadied me as I shuffled round and rested against the edge of the bed. It was too high for me to get up on too. “Maybe not,” I admitted.

“No problems, let’s have you back in the chair for now until you’ve been assessed.” I turned back and sank gratefully into the chair.

I wasn’t waiting long until a young nurse came through to examine me. After taking my details he asked me to describe what had happened and how much pain I was in. Then he carefully cut away my shirt and looked closely at my shoulder, but didn’t touch it.

“Okay, we’ll start by getting something for the pain, then we’ll take you to x-ray. I’m pretty certain you’ve dislocated your shoulder. If the x-rays confirm it, then the doctor will manipulate the shoulder to reduce the dislocation.”

If I had had two working arms I’d have hugged him at the promise of pain relief.

Despite the injection of morphine, the trip to x-ray was uncomfortable but confirmed that my shoulder was dislocated. On my return to the casualty department I was taken straight through to a private room and helped onto the bed, the top of which was tilted so that I was sitting upright.

“The doctor will be with you in a second,” the nurse waiting in the room advised. “Do you want to see your partner before they put your shoulder back in?”

“Partner?” I asked vaguely.

“Yes, he’s waiting outside.” The nurse hadn’t noticed my confusion. Instead of waiting for me to reply she went to the door and beckoned to someone outside.

Nick looked uncertain as he approached the bed. There were no chairs, so he stood beside me with his hands bunched in the tracksuit bottoms he'd obviously slipped on over his football kit at sometime between dropping me off and coming back.

“Partner?” I asked raising my eyebrow.

“Family only,” he explained.

“And you didn't think, say, telling them you were my brother would be a better option?”

He shrugged, looking slightly embarrassed, before changing the subject. “What have they said?”

“It's dislocated, the doctor is going to reduce it then I can get out of here. The drugs they gave me are working, it's not nearly as bad now, but I still can't move my arm. Getting the x-rays hurt like...”

“Si, I'm sorry,” he interrupted with a whisper. He was no longer looking at me. Instead he seemed to be focused on a small area of the bed next to my leg.

“What for exactly?” I couldn't quite keep the sharpness out my voice, but regretted it immediately when I saw him flinch.

“For what happened.”

“For all of it?”

“Yes—No—Well—” he stuttered. “I just...I can't.” He looked directly at me, shaking his head. There was a slightly wild cast to his eyes: part confusion, part anxiety.

“It happened. We can't undo it. We just have to live with it as best we can.”

I would have said more but the doors opened and a small group of people entered the room. Nick was quietly ushered out as they gathered 'round the bed. The doctor introduced himself and explained what they would do. Having determined that the morphine was working effectively, the top of the bed was

lowered, and I was rolled onto my stomach with my dislocated shoulder hanging off the side of the bed.

My arm was supported until it hung down, pointing towards the floor. I was asked to turn my head away and a nurse began to babble at me, trying to get me to join in conversation, I guess to take my mind of what was happening. The doctor had taken hold of my arm by the elbow and wrist.

“Relax,” he advised, which given the circumstances wasn’t even remotely possible. Slowly but firmly he began to pull the arm downward away from my shoulder. The pain—which had dulled to a throb—began to build again as he did. Suddenly there was a popping noise and the pain eased suddenly. I let out a huge breath I hadn’t realised I’d been holding.

Still holding my arm, the doctor bent the elbow as the nursing staff rolled me back over and tilted the bed again to a sitting position. My arm was brought to rest on my chest before being cradled in a sling, which tied behind my neck.

“There you go, now that sling has to stay in place for about four weeks. We’ll see you in Orthopaedic Outpatients and arrange for some physiotherapy,” the doctor advised. “I’ll arrange for some anti-inflammatory pain relief medication and the nursing staff will discharge you.”

I nodded in response to his instructions. The lack of pain combined with the morphine was suddenly making me feel very tired.

I must have dozed off. A gentle hand shaking my arm woke me.

“Hey,” I mumbled sleepily, squinting through half-opened eyes. Nick looked down at me, a frown creasing his forehead.

“Time to go, are you okay to get up?” I nodded sitting upright and swinging my legs round and off the bed. As I pushed myself to my feet I went dizzy, stars sprinkling my vision as I lurched forward. “Steady!” Nick slipped his arm around my waist, holding me up.

“Head rush.” I grinned weakly.

Still holding on to me, he guided me towards the door. Stopping by reception to collect my belongings and sign the discharge forms, the nurse smiled as she handed me my prescription.

“Right, Mr. Sharpe, you’ve a check-up with Outpatients on Friday morning at 10:00 a.m. In the meantime, that sling stays in place and you don’t use your arm.” Turning to Nick she added, “He’s not to be left alone for the next twenty-four hours.” Nick nodded in agreement and steered me away from the desk.

“I’m sure that James or Harry will come and stay with me,” I began to make plans so that Nick could go home. “Paula can probably do tomorrow after she’s got the kids off to nursery.”

“I can stay,” Nick said quietly.

“There’s no need, really, I am sure my friends have it covered.” I felt him tense next to me as soon as the words were out of my mouth. “Sorry, that came out wrong.”

“It’s fine,” he said coldly, clearly lying. “You’d better phone them so there’s someone there when I drop you home.”

He didn’t say another word, silently helping me into the car and digging my phone out my bag on the back seat. As he climbed into the driver seat I could see the hurt expression on his face.

“Nick, I didn’t mean...”

“Si, leave it. You did mean it. You don’t consider me a friend anymore.” He waited for me to call James, who agreed to pack an overnight bag and go straight round to mine. Then without saying a word, Nick turned up the radio and backed out the parking space. I slouched down into my seat and concentrated on the view out the window. The silence between us was painfully uncomfortable.

What I couldn’t tell him was that he was right. I didn’t consider him a friend anymore; I didn’t want him as a friend. I wanted him as a lover, a partner. I wanted what I knew I couldn’t have.

That night I discovered two very important things: it's virtually impossible to find a comfortable position to sleep in when you are in pain with your arm in a sling; and that the only comfortable position, sitting bolt upright, isn't one where sleep is actually possible.

When James looked in on me at eight the following morning I was sore, tired and in an extremely bad mood. After my less than polite response to his cheerful greeting and request to know how I had slept, he tactfully withdrew and left me to drink the coffee he'd bought me. I complained to Roger, who had taken up residence at the foot of my bed, about my situation, but being a cat, he just ignored me and carried on washing himself before settling down with a final glare that told me, quite clearly, that I was nothing more than an inconvenience interrupting his sleeping time.

Although it was my left arm that was completely out of commission, I hadn't realised how difficult it was to do the simplest of tasks one handed. When putting on my dressing gown, I settled for tying it tightly round my waist to compensate for the fact that one sleeve hung limply, I headed for the bathroom. I was sweaty and sticky, having not had a chance to shower after the football match. Brushing my teeth, I glanced mournfully at the shower. I thought that I might manage a shallow bath, but what I wanted was to stand under the hot spray of water, letting it help ease nagging pain that persisted in the tightly knotted muscles around my shoulder and neck. I winced slightly as I realised that washing my hair was going to require assistance.

From downstairs I heard Paula let herself in, followed by a muted conversation with James and then the sound of his car starting in the road outside as he headed off, probably with a sigh of relief.

"Simon, breakfast in five minutes," Paula called from the bottom of the stairs in her most no-nonsense tone. Sighing, I left the sanctuary of the bathroom.

"Eat that," she commanded, sliding a plate with a slice of buttered toast in front of me as I sat down at the kitchen table. She'd cut the toast into triangles. I picked one of them up and put the corner to my mouth, taking a small, unenthusiastic bite.

“You can have pain killers after you’ve eaten.” She put the bottle and a glass of water on the table between us as she took the seat opposite. She studied me as I slowly munched my way through the food she’d put in front of me. As I brushed the crumbs off my fingers she took out two of the tablets and offered them to me.

“I’m not one of your kids,” I snapped. All I got in response was a slight tilt of her head and a raised eyebrow that told me clearly that in her view I was behaving like a five-year-old.

“Thank you,” I muttered, taking the tablets from her and reaching for the water.

“Now, do you want to tell me what the hell is going on with you?”

“Nothing is going on with me.” I pointed to my arm. “Football injury, accidental.”

“Not what I meant.”

“So what did you mean?” I rubbed my forehead with my good hand.

“Si,” she said more gently. “I spoke to Nick last night. He sounded gutted, did something happen between you?”

The kindness and concern in her voice choked me up. I knew I’d behaved badly, not just by what I said last night, but what happened between us last weekend. But I wasn’t ready to talk about it, it was too raw.

“I need to go and lie down.” Without looking at her I stood up and headed for the lounge. Settling in the corner of the sofa, a cushion behind my back to support my shoulder, I pulled the fleece throw over me and shut my eyes. I heard Paula follow me out of the kitchen and after a rather pointed silence head back to the kitchen, from where I heard the occasional scrape of paper as she turned over the pages of the book she was reading.

Despite the discomfort from my shoulder, the lack of sleep caught up with me and I dozed on and off throughout the morning. Paula woke me at lunch time, insisting I eat the bowl of soup she’d made and take more tablets. She

didn't push further to find out what had happened between Nick and me, but I could see from her expression she wanted to ask.

The afternoon found me back on the sofa, my mind being numbed by the reruns of American crime shows which seemed the best programmes on offer. Just before four, Paula came through and took a seat at the opposite end of the sofa.

"I need to get going in a bit," she said. "I asked Nick if he would mind coming to sit with you for a bit this evening, but he says he can't. He's being as evasive as you are. I'm not sure what happened between you, but I warned you how he felt about you."

"How he felt about me? He's my friend, nothing more. Or he was anyway. I might have put my foot in it last night," I confessed.

"Just last night?"

I nodded. I really didn't want to tell her how badly I'd screwed up so far as Nick was concerned.

"Will you be okay on your own this evening? I can come back later if you need me."

"I'll be fine. I'm going order out for a pizza and relax. I'll call you if I need anything."

I never did get 'round to ordering pizza. Instead I spent my evening staring at my phone wishing it would ring, because I didn't have the guts to phone Nick and clear the air myself. Then I dragged myself off to another night of broken sleep.

I woke on Friday determined to move on. If Nick could put what happened behind him and move on with his life, so could I. My arm was still sore, but the rest of me felt more like my usual self. Not least because I'd managed to have a shower and wash my hair, protecting my shoulder by wrapping my arm, sling and all, in a black bin bag. I had to take the sling off in order to slip

on a T-shirt, though. I didn't think that going topless to my outpatient appointment was a good idea.

The hospital was busy. It appeared that all patients were told their appointments were at ten in the morning, with the nursing staff then sorting out some sort of order on a "first come, first served" basis. It was almost noon before I was seen by a rather frazzled looking junior doctor, who removed the sling and manipulated my arm to check my shoulder was still in place. The doctor advised that the sling had to stay on for three more weeks, in the meantime I'd be referred for physiotherapy but they didn't need to see me again.

I took the bus back home again, calling work to let them know that with luck I would be able to work from the office on Monday. By the time I arrived home my arm was aching from the doctor's ministrations. I grabbed a sandwich, mainly so I could take some medication before settling back on the sofa. Unable to face another afternoon of daytime television, I switched on the stereo and picked up my book from the coffee table where I'd left it.

I was woken suddenly by a knock on the door. Glancing at the clock I realised I must have been asleep for at least an hour, probably a result of the pain killers. My book had fallen, still open, onto the floor beside the sofa. Carefully I rose to my feet, wishing that I could roll my shoulders and stretch out the crick in my neck.

"Hang on," I called out as I made my way to the door. Pulling it open I was surprised to see Michelle standing on the doorstep.

"Erm, hi. Shouldn't you be at work?" I blurted out before I could censor my mouth.

"I'm playing hooky," she replied with a tight grin. "Can I come in? I need to talk to you, and this was the only way I could do it without Nick knowing."

Part of me wished I could say no and shut the door on her, after all this was the woman who got the man that I wanted. Instead I nodded and stepped back to let her in.

“I was just about to put the kettle on when you knocked,” I lied as I shut the front door behind her. “Do you want coffee?” Without waiting for a response I turned and walked towards the kitchen.

“How are you feeling?” she asked as she took a seat at the kitchen table.

“A bit sore. It’s frustrating more than anything, but at least it’s my left arm.” Keeping my back to her, I busied myself with filling the kettle and spooning instant coffee into mugs as I waited for it to boil.

“Congratulations, by the way.” I spoke simply to fill the growing uncomfortable silence.

“Thank you, it was...” she paused before she continued, “...unexpected.”

“Unexpected?”

“Yes, we’ve talked about it, in the past, but neither of us felt it was necessary. I mean, maybe, one day, if say children came along, but we were quite happy as we were. Something happened to change his mind.”

I had no response to that. I knew full well what had changed his mind. I’d seen the panic in his eyes on Saturday morning, that “what have I done” moment.

My hand was shaking as I poured the water into the two mugs in front of me. I didn’t want to turn back around and face her but there wasn’t much choice.

“What makes you think that?” I asked carefully. Gathering both mugs in my right hand, I took a deep breath and turned around. I put the mugs onto the table, detouring to the fridge for milk before I sat down.

“I know him.” She shrugged. Placing her hands round the mug she looked deeply into the dark brown drink. “You slept together didn’t you?” she asked without raising her eyes.

I suddenly inhaled the mouthful of coffee I’d just taken, spluttering and choking as the hot liquid scalded my throat. My mind was screaming a million things at me, mainly along the lines of “shit, what do I tell her”. Luckily I was prevented from having to say anything as she continued.

“I don’t actually know why I am asking. I know you slept together.”

“You do? He told you? I mean, well, erm...” I trailed off realising if she didn’t actually know I’d just confirmed it for her.

“No, he didn’t say anything about it. I know him Si, sometimes I think I know him better than he knows himself. The proposal, it couldn’t have been a bigger announcement that he’d done something he shouldn’t have, even if he’d screamed it from the rooftops.”

“It’s a big jump, from having done something wrong to, well—” For some reason I couldn’t say what we’d done out loud.

“Not really.” She shrugged. “I knew you were together on Friday night. When I spoke to him on Saturday he was working, but he proposed just about as soon as I got my foot through the door on Sunday evening. He had the ring ready and everything.” She held out her left hand; the ring, a single solitaire diamond set in white gold, circled her forth finger. “He looked so relieved when I said yes. That was when I knew. The other night confirmed it. When he phoned from the hospital to tell me you were hurt. Well, you’d have thought that he was the one who’d actually caused your injury from the way he was acting. Then later, when he came home, he didn’t want to be there. He wanted to be with you; I could see guilt for something written all over his face.”

“But you didn’t ask him?”

“No, I didn’t say anything about it; I just watched him. He’s not happy; he’s not sleeping. He’s barely looked at me, let alone, well, for a newly engaged couple you’d expect some romance. He hasn’t even touched me.”

“I’m sorry...I...just...” I shook my head. “I really don’t know what to do or say.”

“Look, I’m not here to threaten you, or warn you to keep away from him. I just needed to talk to you.”

“Why?”

“Why what?” she asked.

“Why do you want to talk to me? I mean, given what happened, if you aren’t warning me off or wanting to rant at me, I would have thought I was the last person you’d want to talk to right now.”

Her responding laugh was hollow. “I’m not sure how to explain this,” she began. “Just bear with me whilst I try.” She returned to staring into her mug. I picked up my drink and took a large gulp whilst I waited for her to continue.

“Although we’re a couple...more than that he’s my friend, probably my best friend. I just want him happy, but he’s a long way from that at the moment. Looking back, it seems to have been a while since he was happy. He tries to hide it as much he can, but I know him well enough to see it. It’s not hard; he’s always worn his flaws on his sleeve. He throws all his energy into his work. He brings it home in an evening and at weekends, like he’s using it block the rest of his life out. On the surface he seems fine, but even when he smiles it doesn’t touch his eyes. The only time I ever see him properly happy is when he’s talking about you, or when he’s spent time with you. Hell, even when he gets a text from you. I’ve done a lot of thinking in the last week and while I do love him, I’ve realised that I’m not in love with him, and I’m not going to marry him.”

“So what are you going to do, and where do I come in?” I shook my head, finding it difficult to take in what she was saying.

“I don’t want to hurt him, but I’m certain I’m going to,” she continued as though she’d not even heard me. “Right now he’s scared and confused. We’ve been together for eight years and we’ve been through a lot, but I’ve never seen him like this. It’s as though he’s standing at the top of a cliff. Behind him it’s safe, comfortable, and familiar. In front of him is the unknown and he doesn’t know whether to jump. Part of him is telling him to step back, away from the edge, return to what he knows, but I can see that part of him wants to jump.” She smiled sadly at me as she continued. “That’s why I’m here really. I suppose I am at the top of the cliff with him.”

“And you’re going to stop him falling, keep him safe?”

“No.” She shook her head, unconsciously twisting the engagement ring. Looking directly at me, a hint of a challenge in her expression, she continued bluntly, “I’m going to push him off the cliff. I’m just hoping that you’ll catch him when he falls.”

“Catch him?” I echoed, my mind whirling from what she was asking. Could I do that? Was that what he wanted? Was that what I wanted?

“Yes.” Her head tilted to one side as she watched me. “He deserves a chance to be truly happy, and so do I. In a way I’m as bad as he is. We’re just drifting along because it’s easy, and, well, I’d like a chance to find someone I can be madly in love with, and who can love me the same way in return. So, I am going to break of the engagement and get him to move out. I’m going to suggest that he come here.”

“But he doesn’t want me, not that way. He isn’t gay, for God’s sake. I think part of last weekend was him trying to prove that to himself,” I babbled.

“No, I don’t think he’s gay. Then again, I don’t think he’s completely straight. His parents wouldn’t have approved, and I think the reason our relationship has drifted so long is in part because it’s easy—and he doesn’t have to face the unknown. I don’t know whether it’s just you or whether he’s had feelings for other men, but he thinks of you as more than a friend. That much is obvious.”

“You can’t just decide on what’s right for him. Expect him to come running to me if you dump him.”

“You love him though?” The direct question threw me completely.

Did I love him? I sure as hell had missed him this last week. I thought about him, well, it seemed like all the damn time. I wanted him physically, but more than that I wanted to share things with him—from something I’d seen or heard, to a movie curled up together on the sofa.

“I don’t do relationships.” The automatic response came easily.

“That wasn’t the question.”

“No, but—” I looked helplessly at her. “I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Why not Si? Look, you’ve made it clear over the years I’ve known you that you don’t do relationships, but you’ve never really explained why.”

“Gay men don’t do relationships; we have sex,” I said bluntly.

“Bull. That’s crap; I know you don’t mean that. Something happened to you—a relationship gone badly wrong, and it’s made you too scared to try again. Instead you hide behind the mantra of having one-night stands or pickups only. You’re the opposite of Nick, he might have all his faults and emotions on show, but you’ve buried your emotions so deeply it’s a wonder anyone can get close to you. It’s time to dig them up Simon. For Nick’s sake and for mine.”

I spent an unsettled evening lost in my own thoughts and memories. Sure I’d had relationships since I’d come out, not serious at first; I mean first loves and teenage flings rarely last. Then in my final year at university I was so sure I’d found “the one.” We moved fast, from dating to living together in a matter of weeks. He was older than me, more experienced in just about every area—including manipulation and lying, as it turned out.

I thought I’d found the person I was destined to spend the rest of my life with; instead, after nearly two years, I came home from work one night to an empty house. He’d cleared out everything: his clothes, all the items we’d bought jointly and, as I discovered later, the joint bank account he’d insisted we needed. In the three months it took me to track him down I was overwhelmed by a steady stream of overdue notices and final demands for loans I’d no recollection of taking out.

He’d used the money to buy a house at the other end of the country and move in his not-so-new boyfriend, who he’d been seeing for at least six months. To say I was gutted would be the understatement of the year. Saddled with what felt like the debt of a third world country and nursing a broken heart, I’d broken the lease on the house we’d shared and gone back to my parents’ house to lick my wounds, swearing that never again would I let someone get close enough to use me like that.

I'd spent eight years with my heart locked safely away. Sure, I'd not been a monk during that time, but no one got close. Until now it seemed. I wasn't sure when my friendship with Nick had become something more, but I'd spent a good part of the evening going over what Michelle had said. Not just about Nick but the few home truths she'd thrown in my direction. At the end of the day it came down to one thing. Did I love Nick, and was I willing to put my heart on the line for him?

My phone buzzed with an incoming text just after one in the morning. Reaching over, I read the short message from Michelle: *He's on his way to you.*

My heart seemed to stutter in my chest. I wasn't ready. I didn't think I could do this. I contemplated just letting him stay as a friend, making up the bed in the spare room and insisting he stay in there. Even as I headed to the airing cupboard to pull out a fresh sheet I knew I couldn't do it. If I was honest with myself I knew I was in too deep already. The moment Nick walked through the door tonight, on my part anyway, there wasn't going to be any going back to just being friends. The rest would depend on him.

It was not much later when he arrived. I watched from the front window as he dragged an overstuffed suitcase behind him up the front path. In the glow from the street light I could see the five o'clock shadow that covered his jaw emphasising how pale his face was. There were dark circles around his eyes, which had lost all of their usual sparkle. His shoulders were hunched over as though he was in pain. He looked completely defeated.

"Hey," I said softly as I opened the door to let him in. He didn't say anything, just followed me through the lounge to the kitchen, leaving his case at the bottom of the stairs. "Do you want a drink?" I asked, heading to the fridge.

"No, I'm fine." He hugged his arms around himself and shook his head.

"Fine?" I raised an eyebrow. "That would be the alternative version of the word then. Fucked-up, insecure, neurotic and emotional."

For a second, his lips turned up in a wry smile. “Yeah, that sounds about right.” His voice was tight, as though on the verge of breaking.

Without really thinking about it, I crossed the kitchen and pulled him into a hug with my good arm. “That makes two of us Nick.”

“Really?”

“Hell yes. Just look at us, you’re not gay and I don’t do relationships, and between us just look at the wonderful mess that we’ve made.”

“I’m sorry,” he said into my chest.

“You’ve nothing to be sorry for, this wasn’t planned by either of us. It just happened. The question is, do we finish what we started?”

“I think I’d like to try.” The wistful sound in his voice made my mind up once and for all where he’d be sleeping.

“Come on, we’re both exhausted. We can talk in the morning.”

I led him up the stairs, bypassing his suitcase, to my bedroom. There was no heat, no passion, as we both stripped to our boxers and crawled under the duvet.

In the dark, we lay, side by side; our hands sought each other’s and held on tight.

“So what now?” Nick asked eventually.

“I don’t know. What do you want?”

“I still want you, but I’m scared.”

“That makes two of us, on both counts,” I confessed.

“This last week’s been horrible. Without you it’s been like there’s been something missing, a hole where you should be.”

Leaning over I pressed a kiss onto his lips. “Sleep now, tomorrow we’ll talk, both of us, work out a way forward, how to make this work.”

Hand in hand, exhausted, we slipped into sleep.

I woke the next morning, on what saccharine romantics would probably call the first day of the rest of our lives. Beside me he slept on as I pushed myself up on my good arm and leant over him. His eyes were closed, a faint smile brushed his lips. One arm stretched above his head, the back of his hand resting on the pillow. I felt a wash of emotion come over me, an overwhelming rightness of the situation, of having him next to me to wake up.

I bent my head towards him, allowing my stubbled chin to graze his. I could feel his warm breath on my skin. Slowly his eyes opened. Anxiety made my stomach churn as I waited for his reaction. He didn't speak, but his smile widened. I pulled back slightly as he brought his hand down, gently skimming the side of my face and for a second cupping my chin. His eyes remained fixed on mine as his hand kept moving down towards the side of my chest not covered by the sling; his fingers came to rest, tracing the rosebud tattoo over my heart.

His smile widened as he leant up to capture my lips with his. It was then I realised that no matter what the future might hold, perhaps, just perhaps, we had a chance of facing it together.

THE END

(or beginning, depending on which way you want to look at it)

Author Bio

Despite studying chemistry at university and then working in several different jobs within the legal profession for the last seventeen years, K. still hasn't decided what she wants to do when she grows up. In the meantime, the various animals that own her have decided she needs a full-time job to keep them in the manner to which they've become accustomed. When they allow her any spare time she reads (anything that is put in front of her), knits (mainly socks), bakes (cupcakes), and writes (well, argues with the voices in her head as to who controls where the story goes).

Contact & Media Info

[Goodreads](#)