



only you

by
shayla mist



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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

ONLY YOU

By Shayla Mist

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

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 these authors 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's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, 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.

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Photo Description

This is a lovely photo that immediately makes you scream “Cute!” There are two gorgeous boys doing a back hug. The blond is wearing what looks like a denim jacket, he has a small earring in his right ear and short hair, combed stylishly to one side. He has a sweet, nostalgic kind of smile (maybe a bit shy too). The brunet looks like the athlete type. He has his arms around the blond’s chest and his head leaned towards him. This one has a mischievous kind of smile, like he’s trying to act innocent even though he knows he’s been caught red-handed.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

This is me and my friend Hunt. For years I have loved him, my best friend since age four. For years I have waited around, putting my life on hold hoping that one day he would realize that he loved me too. For years he has sent me mixed signals making believe that he may feel the same way. Too many times I felt that we were so close to something happening between us but for whatever reason he always pulls away. He’s so affectionate and loving with me feeding me enough crumbs that I don’t want to give up, I hold on to hope. Well I can’t do it anymore. The pain of being so close to him but never truly having him? It’s too much. It makes me want to give up. Say something Hunt, because I’m giving up on you.

Thank You so much,

Sincerely,

Amanda

P.S. The song “Say Something” by A Great Big World is my inspiration for this prompt. I don’t know if Hunt’s problem is he’s supposedly straight, if he’s gay and a player, or something else entirely, that’s up to you. But an HEA is a must!!

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: friends to lovers, musicians/rock stars, blow job, young adult characters, college, homophobia, bullying

Content Warnings: graphic violence

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ONLY YOU
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1. Matt

Matt awoke with the feel of a heavy weight on his side. He soon realized it was his best friend's body. So close to his, they could have practically been fused together.

He froze, not wanting to wake Hunter up. Such moments weren't entirely rare lately, but he enjoyed them so much that to not take advantage of them was practically a sacrilege in his book.

Matt took deep, silent breaths and savored the feel of Hunter's hard body against his. He became aware that Hunter's hand had started to move, slowly caressing his hip. Matt bit his lower lip to stop himself from moaning, his cock weeping precome like a leaking tap. Hunter had no idea how much he tortured him. Matt started to taste blood from how hard he'd bitten his lip.

Hunter's hand journeyed farther up his hip, his fingertips stopping barely an inch away from Matt's belly, where his erection eagerly awaited Hunter's touch. Matt let out a strangled whine, barely audible, but enough for Hunter's hand to freeze in its position.

Long moments of silence passed as Matt tried to regain his control. His senses felt numbed, sexual tension fogging his brain. Dreamlike, he thought he felt Hunter's own hardness resting between his ass cheeks, pushing slowly against him. He knew it must be his imagination because Hunter would never, ever feel this way toward another man's body, definitely not toward his.

Then the worst happened—the cell phone alarm went off. They jolted, Hunter moving away fast, as if burned. Matt quickly lay on his stomach to hide his massive wood.

“Morning, Matty,” Hunter whispered, lips inches away from his ear for a few fleeting seconds as he scrambled out of bed, straddling Matt in the process.

He *did* sport a huge erection of his own, Matt noted, before Hunter disappeared into the bathroom, clad only in his boxers.

Matt groaned. Another delayed orgasm. He had to wait for his own shower time to finally jack off because he couldn't possibly do that while Hunter was in the shower. “Fuck,” he whispered, humping desperately against the mattress for a little painful pleasure. He hated when Hunter slept over.

Ten agonizing minutes later, Hunter was out of the shower, a towel loosely tied around his hips. Matt had, in the meantime, procured a towel of his own

which he used to strategically hide his still achingly hard cock. As his cock got more painful at the sight of his wet, half-naked friend, he also admitted to himself why he absolutely loved it when Hunter slept over. It was the story of his life ever since he'd turned sixteen and realized that girl parts did nothing for him. Whereas boy parts, in particular Hunter parts, did everything for him. That had been the turning point of his and Hunter's friendship. He'd agonized over what his best friend would think about him when he'd found out Matt jacked off, not fantasizing about boobs like all the other teenage boys, but about cocks and balls and sculpted asses.

The result of his worries had been spectacularly anticlimactic in comparison to the scenarios his active imagination had provided. Hunter had one day slapped him over the head during football practice and told him to "stop ogling their teammates' asses and concentrate on the damn game." Matt had almost had a heart attack. Hunter had just shrugged and rolled his eyes at Matt's dumbstruck face. "Buddy, you're no Oscar-worthy actor."

Six years later, still best friends and, to Matt's amazement, Hunter still had absolutely no problem sharing a bed with him, in the very platonic sense of the expression. Hunter kept begging Matt to rent an apartment together because he hated staying at the place he'd rented with another college student, Greg. Yet Matt had adamantly refused, claiming Hunter was too noisy, and he would distract him from studying. To this, Hunter always retorted by pointing out Matt and his band mates made double the noise when they got together and, more often than not, received complaints from neighbors.

Nevertheless, Matt did everything in his power to get a single room on campus, going behind Hunter's back. Hunter still didn't forgive him for that. Matt suspected that his increasingly frequent sleepovers were just Hunter's way to get revenge on him. Plus, it was harder and harder for Matt to hide his desire for his best friend. His painful morning wood was just minuscule (metaphorically speaking) proof of how fucked up he was.

Something had to give. Matt reached this same conclusion time and again. Especially every time he emerged from the shower after a very short and unsatisfactory jerk off session in which his fantasy supplied images of his naked best friend. Something had to give, or Matt would sooner than later go insane.

"Matty, I'm suddenly craving pancakes," Hunter called, bursting into the bathroom, still clad in just his towel, like it was nothing. No matter that Matt had just gotten out of the shower. And he was shaving. Naked.

“Jesus, Hunt,” Matt winced, having scraped his face bloody. “How many times do I have to tell you to knock before barging in?”

“Oh, sorry,” Hunter said, not sounding in the least regretful.

He appraised Matt's shaving injury like a dentist looking for a cavity. “So, wanna go to Sally's and order pancakes for breakfast?”

“We always go to Sally's and order pancakes for breakfast when you stay over. Why do you still bother asking me?”

Hunter shrugged. “Okay, then, I'm getting dressed.”

You could have done that already, Matt inwardly snapped. Not that he was complaining; he was just having a hard time keeping his eyes fixed on Hunter's face when he knew what lay lower. Sometimes it felt like Hunter was torturing him on purpose. The only reason why he didn't seriously consider jumping his bones was the fact that he didn't want to risk losing Hunter's friendship. He couldn't imagine Hunter would consciously tease him so much with something he knew he could never give to Matt.

Given that Hunter had already seen his private bits, Matt eventually emerged from the bathroom in his birthday suit. Hunter gaped at him, blushed, then turned his eyes elsewhere, much to Matt's amusement. Matt dressed slowly, watching his best friend from the corner of his eye as he put his clothes on with the speed of light. Hunter's face was flushed by the time he was done, while Matt still leisurely zipped up his jeans.

“Try not to barge in while I'm in the bathroom next time. Deal?”

Hunter nodded. After Matt put on his shirt, Hunter exhaled loudly and his mischievous grin was back in place.

“Pancakes,” he whined, doing his unmistakable eager puppy impression.

Matt rolled his eyes and slapped him on the back of his head. “Let's go.”

They headed out the door toward Hunter's favorite café, Sally's, that served the *killer pancakes* Hunter loved so much.

“I don't know how you can still look the way you do with the amount of calories you wolf down,” Matt commented, shaking his head in amazement as Hunter filled his mouth with a forkful of syrupy pancakes, moaning in appreciation. That sort of moan always went straight to Matt's balls, and this time wasn't an exception. He squirmed in his seat as his cock got half-hard.

Hunter grinned at him and wiggled his eyebrows. "I look hot, huh?"

"There's no need for me to stroke your ego, is there?"

"Say, Matty, what's your type?"

Matt choked on his own breakfast. "Huh?"

"You know, what kind of guys do you go for? I've never seen you with anyone. Are you even sure you're gay?"

Matt took a deep breath. "Oh, trust me, man. I'm more than just sure."

Hunter nodded thoughtfully.

"What? Did you decide it bothers you?" Matt asked, feeling nauseous all of a sudden. A brusque thought flashed through his mind. What if Hunter was still okay with him being gay only because he hadn't actually seen him with another guy?

Hunter swiftly dismissed his worries with his next words, "No way, dude. I just worry about you. I don't understand why you don't have a boyfriend yet. We're away from home. You're free to be yourself here. Don't you think it's time to explore?"

Matt shrugged. "I don't know. I never thought about it. What about you then?" he retorted, even though it pained him thinking of Hunter dating someone.

"I guess I just didn't find the right girl yet. They all seem so..."

"So?" Matt encouraged him.

Hunter only shrugged again. "I don't know. Superficial?"

Matt groaned. "We're barely in our twenties. What do you expect? Girls want to live on the edge while they can, just as much as guys do."

"I guess so."

They fell silent for a couple of minutes, until Hunter spoke up again. "So, you didn't answer my question."

Matt looked at him askance.

"What guys are your type? What kind of guy do you see as handsome?"

Matt blushed. "I don't know. Guys like you, I guess?"

Shit, he thought, *maybe I pushed it too far*. He instantly felt ashamed, blushing furiously. But, to his relief, Hunter grinned mischievously.

“Yeah, I guess you can’t help thinking I’m hot.” He flexed his biceps and winked like a kid.

“Jesus, grow up.” Matt sighed in exasperation, but grinned, nonetheless. How could he not fall in love with such a goofy guy? He’d been a goner the moment Hunter first smiled at him when they met, at the age of four. Of course, it had taken him over ten years to realize the profoundness of his feelings for his best friend.

With a sigh, he took a sip from his already lukewarm coffee and watched Hunter as he poured an unbelievable amount of maple syrup onto his plate. He knew, no matter how much he “explored”, he still wouldn’t find someone who had everything he loved about Hunter. The question was: for how long would he be able to handle being so lonely?

Matt and Hunter parted ways a couple of hours later and, despite being happy in Hunter’s company, Matt couldn’t help feeling relieved as he closed the door behind his best friend. Being around Hunter didn’t just take its toll on his body (having a half-hard cock for hours wasn’t a pleasant experience at all), but it ate away at his soul. It was getting harder and harder to keep from blurting out his feelings, to stop from shaking when Hunter touched him, oblivious to his inner turmoil. His heart was aching, knowing he didn’t stand a chance.

But Matt didn’t have time to mope around. His bandmates would be by shortly, and he’d get the chance to pour out his feelings as he sang. Matt’s therapy was song. Even if it didn’t always give brilliant results, it was the best he got.

He tried cleaning his room. That essentially meant throwing everything in the closet and propping his small computer desk against it to hamper everything from spilling out.

Half an hour later, the boys knocked on the door. They barged in when Matt opened it, and didn’t seem at all impressed with his attempt at cleanliness. Paul chuckled and surveyed the computer desk and closet doors wearily. “Are you sure it will hold?”

Matt blushed. “Don’t be a jerk. At least I bothered making space for us.”

“Yeah, Paul, don’t be a jerk,” Jeremy sing-songed, winking at Paul like they shared a kinky secret. Their secret was well-known to Matt though—they simply enjoyed teasing him and making him feel inadequate most of the time,

albeit in a friendly manner. Jeremy liked to call him their boy-toy. *Gah*. Matt swore one of these days, he'd leave their little band and find less sadistic people to play with, but as soon as Jerr's fingers touched the cords, and Paul's determined hands hit the drums, he'd forget all the torments he had to undergo with them. Their music was both his heaven and his purgatory. Plus, Gay for You, their band, could never exist with other people.

"We need to figure out a setlist for the charity event," he reminded his band mates. Their friend, Delia, had invited Gay for You to sing at her charity gala. It would be their first time singing for more than twenty people, and Matt wanted everything to be perfect. Because of how big the event was, they had decided to play covers instead of their own music.

"I think we should sing songs about getting wasted," Paul mused. He was always the serious one even when he made jokes. But this one was definitely a joke.

"It's a charity event, Paulie," Matt reminded him. "I know you're trying to be funny, but let's be sensible."

They mused in silence, but it was still Paul who broke it. "Let's just sing gay songs," he suggested. "That's what this is all about after all. We're Gay for You and the charity is raising money for gay kids."

"Agreed," both Matt and Jeremy said at the same time.

"I suggest lots of happy songs," Matt added.

"Yeah, but we need a few of those sappy, romantic songs too. They make all the women coo," Jeremy said.

"Yeah, good idea. We could end it with romantic songs." Paul took out a notebook and a pen and started scribbling while talking, "I say, start with happy songs, intersect with some blues for couples to dance to, then end with some sad, slow songs to suggest goodbye. It will suit the mood. I bet everyone will be tired by the end of the evening."

He had a few song titles on paper and passed the notebook around for Matt and Jeremy to see.

"Taylor Swift? Seriously?" Jeremy grimaced.

"What?" Paul defended himself, blushing. "'Teardrops on My Guitar' is actually pretty good."

Matt smiled and decided to help his usually stoic friend. "I like it too."

He'd been listening to a lot of songs about unrequited love since he'd fallen for Hunter. He could add a few hundred to the list if need be. But lately, he'd been especially focused on one song in particular. He took the notebook from Jeremy, wrote it down and passed it back.

“Say something”? What's that?” Jeremy asked.

“Say Something (I'm giving up on you),” Paul said before Matt could reply. “Right?”

Matt nodded.

“I love that song,” Paul said, suddenly looking pained. Matt immediately thought that maybe he wasn't the only one who knew what unrequited love felt like, but before he could analyze it further, Paul's face became unreadable, and Jeremy interrupted, asking them to play the song for him.

Matt grabbed the guitar self-consciously. He wasn't very good at it, but he thought he could manage. Although the song was mostly on piano, it could easily be adapted for guitar. Paul joined him with his unique high-pitched voice as Jeremy listened, riveted till the end.

“That sounds cool,” Jerr whispered when they finished, eyes suspiciously shiny. “It will be the perfect ending song to our setlist.” They all agreed, smiling.

The session continued with rehearsal and adapting the other songs they'd settled on, and Matt couldn't wait for the event night to arrive.

“So, what are we doing today?” Hunter asked from the other end of the line, not bothering with a good morning.

“Huh?” Matt took the cell away from his ear to glance at the clock displayed on the screen. It was little past 8 a.m., and Hunter had just rudely awakened him. What normal guy got up so early on a weekend? “You're not normal,” he muttered to himself.

“I asked, what are we doing today,” Hunter repeated.

“Hunt, go back to sleep. It's only eight,” Matt grumbled.

“I know. That's why I'm bringing coffee and pancakes. Let me in?”

Matt groaned, cursing the man for being such an early bird. He could hear Hunter calling him insistently from the other side of the door.

“Matty, I’m about to drop the coffee,” he whined, kicking the door with his leg in a rhythmical sequence.

Grudgingly, Matt got up and stumbled his way to the door.

“You’ll get as fat as a blue whale if you keep on buying those damn pancakes,” he said as he opened the door and found Hunter smiling at him guiltily. He held a coffee cup in each hand, a bag with alluring smelling pancakes wrapped tightly to his chest, held in place by his bulky arms, while the cell phone hung precariously between his ear and shoulder. He was wearing his tight, white T-shirt that showed pretty much every muscle underneath. It was Matt’s favorite, and he found himself drooling and trying hard to control his growing desire.

Hunter passed him by, heading for Matt’s bed. “But you’ll love me anyway, right?” he called behind him.

It took Matt a while to remember what they were talking about and, even more, for Hunter’s words to finally settle in. With a groan, he watched Hunter take his sneakers off only using his toes and heels with seemingly effortless movements, while at the same time, his hands were busy setting the coffees on the nightstand and digging in the Styrofoam container for his precious pancakes.

So clueless, Matt thought morosely. Sometimes he felt like strangling Hunter for being so dense. He really needed that coffee to deal with this.

“Why are you here so early?” he demanded, grabbing one of the cups.

Hunter shrugged, a pancake already lodged between his teeth. “I was bored.” His words came out like “I wash ball” because of his constant chewing, and, just like that, Matt’s anger evaporated.

“Tell me the truth, you’re just visiting so you have a reason to buy pancakes.” He hated himself for being so weak.

Hunter gave a mischievous grin in reply and licked syrup off his fingers with sensual swipes of his tongue. Matt felt his throat dry up. He coughed, and self-consciously covered his crotch with his coffee cup. He was only wearing his boxers, and there was no doubt that he was displaying a monstrous tent. Unfortunately, the damage was already done, judging by Hunter’s widened eyes that were now fixed on said area.

"I need to shower," Matt blurted out, quickly heading for the bathroom. Only when he closed the door behind him did he realize he'd taken the coffee with him.

Great, now you look like double the loser.

He emptied the cup in one swallow and threw it in the waste basket. Good thing he at least had his own bathroom. It would have been a disaster if he had to share it with all the guys in the building and show them his most pitiful moments.

Thankfully, the shower helped Matt regain some sense, and, when he came back into the room, he wasn't any more self-conscious than usual of his naked body, now that his erection had died down.

With a yawn, he crouched in front of his closet and started perusing for something to wear. Hunter was diluting all the sugary goodness of his beloved pancakes with a mouthful of coffee, but as soon as Matt turned his back on him, he started coughing violently.

"Shit, Hunt, are you okay?"

Matt jumped in bed with Hunter and started slapping him on the back. "Want me to do that Heimlich move?"

Hunter shook his head between coughs and finally managed to speak, albeit with a shaky, rough voice "I'm okay. Pancake went down the wrong pipe."

Matt gave him a pointed look that clearly said he got what he deserved.

"Drink a little more coffee," he encouraged. "It should slide down easier."

Hunter obliged and then let out a deep exhale. Matt kept rubbing his back, and, eventually, they both lay on the bed. Matt flipped over and unconsciously molded his back to Hunter's chest. His friend's hand came around his and rested on his belly, tracing soft circles with his fingers.

"Did your rehearsal go well yesterday?"

"Umhm."

"When will you let me hear you guys play?"

Matt shrugged, "One of these days."

"Liar," Hunter accused, pinching Matt's nose. "You never let me listen to you. Ever since you joined that band, you stopped singing for me." Hunter sounded disappointed.

“Aww, so cute.”

“What?” Hunter retorted blushing.

“Fine, I’ll sing for you then.”

He cleared his throat and tried a few notes, then started singing “Say Something”, pouring all his emotions into it, begging Hunter to hear him out, to read through the lines and see what his heart felt. His eyes got shiny as he sang, avoiding looking at his best friend, fearing what he’d see. He knew Hunter wouldn’t understand.

“Wow, that was beautiful,” Hunter said a few minutes after Matt was done.

His hold on Matt tightened to the point of making it hard to breathe.

“Matt, how does it feel to like another guy?” he eventually whispered.

Matt smiled sadly, “Painful, Hunt. It feels really painful.”

He couldn’t stop a stray tear from sliding down his face. To stop it from showing, he buried his face in his pillow and let sleep wash away his heartache.

2. Hunter

The lights were out when Hunter came back home. He sighed in relief that he didn't have to deal with his asshole of a housemate. He really wished Matt would stop finding excuses not to move in with him. It would have been so much better living with his best friend than with someone like Greg.

He kicked his shoes off almost with a vengeance, sending them sprawling in opposites corners of the narrow hallway. *Maybe Greg would end up stumbling over one of them*, he thought, with a satisfied grin, imagining the scene.

Just then, he heard the key turn in the lock, and Greg entered, almost knocking into Hunter on the way in.

"Oh, you're back early. What's the matter? Your boyfriend didn't put out tonight?" Greg sneered at Hunter.

"Fuck off, retard," Hunter replied, barely keeping his anger in check. One of these days, he would end up kicking Greg's ass so hard he'd rupture his organs if he dared insult Matt again.

"Oh, you're so sweet, defending your sissy's pride."

"That's it. I'm gonna kill you!" Hunter swerved around and punched Greg square in the face. But Greg was a volatile guy, quick to rise up when challenged to a fistfight. They were soon rolling on the floor, fists flying, knees jamming into stomachs, groaning and growling.

"Fucking faggot!" Greg screamed, landing a hard punch in Hunter's stomach.

Hunter groaned in pain, but soon recovered and kicked Greg square in the balls, making him whimper like kicked dog. "Call me faggot one more time, asshole, and you'll lose your nuts for good." For emphasis, he kicked Greg a couple more times, before putting his sneakers back on and leaving the way he came.

"Fucking son of a bitch," Hunter muttered as he walked aimlessly down the street. He really needed to move out now. Knowing Greg, he would probably invite his jock friends over and ask Hunter for a rematch.

Hunter had no choice but to go back to Matt's place. He felt good there. He loved spending time with Matt and sharing a bed like they did when they were

kids, but something between them had changed. Even though they were the same people and acted the same on the surface, Hunter could tell Matt had put up a wall between them, especially since they'd both moved away for college. It felt like Matt was drifting further and further away, and Hunter didn't know what to do about it. Without Matt, he felt lonelier than ever. If only he could tell what was really bothering Matty. But Matt never even hinted about anything. At least, not until this morning when he'd sang that sad song about unrequited love. Hunter had felt that for the first time he'd been shown a glimpse into what was bothering Matt.

Matt had never seemed to be in love with someone, although Hunter had always paid attention. He wanted Matt to be happy, but Matty had almost seemed asexual before. Now though, when he sang about love and confessed how painful it was afterwards, Hunter had realized that Matt had found someone to love.

Fuck, this is so complicated, he thought. He didn't want to stand in Matty's way, but judging by Matty's attitude toward him that was probably exactly what he was doing. Being around Matt all the time, he had become a hindrance, and Matt was too gentle to let him know.

Reluctantly, he had to agree that it was time to grow up and give his best friend a little more space, no matter how lonely the thought made him feel.

One more week, just this one week until I find a new place, and I'll leave Matty alone for a while.

Lost in thought, he'd arrived at Matt's place without even noticing. He knocked, but no one answered. He tried again, to no avail. He was about to take his cell out and dial Matt, when the sound of laughter stopped him. The voices were heading his way, and he could clearly recognize Matt's deep laugh.

Hunter sighed. From down the stairs, two figures emerged, Matt's shorter frame clad in a tight leather jacket, with his favorite cross earring dangling in the light of the hallway lamps and another tall and lanky form that Hunter soon recognized as belonging to Jeremy.

"Hunt, what are you doing here?" Matt asked as soon as he spotted him. "Oh, fuck, what happened to you?"

Hunter frowned, having momentarily forgotten the ugly bruises that marred his face.

"Had a quarrel with Greg."

“Fuck, Hunt.” Matt gently shoved him aside and unlocked the door.

“I should probably go,” Jeremy said, clearing his throat. But Matt didn’t hear him, having already run into the bathroom, Hunter presumed, in search of his emergency kit.

Hunter appraised Jeremy from head to toe. He wasn’t a bad-looking guy, but he definitely didn’t look like someone fit for Matt. He was too... he couldn’t put his finger on it, but he knew he and Matt didn’t fit together. It made him cringe just to think of it.

For his part, Jeremy didn’t seem to like him much either. They were civil every time they met, but that was it. At the moment though, Jeremy looked at him like he was a cockroach he wanted to step on. Or maybe that was just Hunter’s impression. Either way, he looked pointedly at Jeremy, “Wanna come inside?” he asked half-heartedly.

Jeremy scoffed, “No, thanks.”

In return, Hunter shrugged, “I guess I’ll see you around then.”

Jeremy backed off, calling a goodbye to Matt. Matt didn’t answer, most likely because he didn’t hear him, but it gave Hunter a sick satisfaction nonetheless to see Jeremy’s face fall when he realized Matt didn’t care that he was leaving.

With a relieved sigh, Hunter went inside and locked the door behind him. Finally, he had his best friend’s undivided attention. Matt soon emerged from the bathroom, alcohol, sterile bandages and more paraphernalia at hand. “All right, clothes off. I bet there’s more where that came from,” he said, pointing at Hunter’s face.

Hunter grinned. He liked bossy Matt. But then Matt froze, eyes gazing into nothingness.

“Matt?” Hunter asked, worried.

“Oh, shit. I forgot about Jerr. Where is he?”

Hunter couldn’t help but smile at Matt’s words. So he *had* forgotten Jeremy. *I knew that guy’s not meant for him.*

“He left.”

“Damn, I guess I should apologize later.”

Hunter decided it was time to take Matt's mind off Jeremy entirely, so he pulled the best trick he had up his sleeve. He took off his shirt, showing Matt the purplish spots all over his skin.

Matt gasped and fell at his feet in an instant, studying Hunter's wounds carefully, and forgetting all about Jeremy or any other guy that could have been on his mind.

Hunter closed his eyes, as Matt examined every cut and bruise with the tips of his fingers. Although it hurt, Hunter couldn't help the tiny shivers of pleasure at the touch of his friend's hand. He shook his head. Not wanting to think what it must mean, he concentrated on the physical pain instead. With a happy sigh, he allowed Matt to clean and bandage his wounds. Not for the first time, he realized that, whatever these confusing feelings he was starting to have toward Matt meant, one thing was certain: he could never give Matt up. Without Matt being there for him unconditionally, Hunter would have no reason to smile.

Hunter couldn't sleep. Matt had accepted his plea to move in until he could find a new place, although Hunter could see he'd been hesitant about it.

Now Matt lay sleeping beside him, his soft breathing muffled by the pillow, his beautiful long hair falling like a cascade over the white sheets, and Hunter had all the time in the world to think. His mind kept bringing up the same questions: why didn't Matty want him around anymore? Was Matty dating someone and he was ashamed of introducing him to Hunter? Did he want privacy that much? Did Matt doubt their friendship?

Hunter tossed again in the narrow bed, the memory of Matt and Jeremy laughing as they climbed the stairs to Matt's room flashing through his mind. What if they *were* more than just bandmates? Maybe Matt wanted him away because he knew Hunter didn't much like Jeremy.

Ah, he felt like ripping his hair out. When had he and Matt become so distant that they couldn't communicate anymore? A long time ago, he used to know every thought that crossed his best friend's mind, even before Matt himself processed it. They used to be so in sync that they spoke the same things at the same time, they had similar dreams, similar gestures, similar reactions. They were more like twin souls rather than two different beings.

Now Matt seemed so far away, as if there were a whole continent between them, even though he was physically just inches away. Hunter missed him. He

reached over and put his hand around Matty, feeling the hard ridges of his abs move beneath his hand as Matt breathed in and out. He buried his nose in his friend's silky hair, inhaling the smell of his coconut shampoo. God, how he loved his long hair. Matt's hair was more beautiful than any girl's hair.

Matt let out a soft little whimper and leaned into Hunter's touch. His body radiated warmth, calling to Hunter like a mirage in the desert, and Hunter obeyed, like a thirsty traveler. He lined his body to Matt, feeling every inch of their nakedness merging and his fingers caressed soft skin, up and down Matt's torso. Hunter knew this body better than his own. He could bring up its image in his head effortlessly. Every muscle of Matt's body was a work of art. He might have been short and slim, but underneath the deceptive clothes lay a body of perfection, with hard abs and pecs, supple biceps and triceps, gorgeously sculpted legs. Matt was as beautiful as a Michelangelo sculpture, only warm and alive, and so good against him.

Hunter didn't really comprehend what he was doing until he felt Matt moaning beneath him. "Hunt," he called in a weak voice. Hunter couldn't tell how upset Matt was, but his voice was enough to shock him out of his trance. He froze taking in the sight of his best friend's back, still undulating slowly underneath him, and then, to his utmost shame, he realized in shock that he'd had Matt pinned down, unable to move. His cock was so hard it had escaped his boxers and was leaving a slimy trail right between Matt's ass cheeks.

"Shit," he cried, horrified at what he'd done, quickly stumbling away and falling on his ass on the floor.

"Fuck, Matty, are you okay?" he asked when Matt didn't move a muscle. How could this have happened?

"I'm fine," Matt eventually whispered, his face still buried in the pillow.

"Did I hurt you?" Hunter insisted.

"No, Hunt. I'm totally fine."

"Then look at me."

Hunter quickly got up and tucked his deflating erection back inside his boxers. He turned on the light.

"Matt, look at me."

But Matt still wouldn't raise his face from the pillow. "I'm fine, Hunter. Seriously," he said, voice muffled.

"I'm so sorry, Matty," he reiterated.

Matt didn't answer and Hunter found himself at a loss.

Eventually he grabbed his pillow and put it on the floor where he lay, trying to get back to sleep. Several minutes later, he felt Matt place a sheet over his back.

"I didn't... penetrate you, did I?" he whispered.

"No," Matt whispered back.

"Thank God," Hunter sighed in relief.

Matt's hand froze on his shoulder for a few seconds before he retracted it.

Hunter didn't sleep all night. His mind was in a turmoil. For one, he was horrified that he'd been one step away from "raping" his best friend. But other more disturbing thoughts raced through his mind. He couldn't seem to forget the perfect shape of Matt's naked butt, the softness of his skin and the hardness of the muscles underneath. A body so different from that of a female—firmer, stronger, smelling so much more enticing.

He'd always admired men's bodies, especially Matty's. The past weeks he'd slept over at his place, he'd seen Matt naked numerous times, and he'd felt his groin stir uncomfortably, but he'd decided to ignore it. However, he couldn't ignore it anymore. He'd crossed a line he never thought he'd be crossing, and now he was faced with having to reconsider his entire life choices.

The white picket fence, waiting for the right woman, having three children and a dog—that was his life-long dream. But in the light of what happened, he had to admit to himself that said dream was getting further away than ever before.

Fuck, I might be gay. Even as he thought that, Hunter knew he was just lying to himself. No straight man craved his best friend's body the way he'd craved Matty's the past few months, since they'd rekindled their old tradition of sleepovers. There was no question of might.

The morning after was awkward, to say the least. Both Hunter and Matt avoided looking at each other directly. For the first time since Hunter had started sleeping over, he didn't feel like eating pancakes, opting for a ham and cheese sandwich and a black coffee at the campus cafeteria.

“So, what are you going to do about Greg?” Matt asked him after a long, uncomfortable silence.

Hunter shrugged. “I’ll deal with it somehow. The lease is in Greg’s name. I should look at the roommate ads.”

He saw Matt nod from the corner of his eye, “I’ll help you sort the good ones out.”

“I can’t really afford to have high standards. I can’t keep staying with Greg. This fight was just the beginning. I knew he was a jerk from the start.”

“It’s all my fault. I should have agreed to us renting a place together.”

Hunter shook his head. He’d never understood why Matt had refused to live with him, but, after what happened last night, he had the suspicion Matt had somehow seen through him and guessed his attraction before Hunter was even aware of it himself. Matt was too smart for his own good, and, like always, Hunter was extremely grateful for his best friend’s intelligence. He couldn’t imagine how much more awkward it would have been if this had happened while they stayed under the same roof.

They spent the rest of the day looking through ads for housemates whenever they had a break from classes. The awkwardness had slowly faded to an acceptable level, but Hunter was still relieved when they parted, having decided to go looking at apartments together the next day.

Thankfully, Greg wasn’t home, and Hunter locked himself in his room for the evening, packing his stuff.

He didn’t want to think about Matty, but his thoughts kept straying in that direction anyway. Matty’s intoxicating smell, his sweet, innocent smile, his deep, raspy voice as he sang for him. All his bottled-up feelings from years of trying to live up to his parents’ expectations, especially his father’s, came flooding over him now. He was burning with desire for a life he’d tried his hardest not to want.

3. Matt

“This isn’t working,” Paul said in his usual calm matter-of-fact way, even though his frown and lip biting betrayed his distress.

“I’m sorry,” Matt sighed. “I just can’t concentrate.”

He felt bad for ruining everyone’s practice session, but thoughts of Hunter dominated his mind, and he kept missing his cue and getting his notes wrong. He was a total mess.

“Wanna talk about it?” Jeremy asked, looking concerned.

Matt shook his head. “Let’s just wrap it up for today.” Everyone nodded.

“Paul, you head out. I’ll join you later,” Jeremy suggested, surprising both him and Matt. Paul quickly recovered from his shock and left after waving goodbye, leaving Matt and Jerr alone.

“Can we talk for a second?” Jeremy asked him.

“Sure,” Matt replied, frowning.

“Look, I don’t wanna interfere in your life,” Jeremy started. It didn’t sound like a promising start to Matt. He was sure he was going to get a lecture.

“I know you like Hunter.”

Matt’s eyes widened. “H-how?” he stammered.

Jeremy rolled his eyes. “It’s pretty obvious you only have eyes for him, Matt. But... don’t you think it’s time to move on? He’s playing you.”

Matt cut Jeremy off. He wasn’t usually quick to anger, but he wouldn’t stand for anyone bad-mouthing Hunter. “Oh, you think you know Hunt so well? Mind your own fucking business, Jerr.”

Jeremy sighed. “You’re right. I shouldn’t have accused him of anything. But still, I think you’re wasting your time, waiting around for him.”

Matt said nothing, frowning at his bandmate and trying to resist the urge to strangle him.

“What’s this really about?” he eventually asked.

Jeremy’s whole face suddenly turned crimson. “Fine, I’ll cut straight to the chase. I like you.” Matt gasped in shock as Jeremy continued, “And I wanna ask you to go out with me.”

“Jerr...”

“Don’t say anything right now,” Jeremy interrupted. “I just want you to know that I’ll be waiting. Once you decide you’ve had enough of mooning over that friend of yours, you know where to find me.”

Matt shook his head. He wanted to tell Jeremy that he’d never be able to love someone as much as he loved Hunt, no matter how many years passed or how many men asked him out, but Jeremy cut him off again. “I told you. I don’t want an answer now. I just want you to know where I stand.”

He took a deep inhale and was out the door before Matt even had time to realize what had happened.

“Damn,” he whispered as his shaky legs failed him, and he fell on the bed. *I can’t believe I never guessed Jeremy’s intentions.* He’d been blind to his friend’s feelings even though they’d known each other for over two years. His head fuzzy with thoughts of Jeremy and Hunter, he eventually fell into a long sleep.

The next morning, he went to classes, and met Hunter in the afternoon to look at apartments for rent. The first apartment smelled of mold and cat’s piss, so they immediately dismissed it. The second one had no water heater, the third came without furniture. By the time they reached the fourth, their hopes and standards were significantly diminished.

“I’d forgotten how hard it is to find a good place. This is why I settled for living with Greg,” Hunter said with a sigh.

“Yeah. It sucks,” Matt agreed.

By then, they had reached the fourth place and Matt pushed the doorbell. After a couple of seconds, footsteps approached the door, followed by the sound of chains rattling and the lock clicking, before the door was opened, revealing a smiling, fortyish lady, with curly blonde hair and cute little dimples.

“One of you must be Hunter, right? You’re right on time.”

They both nodded and introduced themselves as they were welcomed inside.

“Two bedrooms, one living room, one bathroom and a kitchen,” the lady, whose name was Jenna, supplied and invited them to take a better look inside. The apartment looked spacious and smelled clean. The furniture was new and minimalistic.

"I had everything renovated recently. The sinks are all new and so is most of the furniture." Both Matt and Hunter nodded in awe.

"It's all very nice, but I don't think I can afford this," Hunter said, dismayed, after they had checked out the bathroom and made sure the heat and hot water worked.

"For two people, taking into account the location, I think the rent is very reasonable," Jenna pointed out, giving him a meaningful look.

"Oh, absolutely, but I don't have a roommate yet. In the ad you gave the price rent per room, so I thought there already was a roommate."

Jenna nodded. "That's true. I mean to rent this apartment to two people, but the description in the ad was clear enough. Two bedroom apartment, \$500 per person. Which means you would have to find your own second roommate. Or, if someone else wants to rent, you will have to negotiate your living arrangement with them."

"That doesn't sound very fair," Matt said.

Jenna, who had lost her generous smile in the meantime, shrugged. "Look, I've had offers from other people. It's your loss if you don't take it."

Hunter sighed.

"What about you, Matt?" Jenna asked. "Why don't you move in with your friend? This apartment is very spacious. I doubt you'll find better living conditions somewhere else. You could help your friend and get a good deal out of it at the same time."

"Oh, I already have somewhere to live," Matt found the need to explain himself. "I have my own room on campus."

Jenna snorted. "We both know the conditions on campus."

"Yes, but I have a band. We rehearse a lot, and neighbors don't tend to complain, whereas if I moved off campus..." Matt excused himself further.

Before he had the time to continue, Jenna interjected, "Oh, that's great! Didn't I mention that I have soundproof walls? It'd be perfect for you!"

Matt's eyes widened as he was unable to come up with further arguments on his behalf.

"Can we think about it, Jenna?" Hunter asked, his arm winding around Matt's waist, as if to bring him comfort.

“Yes, of course, but you’ll need to hurry up. I have received many calls about the apartment. I can only hold it for you for two or three days, at the most.”

They said their goodbyes in a daze, Hunter’s hand never moving from Matt’s waist. Matt leaned into him as they walked away. They didn’t realize how close they were until a group of guys pointed at them and chuckled, calling them fags. Hunter jumped away from Matt, looking nervous.

Matt was amazed at his behavior. Hunter wasn’t like that; he’d never been ashamed of their friendship, always showing the finger or leering at everyone who bullied them when they looked too close. Matt felt devastated all of a sudden.

“I should browse more ads. Maybe I’ll find something eventually,” Hunter said, after they walked in silence for too long.

Matt nodded. “You really liked that place, huh?”

Hunter shrugged. “It was the nicest we’ve ever seen so far. But, well, it was only the fourth we visited, so... who knows?”

Matt nodded. He didn’t miss the fact that Hunter didn’t ask him to move in, even though he’d begged him for it continuously in the past year. What the hell happened between them?

It was late at night, and Hunter was going back to the place he shared with Greg. Although he was worried for him, Matt didn’t ask him to sleep over, and Hunter didn’t give any signs of wanting to. Matt knew the incident from their last sleepover had changed something irrevocably.

Even the way they parted was awkward. Hunter didn’t hug Matt goodbye like usual. He waved with a fake smile and all but ran away.

It pained Matt that Hunter had started to put distance between them. Was he disgusted by Matt? He didn’t act like it, but he certainly didn’t act as affectionately as before.

Matt snorted. “He’s probably scared of getting bitten by the gay bug. After so many years of friendship... how disappointing.”

He flopped down on his bed, curling up with his pillow. He couldn’t help a tear from sliding down his cheek, soon followed by another, and another. No matter how much he wiped them, the damn tears kept on falling, soaking his pillow and making his eyes puffy.

When was the last time he'd cried? Probably when Hunt fell and broke his leg in football practice, and he'd been so scared for him. Everything had always been about Hunt. He'd never thought of anyone else. Not even for a second did he imagine his life with someone else by his side, even though he knew how impossible his fantasies were.

He'd lost count of how many guys had asked him out since he'd come out of the closet. Although he'd been attracted by some, his heart still hadn't wanted to part with the illusions of being with Hunter. Delusions, more likely. For God's sake, he was still a virgin! If anyone found out, they'd laugh their asses off. Not even Hunter knew for sure, though Matt guessed he probably suspected it.

"You're so lame! You're the biggest loser!" he screamed, suddenly enraged. "Wasting your life waiting for someone who will never see you. What the hell is wrong with you, Matt?"

Fuck, he'd always suffered when Hunter carelessly touched him and gave him pecks with no consideration at all, but Hunter being indifferent and distant was something that hurt a thousand times more. Matt felt like his heart was breaking piece by piece. He couldn't do it anymore. Something had to give.

Out from his desk's drawer, he extracted a pair of scissors and looked at himself in the mirror. He needed to give up the past, he needed a fresh start, and, this time, he needed to stick to the decision to stop waiting for Hunter because he knew it would never happen.

With slow, deliberate movements he took the strands of hair that grew past his shoulders and cut them mercilessly. With every strand that fell he felt more powerful, more in control. He felt that he could really give up the past and start anew. It would hurt like hell, but he would do it. No more wasting time dreaming for the impossible.

"Shit, Matt, what happened to your hair?"

Paul's reaction was completely uncharacteristic. He was always calm, like everything bored him and nothing could touch him, like a cold marble statue. Matt couldn't help bursting out laughing. He regretted having cut his hair now that he was thinking more lucidly.

"Do you like it?"

Paul tilted his head, uncertain. "It looks good on you, but... I don't think you chose the most professional stylist."

Matt grinned. "I didn't. I cut it myself."

"That explains a lot of things."

"Hey, what's that supposed to mean?" Matt frowned.

"It looks like it's been cut with an axe. We're going to a stylist after classes. This needs a lot of retouching."

Matt opened his mouth to protest, but Paul swiftly cut him off. "There's no sense in arguing."

Matt shrugged and sipped on his cola, knowing when Paul set his mind on something, it was final.

After classes were over, they visited a salon and fixed Matt's hair, then decided to have lunch in the bistro down the street from the college. Jeremy would join them in an hour to practice on their setlist for the party.

"So... what did Jeremy want the other night? I mean, if it isn't too personal..." Paul asked.

Matt was surprised. He thought Jeremy and Paul shared everything. As a matter of fact, he'd suspected they were going out, until Jeremy had dropped the bomb a few days ago about liking him. At the memory, Matt blushed, feeling suddenly self-conscious. How was he to face Jeremy now?

"He..." Matt cleared his throat and continued, "he asked me out."

Paul choked on his hamburger. It took a moment for him to recollect himself. "Really? I didn't think he'd have the guts."

"You knew he was interested in me?" Matt gaped. Paul shrugged and continued eating like there was no need for words.

"I don't know what to do about it, to be honest," Matt confessed.

"You like Hunter, right?" Paul asked, again surprising Matt.

"Jesus, am I really that obvious? Both you and Jerr figured it out."

Paul smiled sadly. "You tend to see these things in the people you care for."

"Aww, that's so sweet, Paulie. I love you too."

Paul launched a tissue dabbed in grease Matt's way. "Bite me."

"I'd rather bite my cheeseburger, thanks."

Paul rolled his eyes. "You and Hunter are made for each other. You both have the dumbest come-backs ever."

Matt's smile faded. He took a lungful of air and breathed it out. "I decided to give up. There's no point in hanging on for him."

Paul nodded thoughtfully. "Life would be too easy if we could make the ones we love love us back."

Matt asked after he regarded his friend for a few long moments, "You're in love with someone too, right?" Paul was usually a very hard-to-read guy, but Matt remembered his expression when they'd both sang about unrequited love. At that moment, he'd felt a deep connection with Paul, because they were sharing the same pain.

Paul nodded again and gave Matt a sad smile. "It is what it is. Can't do anything to change that. As far as I see it, either fight for it or move on. There's no middle ground."

"So, what about you? Are you fighting for it?"

Paul cringed. "As of now, I'm in the same boat as you. There's no point in false hope. He'll never see me."

Matt wondered who Paul was talking about, but there was no time to press for answers, because Jeremy appeared from across the street and entered the bistro a minute later.

"Yo," he saluted them with his usual contagious grin in place. There was no awkwardness as they smiled at each other, and Matt inwardly sighed in relief.

"What are you eating?" Jeremy asked as he sat down. He didn't wait for an answer, but picked through Paul's plate and took a piece of his half-uneaten hamburger. Paul slapped him on the fingers when he tried for a second piece.

"Buy your own."

"Oi, you're snappy today. Who pissed you off?" Jeremy asked, pinching Paul's rosy cheek, a gesture all too familiar to Matt. Jeremy, just like Hunter, liked to touch a lot, and he made it a habit out of teasing Paul. Matt snickered at his own thoughts, as he watched his friends banter.

A sudden longing for Hunter stabbed him in the chest. *No. No more thinking of Hunter. It's time to move on.*

“So, guys, are you ready for another rehearsal session?”

Jeremy nodded as he took a second to wave the waiter over and ask for a hamburger for himself.

“I was thinking of changing the arrangement for ‘Teardrops on My Guitar’ a bit. Make it a little more rock,” Paul suggested.

“Okay. It’s something we should have thought about sooner,” Matt admitted.

“That’s our Paulie. Always a genius,” Jeremy complimented Paul, as he squeezed the life out of the petite brunet. Paul’s face was beet red, but he didn’t protest as Jeremy hugged him. Instead, he sighed when Jerr took his hands away and looked with disappointment at him while Jerr obliviously fumbled through his backpack in search of his music notebook.

Holy shit, Matt thought. Why didn’t I see it before? Paul’s in love with Jerr.

Matt felt like kicking himself. He couldn’t believe he’d told Paul that Jeremy asked him out. No wonder Paul was both sad and pissed at the same time.

Poor Paul. Love sucks, he thought, as Hunter’s perfect smile flashed in his mind’s eye. Love really sucks.

4. Hunter

Hunter hadn't slept a wink for two days. He'd continued searching for apartments by himself, but he hadn't found anything as good as the last one he'd seen with Matt. He bet someone had already rented it by now, anyway.

Locked in his room, he could hear Greg and his buddies hollering in front of the TV, while their favorite baseball team scored. Stupid games reruns. He wished for the umpteenth time to have some goddamned peace. If he were living with Matty, they would have spent the time in a much different manner. He could picture them together, Hunter cooking while Matt rehearsed his songs or studied for his classes. Then they would get beer and watch the game close to each other. Of course, they would banter as they each cheered for opposing teams, just to get on each other's nerves, but it would be completely different from dealing with Greg and his small crowd of bullies.

Hunter sighed. He missed Matty already, and he hadn't seen him for two days. His fingers itched to press the call button, but he kept on looking at his phone like it was an alien object. What was stopping him? He bit his lips hard, and his finger hovered over the damn button, but he couldn't make himself press. It was ridiculous. He called Matty at least twice a day. It was like a ritual. If he didn't hear Matt's voice, it felt like his day wasn't complete. That was probably why he hadn't slept well. However, he just couldn't make himself call. A knot formed in his stomach each time he tried to do it. His hands would shake, his whole body would burn, his breath would hitch. He was acting like a teenager trying to call his first crush. As funny as the thought was, it only made him blush harder.

"Oh, fuck it," he yelled and finally pressed the call button. The minute he did it, he immediately regretted it. Thoughts that had never crossed his mind before were now at the front and center. *What if I'm bothering him? What if Matty is sleeping, or meeting with Jeremy?* He suppressed the possessive groan that accompanied the thought of Matt and Jeremy together.

He was about to end the call when a breathless Matt answered, taking Hunter by surprise. His heart galloped as soon as he heard Matt's husky voice saying hello.

"Hunter? Are you there? Is everything okay?" Matt sounded frantic when Hunter didn't immediately speak.

After forcing himself to talk, Hunter finally replied, "Hi, Matty."

"What's wrong? You don't sound like yourself."

Hunter chuckled at Matt's perceptiveness. "Yeah, I guess I caught a cold," he lied.

"Oh God. Are you okay? Is that why you didn't call before?"

"Yeah," he lied again. "Don't worry. I'm fine."

"I'll come visit. Do you want me to buy something from the drugstore?"

"No, no. Don't worry, Matty. I'm feeling much better now."

"I'm still coming over," Matt insisted.

"You better not. All Greg's buddies are here."

"Ugh, did they try something on you?"

"Nah. I locked myself in my room," Hunter admitted, feeling embarrassed that he hadn't wanted to face the jocks.

"Shit, Hunt, you should come over. Those guys are dangerous, especially with a few beers on board."

Hunter was breathless at the thought of seeing Matt again. A sudden nervousness settled in the pit of his stomach, but also an excitement unlike any before.

"I guess I could come over," he whispered.

"Hell, yeah, you should. I'll come get you."

"Matty..."

"I'll call when I reach your apartment and wait for you downstairs. 'Kay?"

"Okay," Hunter reluctantly agreed.

As soon as he ended the call, he started rummaging through his already packed bags in search of appropriate clothing. He usually never cared what he wore when he was meeting Matt, but this time it felt different. He'd never wanted to acknowledge his attraction to guys in the past, but the more time he spent with Matt, the harder it was to pretend he didn't want to touch him in more than a friendly way. His heart beating frantically, he changed into various T-shirts before settling for a very tight one that he knew drove girls insane. He shook his head at his own antics. He shouldn't be doing this, trying to seduce

his best friend. It was a cowardly thing, something he'd never thought himself capable of, but he wanted so badly for Matt to see him as more than just a friend.

He remembered one of their conversations not long ago when he'd asked Matt what type of guys he preferred. Matt had answered, "*Guys like you.*" It made his stomach flutter just thinking of it. He looked at himself one last time in the mirror, and combed his fingers through his hair. Would Matt like what he saw? *Do gay guys have the same tastes as women?* He strained his mind for hints on Matty's style, but all he could think of was that Matty dressed just like him: plain jeans and denim jackets, plain T-shirts. Nothing fancy except for his beautiful shoulder-length hair.

Hunter exhaled loudly. "Stop. Thinking," he told his reflection.

Just then, Hunter's cell chimed. It was a text from Matty—*I'm here.*

Hunter grinned as his stomach fluttered with millions of butterflies.

He put his cell in his jeans pocket and was out the door in a second. He barely acknowledged Greg calling out to him, "*Going for a date, sissy?*" as he practically ran out the door.

So, yeah, maybe he *was* going on a date with a guy. Maybe he *was* a sissy. Who the hell cared? Matty was waiting for him with a sweet smile on his face, and Hunter was ecstatic as soon as his eyes fell on him. But his smile fell just as quickly when he noticed Matt's hair. "You cut your hair!" he exclaimed, his hands immediately reaching over. His fingers didn't find long, soft locks, but short spiky hair instead. Hunter sighed, "Why?"

Matt shrugged. "I needed a change."

"But I loved your hair," Hunter complained.

Matt frowned, looking almost angry, but didn't say anything.

"Are you mad at me?" Hunter asked, confused.

"It's always about you, huh, Hunt? Maybe I didn't like my hair. Did you think about that?"

Hunter was taken aback by Matt's hurtful tone. "Matty..."

"I'm sorry," Matt quickly cut him off. "I guess I've been tired these days. Tonight's the gala and I'm a bit nervous, that's all. Don't mind me."

Hunter had the suspicion that Matt was lying to soften the blow. He was certain Matt was mad at him for something, but he had no idea what. He almost

called him on the lie, but thought better of it. "You look cute with your hair short too," he said instead. Matt turned beet red, to Hunter's delight.

"Thanks," Matt eventually whispered.

Hunter dared to put his hand on Matt's shoulder, and settled it there, feeling Matt's muscles move underneath his arm. The butterflies in his stomach slowly started to come down from their tumultuous flight. Now, there was just a burning heat in his chest at the thought of having Matt so close. *How come I've never noticed it before, although it's always been there?* He'd chosen to mistake it for excitement when he'd known all along it hadn't been just that.

Suddenly, Matt put his hand on Hunter's forehead, and Hunter stopped dead in his tracks, in the middle of the road.

"You do seem a bit feverish. We should stop by the drugstore."

The people milling around them, the noises of the street, the cars honking and the music coming from inside cafeterias, they all died down as Hunter gazed into Matty's eyes, just half an inch away, and lower still, to his beautiful, perfectly-shaped lips. What would it feel like to kiss a man, to kiss Matty? Would his lips feel as soft as they looked?

Matt sighed, patting Hunter's cheek. "Must have been hell getting sick and trying to avoid that bastard Greg at the same time. Why didn't you call me sooner?"

Hunter shrugged. "I knew you were stressed over the event gig," he lied.

"Hunt," Matt said, regarding him seriously. "You know you come first. You always come first to me."

Hunter felt warm all over, and his legs turned to jelly. He wanted to tell Matty that he was the most important person to him too. He craved him like air. Just two days without seeing him had felt like worms crawling beneath his skin. But Matt didn't give him the chance to express his feelings. "Listen, you need to get out of that rat hole. We need to search for more apartments," he said.

Hunter didn't want to admit that he had done apartment hunting on his own. It would have meant admitting he'd lied about being sick. "It's all right. I've given up the idea. I can deal with Greg. He's not that bad."

Matt gave him a pointed look. "Sure."

"Don't worry about it, Matty."

“What about the apartment we went to before? Did you speak with that woman again? Maybe she found you a roommate.”

Hunter shook his head. “I bet she already rented it.”

“Hunt, we should at least try one more time. Here, give me your cell,” Matt demanded, waiting with his hand stretched out. Hunter, albeit reluctantly, obeyed. Matt scrolled through his contacts until he reached the woman’s name.

“Jenna,” he whispered as he waited for the woman to pick up.

In the meantime, they had reached a park, and they both sat down on a bench in silent agreement.

“Hello, Jenna. I’m Matt. I came with my friend Hunter a couple of days ago for your rent ad.”

Hunter bit his lips as Matt nodded to whatever the woman was saying. “Yes, if it’s not too much bother, can we come see it again?” They spoke some more and Matt hung up with a grin. “She said someone else only wants to rent one room, so you might reach an agreement if you like that person. Let’s hope they’re not a jerk, like Greg and his pals.”

Hunter nodded. “What would I do without you?”

Matt smiled shyly. “Are you up for seeing the place? We’ll go buy something from the drugstore for your fever, and then we can go chat with Jenna.”

“I’m feeling much better. I don’t think I need medicine.”

“Hunt, just do what I say and stop arguing. One pill won’t kill you.”

“Oh, bossy today, huh?”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Let’s move it.”

Jenna had called them back after speaking to the other person interested in the place, and said they were available in a few hours. Matt and Hunter decided to go for lunch as they waited for the mysterious possible housemate to appear. After two hours of bantering over a sandwich, followed by their customary pancakes for dessert (Hunter didn’t find them as tasty as the ones at Sally’s), they finally got the call from Jenna that the other guy had arrived. They excitedly walked the five minutes back to Jenna’s place and rang the door. Jenna was all sugar and honey the moment they entered, but their happiness

was short-lived. Lo and behold, the prospective housemate was none other than Greg, a very inebriated Greg, supported by one of his mates.

“What are you doing here, queer?”

“I should say the same,” Hunter replied. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Greg shrugged, “I’m searching for a new place.”

“Do you boys know each other?” Jenna needlessly intervened.

“We’re roommates,” they both replied, for the first time agreeing on something.

“So you finally decided to move in with your boyfriend, Reed?”

“Yeah, what’s it to you?” Hunter heatedly retorted.

“Be my guest. I guess I don’t need to search for a new place. I can just kick you out.”

“Fine,” Hunter spat. “I was leaving anyway, asshole.”

Greg and his friend left, huffing, banging the door shut behind them.

“Jesus, Hunt, how could you live with him for so long?” Matt asked in shock.

“We mainly stayed away from each other, but lately I don’t know what’s gotten into him. He’s always looking for a fight. Why do you think I kept begging you to move in with me, Matty? I hate that guy. I hate not sharing a house with my best friend, like it was supposed to happen.”

“I’m sorry,” Matt mumbled.

“Well, you two can share a house now, can you not?” Jenna asked them with a wide, money-thirsty grin.

Hunter looked at Matt, uncertain. “I guess we could,” Matt eventually agreed.

Despite his previous doubts, Hunter couldn’t help the wide grin that split open his face. He hugged Matt, squeezing him tight to his chest, and praying for that happy moment to never end.

They spent the following hour negotiating everything with Jenna, and happily went to Matt’s home to start packing his things. Two hours later, Matty would have his infamous charity concert that was eating up his nerves, and

Hunter was determined to get Matty's mind off it until the very minute he was supposed to step on stage.

5. Matt

Just two days before, he'd given up. He'd been determined to never think of Hunter in a romantic way again. He'd even cut his hair to remind himself of that decision, and, yet, here he was, held in Hunter's arms. His face was pressed to Hunter's hard pecs, and all he could think about was how much he despised having so many layers of fabric between them.

"Okay. Enough hugging. You're suffocating me," he admonished.

Hunter chuckled and let him go. "You ready?"

"As ready as I can be."

They exited Matt's room and joined Jeremy and Paul, who were waiting outside in a taxi that would drive them toward the event's location. It was a mansion of Hollywoodian proportions, belonging to the richest girl in their college, but who wasn't a snob at all. In fact, Delia was one of their dearest friends, and she said she couldn't imagine a better band playing at her charitable event. The charity was dedicated to support a center for welcoming gay homeless youth, and their band, Gay For You, fitted the whole theme to perfection.

All of them were dressed to a T. Jeremy had his customary eyebrow ring and nose ring, while Paul donned almost a dozen heavy chains around his neck with gay-friendly pendants, including his favorite rainbow-colored pony. Matt, for his part, wore his signature black eyeliner, various bracelets and chains. His rings, earrings, and tongue ring were all peace signs. Had he had his old long hair back, he'd have wrapped it in a loose bun with a fashionable bandana. But as it was, he spiked it instead. It felt weird not to have his hair long. He missed it and kept touching his head self-consciously.

"Stop that. You'll ruin it. You look pretty, Matty," Hunter admonished him, slapping his hand away just when Matt was about to bring it to his ear for the umpteenth time. Matt exhaled loudly. He noticed Jeremy throw a venomous look Hunter's way through the rearview mirror from his place in the front. *Oh, Jerr...* Then he looked at Paul beside him, trying unsuccessfully to stop gazing Jeremy's way. *Fuck, love really makes no sense.*

They were finally at the party. A few cars loomed before the front entrance like a menacing army of mecha robots, but since no guests were to arrive at that hour, they all assumed they belonged to the family members. It did nothing to settle down their nerves.

“Calm down, guys. You’ll rock their world,” Hunter encouraged them.

Matt wished he had Hunter’s courage. But Hunt wasn’t the one about to go on stage for a few hundred of the city’s most influential socialites in just a few minutes. He caught Hunter’s hand and squeezed it to gain courage. Hunter squeezed back and smiled at him reassuringly.

The next half an hour passed in a blur. They entered the mansion, saluted the host and settled on the stage that had been improvised for them in the garden. Butterflies rolled in Matt’s stomach as the guys prepped their instruments and rehearsed a few songs. Later on, they got introduced to dozens of famous people, and then they climbed back on stage to prepare for the actual concert. Matt was left standing and gazing at the crowd of guests. Chatting among themselves, drinking from crystal-clear champagne flutes, and paying him no mind. But, amongst all of them, there was one person who had eyes only for Matt. Hunter smiled at him as their gazes met, and, for a brief second, it felt like they were alone in the whole universe. A painful longing settled in Matt’s chest. He wanted so much to tell Hunter how much he loved him, how much it pained him to give up hope of them ever being together. Everything threatened to spill out of him. So instead of yelling to the whole world of how much he loved a man who would never be his, Matt poured all his feelings into the music, flying with it, getting lost in the comforting embrace of sounds and verses that always, inevitably, spoke of loving someone.

Without Matt even noticing, the hours had flown by. But Hunter never stopped looking at him, as if he knew, in his heart, that Matt was singing for him alone.

When the final song came, Matt felt drained. His voice tired, he started the slow song about giving up on love that they’d decided to keep for last. It spoke of unrequited feeling, of waiting for a sign from the other person. As he sang, Matt couldn’t help feeling the hopelessness overwhelm his heart, but then he looked up and his eyes met Hunter’s. He saw so much love there, so much trust, that it took his breath away, and he realized he didn’t want to give up. He didn’t want to ever lose sight of Hunter. No matter how long he had to wait to be seen, Hunter was the only one for him. Despite the sad song, he smiled as his voice died.

After they sang, they felt exhausted. It was all a blur of handshakes, congratulations and business cards, but all Matt could think of was how much he craved a bed to just lie down and sleep in.

Hunter was next to him the whole time, letting Matt sag against him. Many of the guests told them they made the cutest couple. Matt was too tired to contradict them, and Hunt laughed, like him being straight was their own personal joke. However awkward he must have felt after the night he'd humped against Matt, everything seemed okay now. Hunter was his old self, always touching him, grinning at him and jokingly pretending he was gay, like it didn't bother him at all. Like usual, he felt emotionally drained.

At some point, Hunter sat him down on a chair and went in search of a bottle of water to help hydrate Matt. Matt smiled at the sweet gesture and waved Hunter off.

“Do you have time for a chat?”

He turned around to find Jeremy looking at him with a nervous expression.

“Sure, Jerr.” Matt patted the chair next to him and Jeremy took the hint and sat down.

“It was awesome, huh?”

“Hell, yeah, it was,” Matt agreed, “and equally nerve-wracking.”

Jeremy chuckled. His knees jerked in an unsettling rhythm. “I'm sorry for what I said a couple of days ago. Forget about it, okay?”

Matt sighed. “About you asking me out, you mean?”

Jeremy nodded, not meeting Matt's eyes. “I don't want to upset you. I don't want things ending up awkward between us.”

Matt nodded in agreement. “I don't want that either.”

“You like Hunter. A lot. Tonight you only had eyes for him. It was kind of a reality check for me,” Jeremy said, laughing humorlessly.

“Jerr, I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say.”

Jeremy shook his head. “Don't worry about it. We can't choose who we fall in love with.” He reached over and patted Matt's spiky hair with a wink. “You better get him, Matt.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Hunter's straight.”

Jeremy burst out laughing. “Are you sure about that?”

Matt frowned. “What's that supposed to mean?”

Jerr shrugged and cupped Matt's face. “Gimme a goodbye kiss at least.”

Before Matt had the time to react, Jeremy planted a full open mouthed kiss on his lips. He drew away with a loud smack and a snicker. "At least I know what you taste like."

With a salute, Jeremy was off and soon lost himself in the crowd, leaving Matt dumbfounded. He was woken out of his reverie by a frowning Hunter, who handed him a bottle of water without another word.

They took a taxi, while Paul and Jeremy took a separate car. Both were silent. Matt didn't really register what was going on around him. He was getting tired again, the stress finally getting to him.

Hunter pushed Matt into the car and sat beside him. His arm went around Matt's shoulder, and Matt gratefully leaned against him. He was so tired his cock didn't even stir when Hunter pulled Matt in so tightly he was pressed against his body. The ride home was entirely too short, but Matt still managed to doze off. When he awoke, Hunter was paying the cab driver, after which he dragged Matt toward the dorm.

By the time they got inside Matt's room, Hunter was breathing hard, due to having lifted Matt more than once.

"Sorry," Matt mumbled.

"It's okay," came Hunter's whispered response, followed by his gentle caress of Matt's head. "I'll get your clothes off," he offered, as Matt slumped in bed. He only had the power to nod.

He felt Hunter's hands on his shoulder, slipping his jacket off, then traveling slowly down his back, until they reached the hem of Matt's T-shirt. Hunter rolled it up and raised his arms to help get the material off.

All of a sudden Hunter's touches took a weird turn. His fingertips lingered on Matt's skin. They traced a trail from his collarbone down his chest and to his abs, then further down until they reached Matt's belt. Hunter's hand stopped there. Matt was aware of his hardening cock and his breathing accelerating. The tension was palpable in the air. Matt stared intently at Hunter's hand on his belt buckle, willing it to move. And, finally, it did, but not lower, as Matt wished. Hunter's hand went back to caressing Matt's abs, then back up to his pecs, flicking his hardening nipples, before descending once again to his abs and back up to his chest—teasing, taunting, driving Matt insane. He didn't understand what was happening, but he thought he would lose his mind if Hunter didn't do something. Anything at all.

As if hearing his silent prayer, Hunter put both his hands on Matt's thighs and started rubbing gently, his fingertips getting dangerously close to Matt's balls. Matt couldn't stop a whimper from escaping his lips. He unconsciously bucked his hips up, silently begging for more.

"I've always wondered how it felt," Hunter whispered, his gaze fixed on Matt's tented jeans. From the foot of the bed, where he was, his face was level with Matt's groin, only a couple of inches away. Matt's cock pulsed at the thought of Hunter getting closer.

"What?" he asked Hunter, breathlessly.

"You know, to be with a guy," Hunt clarified.

"Why now?" Matt couldn't help asking, despite his mind being fogged with tiredness, but especially with want.

"I've always wondered, even before I figured out you were gay," Hunter replied.

Matt gasped in shock at the admission. In an instant, all exhaustion dissipated and his mind became alert.

"What do you mean?"

Hunter shrugged and his hands, which had stopped their movement, resumed rubbing Matt's thighs.

"You know, when we slept over at each other's houses, I wondered how it would feel."

"Jesus," Matt whispered in confusion, all his hopes rising up again. With them came the self-loathing and the anger toward Hunter. Why did he pick then to confess something like that to Matt? Just when he was beginning to understand the hopelessness of his unrequited love.

"Will you let me?" Hunter asked, as usual unaware of Matt's feelings. A strong red tint bloomed on his cheeks as he looked from Matt's face to his groin, and back up again.

"What the hell is this, Hunt?" Matt asked angrily. Despite his own cock straining for release, he couldn't help feeling angry at what his friend was doing to him. "Let's experiment with the gay pal?"

"Matty..."

"What is wrong with you?" Matt cut him off before he got the chance to plead his case.

"I... I don't know," Hunter admitted. His face still blushing, he lowered his gaze and bit his lips. Matt could tell he was telling the truth, and all his anger suddenly dissolved.

"What's going on?" he asked gently, rubbing Hunter's shoulders to help him relax.

"I want you. I can't stop thinking of you, that's what's going on. At first I pretended that it was just because I care for you, that it was normal, because you were my best friend. But it's not like that. Matty, whenever I look at you I want to touch you so bad."

Hunter's admission made Matt's head spin. He'd prayed all his life to hear Hunter tell him that. He'd played almost this entire scene in his fantasies a million times before.

"Are you mad at me?" Hunter asked him, a pleading look on his usually daring face.

"Fuck, Hunt, what are you doing to me?" Matt whispered. His fingers tugged at Hunter's hair, until Hunt got the point and moved up Matt's body. Matt couldn't take it anymore. He pressed his mouth on his best friend's parted lips. They both moaned at the same time. Hunter rearranged himself until he was flush against Matt. They opened their mouths and their tongues met halfway, and rubbed against each other. The delicious friction made their bodies tremble with need.

"Oh, Matty," Hunter moaned when they stopped for air. Matt could feel Hunt's hard cock against his thigh. The thought that he'd made Hunter hard empowered and exhilarated him. He was determined to take this as far as Hunt wanted him to, and if this night was his only chance, he would damn well take advantage of it. Without giving Hunter any opportunity to change his mind, he grabbed him by the back of his neck and pulled him down for another hungry kiss. He put all his pent-up emotions into it, and Hunter must have felt them. He moaned incessantly and rubbed against Matt until their cocks were lined up together. They both jolted as if powered by an electric shock.

"Matty, Matty, I need you," Hunter pleaded, breathless.

Matt rolled them until he was above Hunter. He didn't stop to think that he was a virgin and his whole experience was limited to the amount of porn he watched. He simply let his instincts lead. With determined movements, he unbuckled Hunter's belt and unzipped his jeans. Hunter's boxers were wet with

precome, his huge erection threatening to rip through the thin material. Matt chuckled at the sight. He needed no more proof of his friend's willingness to explore. Hunter whined when Matt didn't make another move, making Matt chuckle again.

"Stop laughing, Matty. Do something," Hunter begged. He looked so cute, flushed and breathing hard, his clothes in disarray. Matt had dreamed of such a sight for years and years. And it was finally coming true. Part of him was convinced this was only a very lucid dream. Soon he'd wake up to find Hunter snoring next to him, oblivious to Matt's perverted fantasies. But, for now, he would savor this unexpected gift, this virtual reality in which he could have his friend in his bed and willing to do more than just hug him in a platonic way. His mind went back to the night he'd woken to find Hunter humping against his ass. Then, Hunter's hard cock and his silent whimpers had almost brought him to the brink of an orgasm in just a few seconds. Tonight though, as long as this dream lasted, he would drag out the pleasure for as long as he could.

He buried his face in Hunter's groin. Still clad in the thin cotton boxers, his friend's cock twitched and Hunter released a heavy groan. Matt inhaled his smell, musky and sweaty, and so fucking good! He started lapping like a cat, wetting the cotton and letting his teeth graze the length of Hunter's erection, enjoying immensely the reactions he produced in his straight friend. Not so straight anymore, by the look of things.

"Gorgeous," Matt whispered drinking in the features of Hunter's face, now scrunched up from painful pleasure.

"Fuck, Matty, please," Hunter begged again, grabbing Matt by the nape of his neck and pressing his face to his cock. He rubbed it against Matt's face, until Matt was left unable to breathe. Oh God, but it felt so damn good he didn't care if he died of suffocation. He wanted this moment to never end. "Please, Matt, please," Hunter kept saying, soft moans escaping his lips.

Finally, Matt took mercy on him. He grabbed both Hunter's jeans and boxers and pulled them down. Hunter's erection bobbed and slapped him in the face. Matt moaned being faced with the beauty of that hard, veiny cock. He licked his lips, overcome by sudden nervousness. He'd never sucked a cock before. Would he be capable of making this good enough for Hunter? He only had this one chance and he needed to make it right. Swallowing hard, he tentatively touched Hunter's cock. It was both hard as steel and incredibly soft in his hand.

“Matt,” Hunter whispered breathlessly.

Matt looked up and their eyes met. He was blown away by the burning desire he could see in Hunter's gaze. It was like a volcano waiting to erupt and all that stood in its way was Matt prolonging its discharge. Matt bit his lips and gave in to his own desire. He lowered his head and licked the tip of Hunter's cock. Hunter groaned and grabbed Matt's head, silently urging him to take him. Empowered, Matt covered his teeth with his lips and descended, taking in as much as he could.

Hunter screamed, “Fu-uck!”

Matt was insanely turned on. He'd always had an oral fetish and sucking Hunt's cock was something he'd dreamed about ever since he'd learned what jacking off was. Now, for the first time, he knew what it meant to have a huge, tasty cock in his mouth. Not just any cock, Hunter's. Fuck, the thought alone almost made him come in his pants. With shaky hands, Matt struggled to unzip his jeans, eventually managing to take his dick out. All it took were a few tugs and he was over the edge, his whole body jerking uncontrollably from the power of his orgasm. Matt screamed with Hunter's cock still lodged in his throat.

“Oh, Jesus, Matty!” Hunter yelled. His legs started to shake, and a fraction of a second later, Matt's throat was flooded with thick come. He choked on it, but was too overcome by desire to care. He let Hunter feed him his hot jizz, jet after creamy jet. Eventually Hunter stopped shooting and his cock softened, escaping from Matt's mouth. Matt groaned with disappointment. He still yearned for Hunter's taste and the feel of him, hard and fat in his mouth.

“Fuck,” Hunter whispered.

Matt's head fell in Hunter's lap. He couldn't resist giving Hunter's sensitive dick a few more licks. Hunter jolted with every lick, but did nothing to stop him. He wove his fingers in Matt's too short hair and gently massaged his scalp. More than ever, Matt regretted having cut it.

“This actually happened...” Matt mused out loud. He still dreamed of himself carrying his usual long hair, not short like it was in real life. But more importantly, this had all been too real to have been just a dream.

He heard and felt Hunter chuckle, his abs moving in rhythm with the sound. “I can't believe it either. Why didn't we do this before?”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Because you're straight?” he answered sarcastically.

“Hmm...” was all Hunter provided.

Matt could feel sleep overtake him. He guessed he must have dozed off, because the next thing he remembered was Hunter tucking him beneath the covers and spooning him before he fell into a heavy, rewarding sleep.

6. Hunter

Hunter had never slept so profoundly before. He awoke with a smile on his lips and was immediately flooded with images from the previous night. He couldn't believe Matt had actually given him a blow job, and Hunter had enjoyed it immensely. It had been a thousand times better than any head any girl had given him. And it had felt a million times righter. It all dawned on him now. He'd never wanted to acknowledge that he was different, but from the moment he'd first seen Matt shyly wave at him from behind his mother's skirts, he'd known he wanted Matty to only look at him. He was different. He was gay. And, if he'd had any doubts before, this night had torn them all down.

He looked at Matt's peaceful face as he was still deeply submerged in sleep, and couldn't believe how right it felt to hold Matt in his arms with no textiles between them. Hunter's cock stirred at the sensation of Matt's soft skin. He moaned softly as he slowly rubbed his cock against his friend's ass cheek. It felt so dirty and so exciting at the same time.

Matt flinched at his movement, and his head swerved back. Eyes still foggy with sleep, he looked at Hunter, who sheepishly smiled at him. "Hunt, what are you doing?"

Hunter felt himself blush. "Morning, Matty," he said, choosing not to reply to Matt's question.

Matt gave him a long, incisive look, making Hunter squirm uncomfortably.

"We need to talk," Matt finally said. His words sounded ominous, but Hunter knew he couldn't wiggle out of it. When Matt got an idea, there was no way around it. He was as stubborn as a bull.

Hunter sighed. "Okay, I'm listening."

"No, I'm listening and you're explaining. When did you suddenly decide you were gay?"

Hunter moaned. "Can we not do this before coffee and pancakes?"

"No," Matt said obstinately.

"Matty, you know way better than I do that no one just decides to be gay," Hunter said, grabbing his pillow and covering his face with it so he wouldn't be forced to face Matt's fierce stare.

“Then explain to me what’s going on, Hunt. Since when has this been going on? Why didn’t you tell me anything about it?”

Matt sounded betrayed. Hunter felt like a jerk. His anger made total sense. He and Matty had shared everything before. Matty must have been feeling like shit. He took the pillow off his face and looked at Matt’s angelic features, distorted by anger and pain.

“I’m sorry, Matty,” he said, cupping Matt’s face and placing gentle kisses on Matt’s forehead and cheeks, then on his eyelids. Matt relaxed under his touch.

“I didn’t mean to upset you. To be honest, I didn’t really figure it out myself for a long time. And when I did, I kept denying it, telling myself I was wrong. That night when I awoke humping against you was the final straw. I realized I couldn’t keep denying it.”

“Is that why you acted so weird after?” Matt asked him after he processed everything in silence for a few agonizingly long moments.

Hunter nodded. “I think I’ve always felt attracted to guys, but I kept telling myself it was normal to admire male bodies and it was normal to pay more attention to men, since my best friend was gay. I kept convincing myself I was just paying attention to what kinds of guys you like, so I could maybe help you out. But whenever you acted like you had a crush on someone, I just felt like breaking their necks instead.”

“What are you saying?”

Hunter smiled shyly. “I don’t know, Matty. I think I honestly like you. As in... more than I should like my best friend. Last night was... like a dream come true. A dream I never knew I had.”

He sighed wistfully, at the memory of last night, images of Matty’s lips around his cock swimming through his mind. His dick was rock-hard at the thought of repeating that experience. *The sooner the better*, he thought with a wide grin, taking another appraising look at Matt’s naked body. He almost groaned out loud at the sight, but as soon as he saw Matt’s angry frown, the sound died in his throat.

“This isn’t happening,” Matt said. “You’re not telling me you like me. Not like this.”

“Huh? Why?” Hunter was confused. “Matty, why are you angry?”

Matt shook his head. His eyes looked like they were tearing up, and it brought even more confusion in Hunter's mind.

"You're straight, Hunter. You've always been straight. You can't do this to me. Stop playing around."

"But..."

"You can't just say something like this after twenty years of being straight!" Matt screamed.

He climbed out of bed and stomped toward the bathroom, shutting the door behind him with a bang. Hunter heard the lock, and water started flowing soon enough.

"What the fuck just happened?" Hunter whispered to the empty room. If he didn't know better he would have thought his friend was pissed at him for being gay. Why would a gay guy be pissed to have a gay best friend? Was it because he'd told Matty he liked him? That must have been it... Okay, it hadn't been his most brilliant moment. Usually you don't tell someone that after one sexual experience. He could get that. But they'd known each other for over sixteen years. They were best friends. It shouldn't have been this odd.

Just then, a cell chimed. The sound came from off the floor where last night's clothes still lay strewn across the carpet. Last night flashed through Hunter's mind again, but he quickly dismissed it and focused on localizing the cell. Both he and Matt had the same brand. The screen showed he had a text, but as soon as he opened it, he knew he was holding Matt's phone, not his. The text was from "Jerr" and Hunter read it before he could stop himself.

Matt I need u.

Hunter bit his lower lip as his shaky hand pressed the delete button before he even thought about the consequences of his move. *Fucking Jerr.* It was all his fault. It was obvious not just from the text, but also from the kiss he'd witnessed last night, that he and Matty were closer than they seemed. They were probably boyfriends.

"Shit, and I went and told Matt I liked him. No wonder he freaked."

Hunter didn't know what he was going to do. Matt wouldn't emerge from the bathroom, he had no place to stay but at his and Greg's apartment, and today they should have been moving out to the new apartment they'd rented together. Things would be even more awkward if that happened. Hunter had no other choice but to go back to Greg's, no matter how much that sucked.

With a loud exhale, he started putting his clothes on and then wrote a short note to Matt.

“Went back to my place. Jeremy texted you. Deleted it by mistake.”

As he walked down the street, he couldn't stop thinking of how wrong it all went. Just that night, Matt had had his cock down his throat and it had felt wonderful, and right, and so damn hot. A wave of heat overtook him just thinking of it.

But then morning had come and everything had changed. Matt proved to him that just because they'd shared a hot blow job, it didn't mean Matt liked him the way he liked Matt. In fact, Matt was most likely dating Jeremy, and knowing how honest Matt was, Hunter had probably messed things up for them. He'd been at fault for initiating everything.

Fuck, will Matt ever forgive me?

Just the thought of never talking to Matt again broke Hunter's heart into a million pieces. He was desperate. When he reached the place he shared with Greg, he didn't care about anything but throwing himself on his bed and crying his eyes dry.

“Hey, faggot, come to take your bags?”

Great. Now he had to postpone his self-pity party because of a stupid homophobic asshole. Hunter tried his best to ignore Greg's taunting and made a beeline for his bedroom, but Greg jumped in his way, blocking the entrance just as he was about to step inside.

“I was talking to you, loser.”

“And I wasn't, dumbass,” Hunter retorted.

“You fucking son of a bitch. You think you're so smart?”

Greg fisted his T-shirt as Hunter launched forward, closing his hands around Greg's throat. That was it. It was the last time he would allow this asshole to insult him.

Greg struggled to breathe under Hunter's hold. He let go of Hunter and desperately scratched his hands, trying to pry them off his throat.

“Listen carefully, motherfucker. Touch me again, talk to me again, and I'll break your legs. Do I make myself clear?”

Greg nodded, a desperate look in his bulged-out eyes. Hunter let him go before it was too late. He hoped this time Greg would really get the message.

He closed his bedroom door behind him, leaving Greg to cough his lungs out on the other side. Not even that sound made him feel happy. All he could think about was that he might have lost his best friend, the only person who really cared for him unconditionally, because of one horny night and one stupid confession that he should have kept to himself. Hunter buried his face in the pillow and cried himself to a restless sleep.

7. Matt

Matt felt the whole world collapse around him. All his life he'd grown up knowing certain things were fixed, unchangeable; like the grass being green in summer and yellowish in autumn, like the sky being blue, like the planet Earth revolving around the sun. Like Hunter being straight.

Those were supposed to be unchangeable things; things no one could do anything about; they *just were*, so one had to deal with them. He'd never expected something like that to *just not be*. But there it was, happening before his eyes.

He'd woken up with Hunter spooning against him with a humongous hard-on, and the memory of his lips around Hunter's cock the night before. And then Hunter had told him he was gay. As if it was the most normal thing in the world, as if he didn't live as a straight guy for twenty years. As if he hadn't changed Matt's whole world in an instant with only a couple of words.

Matt felt like crying, which was exactly what he did. Years and years of dreaming something he'd thought impossible. Years of cursing himself for not being able to stop loving his best friend; years of hiding this deep, painful secret that he thought would ruin the best friendship he'd ever have. And Hunter had cluelessly, like always, walked all over his feelings, making Matt feel like a ridiculous child for having tormented himself with guilt all these years.

He did feel like an idiot. He felt like the biggest loser. Hunter, brave, honest Hunter, had made him feel stupid, just like back when he'd been sixteen and he'd spent countless nights tossing and turning in his bed, wondering how to come out as gay, while Hunter had just told him he'd known all along.

"Fuck, how can I still be so blind and immature at my age?"

Self-loathing was soon replaced by anger at himself and then with anxiousness at having to see Hunter again. This was not how he should have acted when his friend came out. After his drama queen reaction, he felt like a total asshole for disappointing Hunter.

Biting his lips from anxiety, he slowly opened the door and tip-toed outside. But, lo and behold, the room was deserted. Hunter had left.

On Matt's bed, a note. Matt scurried the few steps to his bed and picked the note up with shaky hands. A short, emotionless message. Matt felt like an even

bigger asshole. He couldn't imagine how hurt Hunter must have felt by his stupid reaction.

Shit, I need to look for him now.

Hunter shouldn't have gone back to Greg's place alone. That guy was always looking for a fight and, knowing Hunter as well as he did, Matt was sure Hunter would welcome a fight if he was mad and hurt enough. He just hoped to hell that Hunter hadn't yet done anything stupid.

He was on his way to the subway when Jeremy's call came.

"Jerr, I'm sorry. I didn't get your message this morning. It got accidentally deleted," he informed his friend as he absentmindedly took the stairs down to the station.

"Matt, I need you ASAP. You have to come to my place now." Jeremy sounded frantic.

"Now? I kinda have something up, Jerr. What's wrong? Is it urgent?"

Even as he asked it, Matt realized it must have been, otherwise Jeremy wouldn't have called him.

"Paul's leaving, Matt. He's leaving the band."

Matt stopped dead in his tracks just before the subway's open doors.

"You're kidding, right?"

"Would I have called you just to pull your leg? This is serious! I can't talk him out of it, Matt. I don't know what to do," Jeremy cried. It was the first time Matt had ever heard him so desperate.

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes. Hang on."

Matt put his cell back in his pocket with a loud exhale. Making peace with Hunter had to wait. Hunt would definitely understand.

"What's this about?" Matt asked Paul, who had finally conceded defeat and agreed to meet him alone at their usual bistro meeting place.

It had taken a whole half an hour just to settle an agitated Jeremy down. Then he'd called Paul at least five times, before he got an answer and a reluctant promise to meet up for coffee.

Paul looked sickly pale as he sipped his coffee. His hand shook slightly when he settled the cup down.

“What do you want me to say?”

Matt rolled his eyes. “For real? You’ve just decided you’re leaving the band, didn’t even have the decency to tell me, and now you act like nothing’s going on? What the fuck, Paul? I thought we were friends.”

“This has nothing to do with you, Matt,”

“The hell not!” Matt yelled.

“Lower your voice,” Paul chastised.

Matt bit his lip and continued in a lower voice, “This is my band, too. We’re all in this together—you, me, and Jeremy. Or did you forget?”

“I didn’t forget, Matt,” Paul sighed. “That’s the problem.”

Matt frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I can’t do it anymore,” Paul replied after a loud sigh and a second sip of coffee, with the aid of an even shakier hand. “I... I need out. I need a change. I guess what you said about giving up gave me a lot to think about. And I’ve reached my decision. I need out.”

“Paul...” Matt finally realized what this was all about. He also realized his giving up idea had never really worked. So would it really work in Paul’s case? He doubted it.

“I got a lot of business cards at the party and many propositions to launch solo. We all did. Maybe it’s time we all move forward.”

Matt shook his head. “You’re wrong, Paul. We’re good together, the three of us. That party proved it. And when we play our own music we will be even better. Don’t give up on us so easily.”

Paul looked teary-eyed. “I just can’t do it anymore, Matt. I’m invisible. Can’t you see?”

Matt grabbed his hand as a fat tear rolled down Paul’s face. Paul held on for dear life, squeezing so hard Matt felt like his bones would break, but he didn’t let go.

“Paul, tell him how you feel.”

Paul shook his head. “He confessed to you. I already know there’s no hope.”

“You never know. Trust me, Paul. It’s something I’ve learned recently. You can never be sure enough. Even the impossible is possible sometimes.”

Paul kept shaking his head in denial. Matt squeezed his hand between both of his and looked him in the eye with determination.

“Paul, give it one last chance. It’s all I ask. I won’t say anything about you leaving the band again. I promise. Just tell him everything. And if he says no, then that’s it. At least you know you’ve tried.”

Paul snorted and wiped a tear from his cheek. “Pot, meet kettle.”

“Yeah, well...” Matt shrugged. “I’ve realized something very important today.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“Sometimes we see only the things we want to see. I guess I never saw Hunter was gay because I was too scared of seeing it. I preferred thinking what I felt for him would forever be unrequited. Maybe that was my only way of dealing with my cowardice.”

“Woah, time out. Hunter is gay? How? What happened since we last talked? Dude, we just saw each other last night!”

Matt laughed and started telling Paul everything. It actually felt liberating. By the end of his recount, he felt elated at the sudden realization that Hunter might actually be attracted to him.

He wasn’t naïve. Unlike Hunter, he thought his friend needed to first explore his latent attraction to men before he decided he really liked Matt, but it was still more than he could ever have hoped for. It meant his chances to someday be with Hunter were all of a sudden a lot higher.

“Wow, man, that’s amazing. What the hell are you still doing here? You should be talking things over with Hunter now.”

Matt raised an eyebrow and smiled at Paul pointedly. “Do you actually know how desperate Jerr was? He pretty much went down on his knees to beg me to talk to you.”

Paul snorted. “Well, at least I matter now.”

“Don’t be silly. You know how much Jeremy cares about you.”

Paul bit his lower lip and gave Matt a sad smile. “Jerr cares about everyone.”

Matt was exasperated. "Just promise me you'll talk to him before making the final decision, okay? I really don't think Gay For You can survive without you, Paul. You are a man of few words, but you are our heart and soul."

"Brown-noser," Paul joked, flicking him on the forehead.

"Ow!"

"Go meet Hunter, Matt. I'm fine."

Matt shook his head no. "Not until you promise."

"Fine! I promise."

"You'll tell him everything?"

Paul moaned and nodded. "I promise I'll tell him everything."

"Okay, call me."

"Just go," Paul said, emphasizing his words with a swat on Matt's backside.

"Bye!" Matt called when he was already halfway out of the door. "Good luck!"

"You too," Paul called back, waving goodbye.

8. Hunter

Hunter was deep asleep when the sound of loud voices jolted him awake. He blinked his eyes open and found a worrisome sight before him.

Greg and three other pals of his had managed to get inside his room somehow. He must have been so upset he'd forgotten to lock it. But the scary part was that all of them surrounded Hunter's bed. Judging by the evil grins on their faces and the way they rubbed their hands, the jocks looked ready to kick some ass. Hunter's ass, to be more precise.

"So that's what you call a fair fight, huh, Greggy?" he spit out sarcastically. They would put him in the hospital anyway. He might as well go down not looking like a pussy. Still, he couldn't keep a whimper from escaping his lips the moment one of Greg's buddy's feet connected with his stomach.

"Shut up, fairy," the guy yelled. He didn't give Hunter time to properly get up, but kicked him again and again until Hunter fell off the bed, much to their evil delight.

"You need to learn your lesson, queer," Greg shouted.

All his friends approved, chanting "yeah" and "queer" and laughing hysterically as they kicked Hunter everywhere they could.

"Wow, you're all so eloquent," Hunter managed between hard breaths. "I bet you don't even know what that means, huh?" he laughed.

In the back of his mind, he knew it was stupid to taunt these beasts further, but he couldn't help himself. Their narrow-mindedness stepped on his nerves.

As the blows kept on flying in his direction, Hunter did his best to fight back, but he was soon overpowered by their sheer strength in numbers. He simply couldn't win against four jocks, so he let them kick him and just did his best to keep them from kicking his vital organs.

After long minutes that felt like hours, the jerks stopped. It wasn't so entertaining when Hunter was nonresponsive.

"This fag is no fun," one of Greg's pals commented.

Greg insisted they keep going, but after kicking Hunter a couple more times, they decided to go have some beer instead, to Hunter's utmost relief. He

held his breath until he clearly heard them leave and, only then, did he allow himself to slump on the floor and relax.

Hunter didn't know how long he lay there. He was exhausted. The pain in his back was insufferable, and nausea rose up in his throat. Not even his broken leg had hurt so damn much. He heard the doorbell ringing endlessly, but the house was dead silent. The jocks were long gone. All he could think was how much he wanted Matty with him right then. Matt would call him an idiot, for sure. Hunter chuckled imagining the scene. Jesus, even trying to laugh hurt.

Despite his foggy mind, he thought he heard a phone ring. With shaky hands he searched through his pockets and produced his cell. The ringing was even more persistent as he got it out. Hunter grimaced at the loud sound and swiftly picked up without looking at the display.

"Hunt?"

"Matty," he replied, a smile spreading on his face. He instantly felt better.

"Hunt, what happened? You sound strange. Are you mad at me?"

"Nuh-huh. Why would I be mad at you?"

"Then why do you sound so strange? Where are you?"

"Ugh," Hunter felt his face heat up, but no matter how uncool he was at the moment, he couldn't lie to Matt.

"I'm at my old place. Greg and his pals kinda did a number on me."

"*What?*"

Hunter winced at the loud scream.

"Shit, Hunt, open the door for me. I've been ringing the doorbell for half an hour, didn't you hear me? Are you all right?"

"Calm down," Hunter whispered.

"Sorry. Would you open the door though?"

Hunter moaned. "I don't think I can move right now, Matty."

To prove his point, he tried to rise up but his spine protested in earnest. He fell down with a thump and cried out.

"Shit, Hunt!"

"Shush, I'm okay."

“No, you’re not okay. I’m calling the police and the ambulance. Just hang in there. I’m gonna get you out.”

“Matty, there’s no need,” Hunter tried to protest, but Matt cut him off, without even listening.

“Just hang in there!” he called one more time, then hung up on Hunter.

Hunter fell into a state of semiconsciousness soon after. He could hear a lot of commotion behind the closed door, then suddenly a gust of air burst into the room and dozens of voices broke the silence at once. Hunter felt himself being touched by numerous hands and lifted up and carried. He wanted to open his eyes and tell them he was fine, but was too drowsy to really care what they did to him.

9. Matt

His cell phone rang but Matt didn't pay any attention. His gaze was fixed on Hunter's sleepy face. He'd begged to be let in, lied about being a half-brother even though no one believed him and finally a kind nurse let him slip in for a few moments, making him swear not to get her in trouble. Now he was here in the waiting room, waiting for Hunter to wake up and thanking his guardian angel for having sent him to Hunter's place in time.

"What would I do if something happened to you, huh?" he cried, caressing his best friend's pale face as tears fell from his eyes, unbidden. "I'd die without you, you know that?"

Hunter didn't move a muscle; he was as rigid as a statue. At least the nurse had told Matt he was going to be okay. His spine had suffered, his kidneys too, but he would be fine. Matt just hoped they would catch Greg and his friends and lock them away for a long time, otherwise...

His cell rang again, interrupting his vindictive plans. With a sigh, he extracted it from his pocket. He was planning on turning it off, but then he saw Paul's name.

"Hi, Paul," he replied sullenly.

"I did it! I kept my promise," Paul said instead of a greeting.

"Well, hell. Good job, man," Matt said. He was truly glad Paul hadn't backed out of it, but he couldn't make himself reply with any real enthusiasm. The worry for Hunter had eaten away all his energy.

"You okay, Matt?"

Matt felt himself tear up again. "Not really. Hunter's in the hospital."

This time he couldn't stop the flood of tears.

"Shit! What happened? You're at the Municipal Hospital?"

Matt nodded, then, realizing Paul couldn't see him, he said, "Yes."

"Hang on. We'll be there soon."

Paul and Jeremy arrived shortly thereafter. They lived only two blocks away from the hospital and Matt was so relieved when he saw them that he started crying again.

The guys enveloped him in a tight, suffocating hug, and Matt let them, feeling overwhelmed, but immensely relieved to have them there.

“What happened?” Jeremy asked, after they broke their embrace.

Matt blew his nose, took a few deep breaths and recounted everything he knew.

“Fucking assholes! We need to give them a lesson,” Jeremy muttered, his hands fisted as if he was ready to punch something right at the moment.

“Calm down. We won't solve anything like this. Let the police deal with them. The idiots were stupid enough to beat Hunter up in his own place, then lock the door behind them,” Paul said, always the smart one. Matt smiled gratefully at his friend and sat down on an empty chair.

“I'm so glad you're here. Hunt's parents won't be here until tomorrow. They're not letting me see him even if Hunt's mom talked to the doctors. Will you guys stay with me?” he asked, hating how weak he sounded, but fearing being left alone.

“Hell, yeah, dude. Let me go get some coffee,” Jerr said.

“One for me too?” Paul asked him. Jerr smiled and patted his head, and off he went.

“You seem to be getting along as usual. It wasn't as bad as you feared, was it?” Matt remarked.

Paul grinned and blushed at the same time. “You were right. I've been scared for nothing. Jerr still likes you, you know. But he also knows you and Hunter are meant for each other. I'm willing to accept that. And he's willing to give us a chance.” Paul sighed. “I can't help it. I'm selfish. I don't care how he feels as long as he's with me. I have this naïve fantasy of making him forget everyone he's ever liked, just with the power of my love. Cheesy, huh?”

“I don't think it's cheesy. You're just a guy in love.”

Matt's thoughts went to Hunter again. He recalled how upset he'd been when Hunter had told him about his feelings and that he was gay. Had he really said that? Maybe it had all been in Matt's head. Either way, would Matt be willing to try a relationship, knowing that Hunter could regret it or fall in love with someone else later? Would he have the same courage Paul did?

“I don't know,” he thought out loud.

“What?” Paul asked him.

Matt shrugged, "I just don't know what to do..."

He felt the sudden urge to drop everything and just run. The only reason he stayed was because he knew Hunter needed him now more than ever.

Matt was grateful his friends were with him, but after several hours of waiting he sent them home and waited alone. He entered Hunter's room on tiptoes and regarded his best friend sleeping, after a second dose of pain medication. They hadn't allowed him to see Hunter, even after Hunt's parents talked on the phone with the hospital staff. Hunter was too tired, he needed rest, they had said. It had all seemed fair to Matt, so he'd waited patiently, hoping to be left alone so he could sneak a peek when no one else was around.

It was dark now, and Hunter's room was empty besides the two of them. Moonlight fell on Hunter's pale face, making him look ghostly. Matt felt like crying again at the sight.

"I miss you," he whispered, caressing Hunter's white cheek, then his dry lips. His face moved of its own accord until his lips touched Hunter's. Just a shadow of a kiss.

"I love you," he uttered, in the silence of the room, when no one but him could hear the words. "I love you so much."

No, no matter how many times he'd told himself to give up, he would never be able to. He knew it now more than ever. He loved Hunter for life.

10. Hunter

Hunter woke up later to the sight of a white ceiling. The beeping of machines and the smell of medicine clued him on where he was.

“Hunt, you’re up.”

Hunter smiled and tilted his head toward the voice. Matt looked tired, but also relieved, judging by the sweet smile that spread across his face. The disheveled state of his hair and the dark circles beneath his eyes indicated he’d been awake for most of the night.

“Hey, you,” Hunter whispered, his voice rough. “Man, they drugged me good. I slept like a log.”

“You scared the hell out of me,” Matt complained, hitting Hunter’s chest gently.

“Sorry, buddy. Good thing you were there, though.”

“Jesus, don’t remind me! They had to tear the door down. You were lying there unconscious.”

Matty started to tear up, and Hunter shushed him, cooing to him like to a baby.

“It’s okay, Matty. I’m fine. Hey, look at me.”

Matt furiously wiped his face and looked at Hunter.

“I’m fine, see?”

“Well, maybe not that fine,” a nurse commented as she entered none-too-discreetly. “You will urinate blood for a whole week. And you’ll have trouble standing upright. But at least you’re *all* right.”

She stopped in front of the bed and looked at Matt from beneath her glasses.

“And you, mister, what are you doing here? What part of not allowed did you not get, huh?”

Matt blushed and apologized profusely, making his way to the door. With a final wave he left, closing the door behind.

“That boy really loves you. He’s cried nonstop ever since you’ve been brought in.”

Hunter blushed, “He’s my best friend.”

“Um-hmmm...” she said pensively, looking at Hunter the same way she’d gazed at Matt. “I wonder if best friends have a habit of... Ah, never mind.”

“Never mind what? Habit of what?”

“No, no, none of it. Let’s check your vitals. The doctor will be here soon, and if you behave he’ll release you tomorrow.”

“No, please tell me what you meant first!” Hunter gave her his winning smile that made every girl weak at the knees. “Pretty please?”

He saw a hesitant smile bloom on the nurse’s wrinkled face. “Oh, all right. What I meant to say is that best friends don’t have the habit of kissing their unconscious injured friends on the lips. Now, you listen to me: whatever you feel for that young man, you better treat him right. He loves you very, very much. And I would know. In the hospital, one really sees who truly loves them.”

Hunter barely heard her continued discourse. All he could concentrate on was the word kiss and the word best friend put together in the same sentence. Matt had kissed him. Matt loved him, not only as his best friend, but also... But then why did he react that way when Hunter had confessed to him? Why had he been so mad?

“Ma’am, I really need to get out of here. Are you sure the doctor can’t release me today?” He tried his winning smile again. The nurse tilted her head, seeming to consider it.

“I’ll be really good. Plus I have my best friend who loves me very, very much to take care of me.” He batted his lashes. “Please?”

“Oh, all right,” she finally relented. “I’ll put in a good word to the doctor for you. But only because I trust your friend will take good care of you. You’d better thank him properly,” she said with a wink.

Wow, Hunter thought, *grown-up women nowadays are kinky*. He shuddered at the thought of his own mother, who was around the same age as the nurse. And then he remembered that his parents had called him yesterday when he’d first woken up. He’d been in the hospital for two days and his parents had called incessantly until the nurses snapped and told them to stop bothering the patient. He snickered at the memory, and then thought how his parents must have driven Matt insane with phone calls after that. He felt guilty. It was time to help his parents be at ease and get them out of Matt’s hair. Then he could

actually see Matt because he'd missed him yesterday when he woke up. Matt had been taking lunch just then. A nurse had drugged Hunter soon after and he hadn't been able to wake up until much later.

As soon as the nurse left to visit her other patients, Hunter dialed his mother's number and waited for the ring. She picked up almost immediately, as if she'd waited with the cell in her hand. Hunter cringed at the realization that his mother probably did just that.

"Honey, are you all right? We booked a plane for this evening. We're coming as soon as possible."

"There's no need, Mom," Hunter all but yelled. The thought of his parents ruining his time alone with Matt almost made him faint again. "The doctor released me just now," he lied. "I'm actually really good."

"Honey, but Matty said you'd been beaten to a pulp. You're not lying to us, are you?"

"You know how Matty is. Of course, I'm all right. I only had superficial bruises. Really, Mom, there's no need for you to spend money on a flight. Matty can take care of me just fine."

"But..."

"Mom," he hastily interrupted. "I'm a grown-up. How can I let my own mom take care of me? Plus, there wouldn't be enough room for you at Matty's place. Where would you stay?"

"But we've booked a hotel, honey."

He was getting exasperated. Just then, probably hearing his raising voice, Matt poked his head inside. "Wait a second, mom." He motioned for Matty and covered his cell's mouthpiece.

"You made this mess, you fix it. I don't want my parents coming here, Matty, please!" Puppy eyes. They always did the trick.

Matt sighed and took the cell from him. "Mrs. Reed, Matt here."

Hunter's mother soon launched into another speech that Hunter couldn't hear from where he was. Matt kept nodding and answering monosyllabically.

"Well, you see, Hunter is actually less injured than I thought. I was too shocked when I called you yesterday," he managed to eventually mutter.

Hunter grinned and nodded approvingly.

"I know, Mrs. Reed. You know how much I care about Hunter. He's in good hands. I'm sure Hunter would feel really guilty if you had to fly all the way here and spend money on hotels and tickets back home."

Oh the guilt card. Brilliant, Matty! Hunter inwardly cheered.

"Um-hm. You know how he is. He'll worry about you spending money and about your flight being safe. Maybe it's not the best idea to come right now. We'll come visit for the holidays instead. It's not too long until then."

Hunter's mom talked again, but her voice sounded weaker. Hunter knew Matt had won the argument.

"I promise I'll make him call you daily. And I'll cook him healthy food. Okay, Mrs. Reed, take care."

Hunter took the phone back and said goodbye to his mother after she reluctantly informed him that Matt convinced her not to come.

"Don't ever, ever make me do that again!" Matt threatened when Hunter's cell was safely back on the little hospital nightstand.

Hunter grinned. "Come on, you were always the best liar when I did something stupid. You got us out of being grounded at least a hundred times. This is nothing new."

"The hell it's not, Hunt. You almost died!"

Matt started crying again. "Oh, you little crybaby," Hunter gently admonished.

"Do you know how scared I was? Imagine how your parents feel. Jesus, I feel so bad now."

"Don't. You know if Mom came, she'd worry over me so much I'd get mentally sick because of her. Come on, Matty, don't be mad. I know you'll take much better care of me than Mom would anyway." He winked and gave Matt a leering grin.

"What's with that face?" Matt asked, his tears subdued, and his tone indifferent.

"What? What face?"

Matt cringed. "Never mind."

Hunter smiled knowingly but didn't reply. They spent the next few minutes in silence, until the nurse came back and shoed Matt off again. Then the

doctor appeared and checked him out, giving him a full diagnosis. Things indeed weren't too bad, but he wouldn't be able to walk from the pain in his kidneys. He would get released in the evening if no further problems arose, much to Hunter's relief.

The surprise came a couple of hours later, when two police officers showed up in his room. They informed him they'd caught Greg and his pals almost immediately after the ambulance had picked Hunter up, due to the information provided by some helpful neighbors who'd noticed the noisy gang enter a bar nearby. They were happily celebrating when the police found them. Greg's friends hadn't needed a lot of convincing to betray their pal as the instigator, and they were arrested immediately. At least Hunter now had the entire apartment to himself, though the thought of going back there was beyond nauseating. He filled in a document to formally press charges against Greg and his loyal friends and immediately felt a whole lot better.

"Ready to go?" Matt asked a few minutes after the policemen had gone.

"Really?" Hunter exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Reed, really," the doctor, who had entered behind Matt, replied with sarcasm. "You're free to go. Get out of here and may I never see you again."

Hunter grinned. "Amen to that, sir."

"I got a surprise for you," Matt said after they climbed inside the taxi, none-too-gracefully, thanks to Hunter's numerous injuries.

"What is it?" Hunter knew what kind of surprise he'd want: a naked Matty kissing every single bruise on his body, but he contained the moan that threatened to escape his throat, fueled by the images that flooded his mind.

"Paul and Jerr were kind enough to pick our things up from both our former places and they took them to our new apartment. They cleaned everything up for us."

"New place?" Hunter frowned. "Oh, right. Wow, with so many things going on, I had almost forgotten."

Matt grinned. "Well, now you remember. We have a new place. Completely new and usable and free of any issues. The guys were so in love with it they immediately started practicing our songs there. They filmed themselves and sent me the video before they made themselves scarce."

Matt took his cell out and showed Hunter the clip. Paul and Jerr were fooling around with their instruments in the middle of their new living room. “Nice home, guys!” Paul called as he was banging on his drums. Jerr’s face appeared on the screen. He made his way to Paul and put an arm around his friend’s shoulder. “Get well soon, Hunter!” he called, then made a kissy face before the video went dead.

Hunter was truly touched that they’d thought about him. Even Jeremy, with whom he had a bit of bad blood, so to speak.

“They’re good people.”

“Yes, they are,” Matt agreed.

“So, we’re going to our new place now, huh?”

“Yup.”

Hunter grinned and settled his weight against Matt’s body. “I like that.”

“I like that too,” Matt whispered. Hunter could hear the smile in his voice.

11. Matt

“Wow, they did a great job!” Matt whistled after they entered. When Matt had told them he and Hunter had rented a place together, the guys had been very enthusiastic. They offered to get it ready for them, but he didn't expect to find everything shining, including the floors. They really had done a lot of work.

Hunter hooted and hugged Matt tight from behind. “I think I need to change my opinion of Jeremy.”

“Huh? Why? Did you not like Jeremy?” Matt asked turning around to face Hunter.

His best friend blushed, lowering his head. “I thought you two were going out together. You're not, right?” He quickly asked Matt with an expectant, hopeful expression on his blushing face.

“Ummm... no? Whatever gave you that idea?”

Hunter shrugged. “Besides the way he looks at you sometimes... the fact that he kissed you the night of the gala?”

“Oh... well, that was... We're not going out.”

Hunter instantly grinned and stood taller. “Cool.” As if realizing he'd made a mistake, he quickly corrected himself. “I mean, not cool, if you like him.” It was supposed to be a statement, but it ended up sounding more like a question.

Matt frowned. “Does it matter?”

“Well, no,” Hunter replied, but the frown on his face and the serious tone in his voice said otherwise.

“I guess we have a lot to talk about, huh?” Matt asked.

Hunter smiled sadly. “I guess we do.”

Matt helped Hunter settle on their new faux leather couch, then took a seat beside him and regarded Hunter seriously.

“So, you're gay. No doubt about it?”

Hunter nodded.

“Okay. So you think you like me?”

Hunter jolted and looked at Matt with wide eyes. "I know I like you, Matty."

"More than a best friend."

"Well, yes."

"And you know that because...?" Matt pressed.

Hunter huffed and rolled his eyes. "Do I really need to spell it out for you? You know... one knows."

"Hunter, are you sure you're not just confused? I mean, you're just discovering you're gay. You can't know for sure you like someone."

Hunter gave him a pointed look. "You want to know how I know, Matty?"

Matt opened his mouth to speak, but Hunter cut him off. "I know because every time you're not with me, all I can think about is you. And when you're with me, my heart beats like crazy and I feel butterflies in my stomach. When you smile, the world stops spinning and you are all I see."

Matt gasped. His chest constricted at the realization that he was finally hearing what he'd waited for almost all his life. Well, okay, a little less cheesy would have been better, but that was Hunter for you. Now he couldn't help wondering how he'd never seen how gay Hunt was before. It made him want to snicker, but he held it in, 'cause Hunter cupped his face and he looked so deep into Matt's eyes that all laughter died off in his throat, replaced by a sudden knot of emotions.

"I want you. Only you. I don't need more time to figure it out. I know what I want. I'm not a kid."

Matt nodded and damn if his eyes didn't get a bit teary.

"Do you..." Hunter started, but for some reason, stopped.

But Matt nodded anyway and put his arms around Hunter's neck. "I do," he nodded. "Only you. Always."

Hunter exhaled loudly and smiled. "Good."

Then his hand cupped the back of Matt's head and all thoughts ran away as their lips met. Matt moaned in delight. All his senses shut down. The only thing he could feel was Hunter's luscious lips molded to his own, his tongue probing Matt's mouth with passionate strokes that sent shivers of pleasure straight to Matt's groin. Hunter's mouth tasted like coffee and pancakes, a taste so

uniquely him that Matt couldn't resist licking Hunter's lips again and again. Oh, how often he'd fantasized of tasting on Hunt's lips those infuriating pancakes Hunt loved so much. He'd wondered countless times how that maple syrup would feel combined with Hunt's own taste. And now he knew. It was better than anything Matt had ever tasted. He could get addicted to that. Easily.

When they stopped kissing, both breathless with lust, Hunter gently caressed Matt's face, and blushing he said, "I don't know anything about being with a guy. You'll have to teach me."

It was Matt's turn to blush. "I'm afraid I don't know much myself. I've never... been with a guy."

Hunter's eyes widened, then softened as he smiled. "We'll learn everything together then."

Matt nodded and resumed kissing Hunter. He couldn't get enough of him.

After they finally broke apart, he sighed contentedly and smiled at Hunt, still feeling awed by what was going on. "I'm so glad you said something. I was ready to give up on you," he admitted. It was all beginning to sink in. Everything that brought them together was starting to make sense. All those little clues that Hunter wasn't as straight as he'd thought were starting to come together like jigsaw puzzle pieces. And he hadn't been just blind. He'd been one step away from turning his back to finally having Hunter all to himself, to *this*.

Hunter buried his face in the crook of Matt's neck, inhaling his smell, and Matt almost purred in delight. They sat silently for a few seconds, getting drunk with happiness, and then Hunter gasped. "The song..."

Matt scoffed and tugged on Hunter's hair. "The song." He nodded, smiling. He'd known Hunter would figure it out eventually.

"I've been so blind," Hunter whispered, raising his head and meeting Matt's gentle gaze.

"You weren't the only one," Matt said, laughing. He brought Hunter's face closer to kiss him again. And again. Until they forgot everything else besides each other. In that instant, there was only them—only Matt and only Hunter. As it was meant to be from the start.

The End

Author Bio

Shayla made her debut in the writing world during elementary school with a heart-breaking story about how her grandma's chicks died from an unknown disease. It was published in the school newspaper, spurring a significant amount of pitiful looks directed her way. Being a stubborn Aquarius, she kept on striving, publishing cheesy love poetry, an endeavor that thankfully proved to be far more successful. Her writing life changed dramatically when she read her first yaoi manga and discovered her real calling. Imagining guys together has become her favorite pastime. Aside from writing, daydreaming about men and devouring any M/M book she can get her hands on, she also loves manga, kpop, jrock, classical music, crafts and art. An earnest romantic, she's always been convinced there's a soulmate out there, searching for her. It appears he's been lost. Maybe word hasn't gotten to him that cars are faster than white horses. In case you've seen a prince on a white horse (though a sports car would be preferable), Shayla would very much appreciate if you let her know.

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