

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

THIS WE'LL DEFEND

Leona Windwalker

Table of Contents

Love is an Open Road.....3

This We'll Defend – Information6

This We'll Defend.....7

Glossary 16

Author Bio 17

Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

THIS WE'LL DEFEND

By Leona Windwalker

Introduction

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

What Is Love is an Open Road?

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 is an Open Road*.

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.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

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

Two young soldiers squeeze onto a small single bed. An open wardrobe to the right gives a glimpse of where at least one of the BDU shirts has been discarded. To the left, the open door of a second wardrobe helps provide them with a modicum of privacy. They are sound asleep, still otherwise fully dressed.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

We met in basic training; serving our country with pride our common bond. Friends first, lovers eventually, we've weathered thick and thin, deployment and separation, DADT and its repeal. Not always surefooted in expressing our relationship openly, but here we are, still together on active duty, stronger and more confident than ever.

Preferably no fantasy, sci-fi.

Sincerely,

Dawn

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: Don't Ask Don't Tell, first time, in the closet, long-term relationship, memories, military, switch/versatile, wedding

Word Count: 4,767

A Glossary of terms may be found at the end of the story.

THIS WE'LL DEFEND

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Philip looked at the photo in his hand. At first glance, it was seemingly innocuous. Just two young soldiers worn out after pulling back-to-back CQ duty sleeping it off. They'd taken their shirts off but hadn't made it any further before simply falling asleep like two puppies on the one bed. They hadn't even managed to take their boots off first. The photo was anything but innocuous though. It had very nearly spelled the end of their careers before they'd really even gotten started.

He still remembered the first time he'd seen the photo, the day Top had called him to his office. May 12th, 1988. He'd checked the notice board after class before heading to the mess hall and seen his name on it. He'd been surprised, and had racked his brains to figure out what he might have done to catch his First Sergeant's attention. Nothing came to mind, so he then tried to recall anything he might have seen someone else do. Nothing really stood out. He'd been even more puzzled when he'd seen Shane come out of Top's office, looking very distressed and unwilling to meet his eyes.

There'd been no time to spend on further speculation, as Top saw him through the open door and motioned him in. Top wasn't alone. Staff Sergeant Collins, who was the company's EO rep, was also there, seated next to Top. Collins looked grave. Philip noticed there was not a chair on his side of the desk, but before he could utter a word, Top asked him, "Do you know why you're here?"

"No, First Sergeant."

Top pushed a photo across his desk. "We are here to discuss this, along with certain allegations that have been made."

Philip glanced down at the desk. Someone had snapped a photo of him and Shane asleep on top of the covers of Shane's bunk. He felt creeped out at the thought that someone had managed to come upon them both unawares. It made him feel green and inexperienced. *I should be aware at all times! Never let my guard down!*

Philip's next emotion was one of disgust. Someone who had access to their room in the barracks had not only come in, but brought a camera and taken a

spy photo of them. It had to have been planned, and it smacked of voyeurism as well as malice.

“I don’t understand, First Sergeant. Why would someone take a key and sneak into my room and take a-a picture of me and Shane sleeping?”

SSG Collins leaned forward. “Easy now. I want to remind you that we are here to clarify matters, not to accuse you of anything or to ask you to *tell* us anything.”

Philip’s heart froze at the way SSG Collins emphasized the word “tell.” He’d heard the political rumblings. Given the picture, he had an inkling that he knew what the allegations were. “Okay. What do you need to know?” he asked carefully.

Top pursed his lips, then said, “What can you tell me about this photo? The day it was taken?”

That was easy, and innocent enough. “Gentry and I were both on the roster to perform as ACQ for the weekend, with Timmons as the CQ for Saturday, and Rimes for Sunday. Gentry and I took turns napping, but it’s hard during daylight hours, and Timmons preferred to sleep all night and just have us rouse him if anything happened. We did the rounds, accounted for all the keys, all the usual stuff. Then when we were relieved, we were told we had two days off since we pulled two days on, so we headed back to the barracks. We sat down on Shane’s bunk, and were talking about what we’d do when we got up, and kinda just fell asleep there. You can see we just sort of crashed, we even still have our boots on. Must’ve slept like that for three, four hours? Then I woke up, needing to pee, so I got up, took a piss, got out of my uniform the rest of the way, and climbed into my own bunk. Shane never even woke up.”

Top nodded. “And you’re sure you both locked the door?”

Philip nodded.

“Tell me about your... friendship with Gentry,” Top said.

“He’s my buddy. We met during Basic, then got assigned to the same AIT, and along with two other guys, Reyes and Thompson, got assigned here to get our language qualifier. During in-processing, Reyes and Thompson got assigned to a room together while Gentry and I got assigned to share. We all pretty much hang out together, me, Gentry, Reyes, and Thompson.”

“Hang out?” Collins asked.

“Yes, Sergeant. We go to the movies together, to the Enlisted Club, play pool in the rec room, that sort of thing.”

“Pick up girls?” Top asked.

Philip swallowed. “Well, yes, sometimes. But only in places we’re allowed to go. Mostly at the Enlisted Club. Reyes always gets all the girls though. They take one look at his face, and that smile of his and that’s it. The girls forget all about the rest of us.”

“Did he ever do anything... treat you in any way... unusual?”

“No, just like a brother.” Philip turned to look at SSG Collins. “May I ask if there’s any indication who the weirdo is who stole a key, and came perving on us with his camera while we were asleep?”

Collins refused to answer, but Top did. “That’s a separate matter. Rest assured, our investigation into events will be thorough. Dismissed.”

Philip came to attention and saluted before pivoting and exiting the room. He never did find out for sure who took the key from the admin office, but days later, he and Shane had been reassigned to different rooms in an apparently random room shuffle. A copy of the picture lay upon his desk, perhaps an apology from the peeping Tom, or maybe it had been an accusation. He’d not been fooled a bit about the timing of the room assignment changes, though he and Shane tried to be more circumspect in their dealings with each other when there was even the remotest of possibilities that someone else would see them. Somehow, that had made the stolen kisses and fumbblings all the more exciting.

Philip placed the photo in the album he was putting together. He looked in the box that sat by his side, and picked up the next picture. He remembered this day as well. This was the day that he had PCS’d from the Presidio. Flying colors on his exam and his security clearance coming through all meant he was off to his first duty station. His friends who had not already PCS’d stood in the common area on their floor. He stood in the middle, Shane next to him, his arm thrown around one of Philip’s shoulders while Rodriguez made bunny ears behind his head. Reyes stood there with his eyes crossed and tongue out, and Thompson was shooting the camera a bird. You could just make out the corner of his duffle where it sat on the floor waiting for him to pick it up and go. There’d been back slapping and jokes. Jokes which didn’t translate to mirth at all in Shane’s eyes. Jokes he himself laughed at while his own heart broke.

The next day saw him in-processing at his new station, feeling bereft and adrift. Without Shane, he felt anchorless. Philip remembered feeling relieved

when he got a private moment to use the pay phone in the barracks. “Hey Shane? I made it okay. This is where you can reach me.” Calls and letters, all carefully composed with hidden layers of meaning, should they be seen or heard by others. Neither of them wanted a repeat of that day in Top’s office. Being caught meant discharge and humiliation. It meant being careerless and without the GI Bill, it meant not being able to go to college. It meant becoming homeless, as the army provided both home and job. There was no other home for either man to go home to.

Shane’s family had eight people crammed into a tiny, two-bedroom single-wide trailer. A fourteen by seventy had never been meant for so many. His grandparents had purchased the mobile home for their retirement, never dreaming that first one daughter would come home after a surprise divorce, three children in tow. Nor had they reckoned that then the other daughter would come, and leave her two children there while she took off for sunshine and parties after her own divorce. But it had happened, and the day his grandpa drove him to the recruiter, he’d known it was a good-bye.

Philip’s family had room to put him up until he found a job and got his own place, but he knew they wouldn’t. That ship had sailed the day his father caught him kissing the poster he’d hung in his room. Kissing the poster of a pop star wasn’t an issue in itself. It had been the gender of said star that had been the problem. His father had smiled in public the three months until his high school graduation, but home had been hell. His father had even acted proud that his son had enlisted, never letting on that he’d told Philip that he could either enlist and get to remain at home until he was shipped off to Basic, or he could go with him to buy a bus ticket to anywhere more than a hundred miles away and find himself a homeless shelter as they were done. He remembered his mother simply going into the kitchen as his father spoke, avoiding having to hear it or to deal with it. So even if they’d help him after getting kicked out and pretending all was hunky dory until they could get rid of him again, he’d not go back. The army was his home.

Shane rang him three months later, tired of washing trucks and not doing what they’d trained for. He had been all excited, having started a course to gain a secondary MOS. The two men had available leave and Easter was coming.

“We could book a place in Palm Springs, do the spring break thing. If we share a double room, it’d just be two army buds having a wild time like everyone else,” Shane had said. “We’re the same age as the rest of the spring breakers, so why not?”

Philip had agreed, and they'd made sure to pose with skimpily clad girls, and to rumple the sheets on the other bed in the room so that it looked slept in. Philip smiled. That first night in Palm Springs had been a wild one all right. It had been the night he and Shane had finally gone all the way. Philip closed his eyes.

Shane leaned over me, braced on his elbows. "You all right? I'm not hurting you too much?"

I shook my head. The dull fire that had lit my hole as Shane had breached me was now a low ache. "Just move," my voice rasped. Shane responded by giving a shallow, experimental thrust. That was much better. "Don't stop," I'd urged, locking my heels together behind Shane's back. Shane hadn't stopped, and though I'd felt the ache all the next day, that hadn't stopped us from tearing the sheets up later the next night as I took my turn topping Shane. A week of beer, parties, and frantic lovemaking hadn't been enough.

Philip opened his eyes, still lost in thought. He shook himself mentally, willing himself to the now. He placed that photo in the album as well. He thought about the next time he'd seen Shane. They'd gone to war, everything ratcheting up tight. Suddenly everyone was tying yellow ribbons around trees, and treating every service person as a hero. Philip was under no illusions. That would change in an instant if his and Shane's long distance affair were ever to be uncovered. He'd driven back to Post down streets lined with beribboned trees, and signs on businesses showing the flag with the words "Support Our Troops." He'd hung his newly purchased jeans up and turned on his TV. As usual, the twenty-four-hour news channel was on.

"...Operation Desert Shield," the perfectly coiffed reporter was saying. Philip tuned out the rest as the news footage played. He knew that dirt-streaked face, he'd seen it so many times. That was his Shane, facing fire.

I knew that secondary MOS would get him into trouble, he thought. Please God, let him come out okay. Let them all come out okay.

Of course, they all hadn't come out okay. Rodriguez came home to be buried with full honors. After Shane made it back home, and they had a shared leave together, they'd gone to visit Rodriguez's grave and shared a drink with him. *Well, we drank one each after toasting him and left a can of beer on his grave, anyways.* A smile twisted his lips at the bittersweet memory. *Then Shane and I went to our shared double room, and fucked like bunnies. Life was too short, and we needed to feel alive. To know we were loved.*

A silent tear tracked down his cheek. Philip resolutely wiped it away. Today was not supposed to be about tears. Today was supposed to be about happy remembrance. He carefully placed the photo inside the album, then rummaged through the box.

This one here, in Germany. He was still stateside after his tour in Saudi, and I ended up in Germany, doing what I'd trained for, at last using my language qualification. Ha-ha, my first Oktoberfest. I got drunk off my ass and called Shane. It was like two o'clock in the morning where he was, and he was NOT impressed. I kept telling him I loved him, wished we could be together forever. Luckily everyone who heard me in the break room spilling my guts to Shane thought I was just a ridiculous drunk calling his girlfriend back home. Instead, I was actually a sad drunk tired of us fighting for freedoms without being free ourselves. I wanted to be free to love him openly. Instead, we were each other's dirty secret. The next morning, I was so hungover. I not only was sick from the booze, I was also sick to my stomach over what I'd done. I was sure he'd dump my ass. Instead, he called me later that evening to make sure I was okay. He said to me, "You're my always. I will fight for us until the day it becomes okay. Just, for now, we have to fight to build our fortress, to defend what we have." I'd agreed. Our circumsppection was our fortress, our love defended against those who would deny us.

I began to take college classes on Post. I earned my Associate's degree soon after returning stateside, and Shane missed my graduation because this time, he was in Germany, doing what we'd both trained for. Ironically, he was at the same base, and had the same room I'd had, just the other side of the room. It added a sense of poignancy to that time. Then he rotated back stateside, and we were stationed together again. Both of us now NCOs ourselves, with the barracks crowded, we found ourselves able to move off Post. A shared apartment with no one around who could simply unlock our door and come in for a random inspection. No one to see us cuddle and kiss on our sofa, with the drapes pulled and the lights dimmed. Each of us taking turns cramming ourselves into the other's single bed meant no one dropping by had to guess which room was in use because both were.

Paranoia still keeping our wits sharp, but now our fortress had a physical location. This was our castle, where our love grew stronger, protected by our literal doors and walls, as well as our guarded actions. It lasted two years, then I got new orders yet again. I was off to train as a drill sergeant. The butchness of it all amused us both to no end. Here I was, off to be a professional hard-ass

soldier who was to mold soft recruits into more hard-as-nails soldiers, when if they knew how I kissed Shane, and the way I moaned as we made love, I'd be called a candy ass and shown the door.

The next snapshot was of Philip in his drill sergeant uniform, including his hat. This photo was one that belonged to Shane. Philip was inside Shane's hotel room, so wearing his cover had not been entirely appropriate, but if seen, it'd slide as it could be excused as showing off to a man everyone else considered practically his brother. In truth, Shane had asked him to wear it when he'd come to visit Philip at Fort Dix while he stopped over on leave, on his way to his youngest sister's wedding.

"Drop down and give me twenty!" I'd said commandingly. Shane put down the camera, and did as I asked. "Look at you! Now, stand up! Show me your gun!" Shane grinned, knowing full well I wasn't referring to a weapon. He unbuckled his cargo pants and dropped them around his ankles, pulling his briefs down next. My mouth watered as his cock bounced free. I knelt before him, placing my hat on the floor next to me.

"I'm ready for inspection," he said saucily.

I let it slide, deciding that it was time to get the show on the road. I grasped his dick and swiped my tongue over the purpled head. His breath grew ragged. I grinned up at him. "Something the matter, private?"

"No, Drill Sergeant!"

I smirked, then opened my mouth wide. Watching Shane have to cram his fist into his mouth to stop his scream as he'd come had been so worth it.

"Hey, man, what you doing?" Thompson asked from the doorway. "Hey cool, are those old photos?" Thompson walked over and picked up a random picture from the box. "What's this one?" he asked.

Philip looked. "That was our Waterloo," he said. "He took this picture to remember the day they breached our defenses. We lost that battle, and he was discharged."

Thompson clapped him on the shoulder. "That sucks man. It's not fair, him losing his retirement and benefits."

"Least it wasn't a Dishonorable," Philip said resignedly.

"They ought to reinstate his benefits at least," Thompson said, regarding the picture. It simply showed a building on the last Post Shane had been stationed

at. Just moments before, Shane had been inside, being told his fate. Ironically, he was discharged not because of anything they'd done, but because of accusations made by a man he'd spurned. Angered, the man accused him of having been in a gay bar. The man had outed himself to get even with Shane. Sadly, when shown Shane's picture, a bartender *had* said he thought he'd recognized him. It later transpired the other soldier had paid the bartender to say so, but Shane had had enough.

"Let's not dance around this shall we? I know no matter what, you're going to go with the 'proof' you think you have, from the bartender and my own records. Yes, I was previously accused, and cleared. But I will say this, I have never been in that bar. But the rest? I'm done. I don't think there is anything wrong with anyone loving someone else and I know my service record speaks for itself. Straight or gay, I've been a good soldier. I'm not saying anything else."

Shane had been discharged under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." He'd snapped the photo and emailed it that evening to Philip. *"Come home," I'd emailed back*, Philip thought. *And he did, getting a job on Post at the commissary, and renting a studio in the same complex I was living in.*

"Yeah, they should," Philip agreed. "He more than earned those benefits. But that's another battle." He sighed.

Thompson sat down next to him and placed the photo on the coffee table. "Still sucks, man." He began helping sort the photos. They reminisced and laughed as they shared stories, the way only old buddies could do. "Hey, I remember this one! This was the day 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' officially ended. Reyes and I flew down because you said you had something important that needed a face to face. Man, I remember thinking, 'For reals?' when you two came out to us. I can't believe I'd never noticed. I'd just thought you two were married to the army and bros, ya know? Even when he got out, I thought he was just ready for the civilian sector." Thompson shook his head ruefully. "I was blind as a damned bat, huh?"

Philip chuckled. "We felt like we'd won a major victory." He quickly sobered. "Then we realized that I could be out now, but we still couldn't be together, because in order to live together and actually *be* together, we had to be married. And that wasn't legal yet."

"And now you're getting married, dude. Full military wedding, arch of sabers and everything, man. Gonna put in for Post housing?"

Philip nodded. The two men placed the remaining photos in the album. Having slid the final photo in place, he looked at the remaining blank pages. "Be filling these up after tomorrow." He closed the album, looking at the white satin and the open cutout waiting for a wedding photo.

"Sure will," Thompson said. "As best man, I'll make sure you show your ass up for sure!" The two men laughed, then had one last beer before Thompson went to his own hotel room.

The alarm went off too early, and Philip felt an adrenaline rush like no other he'd felt before. This was it, their victory after all they'd gone through. Today would see Shane and himself as husbands, openly at each other's sides as Philip served out his remaining years before retirement. The day passed in a blur until at last, he slid a ring on Shane's finger, followed by the kiss; then they were hand in hand, exiting the chapel under the arch of sabers. It was a triumphant moment though a bittersweet one as only one of them was allowed to wear mess uniform.

The NCO club was decked out with flowers. At one end stood a table, with their cake ready for cutting. Philip and Shane clasped hands over the hilt of the knife, standing poised to cut the cake, gazing down. Two grooms stood on top of the cake, facing each other from opposite edges. Between them lay the official army emblem. "This We'll Defend" it proclaimed. The men locked gazes meaningfully. It had been a long war with many battles, but they'd won. It was an imperfect victory, but victories often were. It was still more than they'd ever dreamed they'd have together as they'd guarded their love all those years. Today was definitely a day of triumph.

"Every day, baby," Shane promised.

"Every day," Philip affirmed.

The two men pressed downwards, cutting into the cake. "Hooah!" they cried out in victory to all their assembled friends.

"Hooah!" they shouted back.

The End

Glossary

AIT: Advanced Individual Training. School where a soldier is trained in his MOS.

CQ: Charge of Quarters. A tasked duty in which a soldier is assigned to guard the front entrance of the barracks and to do walk-throughs to make sure everything is fine within. Also

ACQ: Assistant CQ, a lower-ranking soldier tasked with assisting the assigned CQ.

MOS: Military Occupational Specialty

NCO: Non-commissioned officer

PCS: Permanent Change of Station. This is not actually a forever type of posting. It merely means it is not a temporary duty assignment.

Author Bio

Leona is a longtime staunch supporter of human rights and environmental causes. Her favourite genre to read is M/M fiction, and she particularly enjoys science fiction, fantasy, and action/suspense subgenres—especially if they have a nice seasoning of romance. She has far too many books on her Kindle, has overloaded her phone with even more, and when not reading, writing, being driven to distraction by her children, or being overlorded by her three cats, can be found trying to locate the portal that the sock monster uses to steal socks from her dryer.

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