



Running
IN CIRCLES

A LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD STORY

JESS BUFFETT

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Love is an Open Road..... | 3 |
| Running in Circles – Information | 6 |
| Running in Circles | 7 |
| Chapter 1 | 8 |
| Chapter 2..... | 13 |
| Chapter 3..... | 18 |
| Chapter 4..... | 24 |
| Epilogue | 27 |
| Author Bio | 30 |

Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

RUNNING IN CIRCLES

By Jess Buffett

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.

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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.

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Photo Description

Two men embrace in a passionate kiss. The larger man firmly grasps the other man's rear, while the smaller of the two removes the other's earbuds.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I left my house this morning for my morning run & ended up at the one place that will change my life....

Sincerely,

Rissa (An MM Kinda Girl)

Please NO Historical, Sci-Fi, Fantasy or Paranormal

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: age gap, businessmen/lawyers, reunited, running/jogging, student/teacher relationship, tattoos

Word Count: 8,308

RUNNING IN CIRCLES

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Chapter 1

Brody Jamerson used the spare elastic band he had around his wrist to tie back his shoulder-length blond hair. Stretching his arms and then his calves one last time, he took in a deep breath as his running shoes hit the dirt track. He set his stride smooth and swift, cutting his way along the path that wove through the dense trees that made up the preserve near his home. The cool breeze fell over him as he ran, the beat of the latest song on his playlist acting as a soundtrack to his morning routine.

Since moving back home after finishing up law school, Brody had made a point of waking up a bit early each day to start his day just like this... peace and solitude. That was something he had been missing in the week he had been home. So used to his two-bedroom apartment and quiet roommate, who had never seemed to be home, the culture shock of moving back into his parents' house with three younger siblings had made him even more determined to find a place of his own.

The move would only be temporary anyway; if all went according to plan he would be working with one of the state's largest law firms in six months. All he had to do was wait. During his final year at law school he had interned for the firm, and while they hadn't had any positions opened for him initially, Brody had made enough of a name for himself there that the moment a partner had decided to retire, he had been the first person they had considered. Once that partner retired, another lawyer would be promoted, which would eventually make room for Brody. The senior partners were connected to a local law firm run by a father and son team in his hometown and had arranged for him to fill a position there in the interim. Brody saw it as a trial run to the big leagues and was determined to prove himself. Between his grades, the local firm's recommendation, and a whole lot of hard work, Brody would have his dream job in New York City.

He continued his morning routine, weaving in and out of the tree line, sometimes sticking to the path, and other times veering off for something a little different.

As he came up to an old, familiar footbridge, a small pang of hurt hit him as he recalled the last time he had been to that very spot a little over seven years ago. He felt himself slowing down before he even fully registered what he was doing.

Coming to a stop at the edge of the aged timber structure, he took a few unsteady steps to reach the peak, staring out at the creek that ran below.

Brody raised a tired, heavy arm to swipe away the drops of sweat that had built above his brow and threatened to fall as he slowed to a stop. His breathing was labored as he struggled to slow his racing heartbeat, the jog having turned into an all-out sprint toward the end.

Bending over to catch his breath, hands firmly planted on the hard wood of the bridge's railing, he heard the clearing of a throat behind him. Drawing up to his full height, Brody turned to face whomever had joined him on the track, only to stop short.

Shock held him still as he came face-to-face with the last man he had expected to see. And by that Brody meant he had planned on actively avoiding him at all costs.

Nate McCallister.

"Hey, Brody," Nate said quietly, eyes dipping down to the ground before lifting up to pin him with an intense stare. "I had heard you were home."

Brody's voice caught in his throat. He didn't know what to say, what to do. So many contradicting emotions raced through him at once. The desire to throw himself at Nate warred with the sudden urge to turn around and race out of there.

Nate had been the man of his dreams in high school, the only problem being that while Brody was an eighteen-year-old senior, Nate had been his then twenty-six-year-old math teacher.

And there he stood, looking as delicious as ever in his own pair of black running shorts, red sneakers, and a tight-as-sin powder-blue tank top. His dark-brown hair was still short with a wave that kicked up at the ends, as it had when Brody was in high school; his whiskey-colored eyes drew him in like a beacon.

Finally finding his voice, he offered up a weak smile. "Ah, yeah. I got back a couple of weeks ago."

Silence fell between the two of them, and Brody wasn't sure what to say to fill the awkward void. Thankfully, Nate had never had an issue with finding something to talk about.

"I hear you're looking for a place."

Brody quirked a brow at the abrupt turn in conversation. “Yeah, well, as much as I love my parents, I think I got a little used to doing my own thing, you know?”

Nate chuckled, rubbing a hand nervously along the back of his neck. “Yeah. I remember what going away for school was like. It’s a bit of a culture shock once you go back home. I think that’s why a lot of people don’t return home afterward.”

A peculiar expression flitted across Nate’s features, gone as quick as it came, but Brody thought perhaps it was a look of longing.

“So you’re doing well?” he asked in lieu of something else to say.

“Yeah, yeah I am. And you? I heard that you graduated top of your class... again.” Nate smiled, folding his arms across his chest as he bit down on his bottom lip. “Not that I’m surprised. When you set your mind to something, very little deters you.”

He gave a careless shrug, trying not to reveal just how much Nate’s praise meant to him, though something in the tilt of Nate’s lips and the sparkle in the man’s eyes told him that he wasn’t quite as successful as he had hoped to be.

Clearing his throat, Brody gestured toward the rest of the track. “Well, I should really get going. It was good seeing you again, Mr. McCa—ah, Nate.”

The other man’s name felt foreign and yet familiar all at once to him, and that sensation completely unnerved him.

“Wait,” Nate said quickly, reaching a hand out to stop him. The warmth of Nate’s hand soaked through his skin, heating him up from the inside. “Just... can we get a coffee or something? It’s been a while. I just want to... I’ve missed you, Brody.”

“Missed me?” he asked, somewhat surprised. He honestly hadn’t thought Nate had given him much thought over the last few years. The last time Brody had made it home for Thanksgiving break, he had headed to the grocery store for his mother, only to turn the aisle and come face-to-face with Nate. More importantly, Nate and another man. The pair had appeared extremely friendly, and while it was obvious they were taking precautions to not be overtly affectionate, Brody had seen the desire in the stranger’s eyes. A desire reflected in Nate’s own.

In the here and now though, Nate stood before him, alone and asking to spend time with him. The look in Nate’s eyes said Brody’s decision was more important than he knew.

“Yes. Missed you. Brody... I...” Nate seemed to be stumbling for words, a first for the older man.

Still, Brody was hesitant to take Nate up on his suggestion. Even after all these years, Nate’s words, sending him away like he had, still caused him a fair amount of pain. Yet in the end, he couldn’t walk away from a chance to spend some time with the man.

Wanting to break the tension that was building, Brody gave one of his cocky little grins that he knew for a fact had made many a man catch his breath. He took silent encouragement from the knowledge that Nate was no exception now. “How much?”

“How much... what?” Nate asked, confusion marring his features.

“How much did you miss me?” He pushed for an answer, taking a step toward Nate.

“A lot,” Nate whispered, lust and want evident in his gaze.

“Do you have anywhere to be today?”

“No. It’s a school holiday. Gotta love a long weekend.”

“Wanna grab a coffee now?”

“If you’re sure? I don’t want you to feel as though you have to.”

Brody nodded. “I’m sure. There’s a new café that just opened up a few months ago. Hotshots. You heard of it? I know the owners. I remember them from school.” Taking the steps necessary to fall in line with Nate, they cut their way through the forest toward the old highway where he had parked his car before heading off into the preserve. “Both of them were a couple of years ahead of me. I don’t suppose you would have met them back then since they graduated the year before you started teaching.”

Brody winced at the memories that particular comment brought up and looked out into the forest, at anything that meant he didn’t have to maintain eye contact.

“Maybe...” Nate started, then fell quiet.

“Maybe?” he prompted.

“Well, not that I have anything against Hotshots, because I don’t. Believe me. I spend plenty of money there every week. Sometimes it is the only thing helping me make it to the end of the day. I guess I was just hoping to have a

little more... privacy.” The flush that infused Nate’s face was adorable. There was no other word for it.

“Private?” he asked, waggling his brows, which elicited a strained laugh from Nate, whose mock glare did very little to tame the sudden spark of hope and need inside of him.

“You know what I mean. I figure there are a few things we should, or at least could, discuss. I just feel that some of those topics probably aren’t suitable for public.”

The hope that had begun to rise plummeted in one swift movement. Was that what Nate wanted to talk to him about? To rehash their reasons for not being together? It all seemed fairly moot now, and he had thought perhaps Nate wanted to explore the possible connection that still floated between them.

He was getting some seriously mixed signals.

An awkward silence settled on top of them until they finally reached their cars, and while he felt a slight relief in the break of tension by parting ways temporarily, another side loathed to let Nate out of his sight.

Still, with a quick exchange of numbers and Nate scrawling down his address on the first bit of paper Brody could find in the glove compartment, Brody found himself behind the wheel and steering the vehicle in the direction of either the best idea or the worst decision he had ever made.

Chapter 2

Arriving at his small two-bedroom apartment, Nate led Brody through the door and closed it firmly behind him, his heart rate increasing due to their proximity. A nervous and anxious feeling settled in Nate. After all this time he couldn't believe Brody stood in the middle of his home, a slight smile tilting at the corner of his mouth.

He looked good.

Brody had grown even taller in the last few years, giving him a more masculine appearance now. Gone was the smooth, baby-faced look, replaced by day-old scruff, a chiseled jaw, and biceps big enough that Nate had no doubt the other man could lift him if he was so inclined.

He flushed at that last thought.

Nate noticed another particular feature that was new on Brody. A rather large tattoo snuck out from the edges of his T-shirt, making Nate curious as to what it looked like in full.

"So, this is my home," Nate said, desperate to say something to break the sudden silence that had descended on them. "I know it's not much..."

The home itself wasn't overly lavish, but Nate was proud to call it his own. Decorated in earthy tones, the combination living and dining room was homey, with bookshelves lining an entire wall. A large sofa against another wall faced a decent-sized plasma-screen TV, with a coffee table situated between them.

"It's great. Really," Brody reassured him, shrugging a shoulder and giving him an uneasy chuckle. "At least you have your own place. I love my family, but what I wouldn't give to have something like this all to myself."

Sensing Brody's discomfort, Nate decided to take charge before this whole thing flopped terribly. "Do you want to take a seat? Can I make you that coffee?"

Taking the offered seat, Brody nodded. "Or we could cut to the chase. I don't know about you, but I didn't really expect coffee when you invited me back to your place. Did you?"

"Um, I guess not. Well, not just coffee." Nate blushed, taking the seat on the opposite end of the sofa.

Swiping a hand down his face, Brody leaned forward, resting his forearms on his thighs. "I really don't know what I'm supposed to say here, Nate."

"Neither do I, if that helps," he whispered, looking down at his hands clutched together.

"Then, can I just ask one thing?"

Nate's head shot up at the unusual tone Brody used, the waver in his voice something Nate had never heard from the self-assured younger man. "What?"

"Can we talk later?"

"Later?" he asked, confused as to the direction the conversation had taken.

Brody sighed, edging up onto his knees and snaking a hand up and around the back of Nate's head to cup his neck. Tugging, his breath came in quicker pants as Brody closed the distance until there was barely a hair's breadth between their lips. "Much later."

Brody's lips when they met Nate's were soft and just a little moist; they pressed against him gently, not pushing in any way, merely moving in one slow, open-mouthed kiss after another. His tongue fluttered against the sensitive seam of Nate's lips, asking permission, and Nate granted access with a low moan.

Nate's hands came up unbidden, brushing over firm muscle until they ran through impossibly soft, thick, long golden hair, to grab hold and turn Brody's head the way he wanted. Nate deepened the kiss almost desperately, clinging to Brody with everything he had to get more of him. He couldn't remember how Brody's shirt ended up on the floor, and didn't know where his own was. He had no recollection of when their running shorts had come off to leave them bare as they stumbled toward the bed.

He couldn't even really bring himself to care, either, as they fell back onto the mattress, rutting against each other.

Nate rolled them until he could pull Brody on top and between his legs. Brody was already breathing hard, the deep hazel-green of his eyes a mere ring around black pupils when he broke the kiss to look down at him. "Do you know how long I've waited for this?"

"As long as I have?" Nate swallowed hard.

Brody smiled then, kissing him softly on the lips, moving to the corner of his mouth before tracing over his cheek and jaw where he nipped gently on

Nate's bared throat. Nate panted as Brody licked and bit, marking greedily, blowing over damp skin to earn shivers.

"Please," Nate begged, arching up into Brody.

"Shhh, it's my turn to make the decisions." There was a wicked gleam in Brody's eyes as he grinned. "And I've decided to take my time."

Brody moved lower still, all the while commenting about how he loved how responsive and sensitive Nate was under him. Nate was a mess as the man kept up his intense yet slow ministrations, but he understood the need Brody had to take his time. This had been a long time coming, and he didn't want to waste a second of it either.

Brody nipped at Nate's collarbone, nuzzling his way down through the light dusting of dark hair until his lips found one of Nate's nipples. He lavished it with attention until it was hard, not unlike himself. Brody scraped his teeth over sensitive skin, earning gasps and moans and grunts, and Nate's fingers spasming in his hair when he followed the trail farther down. Nate moaned as Brody caressed him, his hands gentle, firm, soft, relentless, whispering his nails over one patch only to press the pads of his fingers down on another.

Nate's legs were trembling as Brody spread them further, hot breath ghosting over the sensitive flesh, kissing, nipping carefully while moving lower before pulling away entirely.

"Up," Brody urged him abruptly, moving him to his knees. Brody lay down on the bed beside him, leaving Nate confused and feeling slightly bereft at the loss of contact. "Straddle my chest."

"Brody?" His voice cracked, but he did as told when Brody's hands grabbed his hips and moved him up higher. "Are you su—ah, god!"

All words left Nate when Brody swallowed him down, as much as he could, without a warning. Nate gritted his teeth so hard he thought he'd crack them.

"Brody, I can't..." Nate's voice cracked again, his hips moving minutely. "I'm too..."

Nate fumbled for the bedside drawer, desperate to reach the lube but unwilling to pull away. There was a slight tangle of limbs, a few chuckles, and a groan as Nate inevitably tumbled to the side. He would be more embarrassed if he weren't so turned on in that moment. Nate almost let out a shout of relief when he had his fingers wrapped around the small bottle and was shoving it

into Brody's hand and settling back on top. Brody wasted no time in getting his mouth wrapped around Nate's hard, leaking shaft again. He continued to swallow Nate down and hummed, encouraging him with a wet finger, slipping the tip just past the tense muscle. Closing his eyes, Nate focused on the moving digit that was slowly, gently, exploring him from within, grazing against that spot that could make a man see stars. A groan rumbled through Nate's chest when Brody's finger became two, and he pressed a third against his rim.

Hazel-green eyes snapped open to meet his when he looked down, and those two long fingers that had been moving in and out suddenly curled down in a firm stroke. And another. Nate saw more than heard the deep breath and nearly cried out when Brody suddenly backed off all together.

“Wha—”

“Not yet,” Brody said with a hush.

So on edge, his body trembling from the need for release, all Nate could do was let Brody gently moved him to the side and helped him lie down.

“Brody. I wanted... Why?” His voice was hoarse and a little rattled.

“I've waited a long time for you, Nate,” Brody murmured. “I want everything, not just a little bit of you.”

“Yes,” he said breathlessly. “Everything.”

It earned him a smug grin. “Do you want me that much?”

“Yes. Condoms in the drawer. Hurry up.”

With a chuckle Brody moved to the nightstand to get a condom, returning quickly and covering Nate's body with his much larger frame. “I can't believe this is finally happening.”

“Start believing and get the hell in me already,” he demanded, jerking back in surprise at his own forwardness.

Brody chuckled, an approving expression on his features. “Well, okay then. All you had to do was ask sweetly.”

Nate watched as Brody slicked up his cock and rolled on the condom, moving into position as he lifted Nate's legs over his arms and pressed against Nate's quivering entrance. “Ready?”

At his nod, Brody pushed forward with a little more pressure, slipping the head of his cock past the ring of muscle. Nate urged him on further, enjoying

the burn and wanting everything Brody had to give him. Nate moaned as his lover began slowly thrusting, not stopping until he was fully seated.

“So full... Oh god... Please.” He clawed at Brody’s arms, burning with the need to feel Brody take him. The slow, rocking sensation was driving him mad. He understood that Brody was trying to be gentle and take his time, but he needed more. “Please, Brody, I won’t break. Show me you mean it.”

That seemed to do the trick. Eyes igniting, his nostrils flaring at the words, Brody pulled himself out until only the tip of his cock sat inside and then slammed home, making Nate scream in ecstasy. “Yes!”

This was what he wanted.

Brody kept up the hard, pounding pace, holding nothing back. “Wrap your legs around my waist.”

Linking his arms and legs around Brody, all Nate could do was hold on as the hands on his hips tightened and the force of Brody’s thrust grew stronger. “Fuck, Brody. Yes, harder, please harder,” he cried out, mindless now, pulling the man closer.

He could feel his balls draw up close to his body as his cock began to pulse and throb, causing his rock-hard prick to erupt all over his stomach. Brody tensed above him, and Nate gasped as Brody held him tighter, groaning into his neck.

Happy and content, Nate allowed himself to simply relish the feeling of Brody finally in his arms, for the first time feeling as though everything was falling into place.

Chapter 3

Brody hummed contently, sighing with a sense of fulfillment he hadn't ever experienced. Nate lay wrapped in his arms, eyes closed and a soft smile playing on his lips as his fingertips traced the outline of his tattoo.

"And what has you so happy?" he asked, for no other reason than to hear Nate say it was because of him. It was official; he was a sap.

Nate snickered, burrowing himself in closer. "Looking for your ego to be stroked?"

"Maybe?"

"Then look elsewhere," Nate replied, jabbing him gently in the side.

Brody grunted, and then silence fell between them again, so much more comfortable than earlier. He knew they had so much to discuss, to work out, but that didn't matter. It would all work itself out. Now was the time to enjoy; reality could come later.

A few minutes later, though, he could feel Nate growing restless within his arms. The older man fidgeted, small movements that eventually made Brody speak. "Nate? What is it?"

"What's what?" his lover asked innocently.

Shuffling down to face him, Brody hooked a finger under Nate's chin, forcing Nate to meet his eye. "What is going on in that big old brain of yours?"

Nate's brows pulled down into a frown. "Not old."

"If you say so," he quipped, earning himself another jab to the ribs. "You going to tell me?"

The sigh that slipped past Nate's lips put him on alert. There was something hesitant yet resigned about it. "I was just wondering... what are your plans?"

"Plans?"

"You know, now that you're home." Nate pulled away slightly, propping himself up onto his elbows. The move caused them to lose eye contact, and a heavy feeling settled inside of Brody. "I know you said you were looking for a place, but what about work?"

“Work?” He blinked at Nate, not expecting that question. “Are you asking me if I have intentions of getting a job?”

Nate huffed. “It was more where that job would be.”

Realizing how serious this conversation was turning, Brody sat up, leaning his back against the headboard. As Nate copied his movement, Brody licked his lips, a little distracted as the sheets pooled around Nate’s waist, barely covering his groin. “I have a temporary placement at a firm here in town.”

“Temporary?” Nate glanced up at him, and Brody was momentarily ensnared by his warm eyes.

“Yeah, they partner with a larger firm in New York. It’s kind of like a stepping stone for the next six months before making the move to the larger firm, you know.”

“Stepping stone.” It wasn’t a question, and the way the light dimmed in Nate’s eyes had him focusing more on the current topic.

“Yeah, not that it matters sin—”

“I think you should leave,” Nate said quietly, avoiding any and all eye contact with him.

The sensation of the world falling out from underneath him was all Brody could comprehend in that moment. He felt numb, cold, and out of touch. The extreme buzzing that had started in his ears wouldn’t go away.

“What?” he asked woodenly.

“Leave. Please.”

“Nate. Wh—”

“Can you just do as I ask, Brody?” With a sigh, Nate slipped out of bed, clearly searching for something to wear.

Brody followed suit, moving out into the living room quickly to retrieve his shirt. He was suddenly unable to stand being undressed.

When they finished, the pair turned to one another. Nate’s expression was pained, yet for what Brody had no idea. The last he checked, it was the older man breaking his heart, not the other way around.

“Why?” he finally asked. His voice wavered toward the end, and he hated himself for it.

Nate took a few steps back, each movement causing more cracks to break through his heart. “Listen, nothing has changed. I-I thought it had, but...”

“But what? You scratched your itch and you’re done?” He spat out, anger welling up within him as Nate had the audacity to stare up at him in shock.

“No. No, that isn’t it. Brody, yo—”

“Spare me the whole ‘it’s not you, it’s me’ speech, for fuck’s fuck sake!” he shouted, shoving his feet into his sneakers.

“Brody. Please. You need to hear me.”

Nate’s pleas fell on deaf ears as Brody bent over to grab his wallet and keys. He made it all the way to the front door, a pleading Nate trailing in his wake, before he finally turned to face the other man again.

“That’s the thing, Nate,” he said, suddenly feeling a lot older than his years. “I don’t have to listen. I don’t have to go through this again. I was a kid the last time we did this song and dance, and you were the one who pushed me away. More importantly, I let you. But this time?” He shook his head sadly. “This time, it’s my turn. And you don’t get the last say. You don’t want me? Fine. But don’t put that on me.”

Without a backward glance, Brody opened the door, leaving it hanging open as he exited not only the building, but Nate’s life once and for all, a part of him breaking with each step.

Nate took a deep breath, trying to steady himself and wondering what the hell he had just done.

His heart was racing, and a ringing sound in his ears escalated, a harsh buzzing taking its place. The world was collapsing around him, walls telescoping in. He gasped for breath, but he couldn’t get any air, the muscles of his throat having closed up.

Holy shit. He was having a panic attack.

He could hear his phone going off, but it was like a distant background noise. Stumbling with his movement, he grabbed for the device on the kitchen bench and answered the call as he sank to the ground.

“He—”

Nate wasn’t sure if he was asking for help or something else, he just knew that was all that would come out.

“Nate? Fuck, Nate. Are you okay?” The familiar sound of his friend’s voice jolted him. The reassurance Isaac murmured to him over the phone helped settle the jittery parts of him, allowing him to regain some sort of control again.

“Isaac.”

“Shit, Nate. What happened?” Isaac asked. “Do you need me to come over? Christ, you haven’t had one of these in years. Are you okay?”

Nate let out a strangled sound. “No. No, don’t come. I’m just...”

“You’re just?” Isaac prompted.

“God, I think I screwed up, man.” He laid his head back against the cupboard door, thumping it slightly. “Seriously screwed up.”

Isaac’s chuckle filtered through the phone. “Now what could be that bad, Nate? What did you do... fall in love with another student?”

Nate flinched. He knew his friend only meant it as a joke, though trying to make light of that particular situation was probably not the way to go. No one had ever accused Isaac of being tactful.

“More like falling back in love,” he muttered, cursing himself immediately for letting it slip out.

“What?” Isaac squawked. “Tell me I heard that right? Are we talking about the same kid you used to teach? What was his name...? Ben... Brett...”

“Brody,” he said sharply. “His name is Brody, and yes.”

Isaac went quiet for a moment, probably taking in all the scenarios. “So, what happened? Obviously you two met back up?”

“Yeah.”

“And what? He’s of age now, right?”

Nate groaned, pinching the bridge of his nose with his spare hand. “He was then too, asshole.”

“Barely,” Isaac snorted. “So what’s the problem?”

Nate pursed his lips, genuinely contemplating hanging up on his friend, but ultimately deciding he needed to speak to someone about what had gone wrong. “The problem is that we just had the most amazing sex of my life.”

“Ah, dude... if that’s your idea of a problem, then I would really love to experience what your idea of bliss is.”

“Shut up, you idiot.” He growled in frustration. “Afterward he told me that he has a temporary position here at the local firm, which sounded great you know, because... well... yay... he was home, you know. Then he went on to tell me how it was all a lead-up to a job in a larger branch in New York within six months.”

“Oh, damn.”

“Yeah, oh damn.”

“So I’m assuming when you asked if he still planned on taking it after what had happened...” Isaac trailed off before groaning. “You did ask him, right?”

“Well...”

The truth was, it hadn’t even crossed his mind. Nate had withdrawn and not even given Brody a chance. By the time he had realized his mistake, Brody was already out the door. “Oh jeez, Nate. Tell me you weren’t stupid enough to kick him out without giving him a chance?”

Nate remained silent, unable to voice that, yes, he truly was that stupid.

“Fucking hell, man. What the hell am I going to do with you?”

Nate shrugged, even though he knew Isaac couldn’t see. “I just... he started going on about the job offer he had, and—”

“And you panicked,” Isaac unhelpfully finished for him.

“Yeah.”

“And then instead of asking him to stay, you did the same thing you did last time and made up his mind for him?”

He frowned down at his phone, wondering why he hadn’t already hung up on the other man. “Aren’t you supposed to be making me feel better?”

Isaac snickered. “You want to feel better? Then chase down that guy and tell him how you really feel. Let him decide what is best for him. I’m not going to sit here and let you spend the next five years moping and pining away.”

“I wasn’t moping.”

“And yet he doesn’t deny the pining,” was the muttered reply he received from Isaac.

“Shut up.”

“I will if you promise me you are headed out that door to make things right.”

“Fine. I’m already gone.”

“Good.”

Before he could hang up, Isaac called his name one last time.

“Yeah?”

“I know I’m giving you shit, but you know I just want you to be happy, right?” His friend’s voice had grown serious and quiet.

“Yeah, I know,” he whispered in response.

“Good. Now go get your man.”

He hung up, brows creasing as he wondered just how in the hell he was going to get Brody to speak to him again. It had been a pure miracle that Brody hadn’t turned away from him on the bridge that morning. But Nate was sick of running when it came to the younger man. It was time that he stopped.

Chapter 4

With his music blasting in his ears, phone strapped firmly to his bicep, Brody sprinted down his usual path with a sense of *déjà vu*. The rain had begun to fall, slowly getting heavier, like his current mood. Yesterday's events played through his mind in a vicious cycle, and he wondered how the best day of his life had turned out to be the worst as well.

Whispers of Nate's voice, touches, and sounds teased him, making him push himself faster, harder. As though he could outrun the memories.

However fate seemed to be against him as he rounded the corner to the same bridge he had come to both love and hate, only to find Nate waiting for him. Brody was tempted to turn around, head back the other way, but he couldn't seem to make himself. Part of him wanted to take the opportunity to rail and scream at Nate for breaking his heart again, and the other, more morbid side of him wanted to know why Nate was even here, what he had to say.

Could it be any worse than what he had heard yesterday?

Slowing his run, he came to a stop only a few paces away from Nate, doing everything he could to ignore the way Nate's tight red shirt clung to his lithe frame in the rain. Water droplets hung on his lashes, dripping down his cheeks and his throat, curving around to dip underneath the cotton. Brody wanted nothing more than to lean in and swipe them away. With his tongue.

Damn, this was going to be harder than he thought.

"What are you doing here?" He winced at the harshness of his tone but refused to apologize.

Nate shuffled from one foot to another, hands firmly planted in his jacket pockets. "I called your house, and your mom answered. She told me that if I wanted to make things right, I could find you on your usual path. There may have also been some creative threats involved too."

Brody grimaced. "Yeah, sounds like Mom."

"I'm sorry."

Brody stared at him, completely unimpressed.

Honestly, this was all Nate had to say? Brody figured the man felt guilty, though why he had to listen to Nate try and make himself feel better was beyond him.

“Nate, I re—”

“I was scared.”

Brody raised an eyebrow and waited.

Nate shook his head, letting out a mirthless laugh. “I was then, and I am now. You scare me.”

“Why?” he asked incredulously. What had he ever done to make this confident man fear him?

“Because you...” Nate began and then stopped, appearing to have difficulty with his words. Those whiskey eyes bored into Brody as if he were fighting some sort of internal battle. “Because you could quite easily mean the world to me, and I already watched you walk away once... and it nearly killed me.”

“You told me to go,” Brody said, shouting now with his arms stretched out wide. “You told me to go, that there was nothing here for me. That I was too young to give you what you needed, and you weren’t able to be what I needed. Do you remember? There was no ‘walking away.’ Not until yesterday, and again, you caused that.”

“That was what was best for you, at the time.” Brody wanted to object and call bullshit, but Nate cut him off. “No, don’t say it wasn’t. We both know it’s true. You had so much to look forward to, to experience. I was only going to get in your way, and then what? You would end up resenting me. I did know better then, even if you didn’t want to hear it. The problem is, I thought I knew better now too.”

Brody wanted to argue, even when part of him agreed in some way. Perhaps back then it *had* been for the best. “And you were wrong this time?”

A pained noise escaped Nate. “God, I was so wrong.”

He tamped down on the bolt of hope that grew inside of him. They had been here before, and Brody needed to know if they would end up here again. Would Nate assume because of their age difference that he always knew best? He didn’t think that was the kind of relationship he wanted to work toward.

Brody cocked his head to the side. “How long did it take you to figure that out?”

“Long enough for you to have made it home and start blocking my calls,” Nate said sheepishly.

Eyebrows raised as high as they could go, Brody laughed. “So you decided to wait for me here in the pouring rain?”

“Yeah.”

“How did you know I would even turn up?” he asked curiously. “I could have skipped today. Then you would have stood out here all day in the rain for nothing.”

“Not nothing. For you,” Nate said softly.

“I can’t trust that you aren’t going to do this again,” he said honestly.

Nate didn’t seem to take any offense to his statement, or argue. Brody supposed that was a good start. “That’s because you don’t really know me. And I reacted the way I did for the same reason. There’s no trust because we aren’t the same people, and whatever this is—” he explained, waving a hand between them “—whatever it is, it isn’t what we had years ago.”

Brody shifted closer to Nate, wanting desperately to reach out, but holding himself back. “I feel like all we are doing is running in circles, Nate.”

“Then let’s stop.”

He scoffed. “And what... live happily ever after?”

“Well, I was thinking we could actually grab a coffee this time and maybe spend the next six months, before you have to make any final decisions, getting to know one another.” Nate added with a smirk, “But it is always good to have goals.”

Brody threw his head back and laughed. A true, heartfelt burst of emotion. Relief. Optimism. Hope. Something a lot like love.

“You still spouting that ‘goals are the key to the future’ crap?”

“It’s not crap,” Nate said indignantly. “Fine planning is the way to success.”

“Oh yeah?” A grin stretched across his lips. He reached out and tugged Nate closer, until their chests were firmly planted against each other. “And what about happiness?”

Nate’s brows furrowed. “What about it?”

“What’s the key to that?”

Nate’s frown disappeared, replaced by the most brilliant smile. His lips briefly touched Brody’s and then he leaned lean back to whisper, “That’s easy. You.”

Epilogue

Six months later...

Nate stretched his arms above his head, enjoying the bone-cracking relief before flopping back down on the mattress in a heap. He let out a contented sigh, refusing to open his eyes and just reveling in the peace and quiet of a Sunday morning.

Thump. Bump. Thunk.

His brows tugged into a frown as he tried to ignore the noises threatening to invade his inner sanctuary. The sounds continued, growing in volume until Nate heard the inevitable crash of the coatrack hitting the floor near the front entrance of his home.

“Oh fuck,” he mumbled to himself, flipping over in one move to bury his head under one of the pillows.

Curses filtered into the room, and even with his head covered, Nate was able to make out a few of them. Groaning and giving up on any semblance of a restful and somewhat lazy morning, Nate rolled out from underneath his covers and swung his legs over the side of the bed to stand.

As the blood rushed quickly to his head, he took a moment to right himself before bending down to grab the closest pair of pants. Tugging on his sweats, Nate shuffled out to the living room to find an extremely sweaty and delicious-looking Brody slumped up against one of the walls.

He sighed, taking in the mess on the floor near Brody’s feet and what he thought was once his well-functioning coatrack. “One day you’re going to be able to come in after a run and not make a mess as you do it.”

Brody grunted.

Nate took in the length of the younger man’s neck that led up to his gorgeous face, which was covered in ample dark stubble that was almost long enough to be called a beard. Gone was the long, wavy golden hair, replaced with a closely cropped style that made his hair seem much darker now. Brody had gotten sick of his coworkers commenting on his boyish appearance, and had done everything he could to make sure they took him more seriously.

And he did that... because he had decided to stay.

A small grin spread across Nate's features as he acknowledged the fact that Brody had chosen him over some illustrious career in his favorite city. Had chosen a life with Nate to be his future goal.

Walking forward, Brody, who had yet to drop his head and actually look at Nate, finally did so. Nate chuckled when he realized Brody still had his earbuds in.

"Come on," he said, reaching out for one of Brody's hands, tugging him through the living room and down the hall into the bedroom.

He had no idea why Brody insisted on jogging every weekend instead of staying in bed, but he figured it had something to do with expelling all the issues he had to deal with at work during the week, so Nate let him go.

They made it as far as the doorway before Brody pulled back slightly to stop him. Turning around and frowning at him, Nate shook his head at the leer Brody shot him.

"No," he said sternly, though by the way Brody's expression didn't change, Nate wasn't sure he had been convincing enough. "I mean it, Brody. No. You need a shower."

"So join me," Brody said, finally speaking.

Nate snorted. "Yeah, we'll accomplish a lot if we do that."

"Oh, I know we will." Brody waggled his brows and Nate lost it, cracking up laughing.

"God, you are terrible," he said with no heat whatsoever. "Go and have your shower."

He allowed Brody to pull him closer, firm hands coming around to cup his ass. Nate reached up, tugging the earbuds out of Brody's ears as he leaned in for a kiss. Things quickly turned deeper, more passionate, as they began to move against each other, the friction causing Nate to moan.

"Brody," he gasped when the other man began trailing his lips down Nate's neck, nipping and teasing tender skin, sending shivers down his spine.

Nate's cock pulsed behind his sweats, and he groaned. He jerked forward when Brody's hand came around to the front and slid lower, cupping his arousal. Nate's hand moved of its own accord, tracing well-defined muscles until it reached its destination. Brody's fingers began to toy with the edge of

Nate's sweats, slowly lowering them as he spun their bodies to press Nate into the wall behind him.

Panting heavily, Nate thrust himself into the other man's touch.

Nate found himself arching into caresses and opening up more for Brody, who growled in what Nate assumed was approval, pressing their bodies closer together. Nate wrapped his arms around Brody's neck again, leaning back against the wall and spreading his legs as Brody shoved Nate's pants out of the way. The cool air on his cock was like a balm on his overheated flesh.

Nate cried out and bucked his hips when Brody grasped him in his firm hand, the tip of his thumb dipping into the tiny slit at the top. Brody kept up the slow and steady pumps of his fist, driving Nate higher and higher. "Ah. Fuck, yeah."

Brody chuckled. "We'll get to that. Just gotta make you messy first."

"Oh hell. That feels good," he moaned.

Lips crushed to his again as the intensity heightened. Nate dug his nails into Brody's skin as he thrust his hips, desperate for more. He could feel his balls draw up close, and he squeezed his eyes shut, wanting to hold on for as long as possible. He knew he didn't stand a chance when Brody tore his mouth away, his other hand coming up to pinch one of Nate's nipples.

"Come for me," Brody ordered.

Nate's orgasm ricocheted forward, his release pouring out of him and spilling over the hand Brody still pumped him with.

Nate slumped against the wall, out of breath and a little shaky from how powerful his orgasm had been. "That was..."

Brody hummed, pressing another open-mouthed kiss to him. "Now you have to shower with me. You are filthy."

"I was going to anyway," he snickered, letting his forehead fall onto the massive chest in front of him.

"I was just guaranteeing it," Brody said smugly.

Nate opened eyes he hadn't even realized he had closed and smiled back at the man he knew now, without a doubt, he was madly in love with. "I don't think you need to worry. I'm fairly certain I'm a sure bet."

The End

Author Bio

Jess Buffett was born and raised in New South Wales, Australia. She is a mum of two, married to her high school sweetheart.

Jess is a hopeless romantic who is a huge fan of M/M and M/F romance with a happy ending—anything with hunky men in all their glory, whether they are Shifters, Vampires, Cowboys, or the boy next door.

A caffeine addict who shamefully can't make a decent cup of coffee to save her life, Jess believes in soul mates, happily ever afters, and in love at first sight, but also that sometimes people need a second or a third sighting for the brain to catch up.

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