

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

BACK TO EDEN

Marc Green

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

BACK TO EDEN

By Marc Green

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

Five handsome cowboys are turned away from the observer, buck naked except for their cowboy hats. They are standing in a line next to each other on a ground somewhere outside. Grass, brush, and trees surround them, and there is water close-by. They have muscular backs, fit bodies, and firm butts. They appear free and happy as they throw their towels over their shoulders.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

That's it. We've had it. We're done with convention. We're sick of toeing the line. We want to live our lives the way we say, not the way society tells us. We're off into the woods to live naked and to see what happens. We've thrown caution to the wind and nature is calling us.

Knock yourselves out guys. This can be anything you want. No dub con.

Sincerely,

Dawn Sister

Story Info

Genre: contemporary, paranormal

Tags: ranch, cowboys, shifter, vampire, angel, voyeurism, public activity, poly mmmmm, runaways, homophobia

Content Warnings: cliffhanger

Word Count: 9,666

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“So...” Samantha prodded me, flashing me a mischievous smile. “How did you like the movie? Have I succeeded in corrupting my favorite preacher’s son?”

I laughed. “Much too late for that, love. Don’t forget, I’m playing for the other team. If I believe my dad, I was born with a one-way ticket to hell. No sense in trying to pull someone to the dark side who already lives there!”

She rolled her eyes.

“Fine! You’re a total badass, V card-carrying sodomite, trying to corrupt souls everywhere with rainbows. What did you think of the movie?”

I drove my hand through my short, spiked hair as I was prone to do on occasion. I always did that when I was thinking hard, and I had to find a diplomatic answer. Sam and I were crazy addicted to romantic and often very explicit and sexy books, but there were times when our tastes didn’t totally match up.

“Well...” I began. “I loved the music, the set looked gorgeous and sleek, the cinematography was nice, and the actor was pretty damn hot.”

She nodded enthusiastically when I mentioned the actor’s hotness. He might have put his foot into his own mouth and caused a big backlash, and there were many speculations about the chemistry of the two lead actors, but I was sure no one could have denied that the guy was serious eye candy!

“However...” I continued gravely.

“I knew there would be a ‘but,’” Sam threw in, mock glaring at me. “It would have been a miracle if you’d suddenly developed good taste.”

“However...” I repeated louder, ignoring her interruption. “...I can see why people don’t think it’s real BDSM.” There, I’d said it. I knew she had devoured the books and dragged me into the movie, but that didn’t mean I had to agree with her. I knew I would get an earful, though.

I was prepared for that however, and I felt very proud and adult for not giggling at her use of the word “butt.”

Hmm... that actor really did have a damn nice butt. Very lickable!

I could feel my Levi's getting even tighter than they already were. I loved to display my goods, though if I didn't stop thinking about hot actors and butts, my display would be indecent.

"You did not just say that!" she huffed. "You're just parroting all the other people who want to keep us women boring and vanilla!"

I looked at my friend. Pink hair, nose studs, and a ripped T-shirt that made her look like the survivor of a zombie apocalypse in a weirdly sexy way. It also gave people a glimpse of the dragon tattoo on her back. She was hot, even though, unfortunately, some very important equipment was missing, or I would have snatched her away.

I loved her to death; she was my best friend and would make any sane straight guy drool, but I couldn't ever see her as "vanilla." I just knew her too well for that.

"Besides, you don't even read BDSM. Or practice it for that matter. How would you know?"

"Hey, I have read BDSM stories. You can check my Goodreads account. There is some A.J. Rose, SJD Peterson, and Heidi Cullinan there," I protested.

Okay, so I hadn't really gotten on top of the BDSM train as many of my friends did. I liked playful and kinky, but if things turned too dark and hard-core I was out. I did enjoy the mental bond between two equal partners in the lifestyle when it was well written, because so much trust and love was hot. Even if I would never want to personally try any of those things, I could appreciate them.

Hell, there were some books that were so well written that I even liked the more hard-core stuff that I had assumed was an automatic turnoff and hard limit for me. Good writing could make all the difference.

But honestly, Sam was totally right. I had no experience with BDSM, and I knew it.

"You are totally wrong, Sam," I told her.

Just because I don't instantly come when someone mentions a whip and cuffs doesn't mean that I don't know my way around good BDSM stories. It's not about quantity, but quality.

I know what it is supposed to be about and this movie isn't it.

“Oh right, I forgot you were all-knowing. I always forget. Can't really expect any better from mere mortals like myself, can you? So spill. Why is this not 'real' BDSM?”

Christ. I knew I would get into this discussion with her. I just knew it, even before the first second of this movie. She loved all the different shades of things and hated when people believed they had the only right answer to anything. She didn't like people saying this BDSM was wrong and their BDSM was right. She liked the books and defended them. I got that. However, I didn't think she was right in this case, even though she of course had the right to her opinion.

“You know that I thought the actor was hot. He was also a billionaire with a lot of charm and an intriguing intensity. I didn't even mind the BDSM play. Bondage and all that can be kinky fun, and honestly, it looked hot and sensual. I just didn't like the fact that he likes to cause others pain and gets aroused by it because he was abused when he was young.

“Being abused and taken advantage of is not the same as willingly deciding to do a BDSM scene. The guy is messed up and should try to work out his past with professional help. Instead he is a sadist and takes his pleasure in hurting a woman who is not a masochist and doesn't enjoy pain. I can't see how that will work out into a fairy-tale HEA. I guess if he found a woman who enjoyed that kind of pain and willingly wanted him to do it, that would be different as he at least doesn't cause permanent damage. This just didn't work for me.”

She huffed but didn't say a word. I might not have convinced her, but at least I seemed to have adequately defended my opinion, and she could see my point. That was our way. We could discuss and fight and have different opinions, but we were still best friends and respected each other and our opinions.

“I hope you'll find out soon what love does to you,” she muttered. “Once your heart has been stolen, you can't help yourself. Even if—especially if—it's not perfect, and the guy is broken, you will want to fix him. Love is not always a walk in the park, believe you me. But okay, point taken!”

I kissed her cheek.

I know she was speaking from experience. Loving someone so much that she nearly destroyed herself trying to please him had irrevocably broken her heart. She didn't dare to open her heart to many people anymore and mostly lost herself in romances that were safely contained in books.

“Anyway, it was fun to spend time with my BFF again. I don’t mind what we watch or where we go, as long as I get my Sammy-time. It has been too long.”

“You’re right. We can’t wait this long again before seeing each other. We might have both been very stressed recently, but that is no excuse.”

“On that note...” I said ruefully. “Gotta go! But we’ll do this again, soon. Love you, Sam.”

If only she was the one for me. Sometimes I wished I could go straight for her and love her in the way she deserved and no one else seemed capable of. Would have made my life so much easier. She was my soul mate, and I wanted her to be happy. I was sure I would be happy with her. But we couldn’t change who we were and whom we loved.

I was who I was, and I was born that way. If there had been even a hint of bi-curiosity in me, I would probably have tried to find a girl I could have fallen for. Especially considering my home life and parents. I could have escaped the WWII in my house that left me broken and scarred.

However, I was one-hundred-percent queer. No doubt in my mind. Not even the hint of curiosity about putting my dick into female genitalia. Yuck. I still imagined there were teeth down there that would bite off my boy parts.

There were just some things in life you didn’t want or need to know. Or see. Or feel. Or think about.

Thankfully, Sam was very much in agreement with me. When she was reading an explicit romance, she didn’t want to read about moist girl parts. She wanted to read about hot men, and that was something that had bonded us from the very beginning.

“I’ll hold you to that!” she told me, hugging the breath out of my lungs with an embrace that a tiny little thing like her shouldn’t be capable of. But then, I guess I wasn’t the most built and athletic guy either.

I was smallish and wiry. Maybe a bit more toned and stronger since I had started out working on the ranch, but I’d never look like Nash and his brothers. Or business partners? No one really knew what exactly they were to each other, but in any case, they had kind of appeared out of nowhere and bought the Eden Ranch.

After Mr. and Mrs. Willington had died, their son had sold their small ranch because he really wasn’t interested in slaving away in the sun all day. He had never been interested in a rancher’s life; drawn to the big-city lights instead.

The ranch had never really raked in a lot of money, and while the boy's parents had been very proud of what they had accomplished and content with their life, it wasn't for everyone.

Still, Ben Willington had made sure that the ranch would not be sold to those people who had drooled over his parents' land ever since his parents had their accident.

Those people had never cared for his parents or their financial problems, only visiting them when they thought they could benefit from them. Suddenly they had acted like they were Ben's parents' best friends and were heartbroken.

It was only about increasing their land and power. Ben had rather sold it all to the five strangers who wanted to move there and seemed to respect his parents' legacy.

In any case, he had moved away and asked me to keep an eye on the place. There wasn't really anything either of us could have done if we didn't like the way the new owners acted. However, Ben just wanted to know he had done the right thing, and I needed a place to work and earn some money anyway.

My parents sure as fuck didn't support me anymore now that they had discovered the truth about me. In their eyes, I was the devil's spawn.

I ached for the short years where I believed they really wanted to make the world into a better place. I knew better now. Instead of focusing their efforts into helping the poor; fighting against injustice; helping when disasters struck; helping when people got sick, died of hunger, or were abused; or using their money and influence in a positive way, they focused on preventing gay people from having equal rights.

I had heard so much hatred from people who thought of themselves as people of god; had seen families who had given all their money for this cause. I just couldn't understand it, but at least I had started to realize that there were more important things than approval from such hypocrites.

I unlocked my blue Mazda. Unlike many other modern cars, this one still had a personality. In other words, I was only able to afford a car that didn't always run smoothly, but I liked to pretend that my car chose to act up out of temperament. I lovingly called her Christine.

Christine seemed to be in a good mood. She started without a problem, and one of my favorite audiobooks started up. I absolutely *loved* Amy Lane's *Keeping Promise Rock* and really enjoyed listening to it on my car rides.

There was something wonderfully naughty about listening to a story about hot, gay cowboys while working on a ranch for five hot, built ranchers. I couldn't deny that the stories I read—or listened to—encouraged my imagination to come up with wonderful fantasies involving my bosses. Not that I would actually ever admit that out loud to them. But in my head, there was no denying the truth.

If you couldn't be truthful to yourself then... well, that would just be sad. One should at least be able to trust oneself.

I had spent another long day on the ranch. While I didn't have to do the heavy lifting my bosses were much better equipped to handle, I did whatever I could to assist the men. I took care of the few animals living there, cooked and cleaned, and did some repairs when I noticed things needed fixing.

Originally I had only offered my assistance because I wanted to help Ben and keep an eye on things. But when the shit hit the fan and my parents kicked me out, the ranch had suddenly become my home.

There was still so much I didn't know about the guys, but I knew they were incredibly kindhearted, hardworking, and had accepted me and given me a room to sleep.

For my parents, of course, this was the sign of a corrupted soul they had waited for so eagerly. Strangers who had invaded their community and lived together on a ranch they owned were immediately suspect. That they didn't let their fag son rot without a place to stay, money, or support was a clear sign of their lack of Christian values and of their own immorality.

I spent entirely too long in my own head. I didn't mind a quiet evening and reading a book; didn't need to go out every day to try to find a sex partner. I wasn't loud and bold. However, I did like parties and laughing with friends and doing stuff. It was just that people always assumed I didn't, and I was rarely invited, and the fact was I didn't *need* or search out situations like that.

I was content, but it couldn't help to get some exercise on the farm and get out into the sun on a day-to-day basis.

I didn't mind the quiet of the isolated ranch. Didn't mind that there was not a lot else going on. I loved to relax after a long day of work and loved to read on my Kindle or lie in bed listening to an audiobook.

I had even started listening to audiobooks while doing some menial work like feeding animals and washing up or mowing the lawn. And if I got aroused from time to time, like when I listened to *Hot Head* by Damon Suede for the one hundredth time, who cared? No one was around while I worked, all of the guys having their own work to do, and the animals didn't seem to care if my jeans were a bit tight as long as I faithfully fed them.

So it wasn't unusual for me to sit outside, leaning against a tree in the darkness and reading on my Kindle Paperwhite.

Okay, so I couldn't always read this long. It was way past midnight, and I had to be up early. Every day. That was the reality of working on a farm. But I knew that others went out and partied and hooked up and burned the midnight oil that way. So if a book was too good to put down, I just didn't. Sometimes you just had to indulge.

The temperature was still warm and much nicer than during the day when the sun was blazing down mercilessly, trying to burn everything in its wake. I loved being outside, feeling the grass beneath me, the rough bark pushing against my red T-shirt, the sounds of insects chirping in the air, leaves rustling, the wind blowing. Being part of nature and feeling how wonderful my own life could be, sitting beneath the stars and yet being able to dive into different worlds.

Whether I was reading *Crash & Burn* by Abigail Roux or reading *Kings Rising* by C.S. Pacat, as I was currently doing, there just were some books that deserved me staying up to finish them. I'd been completely and utterly lost in the final book of the Captive Prince trilogy, soaking up how the tables had turned for my heroes and how the "game of thrones" would play out when unexpected sounds startled me.

The sounds were muffled and coming from the main house. The guys were probably trying not to wake me.

Jackson, Nash, Rich, Austin, and Phen.

I still didn't even know all their last names; I don't think they ever mentioned them. I only knew Phen's full name by chance. I had often wondered if they all shared one last name and were brothers or somehow related. They seemed extremely close.

It was weird in a way, but they just naturally used first names without offending anyone or making them think twice about it. They never gave any information about their past, but it hadn't occurred to me or seemed strange

until now. They just used so much charm that everyone was eating from their hands. Well, almost everyone.

There were those people like my parents who always assumed the worst of every person they met. In their case, worst didn't mean murderers, terrorists, bank robbers, or anything as harmless as that. I think if I were a mere serial killer, my parents would visit me every week in prison and never lose faith in me or my ability to be redeemed by the Lord's love.

For them, the worst was a suspicion of homosexuality. Apparently that was much more sinful than anything else and meant that God hated me, that I would go to hell, and that they were free to hate and shun me as well.

Anyway, people were talking behind my employers' backs. They were curious, intrigued, charmed, and some a bit suspicious about the five strangers who had suddenly appeared in our midst.

I blinked my tired eyes shut for a second to clear my head and looked away from the captivating story, trying to focus on my surroundings and the sounds I had heard. It was truly beautiful out here, and at first I could only see and hear the nature around me. Then I heard a door close quietly.

There was some movement to the right of the main house. I heard footsteps and quiet laughter. Curiously, I tried to make out the figures stealing away from the house. Five dark shadows in the night.

Where were they going at this late—or early—hour?

I probably shouldn't be this nosy, but I knew myself too well. There was no chance I could not investigate. I had built up the mystery of my employers for a long time, and every chance to find out more was a chance I had to take.

“Can't wait to jump into the cold water. The sun has been brutal today,” Nash whispered.

They were still trying to be quiet so that they wouldn't wake me. Gentlemen, all of them. Or they just didn't want me to tag along so they could be among themselves. Who knew.

They were always nice though. I really should leave them in peace to do whatever they wanted to do. Seemed like they were headed toward the pond.

I had discovered the pond a few weeks back, and it was like an oasis in the burning sun. The southern states were known for their merciless heat, and I loved to cool off in the water whenever I got the chance to. I could easily see why they wanted to sneak off to go there.

“Yeah. The icy water will be heavenly,” Rich said. He was the biggest of the guys, built like a quarter horse and strong like an ox.

He had looked very frightening when I first saw him. After my time on the ranch, I knew he was the most gentle one of them. Underneath all those rippling muscles was a kind soul. The man would not be able to crush a fly.

Nash was the smallest of them, but that didn't mean he couldn't pull his weight around the farm. I had seen him do things that shouldn't be possible for any man. He was very compact, but his muscles were hard as steel along his sleek figure.

Austin, Jackson, and Phen were somewhere in between, but I was sure any of them could easily lift me without breaking a sweat. It was one of my favorite fantasies, actually.

I liked a guy who would be able to carry me, hold me in place, dominate me if I wanted, but could control his strength. I loved to let go of control, but only if I could trust the guy implicitly. That's why it had mostly stayed a fantasy in my life.

I rarely found situations where I didn't have to worry and didn't need to stay in control.

There were a lot of assholes out there trying to take advantage of others. Going too far, playing too rough, turning a deaf ear to the word “no” when they didn't want to hear it. I might have been sheltered, but I was not naive.

It was weird though. These guys were still almost strangers, yet somehow I had started to trust them. I don't know why. They were my employers, but I barely saw them. They worked different parts of the ranch, and though we sometimes shared the meals I cooked, and they seemed very appreciative of them, they kept away from personal topics.

It was always small talk. Nice and all. Nothing to be said against small talk. But I really wanted more than empty words. They seemed like a team, and it was very hard for a stranger to work his way in, if that was even possible. They had opened up their home to me, though, when I most needed it.

I couldn't ever thank them enough to make up for that, but I worked harder for them than I had ever worked for anyone else, myself included. I worked my ass off. Literally. Since I started working on the ranch, I was looking more trim and had become much stronger and fitter.

I used to sit around inside all day before I started working at the farm, and the hard work and fresh air and sun had done wonders for me. I really should be

very grateful for everything the guys had done. I should absolutely refrain myself from following them like a creepy stalker. They deserved their privacy.

I wouldn't though. I couldn't. Here was the chance to find out more about the guys who haunted my dreams—in a very sexy and sticky way.

I had edged closer through the shadows, keeping a good distance between us. I knew where they were going, or at least had a strong suspicion. I didn't need to stick too close and run the chance of being discovered.

They had their towels slung over their open shirts, sweat dripping from their beautiful bodies like ambrosia waiting to be licked off.

They looked like gods, and I dreamed of tasting them, nipping at their warm and hard flesh. Sucking on their pert nipples until they were wiggling like fish out of water, desperate to get release.

I didn't even know if they were gay, but in my head they were doing devious things to me and each other. God, if I ever found out they were brothers, I probably wouldn't be able to look them in the eyes ever again. Every night in my dreams, they were doing very unbrotherly things.

They made me so fucking hot, and I had no outlet other than my hand. We were so isolated out here, and there was no easy way to hook up with anyone for some quick fun.

Everything was very much like a small town. Everyone knew each other and was in each other's business. On the other hand, we all lived so far away from each other that you might not see another soul for miles.

The chances of meeting someone not working on the ranch were slim to none.

I guess it was only natural then that living with five hot guys would lead to them becoming lead actors in my dreams. And while I might blush a bit at times when I talked to them and remembered a particularly sexy dream sequence, I knew it was just innocent fun and hurt no one. I loved my private head cinema.

They had disappeared through the trees close to the main house. The pond was about half a mile away and hidden by brush and trees. I followed them at a big distance and was as silent as possible.

I hoped I would be able to listen to them talk freely. Always felt like my presence on the farm hindered them from talking openly. I wish they would trust me more and include me, but they were very private.

They also had already done a lot for me, and I probably should not be as greedy and instead be happy with the very lucky situation I was in. Being kicked out by my parents could have been much worse.

It would have been very easy to follow them even if I didn't know where they were going. Muscles weigh a lot, and these five left definite tracks on the soft earth.

I had no clue what I was doing following them and endangering my comfortable situation on the ranch, but I couldn't stop myself. It was like a burning need that drove me forward.

A coy smile kept flashing into my mind. Beautiful red hair like the man had been kissed by fire. I kept trying to convince myself that what I felt was just a general attraction to these hot guys. However, my reaction to Phoenix was very different, and I often feared way too obvious.

It was true that I imagined all of them in very sexual, very explicit situations, but it was Phen who really got my blood to boil.

He was the one who officially owned the ranch and thus the only one whose full name I knew, even though he never used it. Phoenix J. Steele only ever went by Phen, but I loved his name and thought it was very fitting.

Red hair like fire and a hard body I wanted to touch and taste.

He liked to wear T-shirts that hugged his body so closely that everyone could see the nipple piercing underneath and the eight-pack he was hiding. Well, I guess he wasn't hiding it very well, nor was he too modest to strip the shirt when it got too hot.

A very distracting sight that had made me instantly hard more than once.

He was the quiet one of the guys, even though he liked to be admired or at least dressed in a way to draw attention from both women and men. He certainly captured my attention. His gaze was always intense and focused, like he was a predator eyeing his prey.

I caught him looking at me every so often, and his amber-brown eyes made me shiver when they were focused on me like I was the only person in the world.

I knew I probably imagined a lot of it: wishful thinking. But I reacted to him like to no one else. Every word he said to me in his deep, growly voice went through me like electricity.

He only spoke when he had something to say. Not a big fan of small talk. Every move he made was deliberate; he was always in perfect control of his words, actions, and body.

The other guys were hot, but my attraction to him was primal.

I heard their sounds of laughter, and they seemed to have stopped. They must have arrived at the pond, and I tried to find a spot that hid me but let me watch them and listen to their every word.

I felt like a stalker, but I was also really excited. I hoped my loud heartbeat wouldn't give me away. My heart kept drumming so loud and fast that it drowned out nature's sounds. Nothing could drown out the carefree and relaxed laughter as the guys were playing around while they were undressing.

I peered through the brush and saw them roughhouse playfully. I couldn't help but smile at their antics. So unlike the employers I was used to.

They were standing in a valley, a natural pathway under their feet that led to a small bridge over a tiny creek leading into the pond.

I saw the piles of clothes they had left on the ground, and my smile turned hot and lustful. Christ, were those their drawers? I closed my eyes for a second, holding back a lustful moan. After imagining them naked in my fantasies for so long, this was almost too much.

They were naked except for the cowboy hats and the towels they still carried. Sexy fuckers.

They were planning to skinny-dip in the pond. Five ultrahot guys completely naked and playful. It was like they knew I was there and wanted to tease me. I was going to die right on the spot.

They stood next to each other, their towels still casually over their shoulders. They were looking toward the pond and gave me an opportunity to admire their beautiful butts. Damn.

They threw their towels onto a tree close to the water and used branches to hang up their cowboy hats before they entered the pond buck naked.

I should absolutely use this chance to return home to my apartment on the ranch. Get away scot-free. I shouldn't watch their naked, wet bodies; I should leave them in peace.

I returned my gaze to the pond. I knew what I should do, but I couldn't resist staying.

I didn't think I had ever been this hard. My jeans were not just tight, they felt like a cage, and my dick was trying desperately to escape and play.

I couldn't walk away or even look away. My gaze was frozen on the five naked men, bathing in the light of the full moon above them, the cold water of the pond running down their muscular chests.

"God, I'm so glad to get away for a bit," Austin said. "It is so exhausting to walk around in clothes all day and pretend. I hope it's all worth it!"

Pretend? Pretend what? What was the guy talking about?

Before I could wonder any further, Nash pressed his hard lips to Austin's. Not brothers then. Probably.

My dick twitched.

No more words were spoken. Suddenly the five guys had cooled down enough to heat things up again.

And boy, did they ever.

Rich and Jackson were entangled in each other, feeling each other up. Everywhere. Their hands were roaming all over tanned body parts and hard muscles. It looked like no air was allowed to exist between them as they pressed together and kissed like they wanted to devour each other.

Only Phen stood a bit aside though, watching his—partners?—with interest. He never let his guard down, though. Like he was keeping an eye on everything around them.

I didn't dare to move a muscle, just watched. I wasn't sure I was happy about the fact they seemed to exclude him from playing, even though I had the feeling I would leave my hiding place and fight off anyone who dared to touch Phen. He was mine, but I had no clue where these thoughts were coming from.

The closer the men stepped to the shore, the more their sexy bodies were revealed. My heart nearly stopped when I realized Phen was palming his prick underwater as he watched what was going on.

Good idea. My palm pressed hard against my own cock. I didn't dare to open the zipper or pull the pants down, but the delicious pressure felt great.

Nash was bathing the bronze disc of Austin's nipple with his tongue, drawing needy sounds from the big man. I could have sworn the man's eyes flashed red in lust before he closed them again and reveled in the agony of pleasure.

Nash went on to give the other nipple the same treatment to the obvious delight of his friend. They were gone in their own blissful world and didn't seem to mind that the other three could see them. The intensity of their play seemed to suggest that their lust had built up for quite a while, and I wondered if they never dared to be together even in the confines of their own home.

Only here, away from any potential stranger seeing them, did they let out their sexuality and affection toward each other.

Well, away from any stranger's sight in theory. Even if I wasn't a complete stranger, I hadn't been invited to this private display of affection.

I was frozen in place, overcome with lust, drooling over images that far eclipsed what my own imagination had been able to come up with. I had never actually thought they were really lovers, nor that I would ever be able to see them like this.

Nash dove down under the surface, and I got a glimpse of his lover's engorged cock as he swallowed it and bobbed up and down on it.

Rich and Jackson had moved toward Phen—my Phen—and started licking along his collarbone and nibbling on his ear, respectively. Their hands caressing his freckled skin.

It was hard to keep from revealing myself and removing their hands forcibly from what was mine.

Even though I knew intellectually that he really wasn't, and we hadn't even exchanged a lot of words. It didn't matter. It was like my blood was singing that I wanted him; needed him. He was mine, and I was his.

The smell of sex in the air must have been strong. I could see Phen inhale, and his eyes almost seemed to roll back. I jolted when his eyes seemed to find mine in the darkness. It was impossible. The darkness and distance should make it impossible for him to know I was there, much less pinpoint me like that.

His intense gaze was focused fully on mine though, even if he didn't make a move to stop what was going on or say anything. Even when Jackson and Rich dropped down to share Phen's cock, nestled in beautiful, red hair.

He was mine, and I tried to express that in my eyes while trying to hold back a rumbling in my throat that wanted to grow into a possessive growling that was not at all appropriate.

Phen's amber eyes flared up, almost glowing in a beautiful yellow-gold color. Beautiful but unnatural.

He moaned in ecstasy as his friends were worshiping him on their knees. Through it all, though, he never once looked away from my eyes.

I wanted to be the one in front of him, worshiping his cock on my knees. Closing my lips over the wet and swollen head of his shaft and coaxing these sounds from him. Phen seemed to smile like he could read my mind.

Watching him and his friends was so much hotter than porn, and none of the romance books I loved to read could ever reach a heat rating that rivaled the event playing out in front of my eyes.

The men became ever more lost in their play, but Phen's gaze never wavered from mine. I was busted, but I couldn't move.

Austin was now bent over a rock at the edge of the pond, and Nash was rimming him like it was his most important mission in life. He had his face in Austin's ass and seemed to drive his tongue as deep as possible. Austin's frantic sounds must have been music to his ears.

I'd never seen these guys this wild and uninhibited. It was beautiful to watch.

Nash seemed to glow from within, his desire was so clearly marked on his face.

"Suck me, Nash!" Austin begged.

His eyes still seemed to glow with a red color like there was a fire behind them. I knew I must have imagined it because the fires in our soul were invisible. It was hot, though.

Instead of Nash moving to his lover's prick again, he licked up Austin's crack and continued with his back. One continuous lick up the beautiful body of his friend. Austin tipped his head to the side, exposing his neck.

Next to him, Rich had taken Jackson deep into his throat, and from the look on Jackson's face, he was about to come any second. Jackson seemed to lose any semblance of control, and suddenly it seemed like huge white wings were extending from his back like those of an angel.

He screamed out his release while Rich eagerly sucked down his offerings and tried to swallow everything. Only some of Jackson's cum was running down from Rich's mouth, and he licked his lips with a huge grin.

At the same time, Nash bit into Austin's exposed neck. The sound the man made was more orgasmic than a cry of pain, but there was blood flowing out of the wound even as Nash kept sucking.

Phen was jacking off to the sight but seemed still very aware of my presence and, even as he watched his friends, never let me out of his sight.

What the hell was going on here? Was this some kind of kinky dress-up party? Perhaps they had to be this private so no one would figure out they liked weird role-playing orgies. It looked so freaking real, though.

It was too much. I took a ragged breath and stepped back. I had to get out of here.

I heard a snap as a branch under my foot cracked loudly. Crap. In the silence of the night, the sound seemed much louder, and I didn't have high hopes that I was the only one who had heard it.

"What was that?" someone asked, but I couldn't quite identify who had spoken.

I was so busted and still had no clue what was going on. Probably too little sleep and too much reading. But who could blame me when a book like *Dark Space* by Lisa Henry kept me up all night. I still did my work well. If I still had work. Perhaps I should try harder to get some sleep. Hallucinations were never a good sign.

It wouldn't take them long to find me. Crap, I was so screwed.

"Stay back, I'll check it out," Phen said. I instantly recognized his deep and growly voice. There was so much dominance in him as he took charge. I remembered his steely gaze that was fixed on me while he was getting off. He knew exactly where I was.

I had crawled back a few yards as silently as possible, expecting him to appear any minute and take me to task. Christ, why had I followed them?

I would so lose my job. Actually, I was pretty sure that I would fire anyone who stalked me like a creepy voyeur in my most private time, too. Perhaps I should cite my exhaustion as reason for my behavior?

Would they buy it? Well, perhaps that was even the truth. I certainly had no rational explanation for my actions.

I heard a rustling of leaves and branches. I knew my time had run out.

Instead of the man who haunted me in my dreams, there was a beautiful animal right in front of me. A deadly animal, a predator.

So not my day.

I wanted to scream, but I was unable to make a single sound. I just stared into the animal's hard, amber eyes.

It wasn't quite a wolf or a coyote, but something in between. Its color was reddish, and somewhere in my mind, I remembered there was a separate species called "red wolf" that had similarities to both and had nearly been extinct.

It looked magnificent, but I had no idea why I wasn't panicking. I should scream and try to run or fight or anything but sit here without moving as the red wolf approached me.

It was quiet as it stalked toward me, its eyes looking at me intently. I knew if I screamed, the others might be able to help me, but I couldn't. I was frozen. I hoped the animal would be quick about killing me and not draw out my pain.

Even as I stared death in its eyes, I couldn't help but admire the wolf's beauty.

The wolf was almost upon me. I closed my eyes. Instead of seeing my whole life flash by as one might expect in my situation, I saw nothing but darkness.

Then I felt it.

A rough tongue was licking my face. I gasped in surprise and opened my eyes in shock. The wolf was right in front of me, pushing its cold nose into me, sniffing my scent.

To my shock, the wolf turned into a man in that very second. I could not even gasp and scream as he held my mouth closed with his hand, still maintaining his intense stare.

The same eyes that looked at me from the red wolf were now looking at me from a man. Not just any man, but the one man I wanted more than anyone else.

His head was at my neck where he had licked me as wolf.

He was still as naked as he was on the day he was born. Still as naked as he was just minutes before, playing in the cool water of the pond with his best friends. Instead of feeling my blood turn cold, I felt blood rush south again and fill out my cock.

"Don't move and don't make a fucking sound!" he whispered into my ears. Then, without any further explanation, he left me alone in the dirt. I could hear him return to the others.

“It was nothing, just an animal!” he told them. Lied to them. “Go back to the house. I’ll follow in a bit. I might as well get some hunting in.”

I couldn’t hear what they said, but there was agreement, and the others must have put on their clothes again and started to leave.

I waited for Phen to reappear and bring some light into the whole thing. I still couldn’t believe my own eyes and knew there must be some rational explanation.

My mind was still in shock and clung to the knowledge that the paranormal did not exist. Yet it was hard to follow my intellect when my eyes had seen something I could not explain.

“Good boy!” came a deep voice. There was my Phoenix, coming back where he belonged.

“What the hell is going on?” I asked him.

“You have seen something that wasn’t meant for your eyes,” he responded.

“You’re a wolf,” I accused.

“A red wolf, actually. Yes!”

I mentally patted my own back for recognizing his animal form. Then the fact that he had an animal form, and his friends had angel wings and liked to suck blood, came back into my mind.

He must have known how overwhelming all this information was for me, but he made no attempt to deny anything or come up with a lie.

I kinda wanted a nice convenient lie that would allow me to forget what I had seen and continue my life as before. On the other hand, I felt special being one of the few people who knew this secret. Even if it had not been revealed to me by choice.

Phen had protected me though.

I looked up at him, and warmth spread throughout my whole body. Whatever was happening, I knew he would not hurt me. In either form. He was mine; I was his. Even if I didn’t know where this thought came from or what exactly it meant, I felt myself relaxing, his masculine scent calming me down.

“We are runaways,” Phen offered. “Every one of us chose to leave behind our own kind. We are natural enemies, our packs and clans and families in a war that never seems to end and doesn’t make any sense to us. Our friendship is

very unconventional, but we decided that we didn't care what the others thought or what their plans for us were."

He softly caressed my cheek while telling me his story.

"We ran away together, enemies hand in hand, and took our fate into our own hands. We lead a quiet life here, hurting no one. Every other night we steal away in the darkness to renew our bond, our promises to protect each other. We strip off our clothes and everything we have been taught to think and do and just share our love and friendship with each other instead. Naked in every way, leaving conventions behind with the dirt in the water. This is our Eden, our Paradise."

He kissed me gently on my head and ruffled my hair. I couldn't comprehend his words. They were too much, and his scent and warmth overpowered my senses.

Mine, something inside of me screamed, and his touch and kiss were not enough.

Suddenly I was brave. With all the other shit going on, I had to grab what I wanted. I pulled his head down to me until his hard lips were pressed to mine. I wanted to taste him, needed to taste him.

I pushed my tongue against his mouth, demanding entry. I was almost shocked when my "request" was granted, and he opened his lips to let me in. Our tongues danced, and I enjoyed his taste and closeness, refusing to think about anything else at all. Something in me that had been loose and broken settled, and for the first time in a long time, I felt whole again.

Phen ended the kiss and smiled at me. "Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. I won't let it. You're mine. You won't remember any of this. No one will know, and you will remain safe." He whispered these words into my ear, and even though I wanted to protest, I suddenly felt very tired and fell into a deep slumber.

I woke up in my bed and yawned. I hated my alarm clock most mornings, but I felt more rested than I had in a long time. There was a lot of work waiting for me, but the sun was shining, and I felt good.

Though my mood was great, there was some kind of weird feeling that tried to drill its way into my consciousness. It was just out of reach, and after trying to reach the thoughts that evaded me, I gave up.

Whatever, I needed to work.

I brushed my teeth, humming the *True Blood* theme music for some reason. I think my subconscious wanted to give me a message.

I finally needed to finish the show. I still hadn't seen the last season, and a show that gave me hot, homoerotic dream sequences to drool over deserved to be watched.

I went under the hot water of my shower and gave myself a thorough cleaning. Even when I wouldn't get any cleaner, though, I couldn't help myself from keeping my hands on my slick cock and playing with my joystick. Wouldn't hurt anyone to have some fun.

I closed my eyes, knowing I would see him gazing back at me. Steely eyes glowing with an amber fire were looking at me, and I was instantly hard as a rock.

I moaned in pleasure as I pushed myself to new heights of ecstasy, twisting my own nipples and roughly jerking my pole. I wanted his calloused fingers to do it, but this was only a fantasy, and my own hands were the second best thing.

I was almost there, ready to shoot against the shower tiles, when suddenly the image of a beautiful wolf with the same stunning eyes appeared in my head.

Christ. Why the fuck was I thinking about a wolf while jacking off to the image of my employer? That was too kinky, even for me. I shuddered and my cock deflated.

Something was really off today. I was kind of disappointed at not getting off, but I needed to start my chores, and I was too confused to get it up, anyway.

I dressed in my work clothes and put in my earplugs.

I was about to click play to continue one of my very favorite stories when I skipped *Something Like Autumn* in favor of *Change of Heart* by Mary Calmes. I loved the *Something Like* series by Jay Bell, but today I was in the mood for shifters.

And no, not wolf shifters, mind you.

I swear, I didn't suddenly develop a wolf fetish. The guys in the *Change of Heart* series are were-panthers, after all.

I smiled. Even while mucking out the animal stalls, a chore I usually hated, I felt happy. Perhaps this would be a good day, after all.

It was like I had found an anchor, something that grounded me.

I had long been trying to find something like that, and even though I didn't know what had given me this sudden feeling of belonging, it was there nonetheless. I was home.

I was on my way to make lunch for everyone when I saw something lying in the grass next to my favorite tree. My Kindle. How the hell had that gotten there?

I was probably more careful with my Kindle than most people were with their car. It held hundreds of wonderful books inside. It was my best friend. I would never leave it outside. What if it had rained or animals had attacked or pissed on it? I jogged over to my e-reader and picked it up. It was dry and clean. Thank God for small miracles. But still, why was my Kindle lying on the grass?

Again, some kind of hazy memory tried to push its way through, but all I got was the vague feeling that I'd spent some time under this tree recently.

I checked my Kindle and saw that I had marked a few quotes last night. When I tried to think back on the previous night, though, I couldn't hold on to any memory.

Fuck, it was like after a long night of drinking, but worse. Like the memories didn't exist anymore, were forever erased.

The only image in my head was a wolf and a man with the same intense eyes, and the memory of that man kissing me like no one had ever done. This felt real, not like one of my fantasies. I could still feel the pressure of Phen's lips against mine.

I didn't know what was going on, and I had to get to the bottom of it. Somehow it involved Phoenix, and I knew I wanted him back in my arms, wanted to feel his warmth and his kiss and run my hand through his fiery-red hair. I slipped the Kindle in my pants, determined to lift the secrets of this ranch and the five men who lived on it with me.

To Be Continued...

Author Bio

Marc Green (M/M)/Aaron Silver (LGBT YA) is a twenty-four-year-old student, living in Munich, Germany. He is bisexual and has been in a committed gay relationship for more than four years. He has ADD and used to hate writing and reading, but with the right medication he was suddenly able to see words and sentences instead of letters and was able to focus and experience writing and reading in an exciting new way. He started to write “Charmed” fanfiction when he was fourteen, some stories more than 300 pages long, but when the forum he wrote on closed, he put down the pen and only wrote academic papers and reviews since.

He was twenty years old when he decided to face a truth he had avoided and came out to himself, his best friends, and later, his family. After having discovered M/M Romance stories and dreaming of his own HEA, he knew he couldn't find it if he wasn't open about what he wanted. After reading about 600 LGBT Fiction books, starting “Rainbow Gold Reviews,” a new LGBT Review Blog, and “Euro Pride Con,” a new LGBT Fiction Meet, he decided to pick up a pen and start to write again, this time including gay characters and relationships.

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