

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

**SQUARE PEGG,  
ROUND HOLE**

**S.N. Kat**

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# Love is an Open Road

*An M/M Romance series*

## SQUARE PEGG, ROUND HOLE

By S.N. Kat

### 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

Photo 1: Lying on his back, a young man with blue eyes is looking at the viewer. He is wearing a white striped shirt with a blue pea coat.

Photo 2: A group of seven men are standing on a beach, all wearing very short white shorts. One man in particular, furthest on the right, has brown, cropped hair and a lean muscular body.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*That's me in the top photo (my name is up to you). I am lying on a hill that overlooks the beach. The jocks are just getting ready for a game of volleyball. I have been watching him for days (which one is also up to you, they're all hot) but I am out of his league. I am a computer major and he's the captain of the \*\*\*\* sports team. What could he see in me?*

*Author, please give this couple a HEA. The computer major is called a geek by others but is actually a genius. (Think Spencer Reid from Criminal Minds). The jock is not all muscle and no brains and doesn't like being treated as such. He likes a man who he can match wits with.*

My only stipulations are:

No BDSM, please keep it sweet and romantic (but hot).

A few laughs would be good.

At least one hot love scene, if not more than one (hint, hint).

*Sincerely,*

*Carol*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** college, athlete, mutual love, slow burn/UST, geek/nerd

**Word Count:** 14,116

*Acknowledgements*

A huge THANK YOU to the M/M Romance group and everyone involved in the Love is an Open Road event. Without your hearts, dedication and time, this event would not be the wonderful thing it is. Thank you to Carol for providing this delightful prompt. It was fun to write and I hope this story meets your expectations. Thanks to Sandy for her time and patience through the editing process. And to those reading, thanks for taking the time to read and I hope you enjoy.

# SQUARE PEGG, ROUND HOLE

By S.N. Kat

The sun beat down on the beach goers. After bookmarking and closing his book, Aaron wiped his sweaty forehead. His hat did nothing to catch the liquid. He had to remove his sunglasses several times to wipe his face. The protective materials were becoming more of a hindrance to his mission than helping. But Aaron knew he needed to keep wearing the hat and sunglasses, or he would be caught. At least he thought so.

Aaron opened his sci-fi book and attempted to read. Again. Frowning, Aaron noticed that the book he held was on the same page it was when he first sat down on the bench. Hopefully no one noticed that. He flipped several pages to make it seem like he was actually reading.

There was a loud cheer from a sand volleyball court that got Aaron's attention. Looking up from his book, Aaron saw a group of students celebrating. Most of them were undergraduates at the university he attended; he had seen them on campus for the summer session. Through the college's website, he had discovered many of these students were athletes. It seemed that some of them needed to take classes now to free up the semesters when they played their sport.

The guys in the group had their shirts off and the girls wore tank tops, hoping the ocean breeze would cool them from the heat of the afternoon sun. Being athletes, the players had toned and fit bodies, with both bulky and lean muscles. Aaron could admit that they were all good-looking individuals. But one of them had caught Aaron's attention for more than his attractive body: Tyler Saltren.

Physically, the man was built like a swimmer's dream. Tyler Saltren was tall, well over six feet, with broad shoulders and well-defined muscles. Flat but muscular abs accentuated his long torso. Tyler's deep, dark-brown eyes matched his cropped hair. Even as a junior, he was the co-captain of the university's swim team and had been named Conference Swimmer of the Year. Aaron read that Tyler actually wanted to play volleyball, but their college did not have a men's team. So he pursued, and earned, a full scholarship in swimming, his other high school sport.



Not only was he a high achiever in the athletic world, but he was above average in academics too. He excelled in most of his studies and had one of the highest GPAs in his department. Tyler was on path to finish *magna cum laude* in economics.

Aaron sighed and flipped another page. It wasn't fair. Tyler had both sides of the spectrum: brains and brawn. Aaron only had brains. And a lot of them.

Aaron Pegg was the youngest student on path to a PhD in the university's history. He showed high intelligence as a child, especially in the science field, and graduated from high school at the age of fifteen. Though Aaron had many enticing offers to attend large universities, his parents enrolled him in the local college so that he could stay at home. His parents still wanted him to have a childhood and friends, even if he wasn't going to the same school as his neighborhood pals. As hard as his parents tried to not let their son "grow up too fast," Aaron was an undergraduate student for only three years, earning two bachelors' degrees, one minor, and publishing two papers.

When choosing where he wanted to earn his doctorate, Aaron had his heart set on one out of the multitude of offers. He selected a university that had a large computer programming department, and a funded Artificial Intelligence program, which was nearly unheard of in universities.

Aaron was set on his path, the puzzle pieces already in place for his life: school, graduate, work for an AI research company, and publish several papers along the way. The pieces were, and had always been, easily put into place.

Then one day he saw Tyler Saltren. His simple puzzle became complex.

Pulling him out of his reverie, a sudden gust caused the pages of his book to flap quickly and his ball cap almost flew away with the wind. When the breeze died down, Aaron fixed his cap and slowly looked up. There, not twenty feet in front of him, was a volleyball.

"No worries! I got it."

Aaron knew that voice. He looked up slowly to see that Tyler—the Tyler *Saltren*—was jogging his way to get the stray volleyball. Aaron tensed up. He couldn't get caught. Aaron quickly buried his face in his book and hunched over.

He only heard his raging heartbeat as the moments passed. He snuck a peek over his book when he thought the man he had been admiring from afar had left. Aaron saw that Tyler was still there, volleyball tucked under his arm and

looking his way. Aaron knew Tyler couldn't tell that he was staring at him through the dark shades, yet his heart rate sped up and he sweated nervously. He clutched his book tighter so that it wouldn't fall out of his grasp.

This was the first time Tyler had looked Aaron's way. As Aaron paused in his panic to wonder why Tyler was actually looking at him, Tyler started walking in his direction.

As quickly as the nervousness came over him, Aaron felt a rush of calm and determination. This was Aaron's chance, now or never. This could be the moment when they finally met.

He closed his book and began to stand up. At that exact moment, a voice shouted from behind him.

"Tyler! Can we play with you today?"

Tyler halted abruptly and redirected his gaze behind Aaron. He shook his head, smiled, and waved to someone Aaron couldn't see.

Aaron, though disappointed, could not stop his motion to make the situation less awkward. He stood up all the way and noticed a group of female students walking toward Tyler. In an attempt to dispel some of the awkwardness, Aaron quickly gathered his things and headed to the bicycle lot.

It wasn't meant to be. Every time Aaron had the guts to approach Tyler on the beach, something always deterred him. He couldn't approach him on campus since Tyler always seemed to be surrounded by his friends or other students. The beach was an ideal location, open to the public so nothing would seem off if there happened to be a casual, albeit completely premeditated, meeting. Not to mention, the beach was one of the few places Tyler could be found alone, making it less intimidating to strike up a conversation.

Aaron started working the combination on his bike lock. It didn't make any sense. His feelings did not make any logical sense. He paused and rested his head against the frame.

But they felt so real. So right. Though every logical part of Aaron's brain was telling him that his feelings were beyond reason, he knew them to be real.

A few weeks ago, Aaron was taking a walk down the beach. He learned early on that when he walked he was able to produce better outputs for his theses and dissertation. The shaded park trail Aaron usually took near the campus was closed because of a fundraiser for one of the university's Greek societies.

The walk started off nice. Then a gust of wind caught him hard, making Aaron stop to find his footing. Once he regained his balance, Aaron was again sent reeling, but it wasn't the wind that knocked the breath out of him. On the nearest sand-volleyball court was a group of guys drinking water. Among them was a man with short brown hair and muscles rippling along his entire body.

"Tyler, let's go!" yelled one of the guys.

Aaron shook his head and started walking again. He could feel his heart racing in his chest and he began sweating nervously. He stopped and looked back. His eyes honed in on that one man who suddenly caused him to feel a rush of overwhelming emotions. At that point, he knew that his perfectly assembled puzzle for life was not complete.

So like a good research student, he researched his topic of interest. Discovered the details of Tyler Saltren: where he was from, his swimming career, any interests he could find. Both mind and body warming with knowledge of this man.

As Aaron researched, he also learned how different the two of them were. How Tyler excelled at athletics, academics, and social settings. Aaron knew he shone bright in his department at the university, but that was all he had.

Compared to Tyler's height, he only stood a few inches short. But compared to Tyler's athletic ability, Aaron placed himself at a ten to Tyler's one thousand. He kept himself healthy and in shape by walking. When he was younger, Aaron learned that he was not gifted with athletic abilities. He missed almost every soccer ball, basketball and football passed his way. Though he surprised himself by getting hit by every single dodgeball.

What could he have that would even appeal to a guy like Tyler Saltren?

Even though he felt that he had nothing to offer, Aaron sought to get to know Tyler in the world outside of cyberspace. Every attempt he made failed. Aaron postulated that this was the universe bringing him back to reality, back to a world distant from people like Tyler.

Aaron mounted the bicycle and started toward his apartment, not looking back. The piece of his puzzle that he so desperately yearned for was not far from him. But Tyler felt so out of reach.

Deep down Aaron knew that piece called Tyler Saltren would not mathematically, rationally, or logically fit into his world.

The pitter-patter of rain was a soothing melody for the students straining their brains in the library. Aaron idly flipped a page of the research documents his advisor had given him. They were so-called “reading materials” for his nearly finished dissertation. He only had to write one more section, and he would finish it before the summer ended. With his dissertation complete, he could graduate in August, and his next step would be finding a job.

Aaron sighed when he heard the rain pick up its pace. Looking around, he saw that the library was packed. Midterms were quickly approaching for the undergraduates, and the cramming sessions were starting early this summer. Aaron was lucky to find a small table that could barely hold two people’s materials. He hoped that his papers covered the table enough to ward off frantic students looking for an unoccupied spot.

A loud laugh could be heard across the room disturbing the silence for the fifth time. This was why Aaron avoided this building. It was crowded most of the time, and some people were only here to socialize. As soon as it was silent, some fresh commotion would disturb the peace, making it practically impossible to focus. He tended to study in his office provided by the department, but as he was trying to avoid any lengthy conversations with his advisors, he had to settle for the library.

One of the librarians approached the talkative table and spoke to them in hushed tones. After a few moments, the people began packing up their books with scowls on their faces. They left the library grumbling, and silence once again blanketed the space.

It was some time later when a girl rounded the corner and spotted the vacant table.

“Hey guys. There’s an empty table over here,” she hastily whispered to the others.

The sound of backpacks emptying on the table was soon heard. There was a low murmur among the group of new students, probably discussing what subjects they needed to study. As soon as the group reached a decision on their study topics, the library returned to its previous state of studious silence.

The loud bang of a textbook hitting the ground abruptly broke the newly found silence, followed by soft swearing from the student responsible for the disruption.

Aaron looked up to see a guy turned away, bending down to pick up a textbook that he must have dropped. As the student stood up, he looked over his shoulder shyly and made eye contact with Aaron.

It was Tyler Saltren. Their eyes met for a brief moment before Tyler turned away and quickly sat in the last open chair. His back was to Aaron and he was hunched over the table. The other people at the table looked confused and spoke quietly to Tyler.

Aaron looked back to his papers when he heard soft whispers coming from their table. But it didn't take long for him to steal a glance their way. Aaron noticed a few of the people from the beach where Tyler played volleyball. One of the students looked over in Aaron's direction. When her eyes locked with Aaron's, she had a quick look of shock, but then a sly grin appeared on her face when she turned back to her table.

Aaron was confused, excited, and scared. Confused by the woman's action. Excited that Tyler was so close. And also scared that Tyler was so close. This might be the first time that Aaron and his crush were in the same room.

He forced himself to concentrate on his work. It shouldn't be hard to do, but the pounding of his heart was making him lose focus. He needed to calm down.

He glanced toward Tyler's table. The group was in some heated, but quiet, discussion. They kept pointing fingers in his direction and nodding their heads. Tyler kept shaking his head and moved his hand in a dismissing motion.

Aaron secretly looked around to figure out what they were looking at. When he gazed behind him, he saw a table full of girls studying behind him. Again, when Aaron had found a drop of hope, someone or something else splashed away his chances of meeting Tyler.

He looked back to the athletes' table, and the girl who gave him a weird look before now looked fierce. She must have said something punitive, because Tyler shrank in his chair. A few seconds later, Tyler looked at her, nodded, and then started to pack up his bag.

Aaron went back to looking at his papers. He didn't want to see his crush walk over to those girls. He didn't want to feel more disappointment. He could handle not being with Tyler, but the knowledge that Tyler was with someone else hurt like trying to solve Carmichael's totient function conjecture.

“Hey. Mind if I sit here?”

Aaron jerked his head up and saw dark-brown eyes and a soft smile. Tyler Saltren was actually talking to him.

Aaron always dreamt of how their first meeting would be. They would fall into easy conversation, having endless topics to discuss. Then the two would

exchange contact information and have promises of meeting again. Simple and sweet.

But conversation did not flow from Aaron's mouth as his brain stopped working. The silence stretched on to an awkward length. Tyler's smile dropped, and he started squirming where he stood.

"I got kicked out of my table because I... didn't want to study what they were."

Aaron glanced around the man to see Tyler's ex-table's possessors quickly look away, as if they were hiding something.

He brought his attention back to the guy in front of him. His brain, thankfully, turned back on and he found his voice. "Sure. Let me clear half of the table for you."

"Thanks. I'm Tyler Saltren."

Aaron nearly let slip that he already knew his name, and more. Instead he shook the extended hand. "Aaron Pegg."

Aaron gathered his papers into one pile on his side of the table without his hands shaking too much.

Tyler slowly sat in the empty chair and started to pull out his textbooks.

Aaron stared at his papers, trying to form a plan of what to do. He wanted to talk to Tyler, ask questions to know more about his crush. But they were in a library and Tyler came here to study. He shouldn't interrupt him.

After a few minutes of nervous silence, Aaron heard Tyler's quiet voice. "What are you reading?"

Aaron looked at him hesitantly. Tyler was wearing a small smile and his textbook was opened to a chapter near the end of the book. Which was odd because the summer semester was not even halfway done.

"It's an article called *Why the Data Train Needs Semantic Rails*. My advisors give me articles they think will help further my research." Aaron hoped Tyler couldn't hear his voice shake.

"That's cool of them. What kind of research are you doing?"

"My research is on the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence's impact on society." Aaron turned the article around as if he was in a meeting with one of his advisors. "I take into account both sides of the argument, whether humans should develop AI, and show scientifically, sociologically, politically, and environmentally what is better for the human

race.” He leaned forward and pointed to a line he highlighted earlier. “For instance, this article tries to determine what type of data should be integrated by machine and how to, in the future, acquire datasets that we cannot get presently. It hypothesizes that—”

Aaron stopped talking and internally cursed himself. It was a bad habit that he had: once he started talking about his research, he couldn’t stop. He didn’t want to come across as a huge nerd to Tyler, especially during their first-ever conversation—if it could even be called that. In his dreams, if—and it was a big if—Tyler and he ever did talk, he wanted to play it “cool,” as people say, and be approachable. Aaron tended to scare non-computer-science people off when he talked about his research.

Aaron was about to apologize for the flood of information when his vision was full of cropped, brown hair. Aaron was bending so far over the table that his face was mere inches from Tyler’s, which was looking down at the AI article. He had never been this close to Tyler Saltren.

The hair was quickly replaced by Tyler’s face, and his lips were moving. Very slowly.

Aaron pulled back from Tyler, hoping that his pounding heart could not be heard in the quiet of the library. He stared at the man in front of him, trying to process what was just said. “Sorry, what did you say?”

Tyler’s smile flattened. “Do you think that an open source of data is a bad idea for AI machines? Like the Internet?”

Aaron didn’t reply right away. He was too stunned that Tyler was still sitting across from him; he had not scared him off. And he seemed to be interested in his work in computer science.

“I suppose you thought I didn’t know anything about AI.”

Aaron saw that Tyler was now focusing on his textbook and looked... disappointed?

“No. I don’t think that. I really didn’t hear your question. And I was also surprised that I didn’t bore you with all of that information.”

Tyler looked back at Aaron and bit his lip. “I think the topic is pretty interesting. And I think it is great that you are so passionate about your research. It makes other people want to learn from you.”

Aaron was stunned. The man he had a crush on complimented him and actually liked that Aaron was a nerd. He must have had a shocked expression, because Tyler had a small smile.

“I... I believe that you have a lot enthusiasm for volleyball and swimming. You seem to draw people in and make them not want to look away.”

It was Tyler’s turn to look surprised. Aaron gave himself a metaphorical pat on the back for returning the compliment.

“You’ve seen me swim? And play volleyball? When?”

Aaron now gave himself a metaphorical slap to the head. He couldn’t let Tyler know that he secretly watched him play volleyball. He just gotten Tyler interested in his nerdiness.

“Twice... maybe three times,” he quickly lied. “Sometimes when I walk on the beach I see you play with other students.”

Tyler seemed to brighten at the words. “We’re in a summer city league. Some of the people that I play with are over there.” Tyler turned and pointed to his original table. “That guy on the end is Mike, and his girlfriend Samantha is sitting across from him. Mike and I are on the swim team, and we play competitive volleyball together during league play. Though we usually have a group of us get together and play for fun.”

Aaron was looking at the occupied table, memorizing the students’ names as Tyler rattled off the rest. The female student, Samantha, turned to look their way. When they locked eyes, she smiled and gave a little wave.

On reflex, Aaron waved back and tried to smile, but was more confused about her actions.

“Don’t mind Sammy. She can get nosy.” Tyler gave a shooing motion to Samantha. She grinned widely and gave a thumbs-up. Tyler turned in his chair and groaned. “Really, please, do not mind Sammy.”

Aaron let out a quiet chuckle. “You guys seem to be close.”

“We’ve been friends for a while, and we were also in a lot of classes together.” The smile Tyler was wearing as he talked dropped. “Why haven’t I seen you on the beach before?”

The truth to that question would never be revealed. Aaron could not possibly say it was because he was wearing clothes that were not usually his style with a baseball cap and sunglasses. “There are a lot of people on the beach at this time of the year. And you seemed to be very engrossed in the game.”

Tyler pondered for a moment. “That’s true. People have told me I get tunnel vision when I play sports.” He stayed quiet for a few more moments, seeming to debate what to do. “You never answered my question about your research.”



The two of them talked quietly for the next several hours. Aaron learned that Tyler was twenty, one year younger than he, and that he wanted to work for his father's company after earning an MBA. The pair chatted about the classes they were taking, people they both knew, and activities they did in their spare time. Aaron was thrilled to know that they had similar interests. Tyler always seemed so unattainable, like he was on this high pedestal when Aaron gazed at him from afar. But while talking to Tyler, Aaron learned that they were not so different.

Samantha placed a hand on Tyler's shoulder and said, "The library is closing soon. We have to leave."

Tyler nodded and turned to Aaron with a look of uncertainty. Aaron felt the same way Tyler looked. Where did they go from here?

"Do you want to get together and study again?" Tyler asked.

Aaron gazed at his untouched papers and at Tyler's book that was on the same page as when it was opened some hours ago. "I don't think there is an 'again' since we didn't study. But I'm willing to try."

Tyler gave a small grin. "That sounds like a plan."

Aaron gathered his scattered documents while trying to hide his smile.

"So, can I get your number?"

Aaron paused in his task and looked over at Tyler, whose eyes were focused on his hands, fiddling with his cell phone. "So we can arrange when we try to study again?"

Aaron listed off his cell phone digits. When he started to spell his last name, Aaron saw that Tyler had already correctly entered it with two g's. Before he could ask, his own cell phone buzzed, indicating he received a text. Tyler informed Aaron that he just sent him his own cell number.

The reality of the night didn't set in until after Aaron left the library, waved goodbye to Tyler and his friends, and arrived back to his apartment, slightly wet from the light drizzle.

Aaron had finally met Tyler Saltren and talked with him for hours. He even got his cell phone number. But the best part of the night was the idea of learning that the two of them, in some shape or form, could fit.

Aaron was late. He hated being late. Especially when it involved Tyler. One of his advisors caught him as he was leaving, to discuss a conference next week. A conference that his advisor had already talked to him about.

Aaron quickly locked his bicycle and strode to the sand court where he could see his new friends. He would have to stop using “new” since he had been hanging out with them for three weeks. After their not-study meet in the library, Aaron had met up with Tyler, and sometimes his friends, for meals, movies, and study groups that turned out to be more socializing than studying.

It seemed that the match had already finished one out of the possible three sets. Aaron was really late. Looking at the scorer’s table, Aaron saw that Tyler and Mike lost the first set and were currently losing the second set. To win the match, they would have to win the second and third sets. He walked over to where Samantha was cheering on Tyler and Mike and tapped her on the shoulder.

“Hey you!” she jumped and gave him a hug. By the time Aaron tried to return the hug, Samantha was already out of his reach.

“Hey boys! The last of the group is here, so get your asses in gear!”

Tyler, who was about to serve, stumbled and dropped the volleyball. He looked over to the waving Samantha and stunned Aaron. Tyler waved back with a smile on his face and moved into position to serve again.

“Why did you yell that? Tyler could have lost a point,” Aaron tried to whisper against the wind.

Samantha turned with a sly grin. “It will be fine. Now that... everyone is here, Tyler and Mike will win the match.”

Aaron gave her a puzzled look and turned to watch the game instead. It took some time and, from what Aaron had seen on YouTube, chaotic playing, but Tyler and Mike caught up to their opponents. And not long after that the two won the set by a close margin. When Aaron watched Tyler and his friends play pickup, he saw that Tyler had more finesse and fundamental skills.

As the two teams took time to drink water and wipe off the sweat dripping down their bodies, Aaron asked Samantha a question that was eating at him. “When Tyler plays volleyball, doesn’t he become so focused that nothing bothers him? The crowd, other games, or the environment. How were you able to break his concentration?”

Samantha stayed quiet for a moment, seeming to gather her thoughts. “I suppose I know what grabs his attention. Even more than the game.”

While he tried to gather further information, the third set started, and Samantha cheered for the team again. Whatever he was about to say was quickly forgotten. Tyler played the third set differently than the last one. He was more graceful and confident. Tyler and Mike seemed to be, figuratively, dancing around their opponents.

The match ended quickly with victory going to Tyler and Mike. After end-of-the-game protocol, their group of friends walked over to congratulate the triumphant pair. Aaron came up last, still feeling bad about showing up late.

Out of the corner of his eye, Aaron saw Mike quickly approach him. He held out his hand for a congratulatory handshake, but Mike engulfed him in a sweaty hug instead.

“Thank God you showed up! We’re still undefeated.” Mike pulled back slightly and looked into Aaron’s eyes. “Never, ever be late again. Okay?”

Not sure what Mike meant, Aaron nevertheless nodded his head. He did feel awful about being late to the match.

He was suddenly pulled away from Mike and into another set of sweaty arms. His back settled on a broad, heated chest. Aaron couldn’t see who it was, but he hoped it was one person.

“What the hell, Mike? Stop making him uncomfortable with how close you are.”

Aaron saw a huge smile form on Mike’s face. “And you’re not, with all that sand and sweat getting all over him?”

The muscular arms around Aaron loosened and pushed him away from the warm chest. His back still radiated from the heat of the embrace. Or it could be all of the hot sweat soaked into his shirt.

“Shit, Aaron. My bad. Your shirt looks drenched.” Tyler came into Aaron’s line of sight, looking anxious. “I can lend you one of mine to wear.”

“It’s okay. I’ll wash it when I get back to my apartment.” He oddly did not mind his shirt sticking to his skin since it was Tyler who did it.

“I would take Tyler up on his offer. We are going out to eat to celebrate. We talked about it before the match,” Mike said in passing as he held Samantha’s hand.

Aaron glanced down at his shirt again. If he was going out in public, especially a restaurant, he should have a clean shirt on.

“You guys go on ahead. I promised Aaron I would help him with something.”

Aaron froze. He’d forgotten about that. Last night at the coffee shop, he agreed to come watch Tyler’s volleyball match but did not agree with this so-called promise. He had not been able to fall asleep. He was too stressed about what Tyler wanted to do with him that he stayed up all night researching so that he wouldn’t embarrass himself. They’d only been friends for a little over three weeks, and he didn’t want to ruin this budding relationship because he wouldn’t be able to perform at a level he thought Tyler would find pleasing.

To make it through the day without worrying himself to death, Aaron buried himself in school work so he wouldn’t have time to think about Tyler’s proposition. While teaching a class for a sick professor, leading a study group for freshmen computer science majors, and sitting in several meetings, Aaron accomplished his task of having less taxing thoughts.

“That’s okay. I’m starving, and I bet you worked up an appetite from the match you just played. Maybe another time,” Aaron said, hoping to hide his growing panic.

Tyler put his hand on Aaron’s shoulder. “I’m not that hungry. And we’re already out here. The sun is still up for another hour. It’s the perfect time.”

Aaron could not question his logic. But he could question the ability to not embarrass himself. And this was the perfect moment.

Aaron looked around the beach and saw that most of their group had already headed to the parking lot. Samantha and Mike stood by, probably to see what their friends’ decision was going to be.

After a brief pause, Samantha spoke up. “There will be other celebratory dinners, like next week when these two play again. You guys have fun.”

Again, Aaron couldn’t argue with the logic. Looking at Tyler, he gave a shy smile and nodded his head. Though inside he felt defeated.

Tyler beamed at him. Mike walked over and gave a good-bye handshake to Tyler and said something in his ear. When Aaron tried to eavesdrop, the pair had already separated. Aaron watched as Mike and Samantha walked back to the parking lot, with Mike’s arm over Samantha’s shoulders and his mouth peppering kisses in her hair.

Aaron was pulled onto the volleyball court by Tyler’s large hand. Tyler made a staying gesture to Aaron then ran to the opposite side of the court.

Aaron noticed that they were the only people left on this side of the beach, besides a few people walking the shore.

Tyler walked back with his gym bag around his shoulder. “Our game started a little late because the match before us also went to three sets. There is still a little bit of sunlight, so we should be fine for an hour.” Tyler rummaged through his bag before pulling out two T-shirts. “Here you go.”

Aaron grabbed the shirt. “Thanks. I’ll return it after I wash it.” He peeled his saturated shirt over his head and wiped down any sweat he could off of his chest and back. Tyler’s shirt was a little baggy on him, Tyler being a few inches taller and more muscular. The muscles Tyler gained from swimming were not bulky, but lean. Aaron blushed at the thought of how he admired those muscles.

“Do you walk and cycle every day?”

Hearing Tyler’s question, Aaron glanced over at the no-longer-shirtless athlete, who was rifling through his bag.

“I cycle every day to the university instead of driving my car. The amount of time I walk has gone down since I am nearly done with my dissertation.”

“Yeah, you told me that walking helps you figure out problems with your research.” Tyler said as he looked Aaron over. “You look good.”

Aaron barely heard the last of Tyler’s words, not sure if he was meant to hear it. Aaron didn’t think his body could measure up to that of an athlete. But here was conference-ranked swimmer Tyler Saltren admiring nerdy Aaron Pegg’s chest and arms. The blush on Aaron’s face was not seen by Tyler since he reached into his bag and pulled out a volleyball.

“Okay. With what little light we have, you shall learn the ways of volleyball.” Tyler grinned as he threw the ball at Aaron. Aaron caught it with ease, thanking God he had at least that much hand-eye coordination.

Tyler positioned his body as if he was going to pass the ball with his forearms. As he showed the stance, he explained the how and why of it. Aaron listened intently, taking in new information that he had not already learned from his Internet research last night.

Aaron’s first athletic task, not counting catching a ball, was to toss the volleyball at Tyler’s arms and observe how Tyler’s body moved when passing a volleyball. He tossed several, most of them landing close to Tyler’s forearms, and saw how Tyler moved his arms and his legs. It looked easy enough.

Aaron's second athletic task was to be the one passing the volleyball. Aaron gave himself a mental pep talk. *I can do this. The theory is simple. All I need to do is use force and momentum to pass the ball. Easy.*

Aaron's first pass—if it could be called that—went six inches in front of him. The second, behind him, and the third, straight up into the air. After the twenty-sixth unsuccessful attempt, Aaron held up his hands in defeat and humiliation.

Tyler walked back over after having to, again, pick up an off-target ball. “What’s the matter?” he asked with concern.

“Thank you for trying to teach me, but it seems that I’m not able to learn volleyball.” Aaron thought that was a good way not to deter Tyler from his love of volleyball, and also not to embarrass himself.

Tyler chuckled. “I thought you were a genius. You should be able to learn anything.”

“In theory, yes. But when put into application, not all is possible. The physicality of this sport is too advanced for me, I will have to strengthen my—”

“Theory? What do you mean?” Tyler interrupted him.

Aaron tensed. This was the library scene all over again. “Uh, you know, you can read anything and understand the concept, but when you actually try the task you just read about it can somet—”

“You read up on volleyball?”

Aaron looked down at the sand. He’d known this was going to happen at some point. Tyler would now see him as an embarrassment to a sport he loved. Aaron took a deep breath and slowly looked at Tyler. There was a huge grin on Tyler’s face. He never imagined that Tyler would laugh at someone’s inability to learn. “I better get going.”

“Wait. Why?” Tyler was still grinning.

Aaron bent down and grabbed his discarded, wet, and now sandy shirt. “I won’t be able to learn this, and I don’t appreciate people laughing at my disabilities.”

His wrist was seized by a large, rough hand before he could walk away. “I wasn’t laughing at you. Why do you think I was making fun of you?”

“You had this huge smirk on your face that—”

Tyler turned him around, and Aaron noticed he was still smiling. “Sorry. I didn’t know I was smiling. I was—am—just really happy.”

Aaron was confused by Tyler’s response. “Why?”

The smile faded on Tyler, and he looked bashful. “Well, that’s because, um...” he said, “because you studied a sport I love and am passionate about. It seemed to me that you... that you might have studied volleyball because of... me?”

Aaron tried to pull his arm out of Tyler’s grip. He didn’t want to ruin the friendship they were forming. His disclosed secret crush would ruin any chance of staying close to Tyler. If Tyler knew that Aaron had a crush on him, Tyler would probably laugh at him; the nerd liking the jock.

“Please, please, just answer. I won’t laugh or be upset.” Aaron stopped struggling because of the desperation in Tyler’s voice. This was the moment he had hoped for, to confess to Tyler Saltren. But dreamt it as a shared feeling, not Aaron’s own unrequited love.

Aaron took a slow breath. This was probably his only shot.

Aaron stared at their feet and whispered, “Yes. I researched the sport because you play it.” A few moments passed where neither man moved nor spoke. When the silence became unbearable, Aaron said, “I wanted to know your interests and learn activities you enjoy. I thought it would bring us closer together. I did this because... because I think that I...”

Aaron tried to take a deep breath to finish his confession. His once in a lifetime confession.

Suddenly, Aaron was wrapped in sweat and sand and could barely breathe. There was hot breath in his hair and hands running up and down his back.

“You... do you—I mean, that makes me... that’s great.”

Aaron pushed off Tyler’s chest and stared into his brown, teary eyes. Shock was the only emotion Aaron felt. He wanted to wipe away the unshed tears, but his hands were trapped between his and Tyler’s chests.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing is wrong.” Tyler smiled more. “I learned artificial intelligence for the same reason.”

The look of shock must have shown on Aaron’s face since Tyler’s smile got even bigger.

“You, you like me? As in more than a friend?”

Tyler chuckled. “You know, for a genius, you are kind of slow.” Aaron scowled at him. “I’ve liked you for a long time.”

Aaron had only known of Tyler’s existence for a few months. “For a long time?”

“Last semester, you taught a few of my C++ classes when the professor was sick. I was surprised by how young you were and what level you were at academically. You taught with ease and were able to explain concepts more clearly than our regular teacher. Most of the class was hoping he got sick more so you would come back.”

Aaron remembered substituting for that elective class in the spring, but he couldn’t remember seeing Tyler. The class had roughly 200 students in it, and he never got a class roster from the professor. It was also during the semester when he was publishing two papers at the same time. He tried to concentrate only on things that needed to be done, nothing more. Like noticing an attractive and academic athlete was in a class he taught nearly five months ago.

“Some of my classmates looked you up and found very impressive information about you. You are really intelligent and some prodigy, computer-science genius. But at that point I was only impressed with your intelligence.” Tyler reached a hand up and stroked Aaron’s face. “During the spring, the nearby high school was hosting their science fair on our campus. As I was walking to class, I saw you helping a group of students pick up the pieces of their broken project. They were so worried about not getting a grade for their project and failing the class. You asked one of the judges if you could help the students repair their project. He agreed.”

A soft laugh came from Tyler. “I bet he thought you were going to use glue and cardboard paper. You were walking the group to the engineering building when I had to sprint to class since I was already late. I heard later that you spent the entire afternoon letting those high schoolers mess around in the labs, and helped them build something too advanced to be considered for the competition.”

Aaron remembered that event well. “They rebuilt their prosthetic hand, using equipment such as the 3-D printer and a soldering gun.” He really only helped the group use the equipment, trying to allow them to complete most of their project. The students had such a good time and expressed a greater interest for science. “Who did you hear it from?”



“I’m friends with a football player who is majoring in mechanical engineering. He saw you. And I told my friends about it.” Tyler’s hand stopped. “I wanted to approach you, many times, but I realized our differences when I saw your department debated another school about AI research. You seemed so unattainable. You are just so smart and so wanted by the academic world that I thought I couldn’t fit into your life. You would see me as... a dumb jock. I know I’m not stupid, but I’m nowhere near your intelligence.”

Tyler’s other hand ran through Aaron’s dark hair. “So I studied AI and looked for an opportunity to approach you.” He laughed. “You are a wanted man. I could never get close to you, always surrounded by professors, company representatives, and other students. At some point I thought to give up, but—there you were in the library on a rainy night.”

To say Aaron was shocked would be a huge understatement. They had the same feelings for each other. The two of them were also reluctant to approach because of the same thoughts.

When Tyler opened his mouth to speak again, Aaron put a finger to his lips. “Me too. Everything you said, I did and feel the exact same way,” Aaron hurriedly said. “Except for the teaching part. I saw you playing volleyball when I was walking one day. I was actually supposed to be somewhere else. But I’m now glad there are fraternities and sororities. Oh, and I also read up on swimming. Didn’t need to on economics. And you were always surrounded by your friends, and girls on campus, and at the beach playing volleyball. I couldn’t find an opportunity to approach you...”

Aaron took a moment to catch his breath. “I’ve never wanted something more in my life than you. It hurts how much I like you. I feel that—”

Aaron’s explanation was cut short when Tyler kissed him, hard and frantic. He felt Tyler’s hand on his lower back pull him closer, making him stand on his toes. His arms were still trapped between their bodies, so all he could do was enjoy the sensations.

When he tried to pull back for air, Tyler slipped his tongue in Aaron’s open mouth. The passionate kiss was nearly killing Aaron, both the feelings behind it and the lack of oxygen. His lungs could not compare to those of a swimmer. Aaron moved his hands around, hitting any part of Tyler that he could.

“Ouch.” Tyler pulled back after Aaron pinched his abdomen. Aaron threw his head back and closed his eyes, trying to draw in the much-needed oxygen. The arm that was holding him tight to the muscular body moved to his shoulder.

“Sorry. I guess I was too excited.” Tyler shrugged, looking sheepish.

“No. Don’t worry.” Aaron got out between pants. “I thoroughly enjoyed it. But I need to breathe every now and then.”

Tyler grinned at him. “I’ll remember that. Can I kiss you again?”

Aaron answered the man with a kiss of his own. They kissed slowly this time, trying to make the moment last as long as possible. Aaron ran his now free hands up and down Tyler’s back, touching the strong muscles he had seen many times on the beach. When they broke for air, Tyler rested his forehead on Aaron’s and gave him a sweet smile.

“I suppose we can’t practice anymore volleyball. The sun has set.” Tyler kissed his forehead. “How about we go get dinner? Just the two of us.”

Aaron hummed happily. “That sounds great. I was starving an hour ago.” Tyler laughed and laced Aaron’s fingers in his. Walking toward Tyler’s gym bag, Aaron remembered something earlier.

“What did Mike say to you? Before he and Samantha left.”

Tyler knelt down next to his bag. “He told me to man up already and ask you out.”

Aaron laughed. “Are you going to tell him that I confessed to you first?”

Tyler stopped his packing and looked thoughtful. “No. We’ll let them use their imaginations. We’re the only ones who need to know how sappy we got.”

Aaron liked the answer, though he believed that if they showed affection around their friends, the secret would be out. He looked out to the ocean, watching the dark waves crash in. “I guess we’ll have to try another time to teach me volleyball.”

Tyler looked up from placing items in his bag. “You still want to learn?”

Aaron knelt next to him, placing a hand on Tyler’s knee. “I want to learn everything you enjoy, remember? Just try not to laugh too hard.”

Tyler leaned over and kissed Aaron gently. “I like that plan. In return you’ll have to teach me more about your research. Sound good, boyfriend?”

Aaron couldn’t hide the grin forming after hearing Tyler’s endearment. “Sounds perfect.”

Aaron peeked down the hallway one more time before quietly shutting the locker room door. He made sure no one saw him enter the building.

“Hey. I saw Coach leave ten minutes ago, so you can stop being spy-like.”

Aaron jumped at Tyler’s voice. He turned around to see Tyler sitting bare chested on the only bench in the locker room, drying his hair with a small towel, and smiling at Aaron.

“I just don’t want you to get into trouble.”

Tyler told him that his coach, Coach Holstein, allowed the swimmers to use the locker room out of season. But they could only use it to shower and change for swimming purposes. One of Coach Holstein many rules. Some of his rules were a minimum GPA, curfew in season, and not to play other sports, club and intramural included. The last rule was the most important as it is in place to prevent superfluous injury.

“Anyway, I still parked my car in the lot that you said your coach doesn’t use,” Aaron said.

Tyler hummed happily in response.

Aaron smiled at the thought that Tyler was in a better mood. For the past few days, Tyler had been distant and gloomy. He hoped having finished classes and winning the volleyball league would cheer Tyler up, since Aaron had been unsuccessful in his methods.

Aaron noticed something different about the locker room. The walls were bare, but showed an even discoloration of paint, except near the door that lead to the video room. The only other time Aaron had been in this locker room was last week, when Tyler and Mike wanted to wash off after their semi-final match. Some of the athletes used the school’s athletic locker rooms after they left the beach since they were closer than their dorm rooms.

He definitely remembered seeing lockers on the walls and more benches bolted to the floor.

“Is the athletic department renovating the swim team’s locker room?”

“That’s why you’re the genius. Mike thought one of the other teams was pulling a prank. He left after dropping me off.” Tyler chuckled as he stood up. He tossed the towel onto the bench and pulled a shirt and shoes from his gym bag.

Aaron watched as Tyler covered his mouth-watering torso, buttoning up the dress shirt. He noticed that Tyler had chosen a pair of leather shoes to complete

the stunning look. The doctoral student looked down at his clothes he thought were nice a minute ago. The dark blue polo and black jeans looked inadequate next to Tyler's stylish attire.

Thinking back, Aaron couldn't remember Tyler mentioning any plans he had tonight. He couldn't have forgotten anything; his brain didn't allow him to. He assumed it would be the two of them tonight.

"Do you have somewhere to be tonight?"

Lacing up a shoe, Tyler said, "Just places with you."

Aaron was further lost. "Did we make plans other than dinner?"

After knotting the shoe he was working on, Tyler sat on the bench and held out his hand. Aaron took a few steps, grabbed the outstretched hand, and sat next to his boyfriend.

Boyfriend. A label that Aaron never dreamt of calling Tyler until that confession-filled night three weeks ago. They spent their time together similarly to when they started being friends: late nights talking, hanging out with friends, and enjoying meals.

However, they now also indulged in soft lingering kisses, cuddling on Aaron's couch, and passionate nights of heated touches.

Tyler took Aaron's hand into both of his, rubbing the skin in slow circles. "I was hoping to celebrate tonight's win at a more... upscale restaurant. Margaux's. Where we can actually wine and dine."

Aaron smiled slightly at the idea. "First off, congratulations to you and Mike on being 'Kings of the Beach.' Secondly, as you are underage, you cannot 'wine' yet. Thirdly, I would love to eat at that French restaurant, but I think I'm underdressed. And am I not supposed to take you out for your victory?"

"I was going more for the expression, less on the alcohol. I think that shade of blue brings out your eyes. And I'm sure you can think of something to help me celebrate," Tyler said, kissing the back of Aaron's hand after finishing each sentence.

Aaron blushed at the scenes he imagined, showing vigorous ways he could help Tyler celebrate. The look Tyler gave him indicated they had similar ideas. Aaron leaned in for a kiss. "Since your opinion is the only one that matters, I will be happy to look normal next to your handsome self."

Tyler slowly kissed Aaron, pulling away to nip at his bottom lip. "You are so much more than normal. You're—"

The men pulled apart after hearing a loud bang outside the locker room. A few moments later, another crash was heard. This time closer to the door.

Brief pauses in the clamor allowed Aaron and Tyler to hear bits of a conversation.

“Which room? ...Careful with those... This door Coach Holstein? ...Tomorrow we’ll start...”

Tyler jumped off the bench. “Shit! We have to hide!” he whispered sharply. As Tyler grabbed clothes and his bag, Aaron dashed to the only concealing space. When he had pulled the door open slightly, Tyler shoved him into the room and quickly shut the door behind them, encompassing the two in complete darkness. Aaron was thrown against a waist-high object, which he tumbled over, then crashed onto something smooth and supple.

There was silence. Aaron tried to stay still on his back, not familiar with his surroundings. When the quietness stretched on Aaron whispered, “Tyler? What—”

“Shhh. Just until they’re gone,” Tyler said in a low voice.

Aaron suspected that Tyler had his ear plastered against the door. He couldn’t tell if the voices from the hall were even in the locker room. A sudden crash had him jump nearly off whatever he was on. Now Aaron knew people were in the other room.

The sounds of movement and shuffling went on for several minutes, with low murmurs being heard. The sounds eventually died out, and silence was the only noise for a full minute.

“I think they’re gone.”

A sudden light had Aaron covering his eyes. When his vision adjusted, Tyler’s face was mere inches above Aaron’s. His boyfriend was leaning over the back of the leather couch Aaron had fallen on.

“Sorry about pushing you. I didn’t want Coach to catch me. He would know that I was breaking one of the rules.” Tyler gave him a lopsided grin.

Aaron smiled at him. “You have to believe he already knows. Gossip spreads quickly, and more than half of the campus has seen you play volleyball.”

A quick peck was placed on Aaron’s lips. “Probably. But I like to live with some ignorance.”

Aaron chuckled, running a hand through his boyfriend's hair as he pulled him down for another kiss, this one more eager. Aaron slid his tongue into Tyler's open mouth, receiving a moan. His other hand grabbed onto Tyler's shoulder, attempting to pull him over the couch and on top of him.

Tyler broke the kiss. "We should get going if we want to make our reservation."

Aaron nodded. As he sat up, Aaron thought of something witty. "If you are that hungry, I know something that will satisfy your appetite."

Tyler moaned as he pecked Aaron's lips. "Keep that plan for dessert."

Aaron stood up and took in his surroundings while Tyler gathered his discarded bag and clothes. He had never been in the swim team's video room before. There were two leather couches and a few chairs facing a large television mounted on the wall. On a shelf below were DVD and VCR players, and a collection of DVD and VCR cases, labeled with names of other schools and individual opponents.

"Oh no."

Aaron turned his head to see Tyler clutching the doorknob with one hand while his gym bag was over his shoulder. Tyler wore a look of panic. He turned the knob again and pushed. And pushed. Then he shoved the door with his body weight, letting his gym bag fall to the ground.

"No! Damn it!" Tyler rested his head against the wood and banged it with his fists.

"Does the door lock from the inside?" Aaron approached slowly. He gently laid a hand on Tyler's tense shoulder.

Tyler tried opening the door one more time with no success. "No, this door doesn't have a lock on it. We shut it all the time when watching film. Why won't it open?"

Aaron took a step back and examined the shut door. As Tyler mentioned, there was no lock on the door handle. He also noticed that the hinges were not visible. "Then something is blocking the entry on the other side. What were those men moving?"

"What?" Tyler grunted as he tried to break down the door again.

"The noises we just heard. When we were hiding? It sounded like they were moving something around."

Tyler paused in his frustrating task. A look of clarity dawned on his face. “The school bought us new lockers and benches. We were never told they were doing the renovation today. Or this week.”

Knowing that they were stuck for a bit, Aaron sat back down on the couch. “Why would the administration notify anyone? It’s summertime. The construction won’t affect any students or activities.”

Aaron lifted his hand to Tyler, asking him to join him on the couch. After a deep sigh, Tyler took the offered hand and plopped on the leather. His other hand rubbed over Aaron’s joined one.

“Do you have your phone?”

Aaron shrugged. “I left it in my car. I didn’t think we would be in here for long. Where is yours?”

“In my bag. But the battery is dead.” Tyler rested his head on the joined hands.

Aaron’s free hand rubbed the short brown locks, trying to be soothing. “I guess we are stuck in here until the workers return tomorrow.” At least he hoped it would be tomorrow. He thought he heard earlier whispers speak of it.

“No. We need to find a way out,” Tyler asserted, letting go of Aaron’s hand to stand up.

Aaron gripped Tyler’s hand and pulled him back down on the couch. Aaron waited until Tyler looked at him before fully explaining their predicament.

“We cannot physically open the door. There are stacks of lockers and benches preventing that path, and the hinges are on the outside, so we cannot remove the door. The only other way out is crawling through the duct, but one of us needs to be shoebox size. We have no way to communicate to someone outside of this room, unless we yell. But at this time on a Friday, there will be nobody around. There isn’t—”

“Please. Just stop,” Tyler groaned. “I don’t need ways not to get out. I need a way to get out. Right now.”

Aaron kissed his boyfriend’s hair, trying to soothe him. “I’m grateful for the dinner you had planned, but we can always celebrate your win tomorrow.”

“No, it has to be tonight. I have plans for you.”

That puzzled Aaron. “For me?”

Tyler froze. “I mean, for us?”

“Are you asking or stating that?”

Tyler slumped, looking defeated. He ran a hand through his hair, eyes trained on the floor. “I, umm... I made plans to congratulate you. You submitted your dissertation and defended it earlier this week. I actually had something planned that night, just a little dinner and candlelight. After you exited the auditorium triumphantly, I went to congratulate you but your advisors had already surrounded you and announced what they had prepared for you as a celebration.”

Aaron watched as Tyler took a breath and then looked away.

“Watching you interact with the CEO of Robotics Corp. was like watching you leave. They made you an offer, right there at dinner. From what you told me it’s your dream job, working with them. So I was really happy for you... but I can’t help but feel miserable. That company is on the other side of the country. We will probably never see each other since I have a year left and then two years for an MBA here. So it—”

“You are going to get your MBA here?” Aaron interrupted.

Tyler looked a little shaken from the disruption. “I talked with my professors last week, and they told me that if I apply, I’ll be one of their top candidates. It is one of the best—”

“Programs in the nation. Top five, I know,” Aaron said happily. “That’s great!”

Tyler looked slightly peeved. “Thanks,” he spat. “Were you not listening to what I was saying? We are going to be nearly two thousand miles apart.”

“No, we are not,” Aaron replied. “We are going to be forty-five point seven miles away, plus or minus your office.”

The look of confusion on his boyfriend’s face made Aaron bite the inside of his cheek to not laugh out loud. “Does Robotics Corp. have another office in the area?” Tyler asked.

“No. But Kuora has one in the next city.”

Tyler mouth gaped like a fish. “Are you telling me that you turned down a job with a multinational company for a... startup company?”

Aaron turned his entire body so that he could face Tyler. He crossed his legs and brought their hands back together. “I turned down that job for a small company I know is one day going to be bigger and more powerful than Robotic



Corp. Kuora may be little now, but their employees really believe in what they are doing. Beliefs I share. They invited me for an interview last week while you were in class. I was offered a position the next day.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Tyler asked as he moved to mimic Aaron’s position.

“You were preparing for your two finals and projects. I also wanted to make it a surprise after I defended my dissertation. It would be the icing on the cake after your summer classes and my completion of the PhD program. But you looked depressed this week. I imagined you believed you didn’t do well on your exams, so I was going to wait until after you found out your grades.”

Tyler removed his hands from Aaron’s and threw his face into them with a groan. “I’ve been worrying for the past three days, thinking that you were leaving and we would have to break up.” Aaron heard a chuckle from Tyler. “Mike is going to kill me when he hears about this.”

Aaron let out a relieved laugh. He had been worried about why Tyler was so distant the past few days. “Is this why Mike was carrying the team on his back today?”

The question made Tyler drop his hands, a scowl on his face. “He did not carry me. I was just letting him have his moment to shine.”

“You decided this for the championship game?” Aaron said around his laughter. “Real smart, Saltren.”

Tyler’s pout made Aaron laugh louder.

“Stop laughing. I was really worried. Will you—”

Aaron tried to fend off Tyler’s playful hands, but he was no match for the swimmer’s strength. Aaron found himself pinned on the leather couch looking up at a smirking Tyler. His arms were held down above his head by only one of Tyler’s hands.

“Looks like I’ve *Pegged* you down.” Tyler’s other hand trailed down Aaron’s clothed torso. He stopped his journey right above Aaron’s jeans. “I wonder what I should do with you. Any suggestions?”

Aaron shivered as Tyler moved his hand in circles. “I suppose we both have congratulations in order.”

“I suppose we do.” Tyler leaned down for a kiss.

Aaron's hands were released from their prison, allowing him to run his fingers in Tyler's cropped hair and pull him closer. Two hands were now on his abdomen, pulling his polo up. Aaron arched off the couch, pressing their bodies closer, to help Tyler with his task. They broke free to get the shirt over Aaron's head. Aaron reached for Tyler again, wanting to feel the warmth of the man who made his heart both stop and beat out of control.

"Wait a second," Tyler said breathlessly.

Tyler stared, his eyes roaming over the naked torso that lay before him. His hand traveled the same path down Aaron's chest.

Aaron closed his eyes as his body trembled at the touch. The caress was gone too soon, leaving a cold trail in its wake. Aaron opened his eyes to see Tyler undoing the top button of his dress shirt.

"Let me." Aaron sat up and pushed Tyler's hands away. Slowly he opened the dress shirt, revealing the muscular gift underneath. When the final button was unfastened, Aaron ran his hands up Tyler's chest and over his shoulders.

Tyler leaned his head back, moaning from the contact. Aaron took advantage, kissing the exposed skin on his neck. He didn't suck hard, knowing that Tyler would be teased endlessly by their friends. The shirt was removed from Tyler and dropped over the back of the couch.

The pair fell back on the leather, hands leisurely roaming over now-bare skin. Their lips moved gently over one another's. Tyler nipped at Aaron's lower lip, eliciting a moan from the genius. Tyler licked the tender flesh before pulling back.

Bare chest to bare chest, they stared into each other's eyes for a few seconds. The spell was broken when Tyler ran a hand through Aaron's hair.

"I had this grand plan tonight. To woo you, making you see what you'll miss and not want to leave. It sounds selfish, and it is, but I have you in my life and I don't want to let you go." Tyler gave Aaron a soft kiss. "Margaux's was the first stop. We were going to drive to a bed and breakfast Samantha told me about. It's on a beach and far from any busy city. We would have walked on the beach, hand in hand, and gazed at the stars. Then back in our room, I'd worship your body to the point you couldn't handle me not being near you. The sound of my voice or the feel of my touches." Aaron quivered as Tyler ran a hand down his chest, as if he wanted to emphasize his point.

"That would be hard to leave. But you don't need to go to that extent to make me stay. I'm not leaving you," Aaron spoke softly.

“What would have happened if I had decided to pursue a different MBA program? I wouldn’t be at this school.”

Aaron held Tyler’s face with both of his hands. “With the advancement of technology, I can work from any place. I told Kuora that I might have to work long-distance when they interviewed me, and they were fine with it. The company is mostly programming, so we don’t need much to communicate.” He pressed his lips to Tyler’s and whispered, “You have become the essential piece to the puzzle of my life. I wouldn’t be able to finish it without you.”

Tyler bit his lip, seeming to have trouble forming his next words. “You... I... Why?”

“You know, for one of the best swimmers in the conference, you are a bit slow,” Aaron teased. “For the same reason that you want me to stay. I love you.”

Aaron’s heart stopped beating when Tyler smiled at him. His boyfriend closed the gap and kissed Aaron slowly, nipping at his lips. Tyler deepened the kiss, sliding his tongue on the roof of Aaron’s mouth. After a few minutes, Tyler rested back on his knees and popped the button on his jeans. After he pulled his zipper down, he reached out and repeated the process on Aaron’s jeans.

Trying to sit up to participate, Aaron found himself stuck to the leather couch. This reminded him of where they were, stuck in the swim team’s video room. “Did you bring any supplies?” he asked nervously.

Tyler stood from the couch. “I have most of our trip supplies in my bag. While I’m grabbing them, why don’t you finish getting out of those?” he said, pointing to Aaron’s jeans.

Admiring the way Tyler’s low hanging pants accentuated his hips, Aaron removed his denims and sat on the couch, waiting for Tyler’s return. He noticed the usual supplies plus the towel used earlier in Tyler’s hands. Aaron stood while Tyler laid the towel over the leather couch.

Tyler’s hand on Aaron’s shoulder urged him to sit back on the couch. His boyfriend knelt in front of him, grabbing his hips, and sliding him and the towel to the edge of the couch. Aaron let out a grunt of approval as Tyler cupped his dick through his boxers. The hand was soon followed by Tyler’s mouth, trying to engulf him through the cloth.

Aaron raised his hips, allowing Tyler to remove the last article of clothing. Hands now gave Aaron pleasure as they cupped his balls and stroked his shaft.

His moaning seemed to encourage Tyler, who sucked just the top of his penis. Aaron's hand flew to Tyler in an attempt to grab hold of the short hair. He groaned in frustration when he couldn't grasp anything. His groan turned into a moan of pleasure as vibration flowed down through his dick from Tyler's muffled laughter.

He clutched the towel and tried not to thrust forward when Tyler engulfed him. It felt like his entire being was being sucked out of him.

"Tyler. Stop. Please," Aaron panted between gasping breaths.

Tyler hummed, as if he was trying to ask "why," making Aaron whimper his boyfriend's name.

After a few mind-numbing moments, Aaron tried to fight the pleasure again. "Stop. I don't want to come yet."

Tyler released Aaron's dick with a *plop* as his hand lightly stroked the hard shaft. "When do you want to come then?"

Taking in a few more gulps of air, Aaron looked down at the man who worshipped his being. Saliva and precum coated Tyler's lips. He shone with sweat, which traveled down his chest and abdomen to fall hidden under the open pants. He bit his lip, trying to prevent another moan from escaping.

"In a little bit. With you."

Tyler knelt and tilted forward. He kissed Aaron, slowly at first, trying to coax him to open his mouth. When Aaron granted him access, Tyler slid his tongue inside. Aaron hummed, finding the taste of himself on Tyler's tongue appealing.

"Lie back."

Aaron did as he was instructed, bending his knees to allow Tyler to sit between his legs.

Aaron watched as Tyler coated his fingers with lube. He felt one trace around his hole and then line up. The sudden entrance caused Aaron to hiss, and Tyler paused with his finger halfway inside.

"Don't stop," Aaron huffed.

With a chuckle, Tyler continued to push in. When the finger was fully in, Tyler began to move, loosening Aaron. Aaron felt himself relax as the digit moved in and out of him.

Another finger was added. Tyler scissored his fingers, further stretching Aaron for something larger.

“Come here.” Aaron beckoned.

Aaron hiked his hips up as Tyler crawled up to him, allowing his fingers to stay in place. He wrapped his arms around Tyler’s strong back, drawing him in for a kiss. A third finger joined the other two.

After a few minutes, Tyler removed his fingers, causing Aaron to let out a noise of frustration, and rose from the couch. Aaron watched as Tyler quickly stripped off his jeans and pulled out a foil wrapper. Aaron stood and snatched the condom and with a light shove pushed Tyler back on the couch.

Aaron saw a look of confusion on Tyler’s face as he ripped open the foil. “You’ve worshipped my body enough. Let me return the favor.”

He stroked Tyler’s already hard cock a few times before rolling the condom down it. Luckily, the bottle of lube was in reach on the floor. Aaron placed a generous amount on Tyler’s condom-covered flesh.

Aaron locked eyes with Tyler, not wanting to miss any emotion appearing in his eyes. Grabbing onto the broad shoulders for support, Aaron straddled Tyler. Hands gripped his ass, spreading his cheeks so he could easily guide himself on Tyler’s shaft.

Aaron tried to purposely go slow, wanting to take in the sight and sound of Tyler and to slow his approaching orgasm. He took a moment to rest his forehead on Tyler’s when he had completely sheathed the man.

Eyes still locked, Aaron lifted himself up and slowly descended. It didn’t take long for him to pick up the pace, needing more friction. His hands moved down to knead the large pectorals before him. The sounds coming from Tyler drove Aaron to quicken his pace.

The fast pace of riding didn’t last as long as Aaron hoped. His stamina had increased from dating Tyler, but apparently not as greatly as he needed right now.

Tyler’s hands reached under Aaron’s ass, palming a cheek in each hand. He helped Aaron continue the rapid pace, lifting his body up and slamming him down.

Not needing to fully balance himself anymore, Aaron cupped Tyler’s face and kissed him. Their mouths moved sloppily against each other, never fully

connecting. Aaron broke away. “Slow down. I need to slow down,” he panted. Aaron wanted to continue, but his legs were exhausted from the vigorous activity.

“It’s okay. I got you.”

As Aaron was about to ask what he meant, Tyler stood up with hands still under his ass. Aaron wrapped his arms and legs around Tyler.

When Tyler took a step, Aaron let out a deep moan. He was still wholly filled by Tyler’s cock. Every move Tyler made had his dick hitting deeper in Aaron.

Aaron felt the fabric from the towel on his back. Tyler had lowered him on the couch and was staring down at him. And Tyler was still sheathed inside him. Tyler gave him a lopsided grin, probably from seeing the look of disbelief on Aaron’s face.

“That was hot,” Aaron said.

Tyler laughed, loud and deep. “And the rest wasn’t? I need to get bett—”

Aaron’s mouth crashed into his, stopping Tyler from finishing his remark. Tyler began with slow and long thrusts. Soon the pounding was fast and frantic, both men needing release. Aaron came first, shooting on their stomachs while moaning Tyler’s name.

Tyler thrust a few more times, riding the pleasure of Aaron’s inner muscles clenching around him. Aaron trembled as he felt Tyler release into the condom.

Neither of them moved for several moments. Aaron had his eyes closed, fatigue setting in. He felt Tyler’s hot breath as he panted above him. Tyler gave him a short kiss before pulling out.

Even after the passionate love making, Aaron felt the loss of warmth as Tyler disposed of the condom in a small trashcan.

“Remind me to grab that on the way out. Can’t let Coach know I’m breaking another one of his rules.” Tyler made his way back over to the couch. “I know you’re tired, but we need the towel to wipe off.”

Tyler turned off the lights after their bodies were cleaned of sweat and cum and clothed in their boxers. Tyler lay down, pulling Aaron down with him so that they were chest to chest, wrapped in each other’s arms.

Aaron felt Tyler nuzzle his hair, giving it a kiss as he found a comfortable spot to rest.

“I love you.”

Aaron smiled at the muffled words. Kissing Tyler’s chest, he echoed the sentiment.

As he drifted off to sleep, Aaron heard Tyler whispering the confession again and again.

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### *Epilogue*

The crowd was roaring with cheers and fight songs as the men’s 4x100 medley relay was about to begin. Aaron sat with Samantha, catching up and idly talking when neither Mike nor Tyler were swimming. As the swimmers lined up for the final event in the conference tournament, the audience rose to their feet.

Aaron clapped with the people around him but didn’t encourage the team vocally. After their first home meet in November, he was banned from cheering by Coach Holstein after Tyler lost two events that he, as Aaron was told, “Should have won by half a lap.” Later that night, Tyler agreed with his coach, telling Aaron that he imagined him writhing in bed when he heard him shout his name at the meets. Aaron had not cheered at any athletic event since then.

He also had not returned to the men’s swimming locker room. The embarrassment of waking up locked in the video room over half a year ago still mortified Aaron. Luckily they were woken by the sounds of drills and hammers that morning. Tyler and Aaron had just enough time to throw on their clothes before their exit to freedom was opened. The construction worker and the pair of students stared at each other for a few moments, waiting for the other to say something.

Tyler, first to speak up, lied that they were practicing earlier the day before and fell asleep on the couches. When they awoke, it was dark and the door wouldn’t open, and they couldn’t call for security since their phones were dead.

The construction workers didn’t question their story and apologized for not checking the room first. The boys left their overnight prison, hopped in Aaron’s car, and spent the day at the bed and breakfast.

The worst part of it was they forgot to grab the dirty trash bag which contained the used condom. It was all but forgotten until Tyler introduced Aaron to Coach Holstein. After shaking hands, Coach turned to Tyler, asking if

Aaron was the person who spent the night in the film room with him. Probably noticing Tyler's shocked look, Coach Holstein explained that the workers told him of the incident and described the two men. He identified Tyler, but couldn't figure out who the other one was. So he inspected the film room, just to make sure nothing was out of place. Frowning, Coach Holstein announced that new couches had been ordered and asked that Aaron look after his best swimmer. Tyler couldn't look his coach in the eyes for two weeks.

Samantha brought him back to reality, talking about an internship she had lined up for the summer and that Mike was waiting to hear from the graduate schools he applied to. She also mentioned that Mike was jealous that Tyler had already received his acceptance letter. Aaron was sworn to secrecy not to tell Tyler. He promised and smiled at that.

Everything was occurring as they had planned months ago. Tyler was staying at the university to earn an MBA, and Aaron had a job he loved close by. Even though it was Tyler's senior year, his coach strongly urged him to stay on campus so that he could focus all his time on school work and swimming. That didn't stop Tyler from spending nights at Aaron's apartment. As a concerned roommate, Mike didn't seem to mind his friend's nightly absence.

Even though Tyler spent most of his nights at Aaron's apartment, the two had yet to talk about living together. There had been subtle comments from both of them: Tyler saying he liked houses with a big yard, and Aaron saying he needed an extra bedroom for his computer equipment. A few times they even watched HGTV and commented on the style of houses or interior design. With Tyler graduating in a few months, the conversation about his living situation needed to happen soon.

The sound of the starting gun returned him to the present. The first man of each team was off, performing the backstroke. Mike was the third leg and Tyler the fourth and final. The swimmers moved quickly down the pool, already having the second man diving in. Mike finished a few strokes in front of his opponent which gave Tyler enough space to finish first.

Aaron began yelling his excitement, now that the event was over. The relay team celebrated before turning to the crowd, whence more cheers erupted. Tyler seemed to find Aaron easily, waving and giving a thumbs up. Aaron waved back and then applauded louder.

Tonight, the entire team, family, and friends will revel in the success of a season. Later on, back at Aaron's place, the two of them will celebrate with



each other. And when the sun rises tomorrow, Tyler and Aaron will be blissfully content, wrapped in each other's arms. Two different puzzle shapes fitting perfectly together.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*S.N. Kat is an avid reader of m/m fiction. Located on the East Coast of the U.S., she spends her days doing analytical research and her nights watching and playing sports. With the free time she never seems to have, she reads, cooks, and occasionally gets sleep.*

## **Contact & Media Info**

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