

A FRAGILE LOVE

Adam and Peter are a couple who are very much in love with each other, but they've come to a turning point in their relationship. They don't realize how fragile love can be and how one moment can change everything.

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

A FRAGILE LOVE By Les Joseph

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

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 they 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 <u>Goodreads M/M Romance Group</u> and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers.** It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

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Photo Description

Two men are entwined on a seat while riding a subway. One of the men, in a black long-sleeved shirt, is leaning over the other, who is lying across his lap and wearing a white T-shirt. Their lips are just a breath away from touching.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I'm so glad we're finally at this point in our relationship where we are comfortable with each other like this in public; I was an idiot for so long, trying to hide what we had. But after what happened, I'll never take him for granted again. I'm through hiding. I'm going to make sure that he knows every day just how much I love him.

Note: I'd love this to have both sweet and steamy moments, but no BDSM please. The rest is up to you!

Sincerely,

Sas

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: drama, sports, coming out, out for you, hurt/comfort, celebrity, tattoos

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Adam stood at the window, staring into the dark. The inky black night provided a perfect backdrop for the reflection of bright red numbers glowing on the alarm clock beside the bed, casting a strange, almost eerie light over Peter's sleeping form. Adam was exhausted; it was after three in the morning, and he should have been asleep. There were still aches in muscles he didn't know he had. His body hurt, but his mind was flooded with too many thoughts for there to be any hope of rest. He sighed and pressed his forehead against the cool glass, his tense shoulders lifting all the way to his ears before falling. The slight movement caused the ice to tinkle in the tumbler he held next to his thigh. Adam looked down, frowning as if he'd forgotten the double shot of scotch he'd poured for himself in the hopes of being able to relax. So far, it hadn't worked.

Behind him, Peter mumbled some nonsense and burrowed beneath the covers. Adam looked over his shoulder at his lover, and the immense relief he felt at having Peter here, in his bed, washed over him, stealing his breath for a moment. He took a drink. The warmth that started in his chest and unfurled, filling him completely, had nothing to do with the ill-advised alcohol and everything to do with the man lying in the bed. Adam still had trouble wrapping his head around all that had happened, and there were definitely questions he needed to have answered; but the fact was, Peter was here.

It blew Adam's mind.

Turning back around, Adam crossed his arms over his chest and winced at the dull burn in his left biceps. Glancing at the clean white gauze, he couldn't help but smile. Of the many aches and pains he was currently nursing, this newest one was the most welcome. He should have waited; he was an idiot for being so insistent in his condition. After close to two weeks in the hospital and the medication he still needed to take, stopping at the tattoo shop immediately after being discharged wasn't the smartest thing he'd ever done—but he couldn't, *wouldn't*, delay any longer. It was something he and Peter had discussed before but always put off until another day. They'd both just had a crash course in not taking anything for granted, so Adam begged and pleaded—even promised a week's worth of morning blow jobs—if Peter would agree to get inked right then. Adam couldn't wait until the tattoo healed. The thought of seeing a symbol of Peter and him etched into his skin in black and blue and red made the anticipation that much sweeter. Knowing that Peter had the exact same design in the exact same spot caused Adam's stomach to flip and his heart to fly.

The marks would stain their skin forever. "Forever" was a word Adam never really appreciated all that much and definitely didn't spend a lot of time pondering. Oh sure, he understood the concept in theory, in that way most people approached abstract topics like space and physics, but with each sharp sting of the tattoo gun it became crystal clear. He loved Peter. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with Peter. They weren't new thoughts, but after all they'd been through the word "forever" had taken on a whole new meaning.

Almost from the first moment they'd met a little over a year ago, when Peter accidentally bumped into Adam in the waiting area of a crowded restaurant, Adam sensed Peter was going to be an important part of his life. Once Adam realized he'd fallen in love, he couldn't imagine being with anyone but Peter. He didn't want to imagine it. Over the past few months he'd begun to question their relationship, to doubt Peter's commitment, but Adam didn't need to do either any longer. What Peter had done proved that to him and basically the entire viewing population of Denver and beyond.

As Adam's mind wandered he took another sip, held the spicy liquid in his mouth until it began to burn, and swallowed, enjoying the heat along his throat before it settled in his stomach. He watched the raindrops slither and meander down the window. The lights of Denver twinkled, even at this hour. Everywhere he looked—the curtained windows in the apartment complex a few buildings down, the occasional car travelling the street of their neighborhood, the condo next door—life went on. Everything about Adam's life might be in limbo right now, but for the rest of the world it was just another day.

It was a humbling, if not somewhat melancholy, thought.

There was another rustle of sheets and then the muted sound of Peter's bare feet on the hardwood floor. With every step closer, Adam's heart raced faster and faster. Before Peter reached him, Adam knew where his lover would touch first, so he turned his head, leaning it against the window frame, granting Peter perfect access to his neck.

Sleep-warmed soft lips attached themselves to his skin, followed by the slow lick of a wet tongue. "What are you doing up? Are you hurting? Do you need me to get your pills?" Each question was punctuated with a kiss, the last with a scrape of Peter's teeth across Adam's shoulder.

"Can't sleep."

Peter rubbed his hands up and down Adam's arms, as if warding off a chill. "You should be passed out. Your body needs rest, babe."

Adam lifted his glass and swirled the watered-down scotch. "I tried this. It hasn't helped."

Taking the glass from Adam, Peter set it on the small table beneath the window. "You shouldn't mix alcohol with your pain meds," he fussed.

Adam scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Yes, Mother. I was there when the doctor went over the discharge orders, but I thought it might help me relax. Besides, I've only had a few swallows. At this point, it's more water than alcohol."

Peter stepped closer, pressing his chest tight against Adam's naked back. He circled his arms around Adam's trim waist, resting his hands lightly on Adam's firm stomach. Peter's fingers ghosted along the waistband of Adam's boxer briefs, and he was barely able to keep his fingertip from dipping to slide across the sensitive, warm skin beneath. There was no stopping the way his semi-hard cock settled right between the cheeks of his boyfriend's ass, though; he didn't even try.

"I wish you would have woken me," Peter whispered as he nuzzled the side of Adam's neck with his nose. He inhaled deeply, the brisk, clean scent of Adam's soap and shampoo familiar and comforting. It was a smell that would always make him think of Adam, only one of the countless things that would.

Adam sighed and kept his eyes focused on the window in front of him. Peter knew not to push. It had been a long-ass day—a long two weeks, if he were honest. Two weeks of almost unbearable stress. Days upon days of incessant worry, of picturing every worst-case scenario his brain could conjure up—some so farfetched, Peter had made himself sick. Pacing until his feet ached, feeling anger so acute Peter swore he'd never see anything that wasn't filtered through a red haze ever again. Hours spent sitting at Adam's bedside, begging Adam's silent, unmoving, battered- and-bruised body for a sign, any sign, that he was still there beneath the tubes and bandages.

"I can't get my brain to turn the fuck off long enough to sleep. I want to, I'm fucking exhausted, but every time I close my eyes, all I see..." Adam shivered, and Peter tightened his arms.

Peter wouldn't let his mind go there. If he did, they'd both be up all night. "Come back to bed so I can hold you."

He didn't wait for Adam to agree; he simply took his boyfriend by the hand and led him toward the bed. Peter pulled the blankets back and gently but forcefully pushed Adam's shoulders to the pillow, getting him settled as comfortably as he could. Turning, he grabbed the glass of scotch and hurried to the bathroom to dump the liquor and rinse the glass. He refilled it with cool water, knowing that Adam needed to take another pill before he fell asleep. The stubborn ass would bitch and complain about how they made him feel loopy and out of it, but the man's body still had to heal. It was going to take months until Adam was fully recovered.

By the time Peter walked back into the bedroom, Adam had rolled onto the side without the healing ribs. He'd shed his boxer briefs. The slope of his hip and the top of one ass cheek peeked out from beneath the sheet that was already tangled around his legs. Peter smiled when he spied the dimples in the small of Adam's back; the spot was one of his favorite places to lick. His eyes roamed, savoring the view, before they narrowed at the yellowing bruises and numerous scrapes that still covered so much of Adam's body. They would fade with time, but Peter knew he'd never forget the look of Adam's mangled skin. He planned to kiss each inch every night to remind him of how close he'd come to losing the most important person in his life.

Scooping up the bottle, Peter walked around the bed and held out both hands. "Take a pill. You need it." His tone left no room for argument, and the fact that Adam accepted the water and the medicine without even so much as a huff let Peter know how badly the man was hurting.

Peter took the glass when Adam was through and placed it on the nightstand, then stripped and climbed into bed. The two lay on their sides, facing each other in the silent, dark room. It was the first time since the accident they'd had the luxury of really stretching their legs, of being close enough to share the same breath, not to mention being free from interruptions. No nurses waking Adam at all hours to take his temperature or blood pressure, no lab tech to whisk Adam away for another test or to draw more blood, no trays being delivered with bland, bordering-on-barely-edible food. They were blessedly alone. So much had changed since the last time they'd been in bed together like this. The one thing that hadn't changed was how Peter's body responded to being so close to his naked lover. Adam was skinnier and paler than normal, but he was still able to make Peter hard doing nothing beyond just breathing.

Tentatively, Peter reached out and skimmed his fingers down Adam's slightly stubbled cheek, along his arm and over his chest, stopping so he could feel the comforting beat of Adam's heart beneath his fingertips. His cock swelled, aching, his breath becoming more choppy and erratic with every inch of skin his fingers traversed. "Are you really okay?" Peter whispered, the words almost harsh in the quiet of their bedroom.

Adam's eyes were heavy with exhaustion and pain, though the drugs were beginning to take effect. He nodded and tried to give Peter a smile, which wound up looking more like a grimace. Peter scooted closer, needing to touch as much of Adam as he could, and wished he could cover Adam's body with his own like a blanket without causing him pain. He settled for sliding his legs between Adam's longer, thinner ones and laid his hand on Adam's hip, molding it around the bone that protruded more than it should. Peter immediately found the sensitive skin just inside with his thumb, tracing circles over and over. "Kiss me?" Adam mumbled. Peter didn't move for a moment, wondering what in the world would make Adam think he needed to ask, but it certainly wasn't a request he'd deny.

Sliding his hand up Adam's side, Peter took his time, peppering Adam's face with soft, barely-there kisses—both eyelids, the tip of Adam's nose, both cheeks—before sweeping his closed mouth across Adam's chapped lips. Peter cupped the back of Adam's head and found Adam's lips again. This time he was more insistent—licking, nipping—until Adam opened his mouth and invited him in. Peter didn't wait; instead, he invaded Adam's mouth, using his tongue to kiss him deep and slow. Adam groaned and arched his back, rubbing his cock against Peter's. Hot sparks shot up Peter's spine, and he growled. It had been so long since they'd made love, and it would still take a little time before Adam would be healed enough to have sex.

"Peter," Adam sighed sleepily, almost dreamily. "I wanted that to be the last thing I felt before I went to sleep. Maybe now I won't have bad dreams." He slurred, but Peter heard and understood him perfectly.

"I'll be right here if you need me, babe. I won't let anything happen," Peter vowed, fighting back the urge to bury his face in Adam's neck and cry.

Adam burrowed, finding a comfortable position against Peter's body. "You'll always be here. It says so on my arm."

Minutes later, Adam's quiet, even breaths filled the room. Peter lay beside him, unwilling to close his eyes until he was sure Adam would sleep for a few uninterrupted hours.

It was days later before Adam felt up to doing much besides sleeping. Peter had managed to arrange his schedule for more time off, which really didn't take a lot of effort considering all the attention and publicity surrounding Adam's accident and subsequent, albeit not particularly wanted, fifteen minutes in the spotlight. The sports channels had only just stopped using the infamous sound bite during every show. The two hadn't even left the apartment since Adam had been released from the hospital. Between takeout, a few helpful friends, and the pharmacy delivery service, there hadn't been a reason to go out.

"Hey," Adam called out to Peter, hobbling from the bathroom to the bed. He tried not to use the crutches at home; he hated them.

Peter poked his head in the door and glared as Adam hopped on his good leg, but Peter wisely kept his mouth shut. There'd been enough arguments over the crutches, and he didn't feel up to another. Adam was as stubborn as a mule, and reminding him that he was supposed to use them, even from the bathroom to the bed, was a waste of breath.

Arching an eyebrow, Peter crossed his arms, waiting.

Adam rolled his eyes at his boyfriend's nonverbal reprimand and held up two shirts, smirking knowingly as he did so. "Which one?"

The corners of Peter's mouth lifted slightly, even though he tried really hard to keep a straight face. Of course the little shit *had* to pick his favorite. Giving in gracefully, because there was no reason not to, he pointed to the faded, light-blue polo in Adam's right hand. The collar was slightly frayed, but the color looked absolutely lethal on Adam. The blue brought out Adam's eyes and highlighted his tanned skin, and the cotton stretched across his body in all the right places. Seeing Adam in that shirt always made Peter want to do very dirty things to his very sexy boyfriend—a fact Adam was very well aware of, judging by the glint of mischief in his sky-blue eyes.

"This old thing?" Adam laughed as he waved it back and forth. He tossed the other shirt onto the bed and clumsily tried to balance himself on one leg while he pulled the polo over his head. His arms got twisted in the sleeves, and he grunted as he struggled. Warm, strong hands gripped his sides, steadying him.

"You know, this would be much easier if you'd just ask for help," Peter growled in his ear once Adam was able to get the shirt over his head.

Adam sagged against Peter's chest, out of breath from the exertion. "I know," he admitted, albeit grudgingly. "I hate not being able to do even the simple shit like getting dressed by myself."

"Babe," Peter started, trying not to sound frustrated, though he knew he did. He couldn't help it; he *was* frustrated. "The longer you're too stubborn to use the crutches and continue to put weight on your foot without your brace on, the longer it's going to be until you can get rid of them. I know it sucks, but damn it, you need to listen to me. Or at least to the doctor."

Properly chastised and feeling pretty guilty for whining and being a brat, Adam wrapped his arms around Peter's neck. He leaned into Peter, trusting his boyfriend to keep him upright. Most of Adam's aches and pains had disappeared. Every now and then he'd move wrong, and his body would let him know; except for the ribs, his head, and right knee, everything was mostly back to normal. There was still an ugly purplish-brown bruise on his hip from landing on the asphalt after being flung into the air and a shiny pink scar on his left cheek, both of which made him cringe when he looked at himself in the mirror. He knew he was lucky, damn lucky, to be alive. There wasn't any permanent damage other than a few new scars, so really, whining was rather pathetic.

Adam turned his head and placed a gentle kiss against Peter's jaw. "Thank you," he said simply. The words encompassed so much more than just thanking Peter for helping him get dressed.

Peter chuckled and kissed the side of Adam's head. "No thanks needed." His response was light and breezy, but Adam knew by the little catch in Peter's voice that his words had a double meaning as well.

They stood silently for a few moments longer, until Adam's knee began to throb. "I need to sit," Adam quietly told Peter and gratefully accepted his help to the side of the bed.

Peter started to step away but was stopped when Adam grasped his fingers. "Do you think we can grab some lunch after we're done at the doctor's? I'm going stir-crazy, and I'm dying for some sushi. I mean, we can bring it home if you don't want to be out in public with, uh, me..." Adam trailed off.

Feeling as though he'd been gutted, Peter wrapped an arm around his stomach. He turned his hand and gripped Adam's so tightly his knuckles turned white. "Adam," he started and had to pause for a calming breath. "I

promised you no more hiding or allowing others to think we're less than we are, and I meant it."

"I know. I believe you. I do. I just wanted to make sure you were still okay with it. We haven't really talked about everything. I mean it's kind of a big deal." Adam shrugged his shoulders and looked away. Kind of a big deal—an understatement if there ever was one.

Adam curled his fingers into the comforter that was thrown haphazardly over the bed and stared at the floor. They'd both been walking on eggshells since Adam woke up in the hospital two days after the accident, disoriented and confused. Peter's pale and haunted face was the first thing Adam had seen when he'd opened his eyes. Between the nurses and the many visitors always stopping by, there hadn't been any time for them to talk about everything. There was a lot to discuss.

Strong fingers squeezed Adam's chin and tipped his head back. "I'm so sorry," Peter choked and swallowed past the thick ball of emotion lodged in his throat. Keeping his fingers beneath Adam's chin and their other hands clasped, Peter leaned down and gave Adam a desperate, punishing kiss. He sucked Adam's tongue into his mouth so hard his cheeks hollowed, and continued the kiss until his chest burned.

"I love you. So fucking much," Peter said, panting, as he rested his forehead against Adam's and closed his eyes.

Peter's heart hammered behind his ribcage. He had so much making up to do to Adam. Leaning forward, Peter let his head rest more heavily. Peter sighed as Adam's strong fingers slid through his hair.

"I love you, too," Adam replied softly.

The two stayed that way, quiet, absorbing the moment, until Peter glanced at Adam's watch. "Damn, we need to get moving if we're going to make it to your appointment on time."

Peter kissed the top of Adam's head and asked, "Can you finish up without me? I need to change and pull the car around front."

Adam nodded and watched Peter walk out of the room. His stomach was in knots, and it wasn't because of the impending visit to the doctor. Finally going out with Peter for the first time, here in their hometown, without having to watch their every move or pretend to be friends and not lovers, was exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure. Adam hoped that Peter was as prepared as he insisted he was, for both their sakes.

He managed to slide his feet into his favorite pair of red Vans without busting his ass and snarled as he situated the crutches under his arms. He really did hate the fucking things. By the time he made it to the front door, he was sweating; he could feel it in the small of his back and along his hairline. For a moment, he wondered if it wouldn't be better to come home after going to the orthopedist. He knew, however, that there were issues that still needed to be addressed—most importantly, how to move forward now that they weren't exactly off the grid any longer—and both had sidestepped the landmines long enough.

Lunch out, where they weren't confined to the condo, would give them the perfect opportunity to talk.

Peter had the car parked along the curb in front when Adam opened the door. Adam gritted his teeth as he began to slowly shuffle down the sidewalk. The sun was shining. Cool air sent goose bumps up his arms and a shiver down his spine when a gentle breeze blew, chilling his slightly damp skin. Fluffy white clouds dotted the sky above, like dollops of whipped cream strewn across a brilliant cobalt sky. He watched as Peter got out and walked around the front of the car, Peter's eyes hidden behind dark designer sunglasses. Adam froze in place as he gazed at Peter, mesmerized by his drop-dead gorgeous boyfriend.

"Babe?" Peter called out as he leaned against the car, arms loose by his side and ankles crossed, waiting to open the door for Adam. "You need help?"

Jerking his head to clear it, Adam said, "Nah, I got it."

"We're going be late, and traffic will get heavier if we don't get a move on. Shake a leg, huh?"

"You're really fucking funny," Adam snapped, glaring at Peter.

Chuckling, Peter was totally unfazed by his grouchy lover. He figured there'd be a few more flashes of anger before the day was through. It made him smile, though he turned his head so Adam wouldn't see. It meant Adam was almost back to normal.

Eyes locked on his boyfriend, Adam stared as Peter fluidly pushed off the car and took two long strides, stopping right in front of him. Without saying a word, Peter reached out. He took Adam's head in his hands, held him still, and proceeded to kiss him, mouths fused, tongues working, until they were both dizzy.

Peter brushed the pad of his thumb across Adam's slightly swollen, shiny bottom lip. "You look so fucking hot," Peter growled. "That damn shirt," he said as he shook his head and turned to open the door for Adam.

Adam was glued to the sidewalk, struck totally stupid. Peter had never, *ever*, kissed him out in public like that before. And not just in public, but right there, in front of all the neighbors and anyone else who happened to be driving by.

Holy shit.

Adam teetered on his crutches while his heart tried to beat its way out of his chest. His body was electrified, thrumming with happiness and surprise, not to mention a healthy dose of lust that curled low in his stomach. He'd give anything to be able to strut over to Peter, drag him back into the house, and proceed to ravage his hot boyfriend for hours.

He took a deep breath and groaned, uncomfortable and more than a little pissed off. Adam's dick was rock hard and nudged the zipper of his jeans. His eyes flicked down and took in the bulky brace and gleaming crutches, and he muttered an emphatic, "Fucking hell." He was in no condition to do any ravaging of any kind. It sucked balls.

"Come on. Let's go," Peter huffed, concerned that maybe Adam wasn't up for such displays of affection out in public quite yet.

Nodding, Adam slowly took the last few steps before he stopped in front of the car. He grinned at Peter, lips still tingling from the kiss moments ago, and

leaned forward just enough to press his mouth to Peter's ear. "In case you were wondering, feel free to kiss me like that anytime you want."

Peter gulped and laughed at the same time, and a ridiculous sound bubbled up out of his throat. "In you go, Hopalong." He waved Adam inside the car.

The light tone settled the butterflies in Adam's stomach. He took one last deep breath as he got situated in the front seat and pulled the seat belt over his shoulder. "Damn," he swore when he moved and felt a sharp jolt in his tender side.

"What's wrong?" Peter questioned, sliding into the driver's seat. He reached out and covered the hand that Adam had pressed against his ribs.

"Just twisted wrong. Christ," Adam snapped and threw back his head. "I'm so fucking tired of this shit."

Peter squeezed Adam's hand before he pulled back, starting the car. He kept quiet. Placating Adam would do nothing but get his ass chewed, and Peter was in too good of a mood to let anything ruin it.

"Are you still feeling like sushi?" Peter asked once they were underway and it appeared Adam had calmed down.

"Yes. And some strawberry frozen yogurt for dessert."

Peter chuckled, loving the excitement in Adam's voice. "Anything you want." He meant it, too. He'd been feeling as cooped-up as Adam, unused to having so much unstructured time, and he was really looking forward to spending a few hours out of the condo.

Adam turned his head and his gaze settled on his boyfriend. He took in the day-old scruff along Peter's jaw, noting the way the sun highlighted barelythere hints of red mixed with the dark brown. The way Peter's hair curled slightly behind his ear in a perfect swirl. How the muscles of Peter's forearms flexed as he worked the steering wheel. Adam's pulse raced. He was hot all over, and he shifted in his seat, trying to relieve some of the pressure between his legs. "Well, what I want, I can't have," he mumbled.

Cutting his eyes sideways for just a moment, because there was no way Peter could let that comment go by without a response, Peter tucked his chin and looked at Adam over his sunglasses. His voice lowered until it was little more than a purr. "You can have whatever the hell you want once we get home."

Peter's voice, smooth and sultry, but with just a trace of a bite, like a piece of rich, dark, red chili chocolate, sent a shiver down Adam's spine. Immediately, images flickered in Adam's mind. Nights spent in bed, Peter looming over him, staring into his eyes as Peter entered him, their eyes locked as the burn turned to pleasure with every slow, measured thrust. He relived inching down Peter's body, letting his tongue paint his lover from collarbone to hip while his fingers danced over every dip and well-defined muscle of Peter's stomach and thighs. Quiet mornings spent in the shower merely touching, holding one another, whispering softly as the warm water cascaded over them, in constant contact with mouths and hands until the water ran cold.

The car stopped at a red light, and Adam still hadn't said a word. He couldn't. Tongue-tied and turned on beyond belief, it was all he could do to continue to breathe, though even that was pretty damn hard.

"Peter," Adam whispered when he was finally able to speak. He rubbed his hands up and down his jeans, just to do something with them because, really, all he wanted to do was crawl over into Peter's lap and grind his aching cock against Peter's—healing ribs and blown-out knee be damned.

Peter slid his sunglasses down his nose and turned his head. He winked. "It's the shirt, babe. Gets me every single time. You know that."

They laughed, lightening the mood, and the rest of the trip to the doctor's office passed quickly. Peter managed to find a parking spot relatively close to the door, so the walk wasn't unbearable. However, Adam acted like he was being forced to run barefoot across hot coals, cursing and glaring at everyone that passed by. He really hated the crutches.

Holding the door open, Peter rolled his eyes as Adam shuffled past him into the doctor's office.

"Go sit before you bite someone's head off, and I'll get you checked in," Peter scolded.

Adam fell onto a sofa with a heavy thump. His knee ached beneath the heavy brace, and his temple throbbed with the beginnings of a killer headache. The whole left side of his torso felt battered and bruised from the drive and the walk from the car. He was exhausted. It frustrated him to no end that he could still do so little before his body became fatigued. He definitely wasn't used to being so immobile and limited. To say he made a piss-poor patient was being generous.

He leaned his head back against the wall. Plush, slate-gray carpet and smoke-colored walls lent a calming atmosphere to the waiting room, and the supple black leather of the sofa helped the time pass comfortably. The muted jazz wafting from hidden speakers made it difficult for Adam to stay awake. He floated, half-asleep, and smiled when warm, familiar fingers slid between his.

"The receptionist said it should only be a few minutes until you can go back," Peter said softly.

Adam nodded and squeezed Peter's hand, but kept his eyes closed. Peter didn't say anything further, and Adam appreciated the silence. Having Peter beside him soothed him in a way nothing else did. Just as he was about to succumb to sleep, Adam's name was called.

Peter patted his knee and stood. "Come on. Let's get this over with so we can go eat. I'm starving."

Two hours later, Adam and Peter were seated in a quiet corner of their favorite sushi restaurant. It was past the lunch rush so the place was mostly empty, which suited both just fine. A few tables over a busboy cleared a table, a waitress was busy refilling the soy sauce bottles in a booth in the back, and toward the front door the hostess was folding crimson napkins. Peter picked at the label of his Sapporo while Adam watched, somewhat envious. Having a drink at home, at night, when he could collapse into bed afterward was one thing, but there was no way he was up for even so much as a beer during the day while he was still taking painkillers. Adam took a sip of his iced green tea and stretched his sore leg beneath the table, sighing as he slouched down in his chair to get more comfortable. The heavy brace on his knee was cumbersome, and Adam loathed wearing it.

"So, it wasn't all terrible news," Peter said after the silence dragged on for a few more moments.

Adam ran a hand through his hair and shrugged his shoulders. "I guess. The PT is going to suck ass, though."

Peter agreed. "No doubt, but at least you'll be up and moving around. It's not much, but it's better than sitting around the condo all day."

Scowling, Adam huffed, thinking over what the orthopedist had told him earlier. "Three fucking months until I can jog again, not even run but jog. Damn." Just the thought of being restricted that way, for that long, was enough to set Adam's teeth on edge.

Being a sports analyst who covered most professional sports for one of the major television networks, Peter knew a thing or ten about knee injuries. He'd seen more than he cared to count, and he knew how serious they could be. One like Adam's, where the "big three" —ACL, MCL, and meniscus— were damaged, required rehab and physical therapy that would be intense and painful. For someone as athletic as Adam, who ran religiously, hiked ten miles as if it were a casual stroll, and played basketball like the Tasmanian Devil, it was going to be torture to have to wait so long until his body could be pushed and punished.

Peter was not looking forward to the cursing, raging, and crying that were certain to come up from time to time as Adam worked to get his body back in shape, but he knew it was all a part of the process.

"I'm sorry," Peter said, reaching out to cover Adam's hand with his own. "You know I'll be with you every step of the way."

Adam's breath caught in his throat. The gesture was simple, but one Peter never would have dared to attempt before the accident. Adam stared at their hands as they rested on the shiny black tabletop. He loved Peter's hands. They were big, slightly larger than his. Smooth, though there was a scar across the palm of his right hand—an accident during Peter's skateboard/extreme sports phase in high school—that Adam traced over and over again every night in

bed before they fell asleep. Peter had long, strong fingers with blunt ends and perfectly shaped fingernails. It wasn't an odd thing for Adam to daydream about Peter's hands and fingers, about how they touched and teased and felt so good on his skin.

Adam always wanted Peter's touch. He craved it, yearned for it, *needed* it, which meant that the long days while Peter was away working were always especially difficult. Lately, in the weeks before the accident, the touches had been less frequent, fleeting, and given more out of habit than want. Adam missed, quite deeply, the way his body would light up like a Christmas tree with simply the ghost of Peter's fingertip on the inside of his arm or across his shoulders. Looking back, Adam recognized that their relationship was considerably more fragile than either realized. It wasn't until he'd woken up in the hospital that he was able to appreciate just how fragile.

"Babe?" Peter urged softly when Adam had grown quiet, rubbing his thumb in a circle on the back of Adam's hand.

"I'd been so scared," Adam whispered haltingly, as though he didn't want to say the words but they were going to come out anyway.

Peter sucked in a sharp breath. "What? Why? What are you talking about?"

Peter's eyes darted around Adam's face. Adam's mouth was drawn into a tight line, the corners pinched. His nostrils flared as he slowly inhaled deep breath after deep breath. And his boyfriend's eyes? They stopped Peter's heart. Normally so warm and full of sparkle, with just a hint of naughtiness, now they were cold. Worse than that, though, was that Adam looked lost. So fucking lost and unsure.

The waitress arrived with their food, setting down plates of elegantly wrapped sushi on the table. The food was picture-perfect, gorgeous and mouthwatering, except the thought of eating right then made Peter's stomach roil.

"Thank you. It looks delicious," Adam told the server when she asked if everything looked okay. Adam's voice was hoarse. It wavered, and the sound filled Peter's veins with ice. Tentacles of doubt and panic slithered beneath Peter's skin, filling every crevice, every dark, hidden part buried deep inside. The waitress hovered, which made Peter grind his teeth. *Couldn't she see that he was about to lose his mind?* He must have made some sound in the back of his throat, because she jumped and her eyebrows crawled up her forehead. With one last furtive look at first Peter and then Adam, she scurried off like a scared rabbit.

Neither man moved. Long, uncomfortable moments passed while the clank of glasses against the lacquered tabletops and the hushed conversations between the few patrons in the restaurant floated in the air around them. Peter couldn't remember a time he'd ever been so afraid to speak, to even take a breath or reach out and touch Adam like his mind was screaming at him to do. Peter knew that whatever Adam was scared of, it wasn't anything he was prepared to hear. He quickly catalogued the past few weeks, all the images like a flip book, until a clear picture formed, and it wasn't one that would cushion the blow he was almost positive was coming.

"Ad... Adam?" Peter stuttered.

Across the table, Adam looked down at his plate but he shook his head, saying nothing. Peter watched as Adam's shoulders bunched, his hands curling into fists beside his plate then releasing over and over. The rustle of Adam's jeans as he jerked his good knee up and down, a telltale sign that Adam was working himself up to saying whatever was bothering him so badly. After being together so long, Peter was well versed in how his boyfriend operated. Little things—Peter drinking the last of the orange juice and not replacing it, erasing the latest episode of Game of Thrones to record Top Chef instead, leaving his wet towel on the floor of the bathroom—were met with snarky comments or a pointed look. Bigger things took Adam longer to talk about. Normally Peter could tell when something was bothering Adam. He'd get quiet, his temper quicker, he'd fidget until Peter would ask what was wrong, and Adam would word-vomit in one long rant everything he'd been holding inside. Sometimes they argued afterward, sometimes not, but any argument was short-lived—and make-up sex, whether truly warranted or not, always followed.

But this—sitting, waiting, wondering—was new territory. Peter pushed his food around his plate, too scared to eat. Seconds ticked by, the air practically suffocating them with whatever was to come.

Adam cleared his throat, the sound abrasive and harsh. Peter held his breath, clutching the unused chopsticks in his hand so tightly he was surprised they didn't snap. "I'd felt so alone before the accident." Adam spoke in an even tone, almost devoid of all emotion, and that hurt Peter more acutely than if Adam had screamed the words. "You'd been gone so much and I was so fucking tired of hiding, Peter. So tired. It had gotten so hard..." He took a big gulping breath, and Peter's eyes burned. "We'd had that terrible fight. I was pissed, you were upset, and everything felt so up in the air with us."

"I thought, I mean I know it was hard, but I thought you'd understood," Peter trailed off before clamping his mouth shut. "Never mind." He waved the words away, hoping at the same time to wave away the cold ball of unease swirling around in his gut. "I'm here. Now everyone knows who you are to me, how much you mean to me. None of that matters anymore."

Adam snorted, and the anxiety inside Peter multiplied tenfold. Again, all the recent trips from one football game to the next, an assignment that took him to Florida for a four-day PGA event and then all the way back to California for an MLS game, played out in his mind. It had been an exceptionally busy month. There hadn't been much time to come back to Denver, and Adam's few trips to meet him had been frantic, bordering on desperate, now that Peter really examined them. He'd known Adam was growing frustrated, but he hadn't known how to fix it, and there really hadn't been any time to have the heart-to-heart Peter had known was necessary.

Witnessing Adam's near breakdown, Peter realized how blind he'd been.

Peter stared at Adam, dread and guilt churning in his stomach as if they were in a blender. He felt sick, and it was hard to breathe. His hands shook, sweat slid down his spine, and the blood in his veins ran cold. Heart splintering apart, Peter swallowed the bile bubbling up his throat and whispered hoarsely, "I almost lost you, didn't I?"

Adam said nothing. For a few interminable moments, Peter's world stopped. Peter swayed, dizzy and nauseated. "I did. You were going to leave me. Oh, God," he gasped.

It took a few beats for Adam's brain to catch up with Peter's words. He opened his mouth to tell Peter he was wrong, crazy for thinking that, but quickly closed it, unable to answer. Another few seconds passed before he was able to meet Peter's devastated eyes. "I don't know," he admitted.

"Adam," Peter choked. "Why?"

Adam looked at Peter, not really seeing him, lost in thought as he remembered.

A little over two weeks ago...

"What do you mean you're not coming home tomorrow?" Adam barked at Peter, squeezing his cell phone so tightly he was afraid he'd crack the screen.

Peter sighed on the other end, and Adam gritted his teeth, glaring even though Peter couldn't see. "Babe, I have to fill in for the Seahawks game. You know I can't say no," Peter told Adam.

"Bullshit. You *won't* say no. Big fucking difference," Adam spat. "This is getting really fucking old, Peter."

"It's not like I'm going to be partying in Vegas. I'm working." Adam heard Peter breathe heavily, like he was trying to calm down. Instead of doing the same, Adam's anger built and his body vibrated. Another beat, then Peter started to say, "You know, you can always—"

"Fuck that. No. I've got work to do this week. Cam has two new websites for me to work on and I'm behind on the others, thanks to the trip to Chicago last week. I need to stay home." Adam paced back and forth in front of the sofa, growing more agitated with every step.

"Adam," Peter countered slowly, testing.

"What?"

There was an uncomfortable silence. Adam refused to budge. He was pissed off and tired of always being the one who gave and gave. He wasn't giving in this time.

"What do you want me to do? Do you want me to come home? I can try to find someone to take my place if that's what it'll take to get you to stop pouting," Peter replied, annoyance tinting every word.

Adam saw red.

"You know what, Peter? Kiss my ass. I'm not pouting. What I am is sick and fucking tired of always coming to you. Of only being with you when it's convenient for *you*." Adam's voice rose, shaking with rage and all the things he'd been holding inside. He couldn't stop. "Fuck whatever I have going on. If I want to see you, to be with you, I always have to go to *you*! And why? Because of your fucking job and the fact that it always comes first. Because you're too fucking scared of anyone at work finding out you have a boyfriend! A boyfriend..." He gulped in a breath of air that made his chest burn, or maybe that was the crushing combination of anger and hurt, "that you won't even hold hands with when we go to the goddamn grocery store. I'm tired of it. So fucking tired."

Sweat pooled under Adam's arms, dripping down his sides, and he couldn't catch his breath. The arm that hung by his side tingled, and he clenched his fingers so tight he could feel his fingernails dig into his skin. His pulse roared in his ears.

The words *fuck you* were on the tip of his tongue, but he forced them back down his tight throat.

"Jesus, babe," Peter said hoarsely.

Adam squeezed his eyes shut and tried to calm his thundering heart. He was done. He knew if they kept talking he'd wind up saying something he'd regret. "Look, I can't talk to you right now. I'll call you later." He didn't give Peter a chance to respond before hanging up.

"Fuck," Adam howled and threw his phone on the couch. He stood still, his chest heaving. "God fucking damn it," he hissed.

The phone on the sofa buzzed with an incoming call. He glared at it, watching the picture of him and Peter light up the screen. He didn't move to answer. The cell buzzed again, and still, he didn't answer. The next time, it vibrated with an incoming text message.

"Asshole," Adam mumbled, still glaring.

Finally, the phone was silent. Adam flung himself onto the sofa, turned off the ringer, and tossed it onto the coffee table without even looking at the text. Even if Peter were calling to do some very necessary groveling, Adam was in no mood to hear it—and he damn well didn't need to hear more of Peter's condescending remarks.

He ran the previous few minutes back through his mind, his stomach twisting painfully. *Jesus*. While he wasn't necessarily sorry for what he'd said, he was sorry for blindsiding Peter the way he knew he did. He'd known for weeks, probably more like a month or so, that he and Peter had needed to talk. All the time apart, the quick, secretive visits when Peter would slink into town then leave before anyone knew he was home, and the exhausting travel week after week was taking its toll.

They were drifting apart.

Adam rubbed his chest, right above his heart, as if it would ease the ache. Tipping his head, he stared up at the ceiling. Thoughts and images flickered in his mind. He was madly in love with Peter, that hadn't changed; in fact, it had only grown stronger. It was the hiding and the pretending that were eating away at his soul.

Long, quiet minutes passed as his thoughts bounced like marbles dropped onto concrete. Scattered and jumbled, going every which way, there wasn't one he could hold onto long enough to dissect. He didn't even attempt to try.

A sharp, staccato knock on the door made Adam jump. He groaned and scowled as the next knock was louder, quicker. Only one person ever knocked on his door that way.

"Adam, I know you're in there, so you might as well let me in. I'll just use my key if you don't," came the annoyed, slightly panicked voice of his best friend. He debated for about thirty seconds the ramifications of not opening the door, and decided that the punishment wasn't worth it.

Just as he was about to reach for the doorknob, another knock. "I'm coming. Damn." He shouted before yanking the door open and staring into the bright green eyes of a very feisty female.

"What's going on? Why aren't you answering your phone?" Cami fired at him as she shoved him out of the way and stomped inside. "Peter sent me a text thirty minutes ago and told me I had to come over here."

Adam grunted derisively and rolled his eyes. "What? Did he tell you to check and make sure I wasn't pouting?"

She stared at him a moment, then blinked slowly. "Why would he think you'd be pouting?"

"Nothing. Never mind." Adam turned to walk to the kitchen.

"Where are you going? What's wrong?"

"I'm getting a beer, do you want one?" Adam asked, ignoring her questions. He grabbed two beers, thinking if she didn't want it, he sure as hell would need more than one anyway, and turned around.

Cami stood in front of him, her hands on her hips and her mouth twisted, waiting for the answers he didn't want to give. He'd give them, though. He always did.

"Adam," she sighed, her voice softer. "What happened? You look like shit."

He looked down, eyes glued to the floor. "We had a fight. It's not a big deal," he lied.

Of course she knew he was full of shit. "Come on. You're talking," she plucked a beer from his hand, "and I'm drinking."

She manhandled him down onto the couch, kicked her shoes off, got comfortable, and plunked her feet in his lap. "Spill it, AJ."

Snorting at the awful nickname, he poked her foot, smiling when she squealed. Her feet had always been ticklish, a fact he had used to his advantage on many occasions during their almost seven-year friendship. She was the only person he ever allowed to use his middle name, Juddson, and only the initial at that. As his assistant, she was invaluable. More than that, though, she was his rock. She was the one person, other than Peter, he knew he could always count on.

Adam took a swig of his beer and said, "I had a fight with Peter. He's not coming home tomorrow, and I got pissed."

Cami waited to see if Adam offered any more information, and when none was forthcoming, she kicked his leg. "And? I know it sucks he's not coming home tomorrow like he said, but it's not like you to get so upset over something you know he can't change."

He waited, not wanting to talk about what was really bothering him, but needing so badly to get it off his chest. It had been building for weeks, longer even, and he'd been so afraid to bring up his concerns with Peter. With Peter's schedule, there was never a good time, but Adam knew that it was mostly fear that kept him from saying anything. Adam didn't know how to fix the distance between them. Peter had worked so hard to get to this point in his career, and the future for him was wide open. Adam was proud of him and would never want to get in the way of Peter's goal. It was just getting harder and harder to watch from the sidelines instead of being by Peter's side.

"I'm losing him," Adam said, the words difficult and bitter in his mouth. Hearing them out loud was like a sledgehammer to his sternum, stealing his breath and sending shards of pain through his body.

"AJ," Cami said slowly, reaching out to take his hand. She turned his hand over and let her fingers trace the lines of his palm, saying nothing as she gathered her thoughts. "You know that's not true, no matter how it seems. Why do you think that? Has he said something?"

Adam shook his head but said nothing else. Cami's soft, familiar touch soothed the jagged edges of his anger, and he took a deep breath. He turned, looking at her with tired, pained eyes. "What will I do if he leaves me? The two of you are all I have." That wasn't quite the truth, but that's the way it certainly felt most days. His dad was gone, he had no brothers or sisters, and his mom, well, she might as well live on the other side of the world for as often as they had contact. He could go weeks, sometimes longer than a month, between phone calls to his mother. She and his stepdad lived in Durango, about eight hours away from Denver. Thankfully, they spent very little time in the state; instead, they wintered in Florida and travelled a good deal of the time. If they saw each other more than twice a year, it was rare.

They weren't a close family, which was probably for the best. Adam had known he was different from a very young age—fourteen, and a freshman in high school. Standing in the locker room after lacrosse practice with naked guys everywhere, Adam knew when his heart started to race and he had to hold his plain white towel in front of him to hide his growing hard-on that the feelings and desires pulsing inside of him made him unlike his friends. It took him a while to use the word gay to describe himself. Time spent surfing the internet and prowling message boards and chat rooms, of watching gay porn beneath his blankets late at night with the sound turned down low enough that no one would hear, and one very long, life-changing conversation with a very intuitive and pushy guidance counselor, and Adam's life was irrevocably altered. Realizing and understanding he was gay weren't quick or easy processes. A stepfather who refused to talk about it, and a mother who took every opportunity to tell him that liking boys was wrong, made things even more difficult once he came out.

He tried dating while in high school, not an easy task when you were a varsity athlete. Adam was the star attacker on his school's lacrosse team, a four-year starter. He was tall and well-built, fast and agile, and with his light-brown hair, brilliant blue eyes, and killer smile, he could have had his pick of any girl in the school—except he much preferred bulging muscles and stubbled jaws to boobs and fake-baked skin. He didn't make a habit of announcing his preference for cock over pussy, but he didn't hide it either, and that made him a target, as well as somewhat unapproachable for other boys who weren't blessed with Adam's confidence and jock status. It wasn't until Adam got to college, deciding to stay local and go to the University of Denver

versus heading to any of the number of schools that offered him a scholarship, that he really spread his wings.

College was a whole different world for Adam. A sea of beautiful boys just itching to get their freak on, or at least get their first sexual experience under their belt, and Adam was more than willing to be the one who showed them the way. He had one-night stands, he had flings that lasted a few weeks, and he even had steady boyfriends from time to time. If a guy interested him, if there was chemistry, Adam was all for giving anyone a try. The first two years of college flew by. With lacrosse games and practice, his coursework, and partying, Adam was having the time of his life. He met Cami in one of his web design classes during his sophomore year. They'd been paired as partners for a project, and Adam knew they would be best friends for life when Cami looked him over from head to foot and said, "Don't make me want to kill you. You're too pretty to die young."

They were pretty much inseparable from that point on. Once they were introduced, they realized they'd had two other classes together, but due to Adam's tendency to arrive late and his preference for sitting in the back of the lecture hall, they'd never crossed paths. They studied together, ate lunch together, and partied together on the weekends—an interesting endeavor in itself, since they tended to be attracted to the same type of guy. Cami was the first person he turned to his junior year after catching his boyfriend of almost a year, Nathan, balls deep inside a body with probably the most perfect tits Adam ever had the misfortune of seeing. And it was Adam's lap Cami spent an entire weekend curled up on when her parents were killed in a car accident shortly before her college graduation.

They were best friends, closer than most brothers and sisters, and there was no one alive, including Peter, who knew Adam as well as Cami. So Adam knew, sitting there on the sofa together like they'd done a thousand times before, there was no way he'd not tell Cami everything. They just didn't work that way.

"Hey," Cami tugged on his hand to get his attention since he'd obviously spaced out. "First, he's not leaving you. And second, you will never, ever lose me. BFFL, remember?" Adam couldn't help but snicker and roll his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, best friends for life. Like that doesn't make me sound like the gayest gay dude around." He took a drink of his beer, and then turned to grin at her.

"No, what would make you sound that way is if you asked if we could go buy those cheesy heart necklaces where you get half and I get half. Oh wait," she squealed dramatically, adding a girly clap. "You already did that!"

"That was totally a joke, Cam." He nudged her foot with the bottom of his beer bottle. "Besides, you can't tell me you don't secretly take it out and wear it."

Her cheeks flushed pink, and Adam snorted. "Busted!" he laughed, but it died as quickly as it came.

"Come on. It's me, what else is it?" Cami urged softly, turning her body so she could lay her head on his shoulder.

Shifting, Adam slouched down enough to throw his arm around Cami's shoulder and lay his head on the back of the sofa. "It's just everything. He's gone all the time, and yeah, I get to see him when we meet between assignments if he can't come home, but it's not the same. It's exhausting." Adam sighed and squeezed her arm. "This is home, you know? Our life is here. Our house, my job, you, our friends, Peter's family. It's not like no one knows Peter's gay, he just hides it at work and out in public. I fucking hate the pretending and the hiding from the world." His words slowed as he admitted guiltily, "It's gotten to the point where I resent him for making me do it, Cam."

"Oh, Adam," Cami comforted. "Why haven't you said anything to Peter? He needs to know how you feel."

Adam shrugged. "When am I supposed to talk to him? He's gone all the fucking time. It's football season, so between filling in for college games and then covering the NFL, plus all the other things they keep sending him to, I hardly ever see him." He winced, hating that he sounded so whiny and needy, but damn, he was just over it all. "Sure it was fun at first, exciting to fly all over the country, staying in hotel rooms and eating room service, fucking all night in city after city, but it's sure as hell not fun anymore. Now it just pisses

me off." He was on a roll, the words tumbling out, just like he knew they would. "We can't go out here like a normal couple because everyone knows who he is, and God forbid someone sees him on a date with a guy and word got back to the network. We can't go out when we're out of town because you never know who's watching. I'm so tired of being treated like I'm a dirty secret," he whispered painfully, the words burning his throat as if they were coated in acid.

He ran his fingers through Cami's curly red hair while he tried to get a handle on his careening emotions. The bitter taste of his frustration curdled his stomach, but he was relieved to finally give voice to the feeling that bothered him more than anything else. He'd been out of the closet for a long time, he was never really in it to begin with, and he despised being made to feel like what he felt for Peter was wrong. That feeling had manifested itself into resentment of Peter, a small kernel that had steadily grown and grown until now Adam wasn't sure what that meant for their future. Not knowing terrified him.

"When he is home, all we do is stay in bed and avoid all the things we both know we need to talk about." He laughed, but it was hollow. "We've never had a problem with sex, but it's not going to fix what's going on between us." Adam knew that much. The gap between them would only continue to grow wider the longer their problems went unresolved.

Cami didn't say anything for long minutes, not that Adam was surprised. She always needed time to process and analyze before she tackled an issue; it was one of the reasons their friendship, not to mention their business, worked so well. She was the thinker. Adam was the spontaneous one, prone to go by what felt right rather than what was most logical. Her need to plan and look at something from all sides drove him crazy, and more than once his fly-by-theseat-of-his-pants approach to most everything drove her to drink. They were perfect for each other.

"You know," Cami began quietly, "you really just need to talk to him when he comes home." She held her hand up when Adam opened his mouth to argue with her. "No, Adam. You do. You love each other. Neither one of you is stupid, even though right now you're both acting ridiculous. You don't talk, he doesn't talk, and look what happens—I have to miss *The Notebook*."

"Oh, hell. You've seen that movie a thousand and one times," Adam scoffed at her, rolling his eyes to emphasize his point.

"Well," she drawled as she sneakily elbowed him hard in the side, "it could have been a thousand and two." Standing up, she set her empty beer bottle on the coffee table and then moved in front of him. With her fingers she pushed his hair back and leaned forward, kissing his forehead. "Talk to him, AJ. He's not just your boyfriend, he's your partner. He deserves to know how you feel. You two can work this out. I know it."

Adam reached up and laid his hands over hers where they rested on his shoulders. "Thanks for coming over and listening."

"Like you wouldn't and haven't done the same for me. It's part of the job description, you know? BFFLs... it's what we do." She flicked the end of his nose and giggled when he growled at her.

She moved toward the door, and he smiled as he watched her walk away. "Love you."

"I love you, too, even when you're an idiot. Call me tomorrow," she quipped before she blew him a kiss and left.

Adam threw his head back on the couch, sending a silent prayer of thanks to whatever force put them in the same class. She was a pain in the ass at times, but he'd be lost without her.

The next morning, Adam woke up more tired than he had been when he finally managed to fall asleep. His muscles ached, the sheets on the bed were a twisted mess, and all of the pillows were strewn across the floor. Obviously the few hours of sleep had been anything but restful. He sat up and yawned, jaw creaking as he rolled his head from side to side to stretch out a painful crick. A glance at the clock let him know it was way too early to be awake on a Sunday, and he gave serious thought to trying to catch a few more hours of

shut-eye. But when he remembered that Peter wouldn't be arriving later on, he knew sleep was the last thing he'd be doing with his morning.

"Damn it all to hell," he groaned loudly before falling backward onto the bed.

He knew he should call Peter. They hadn't gone a day without talking since their first date, and they'd never gone to bed without saying goodnight until last night. Adam ignored the flare of guilt that burned his stomach. He wouldn't be able to ignore it for long, though. Sitting up once more, Adam slowly glanced around the bedroom, taking in all the little things that made it their room. Peter's softball glove and bat in the corner. His favorite black Armani suit that Adam had picked up from the cleaner's just the day before hanging on the hook on the closet door. A picture of the two of them, slightly drunk and sunburned, from Cami's Fourth of July party a few months ago hung on the wall. Peter's battered sneakers were by the dresser, and the book he'd been reading before he left was still open on the nightstand beside the bed.

Bits and pieces of Peter were everywhere. From his gourmet coffee and his favorite Frosted Mini-Wheats in the pantry, to the country music programmed into the satellite radio in Adam's Jeep, Peter had infiltrated every part of Adam's life. The condo was no longer his. It was theirs. Peter still had an apartment in town that he went to about once a month to grab more clothes—truthfully, it was little more than a big, expensive storage closet. Peter never slept there, and most of his things were at Adam's. Adam wasn't sure why Peter still had the apartment. He sighed. It was just another thing to put on the list of issues they needed to discuss.

He stood and stretched, the muscles in his back pulling tight as he leaned from side to side. Feeling on edge, restless, he bounced on his toes. He needed to run. Needed to feel the burn in his legs, the steady, rhythmic thud of each stride against the asphalt beneath his feet. Wanted to lose himself in the way his heart rate slowly increased as his blood started to pulse in his veins and in the music that pounded from his earbuds. Glancing at the clock once more, he did a quick calculation of what time it was in Seattle; he always got the time zones confused. He knew Peter would be tired, having worked the Huskies game yesterday afternoon. Thinking about it in the light of day, it made sense for Peter to fill in for the Seahawks game since he was already in Seattle, but it didn't make the fact that he wasn't coming home today any easier to accept. Frustrated again and still antsy, Adam grabbed his phone and fired off a quick text to Peter, telling him good morning and that he'd talk to him later. Chickenshit, sure, to send a message when he knew Peter would still be asleep, but it was all he could do for the time being.

Needing to wake up a bit more, Adam decided to take a shower. He slid his lime-green boxer briefs down his legs and kicked them toward the hamper just inside their bathroom. Naked, he stood in the middle of the room and bent at the waist, trying to get his blood flowing. Fifteen minutes later his muscles were loose, and he was ready to get started with his day. His mind was focused on Peter, about what he'd said to him the night before and what he knew he needed to say once Peter got home. With effort, Adam pushed those thoughts away as he strode toward the bathroom. Instead he let his mind travel a different course, one that was way more enjoyable. He palmed his cock as he stood beside the shower, hissing as the first jolt of pleasure from the simple touch shot through his body.

"Ah, fuck," Adam cursed as he wrapped his fingers around his shaft.

Reaching out with his other hand, he slapped at the faucets making the water as hot as he could tolerate. The bathroom quickly filled with steam. Adam stepped in the shower, dick still in hand, his strokes firm and sure. The first stream of hot water against his skin made him jerk, but as soon as he stood with the water sluicing down his body, he groaned because it felt so damned good.

He hung his head, watching his hand move up and down his length, and leaned forward, smacking his palm against the tiled wall.

"Oh, yes," he moaned, sweeping his thumb across the flared head of his cock, gathering the pre-come that seeped from the tip. Using the liquid to coat himself, his fingers slid down to the base. He twisted his wrist on the up stroke, again circling his thumb when got to the head.

An image came to life behind Adam's closed eyelids—Peter on his knees in that very shower, with his lips wrapped around Adam's cock. Adam could almost feel the slick slide of Peter's tongue as he swallowed around Adam's cock, taking him impossibly further into his sweet, hot mouth. In his mind, Adam could see his hips flex as he moved in and out of Peter's talented mouth. Standing beneath the shower, Adam's hand pumped up and down his aching cock, mimicking the way he fucked Peter's throat.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," Adam babbled as his cock swelled in his hand even more.

The cheeks of his ass tightened and his thighs burned. He clenched his jaw as his orgasm approached. Stroking faster and faster, his hand flew, the sound of his palm against his shaft almost obscene as it echoed in the confines of the shower.

He threw his head back and grunted loudly as he came. Ropes of his release painted the wall in front of him, spilling onto the floor and swirling down the drain. His chest heaved as he squeezed out every drop of come. It took a few moments for Adam's head to clear and for his legs to no longer imitate Jell-O. Relief and warm pleasure made his muscles loose, his entire body relax, and for the first time since the phone call the night before, Adam felt like he could breathe. His heart was still heavy because of the fight with Peter, and especially from the talk with Cami and all the things he'd finally admitted after holding them in for so long, but he knew it was time to face some difficult truths about his and Peter's relationship.

Decisions needed to be made. Now he just needed the strength to follow through.

Twenty minutes later he walked out the door, slapped his favorite tattered, black ball cap backward on his head, and tucked his cell phone into his pocket. He was going to call Cami and treat her to breakfast when he was finished with his run as a thank you for being his rock, as usual, the night before. She'd been a lifesaver. He didn't know what he'd do without her. The morning was slightly overcast. Smoky-gray clouds hid the sun, leaving the air damp and cool. Perfect running weather, at least for what Adam needed. He checked his watch and stretched again for a few minutes as he tried to focus.

Once on the sidewalk in front of the condo, Adam looked up and down the street, mentally planning his route and how far he wanted to run. If he were being honest, he'd really like to pull a *Forrest Gump* and just take off, running as far as he could. He grabbed his phone, found the playlist he wanted and popped in the earbuds. Music flooded his ears, hard with a driving beat. It suited his mood perfectly. The tightness from earlier pulled at his chest, and before his warmed-up muscles cramped on him, he looked right and began to run down the street and toward the park about a mile away. Step after step, he timed his breaths with each stride. It didn't take long for the music and the steady cadence of his feet on the ground to work their magic.

Adam's mind cleared as he found his groove, leaving behind nothing but a slight burn in his thighs and the knock of his heart against his ribs. Trees blurred as he passed. He nodded at an old man, still dressed in his slippers and plaid robe, picking up the Sunday paper off the still damp grass of his yard. Dodging a stray basketball that rolled out of a driveway, his feet chewed up the asphalt. Breathing faster, his pulse quickened and the endorphins flowed. He looked left. There was a perfect trail that he always enjoyed running that went around the park. The sun made its first appearance of the day as he approached the end of the sidewalk. It blinded Adam after being hidden all morning, and he squinted as he started to run across the street. He didn't slow down; the way was clear in both directions. He made it about half way when there was a squeal of tires, the long wail of a horn, and then... searing pain. Adam sailed through the air after the front of a car clipped his hip and sent him flying.

He landed with a grotesque thud. His hip and knee absorbed most of the impact before he rolled, and his head slammed against the asphalt with a hollow crack. Blood seeped from a large gash, pooling before it slowly spread. Shouts and shrieks filled the air as Adam tried to understand what had just happened. He groaned, tried to take a breath, and hissed as white-hot pain shot to every point in his body.

Stunned, Adam struggled to focus on the people that suddenly surrounded him. The ground beneath him was warm, but he was cold all over... or at least he thought so. He blinked slowly. A blurred face was above him, but all Adam could see was the sunlight that looked more like a halo around whoever was there.

"What—?"Adam strained to ask, tasting blood. His stomach lurched and his body jerked, sending spikes of agony everywhere. "Fuck," he whimpered.

"Oh my God, are you okay?" somebody frantically asked.

There were so many voices all around him, panicked and urgent even though they sounded like they were underwater. Adam tried to turn his head, but unfamiliar hands held him still.

"Don't move. You're hurt badly. The ambulance is on the way," the stranger told him in what he assumed was supposed to be a soothing tone of voice. It was anything but, and the longer the person talked, the more agitated Adam became.

"What's your name? Should we call anyone?" someone else questioned.

With effort, Adam managed to lift a finger. "My phone. Peter," he slurred. He hurt everywhere. His head throbbed, he knew his knee was in a position it shouldn't be in, and it felt like an elephant was sitting on his chest.

Adam looked up at the sky, then quickly closed his eyes as a blinding jolt of pain stole his breath. It felt as though a red-hot poker was being stabbed through his eyeball. He cried out, the sound garbled, and he struggled to focus. As he lay on the ground, bloody and broken, there was just one thought he was able to hold onto. Darkness was creeping in, the pain too much for his body to withstand, and when the paramedics arrived and began to treat him, Peter's name was the only word he was able to croak over and over again. Peter was the last thing he thought of before he lost consciousness.

"I don't remember much that happened after that," Adam told Peter, looking up and meeting his eyes for the first time in many minutes. Peter was grief-stricken. Shaking from head to foot, he reached out and clutched Adam's hand as if he didn't really believe Adam was sitting right there in front of him. "Babe, Jesus Christ. I don't know... how did you... fuck," Peter's voice broke. He didn't look away from Adam as scalding tears streamed down his face, didn't notice as they dripped from his chin and ran down his neck. All he saw, the only thing that filled his world, was his boyfriend, lover—partner—sitting across the table from him.

"You were all I wanted, the only thing I could think about," Adam whispered hoarsely, ignoring his own tears.

Peter closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening them to look at Adam once more. "When I got that damn phone call, I felt like I was the one that had gotten run over. I swear, Adam, I have never been so afraid in my whole fucking life."

Neither man said a word as they processed everything, but they couldn't let go of each other. As always, touching one another, the skin-to-skin contact, kept them connected in a way nothing else did. Peter's mind raced as he filled in the details he'd been told at the hospital with what Adam had just told him.

Peter cleared his throat, swallowed the lingering terror from reliving the accident, and stared intently at Adam. "You know when the police officer came to the hospital to take your statement and you were still unconscious, he told me that it was the glare from the sun that caused the driver not to be able to see you. Can you believe that? Something as simple as sunlight almost took you from me," Peter scoffed, tightening his grip on Adam's hand. Whispering roughly, he continued, "Of course, I almost managed to do that all on my own, didn't I? I've been such an idiot."

Leaning forward, Adam covered their joined hands with his free hand. "It wasn't just you, Peter. I was as much to blame. I knew we needed to talk, that you were slipping away, but I didn't say anything either."

Unable to resist the urge, and unwilling to worry about who would see, Peter pulled Adam's hand across the table and lifted it to his lips. He kissed the inside of Adam's wrist once, twice, saying a silent prayer of thanks for the strong, healthy pulse he felt beneath the newly healed skin. "I love you, and I'm so sorry," Peter apologized profusely.

"I'm sorry, too," Adam replied immediately. "I love you. It's over now. You're here, we're together, and I'm okay. Everything's fine."

Thinking about the conversation with Cami that Adam had just told him about made Peter's stomach turn all over again. He was extremely grateful to her for always being there for Adam, even more so for being the voice of reason when both of them were being ridiculous. Thinking that Adam went to bed the night before the accident wondering if their relationship was over hurt Peter in a way he was sure he'd never forget.

Peter growled in the back of his throat, and narrowed his eyes at the most important person in his life. "It's not fine, Adam. Not even close. Do you know how close I came to losing you? How will that ever be fine?"

Adam swiped at his face, finally cleaning it of the tears that burned his cheeks. "But you didn't lose me. I'm here."

"Were you really going to leave me? Without talking to me first?" Peter had to ask. He needed to know.

Letting out a huge huff of frustration, Adam sat back in his chair. "Of course not. I was pissed and scared and not thinking clearly. I missed you and wanted you to come home, and when you didn't, I overreacted." Adam picked up his very much watered down glass of tea and took a sip.

He felt a million times better. Knowing that the worst was behind them, that nothing stood in their way any longer now that anyone who followed sports of any kind—and many who didn't—knew Peter was gay and in a relationship, made their future look very bright indeed. After all, it wasn't every day a man came out on national television.

Unable to stop the shit-eating grin that spread slowly across his face, Adam laughed. "I still can't believe you blurted out you were gay like that. Talk about putting it out there!"

Adam's throaty laugh settled deep in Peter's soul, and in that instant, he let go of everything. No more worrying about what might have happened, no more guilt for all the things he didn't say. It was all gone. Adam was rightnone of it mattered. There was ink on his arm that would remind him every day of how much Adam meant to him. If that wasn't enough, the new scars on Adam's body would never let him forget. Ogling his gorgeous boyfriend, appreciating that damn shirt on a whole new level, his jeans became uncomfortably tight. Peter's stomach fluttered, followed by a deep flare of heat that made his heart skip a beat. He licked his lips, the bitter taste of beer a shock on his tongue. His dick twitched, and he groaned.

A wild, needy sound gurgled out of Peter's throat. "Pete—" Adam began, then stopped, taking in the way Peter's eyes were almost black as well as the slight curl to his upper lip. "Oh."

"You done?" Peter rasped, tipping his chin toward the table covered with all their uneaten food.

Adam gulped. "Hell yes."

The chair behind Peter screeched across the floor as Peter stood up, but he didn't care. He couldn't take his eyes off Adam. He moved around the table to help Adam with his crutches. They passed the hostess, who wished them a sweet goodbye, but neither man acknowledged her. Peter rested his hand in the small of Adam's back as they exited the restaurant, and he didn't remove it during the short walk to the car. Beneath his palm, the muscles of Adam's back worked as he moved forward. Peter couldn't wait to lick over every inch of that skin.

His fingers dug into Adam's side. Urgent need and intense want warred for dominance as they approached the car. Mindful of Adam's crutches, Peter forced Adam up against the door and attacked his mouth, wedging his knee carefully between Adam's legs. Adam moaned when Peter's cock ground along his hip, making Peter hiss.

"Need you so fucking badly," Peter told his very stunned boyfriend. Craving the warmth of Adam's skin, Peter slipped his hands beneath the damned blue shirt and covered Adam's stomach. "Oh, yes." Peter urged, needing more. He fanned his hands, allowing his thumbs to drag across Adam's nipples. When Adam moaned, Peter kissed him harder, deeper, forcing more of his tongue inside Adam's hot mouth. "Damn," Adam muttered once Peter stopped his assault. Breathing heavily and with hungry eyes, he reached out and held each side of Peter's face. "Take me home, Peter."

Once in the car, Peter could only think of one thing—get home as fast as fucking possible. Get Adam naked as fast as fucking possible. Get Adam inside of him as fast as fucking possible, and never, ever, forget how close he came to losing him. Well, that was three things, plus a little extra, but the point was, Peter wanted to be home.

Immediately.

Peter gripped the steering wheel so tightly his fingers went numb. The air in the car was thick with tension, both sexual and the lingering effects of Adam's admissions. Pieces of their conversation bounced around in his mind, but Peter's concentration was focused almost solely on Adam. It was a good thing he'd lived in Denver all his life and could practically drive with his eyes closed.

Beside him, Adam cleared his throat. "Peter-"

"Just wait. Please." Peter snapped his head to the side as he passed a car. "I can't, not while I'm driving. I need to touch you, look at you, and if you say anything right now, I'll lose it."

A strangled sob ripped from Adam's throat, but he swallowed and kept the next one inside. Tentatively, he reached out and ran his fingers through the hair behind Peter's ear.

"Oh, God. Keep touching me, baby. Don't stop." Peter didn't care that he sounded desperate and on the verge of a full-fledged breakdown. He needed Adam like he needed to breathe, and nothing would keep him from letting Adam know that ever again.

Adam's hand shook, but he didn't stop touching Peter. Fingers in Peter's hair, then down the side of his neck and across his shoulder, he made the same circuit over and over again. His stomach clenched, protesting the few pieces of sushi he'd managed to eat during their time at the restaurant. He couldn't keep his eyes off Peter. The discussion they'd just had was probably the most painful he'd ever experienced, even harder than telling his mom and stepdad

he was gay. There was still more to say, he knew that, but the worst of it was out there. He knew he'd never forget the look of complete horror and devastation on Peter's face when he told him about the accident.

Because it wasn't quite rush hour yet, it didn't take long to get home. As Peter turned the car down their street, Adam's heart felt like it would explode right out of his chest. Hunger and urgency mingled with a frantic desire to scream and cry. In the restaurant, aware of others watching, it was impossible for both of them to freely give in to all the emotions Adam's confession had wrought. Inside the safe cocoon of their condo, the one filled with the things that made their place a home, Adam knew that the tenuous thread they were both hanging onto would break the second they walked through the front door.

He wasn't wrong.

Peter slammed on the brakes as soon as he reached the driveway at the back of their condo, threw the car into park, pressed the button to open the garage door, and turned to Adam with wild, bright eyes. "Inside. Now."

The shiver that wracked Adam's body from the deep, almost feral, tenor of Peter's voice was completely involuntary. After a beat of stunned silence, Adam did as he was told. It was difficult considering the crutches, the brace, and the enormity of all that had been said, but he got out of the car and started to move. He felt Peter behind him, heard him breathe. His heart raced and he was hot, so hot all over, even though it was cool inside the garage. The whir and clank as the door began to lower made him jump, but Peter was right there to keep him from falling.

"I've got you," Peter whispered as he pressed his mouth to Adam's ear. He wrapped his arms around Adam's chest and felt the way Adam's heart beat so fast beneath his hand. The second Peter touched Adam, he was done. All the pent-up frustration and anxiety, mixed with the fact that there really wasn't ever a time when Peter didn't want Adam, had Peter like a rocket, ready for takeoff. With no shame whatsoever, Peter pushed his hips against Adam's ass and let him feel how hard he was already.

Gently, so he didn't knock Adam off balance, he turned Adam's head to the side. "Do you feel what you do to me? All the damn time." They kissed. It was messy and awkward, but Peter couldn't make himself let go of Adam enough to change positions, or to even go inside the house.

Need escalating, Peter wanted more. More skin, more touches, more of his mouth over every inch of Adam's slightly damaged but still very sexy body. He lowered his hands, letting them skim along the hard planes of Adam's chest and over Adam's firm stomach. When he reached the bottom of Adam's shirt, he quickly slipped his hands beneath, sighing when his hands met warm flesh. The silky hair that led from Adam's navel down to the best part tickled Peter's palm as his hand glided back and forth.

He pushed Adam's shirt up and over his head, ignoring the goose bumps that broke out all over Adam's exposed skin. He'd warm him up soon enough. "I want you. Right here, right now," Peter said into the skin along Adam's neck. He dragged his teeth across Adam's shoulder and dipped his tongue into the hollow between Adam's shoulder and neck before pulling the skin into his mouth. "I can't wait any longer." Lowering his hands to Adam's hips, Peter slowly turned him around so they were face-to-face.

Energy crackled between them. It had been so long since they'd been physical. There had only been a few make-out sessions since before the accident consisting of nothing more than long kisses and gentle touching that didn't even result in an orgasm. Now everything was so very different. All their walls were down, their secrets brought into the light and dealt with, leaving nothing between them but their deep love and commitment to each other.

The realization took Peter's breath away.

And with that thought, the garage was no longer good enough for what Peter wanted. "Let's go inside. I need you in our bed where I can get at every inch of your gorgeous body."

Adam followed Peter into the house, his insides twisting and his pulse racing. Peter didn't pause as they entered the kitchen, but kept moving toward their bedroom. He was like a man on a mission, and it was obvious that mission was to drive Adam completely out of his mind. Adam was sweating so much his hands slid on the handles of his crutches. He was nervous, excited, and so turned on he could hardly stand it, but the second they entered the bedroom, the only thing that mattered was Peter.

He watched as Peter threw the car keys on the dresser, the clank as they hit the glass bowl loud in the silent room. Peter tossed his phone without even checking for messages, something he never did, making Adam's stomach flip. Next he kicked off his shoes and pulled his shirt over his head, all without saying a word. Adam's throat went dry. His boyfriend was so hot, fit and hard all over. Unlike Adam, who got his exercise outside, Peter kept his body in shape by spending countless hours in the gym. Lifting weights, cross-training, yoga—Peter pushed his body as far as he could, then pushed it some more. Through his youth, then on into high school and college, Peter had played football, but one too many concussions kept him from moving on to the next level. Being a sports analyst was a perfect fit for Peter. With his charisma, All-American good looks, and a sexy smile to boot, it was no wonder he was well on his way to being one of the most popular analysts out there. And now, after his unintentional, though very public, coming out, the world knew he was taken.

Very, very taken, and Adam had no intention of ever letting him go.

Peter's back was to Adam—who still had yet to move—as he undid his jeans and slid them down his legs. When he turned around, clad in only a pair of very tight black boxer briefs, the grin on his face was sexy and naughty, and it made Adam's cock ache.

Peter crooked his finger. "Come here," he ordered.

Crossing the room, Adam stopped just in front of Peter. "Sit," Peter whispered gruffly as he took his crutches and leaned them beside the bed.

Peter stood in front of Adam and let the tips of his fingers ghost across his shoulders and chest, then down his arms. Nothing was said, but words weren't really necessary. Adam could feel Peter's love, and the regret that was buried beneath as well. Adam took a stuttering breath. His chest felt like it could crack right down the center, exposing him completely, with the slightest encouragement. The moment was wrought with so much intensity he could hardly keep his eyes open. Kneeling in front of Adam, Peter began unbuckling the brace, the sound of the Velcro incredibly loud in the silent room. Once Adam's knee was free, Peter laid the brace on the ground, forgotten the moment he faced Adam again. Adam watched as Peter bent down and began removing his shoes for him. Almost reverent with each motion, Peter removed one shoe then the other before he did the same with his socks.

He slid his hand up Adam's denim-covered legs, carefully avoiding his injured knee. Even through his jeans, Adam could feel the heat from Peter's touch.

"Peter," Adam breathed when the backs of Peter's fingers brushed against his stomach as he grabbed the button on his waistband.

"Please let me do this," Peter implored.

Adam nodded, sucking in his stomach while Peter slid the button through the hole. Peter leaned forward and kissed the exposed skin just above Adam's underwear. Adam closed his eyes. "Jesus." His voice caught, the motion so intimate it made his heart hurt.

"Lift. Hang on to my shoulders so you don't hurt yourself," Peter instructed. Adam obeyed, and hung on while Peter tugged on his jeans and pulled them over his hips and down his legs. He was about to pull Peter onto the bed with him, needing to feel his lover's hard body next to his, when he felt Peter's warm lips once more—but this time it was on his scarred knee.

"I'm so sorry," Peter murmured against the sensitive skin. "I'm sorry we fought," he went on, using his lips to rub against the scar on the side of his kneecap. "I'm sorry I hurt you." This time, he used his tongue to lick the next mark on the other side of his knee. "And mostly, I'm sorry I wasn't here for you, that you were alone. It won't happen again, I promise." Peter used his teeth to nip at the skin on the inside of his knee.

"Baby, please. Come up here. I need you." Adam's hands grappled at Peter's shoulders.

Peter placed one more closed-mouth kiss—really it was more a resting of his lips against Adam's knee—before he stood up. It took a moment for them to maneuver Adam to the center of the bed with a pillow placed beneath his knee to keep him from hurting himself, but they managed. Once he was comfortable, he wasted no time in pulling Peter on top of him. Adam ran his hands up and down his lover's back, sighing as Peter allowed his body to relax and settle between his legs. He lifted his head and began to ravage Peter's mouth with his own.

They kissed over and over, using their hands to explore each other in a way they hadn't done in much too long. Familiar became new and uncharted—as if with their new beginning they were making love for the very first time.

And with that thought, Adam couldn't wait any longer.

"Let me make love to you, Peter."

In a flash, Peter yanked Adam's briefs down his legs. Peter grinned at his lover's surprise before he crushed his lips to Adam's, plunging his tongue deep into Adam's mouth. Peter's hands reached and scraped, grabbed and pinched—Adam's nipples, the inside of his thigh, the top of his shoulder. Peter's mouth followed his fingers, licking and biting every bit of skin he could get to. Adam was so turned on he could hardly think. He spread his legs wider so he could get Peter where he wanted him to be. Adam gripped Peter's sides, trying to urge him higher so that he could touch him, get him ready for his cock. He threw his head back when Peter licked a long line up his chest, along his jaw, all the way until he reached his ear.

"You just lie there and look hot. Let me do all the work this time," Peter told him with a smirk as he sat up and rested on his ankles. "You're going to feel so good, babe. I can't wait for your cock to be buried deep inside of me."

Adam grabbed his own dick and slowly began to stroke as he watched Peter do the same.

"Mmmm, yes. You should see yourself right now," Peter taunted, licking his lips suggestively when Adam looked at him. "Naked, your cock in your hand, getting yourself nice and hard so I can ride you until you beg me to stop."

Peter's words were like blazing-hot brands, setting Adam's entire body on fire. "Peter, fuck," he stammered.

"Oh yeah. You're about to fuck me so good, aren't you?"

Adam bucked his hips; his cock throbbed in his hand. "I want to touch you. Let me get you ready."

As much as he wanted to do what he said, watching Peter stroke himself, giving himself over to his pleasure, was the hottest damn thing Adam had ever seen. Peter's cheeks were flushed, his lips were swollen from their kisses, and Adam couldn't help but stare at the ink that stood out so starkly against Peter's golden skin.

Their mark was there, and the image was so powerful, Adam's hand skipped along his shaft.

Peter, whose eyes hadn't left Adam's, whispered in a voice full of emotion, "Yes, Adam. You feel it, don't you? Feel how much I am a part of you and you are of me? I know you do."

Mesmerized, Adam stared, panting, as Peter sucked two fingers into his mouth. He groaned loudly when Peter released his fingers then slowly, so slowly Adam thought he would die, made a wet trail down his stomach and reached lower, below his cock. When Peter threw his head back and his whole body shook, Adam knew where those sinful fingers were.

Adam said roughly, no longer willing to let Peter do all the work, "That's it, stretch yourself. Get ready for me. You know I'm going to fuck that ass so good."

"Damn, it's been so long." Peter still had his eyes closed, but Adam could hear the wet slide of his fingers in and out of his ass.

Adam reached out to get the lube from the nightstand, fumbling with the lid once he grabbed it. He poured a generous amount on his hand; he wasn't about to cause any pain to the man he loved. There was no way he could resist helping Peter out, not when it had been weeks since they'd had sex.

"Get up here," Adam urged. "I want to feel you."

Peter listened and scooted forward until he was close enough for Adam to touch. "Give me your mouth, let me kiss you," Adam told him.

Lowering his mouth as his lover asked, Peter got close enough so that Adam could kiss him. Adam rolled slightly, keeping his leg propped on the pillow, but moving in such a way that he could wrap a hand around the back of Peter's neck. He hungrily kissed Peter. It was messy and noisy, but he didn't give a damn. He needed this so badly, to lose himself in Peter, to take him, claim him, and make him his.

He reached out with the hand that was covered in lube and stroked Peter's cock, loving the way it pulsed beneath his fingers. Peter began to rock his hips in time with Adam's hand. Low, demanding sounds rumbled in Peter's chest, turning Adam on even more.

Adam firmly stroked Peter one last time before he allowed his fingers to dip lower to Peter's balls. He spent a few moments rubbing the soft, wrinkled skin before he moved even lower. Peter wantonly spread his knees wider, an invitation for Adam to do what he wished. Adam complied, searching out Peter's opening with his fingers. He pressed slightly after circling around it a few times, feeling the tight ring of muscle give just a little.

"Ah, oh, yes," Peter cried out.

That voice, full of passion and love and hunger, settled deep inside of Adam, curling around his stomach, his heart, and filled every part of him.

He added more pressure, pushed a little harder, and slid his finger about halfway in. He continued to move slowly, until his finger was completely inside. Heat surrounded it, and the sound that erupted from Peter's mouth was raw and desperate. Adam's own cock responded, throbbing between his legs.

Peter's chest was covered in a sheen of sweat, drops trailing down the center, mingling with the dark-brown hair that led down to his cock. Adam wanted to lick every drop with his tongue. He added a second finger, scissoring them to stretch Peter, preparing the way for what came next.

"Ah, yes." Peter tilted his hips as Adam rubbed the spot that he knew curled Peter's toes. "There, right fucking there," Peter told him.

Ignoring the ache between his own legs for the moment, Adam gave Peter all his attention. He didn't slow his fingers; instead he kept the rhythm the same, timing each in and out with every breath Peter took. He bit his lip to keep from leaning over and taking Peter into his throat because, God help him, he loved the way it felt to have a mouthful of Peter.

That would have to wait. Adam was so hard he hurt, and he knew Peter was close to coming just from his fingers. He wanted to watch his lover come, to feel himself let go while buried balls-deep inside of Peter, so he pulled his fingers out and used the leftover lube to coat himself. Condoms were a thing of the past since both had been tested months before, a definite bonus to being in a committed relationship.

"Come on, I want inside of you," Adam said as he held his cock, his voice hoarse and his throat dry.

In one smooth motion Peter straddled him, and each man groaned as he slid down Adam's length.

Neither moved for a few moments as Peter took all of Adam's cock inside of him and settled against Adam's thighs. When Adam couldn't wait any longer, he dug his fingers into Peter's side and urged him to move. Their bodies were slick with sweat. Peter bent, drew his tongue up Adam's chest and up the side of his neck.

"You feel so good, babe. So big and full inside of me," Peter breathed between biting kisses and sweeps of his tongue anywhere he could reach. "I could stay right here with you inside of me all fucking night, just like this."

It was a lie, of course. Both of them were going to come before too much longer, but that didn't mean Adam didn't wish it were true. Making love to Peter, being with him this way, was everything he ever wanted.

"Love you, so fucking much," Adam panted after Peter rocked against him, driving him even deeper inside.

Hooking his arms beneath Peter's thighs, Adam stretched, mindful of his knee, his own thighs burning from exertion. He went deeper, kept fucking Peter. It felt too good to stop. Adam arched his back and again dug his fingers into Peter's hips hard enough to leave bruises. He held Peter and buried himself as deep as he could get.

Peter's spine curled forward, allowing Adam's cock to slide right along his prostate, and he moaned a loud, hoarse, "Yes. Don't stop."

The pace increased, their bodies slamming against one another. Grunts and groans, the sticky sound of Peter as he stroked himself, the slap of Adam's balls against Peter's ass, filled the room.

"So close. Do it. Come for me," Adam urged, trying to hold off his orgasm until Peter had his first.

Peter threw his head back, his neck stretched, his mouth open. "Adam, oh shit. Love you, ah, fuck."

Adam watched as Peter closed his fingers tightly around his shaft and then roared as he shot stream after stream after stream of come onto his chest. Seeing Peter lose it, feeling himself covered in jizz, set Adam off, and he bucked, stilled, and filled Peter with his release.

Unable to hold himself upright any longer, Peter collapsed onto Adam's chest, apparently not caring in the least about being smeared with spunk. Peter kissed Adam's chest. Adam kissed the top of Peter's head. They didn't move, didn't speak, they simply lay that way until the mess became too much to take. Peter rolled off Adam and grabbed a T-shirt, wiping them both off.

They lay on their sides, facing each other, and Peter pressed his lips to Adam's. "Thank you for not giving up on us—on me—babe. I have no idea what I did to deserve you, but whatever it was, I'm so damn grateful."

Adam pulled Peter forward, pressing his chest to Peter's. He tangled their legs together, being careful not to jostle his knee too much, and ran his fingers through Peter's damp hair. "I love you so much."

"Adam," Peter sighed, too overwhelmed to say anything else.

They were quiet long enough that Adam felt Peter's body relax and drift off to sleep. Adam pressed his lips to Peter's forehead and whispered, "I'm glad I didn't give up on us, too."

Peter woke slowly the next morning. With his eyes still closed, he groaned as he became aware of aches in muscles he hadn't used in a while. He peeled

his eyes open, wincing at the sunlight that filtered through the trees outside the window, sending streaks of bright light across their bed. Tentatively, he stretched, stopping when he bumped into something hard and warm. Adam. He smiled and scooted closer to his boyfriend, laying his arm across Adam's stomach. He lowered his head and nuzzled his favorite spot behind Adam's ear. The scents of salt, soap from last night's shower, and of the sex they'd had, again, before falling asleep for the night, filled his nose. Using his lips, he left a trail of soft kisses across the span from Adam's neck to his shoulder.

His heart was light, though his mind was full of everything that had happened the day and night before. He almost couldn't believe how easy it was for both of them to let go of all the negative feelings and concentrate only on moving forward. Of course, it didn't hurt that they'd had sex three times since getting home yesterday afternoon. Peter knew Adam was a little frustrated by his inability to actively participate, but Peter had no complaints. At all. Being with Adam was always an enjoyable experience, but with his newfound appreciation of how fragile life could really be, the pleasure factor was off the charts.

"Good morning," Peter whispered in a voice still rough from sleep. He should feel bad for waking Adam, but he didn't. Mostly because his dick was hard, and he wanted to feel Adam's hands—and maybe even his mouth if he was really lucky—all over him.

Rolling his hips, he slid his dick between the cheeks of Adam's ass. Adam chuckled. "Again? Jesus, Peter. If we're not careful that thing might shrivel up and fall right the hell off. Then what would we do in the shower?"

Peter's chest rumbled as he remembered just how they had spent their time in the shower a few short hours ago—his knees were still protesting. He flattened his hand against Adam's chest and pulled him backward; laying him flat so he could get at the lips he couldn't seem to kiss enough. Kissing Adam was one of his favorite things to do, and he would never get tired of it. Not of the way Adam tasted, or how his lips fit perfectly against his own, or how, when he kissed Adam, he never wanted to stop. Low moans from the back of Adam's throat had Peter rocking his hips against Adam's thigh, his hard cock pressed tight between their naked bodies. Peter let his fingers travel across Adam's chest, using his thumb to tease his nipples into hard peaks. Adam sucked in a quick breath and dug his fingers into Peter's back.

"That feels so good," Adam rasped.

Flattening his tongue, Peter lapped and sucked Adam's right nipple before licking his way toward the left. The flavor of Adam's skin exploded in his mouth, and the only word Peter could think of was *more*. More skin, more of Adam. He continued his descent, taking long moments to enjoy the span of sensitive skin beneath Adam's navel. Peter loved to drag his tongue through the soft hair that covered the few inches of one of his favorite spots on Adam's gorgeous body. He could spend hours with his mouth right there.

The buzz of his cell phone made him utter a harsh, "Fuck." He dropped a quick kiss to the tip of Adam's hard, already-leaking cock before he rolled over and snatched the phone off the nightstand.

Adam huffed as he listened to Peter, obviously with work judging from the one side of the conversation he could hear. It took a few minutes for his erection to go away; it didn't help that he couldn't stop staring at Peter while he paced back and forth in front of the bed. Still naked, still semi-hard, with stubble covering his jaw and the faint scratches he'd left along Peter's arms and back, Adam thought Peter was as sexy as he'd ever been. Adam sighed, blowing out a long breath to release some tension. From the tone of Peter's voice as he wrapped up his call, sex was going to have to wait.

"Well, shit. God damn fucking pain in the ass..." Peter cursed as he tossed his phone on the bed, mumbling under his breath.

Adam couldn't help but chuckle as he carefully rolled on his side to face his very worked up boyfriend. Peter was ridiculous when he ranted—that he was doing it naked just made it even more so.

Peter spun around and narrowed his eyes at him. "Oh, you can stop laughing any time now, jackass, considering you're not going to like this any more than I do." "Why? What does anything with your job have to do with me?" Adam asked, alarmed, as a bad feeling settled in his stomach.

"Ugh," Peter groaned. He sat on the bed, and Adam couldn't help but reach out and grab his boyfriend's hand, wrapping his fingers tight in a show of support. Adam watched closely as Peter took a deep breath before he turned to face him. "It seems that the big bosses at the network have had a lot of requests from some of the major sports magazines and sports shows to have me do a few interviews, make some appearances. *Behind The Lines, Sports Illustrated, Real Sports*, just to name a few. The list is... kind of mind boggling."

Adam gulped. "Holy shit, baby, that's fucking great! Just think what that kind of exposure could do for your career. I always knew you'd make it to the next level. I'm so proud of you," Adam gushed, so happy for Peter. When Peter didn't look as excited as Adam felt, Adam snapped his mouth shut. "What is it?" He whispered with trepidation.

"They want me to talk about the accident. About what happened to you and what I did. And about being gay and being on television and around athletes all the time. They want me to talk about everything, babe."

"Oh." Lame, but it was the only word that came to Adam's mind.

They were silent for a bit, but Adam didn't let go of Peter's hand. He knew they were asking Peter to take a big step—the biggest of his career—one that could make or break him, and as much as he wanted Peter to tell them no, secretly he hoped Peter said yes.

Adam opened his mouth to offer Peter some kind of encouragement, but as soon as he started to speak, Peter said in a rush, "You know, when the phone rang that day, and I saw on the caller ID it was from St. Luke's, I knew right away it was bad news about you. Nothing else mattered but finding out what was wrong. I would have answered even if I'd been in the middle of calling the Super Bowl."

They hadn't talked much about what had happened, and now that Peter brought it up, Adam asked the question he'd been dying to know the answer to

ever since he woke up and Peter was sitting at his side. "What happened? How were you even on the air?"

Peter laughed, and it was a mixture of embarrassment and humor. "Well, I was taping a sideline interview during the pregame that we were going to show during the broadcast, and the camera guy was supposed to pan to the field for a shot and then pan back to me. We had discussed what he was going to film and for how long before I would finish my commentary. Somehow, I'm still not a hundred percent sure what happened, but at the exact time my phone vibrated with the call from the hospital, he'd already turned the camera back toward me. Of course I didn't pay attention to anything except what the doctor was saying, but the camera picked up every word, starting with, "Yes, Adam Westbrook is my boyfriend," and ending with, "I'm getting the first flight out, tell Adam I love him and I'll be there soon."

"Damn," Adam said, shocked.

"Yeah," Peter snorted. "I dropped my microphone and ran off the field without even looking back. I didn't even think to call anyone until I was in a cab on the way to the airport. It wasn't until I got back here to you that I even paid attention to what I'd done, and by then every network had already run the clip of the phone call."

Adam swallowed, his throat suddenly dry and tight. Hearing how Peter had reacted, without even thinking about himself, and after the fight they'd had the night before the accident, had Adam reeling, and more in love with his boyfriend than ever. Needing to be closer to Peter, Adam slowly rolled and sat up so he could lay his head on Peter's shoulder. "I'm sorry I scared you so badly," he whispered, rubbing his cheek against Peter's arm. Their tattoo was right there, so Adam lowered his head and placed a soft kiss, murmuring his thanks against the mark that would stain Peter forever. "I love you, so much, for risking everything just to come home to me. I can't even tell you what it was like to wake up with you as the first thing I saw. I couldn't remember everything that had happened, just bits and pieces, but seeing you, it was like I knew everything would be okay. You were home, and that was all that mattered." Hands shaking, Peter turned and slowly lowered Adam to the bed. He crashed his mouth against Adam's, pouring out all his love and thanks and fear and hope into the kiss. Breathing became necessary, so Peter slid his mouth to Adam's neck where he said softly, "You know nothing is going to be the same once I do what they want, right? My being gay is going to be big news for a while."

Adam shrugged. "So? Everyone that matters already knows anyway. Besides, I want the world to know you're mine. I could give a shit if we get stared at when we go to the grocery store." He smirked. "You might want to rethink your love of gummy bears, though. That might really be big news." Adam waggled his eyebrows, making Peter laugh, and in that instant Peter didn't care what anyone thought either.

He'd been out to his friends and family for a long time. The only thing different now was that he could take Adam with him to the Pro Bowl as his boyfriend. A week in Hawaii a few months from now with a healed, healthy Adam sounded pretty fucking perfect to Peter just then. In fact, there was nothing he could think of in their future that didn't sound perfect.

Grinning as he got an idea, Peter stood up and held out his hand to Adam. "Come on. I'm hungry, and I'm taking you out for breakfast." He helped Adam stand up and twined their fingers together before laying a loud, smacking kiss right on Adam's lips. "Hurry and get dressed," Peter laughed. "I want to hold hands with my boyfriend while we stuff our faces with pancakes."

THE END

Author Bio

Les Joseph lives in Texas with her husband and children. She's been an avid reader ever since she can remember and enjoys everything from erotica to YA to paranormal and everything in between. Les has always had a passion for writing, even writing short stories to share with her friends when she was little, and has finally decided to take the leap and put her words to print.

There have always been stories in her head and multiple characters at a time trying to talk to her, and it's just a matter of which voice is the loudest. She's currently working on her first novel and hopes to have it ready to print in the very near future.

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