



extreme
Homecoming

Jennah Scott

eXtreme Homecoming

Hunter Castille almost has everything he wants. Being on top in the motocross arena means he gets his adrenaline fix often. Life would be perfect if he he hadn't lost the one person he wanted forever.

Bastian Reed has been gone for three years. Stationed in Afghanistan, he's seen it all and the only thing he wants now is the man he left when he was deployed.

Now Bastian's home and all he wants is for Hunter to forgive him so they can both have the forever they've always wanted.

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

eXtreme Homecoming

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Introduction

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

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

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

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

The prompt picture for eXtreme Homecoming is a single person, black and white photo. The man—who turns out to be Hunter—is sitting down, looking at the camera like he's deep in thought. He's holding his bike helmet to the top of his head and wearing his riding glove. Tattoos cover three-quarters of the one arm showing and his elbow is propped on his knee. To me this picture was one of contemplation.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I don't talk about my past. Ever. My tattoos are all the reminder I'll ever need. "Don't look back. Don't back down." That motto's gotten me to where I am today. I dragged myself out of the gutter and hell itself to be able to live the dream life as one of the top Xtreme Sports athletes in the world. So what if I'm a bit of an adrenalin junkie. I've got girls screaming my name and throwing themselves at me every chance they get. Too bad that'll never be what turns my crank. Any dream I could have had, of a happy future with that one person who might just be the other half of your soul, was destroyed long ago. Well fuck it all anyway! Whoever said you could have your cake and eat it too was a goddamned liar. Lord knows you can't be gay in this world, not at this level. Besides without him it's not like there's any point.

****I love reformed bad boys, more than a little snark, and a HEA is a must. While I love the paranormal world as well, this guy just called to me, granted if someone wants to take a swing at throwing that in there with the kitchen sink I'm not going to complain. ;)*

Sincerely,

Shelby

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: new adult, military men, motocross, oral sex, established couple, homecoming, sports, reunited, tattoos

Word Count: 8,369

Author's Note

This is my first Don't Read in the Closet event, and I'd like to take a quick second to thank a few people. First, to the volunteers of the Love's Landscape event, thank you for your time and dedication. You've made it easy as an author to participate and enjoy the event. Shelby: thank you for the great picture and prompt. I've wanted to write a sports-themed story and your picture and prompt gave me the chance. I couldn't have finished this story without my betas: Amy, Lori, and Valerie. Lastly, thank you Andrea and Pamela for helping name Hunter and Bastian! I hope you all enjoy Hunter and Bastian's story; it was a lot of fun to write.

eXtreme Homecoming

By Jennah Scott

Chapter One

In less than one minute, I will mark another item off my bucket list.

“Thirty seconds. You ready?” My skydiving instructor checks my harness one last time. His fingers run across my waist, and my muscles tense. It’s been too damn long since another man has touched me—intimately.

Women. All. The. Damn. Time. Unfortunately for me, it’s not their touch I want.

“Ten.” The countdown starts. “Nine.”

“Don’t look back. Don’t look down,” I whisper the mantra written on my forearm.

“Five. Four.”

I place my hand over my heart. It’s the only spot I haven’t inked. Well, one of the few. But this blank canvas is blank for a reason. It’s a reminder. Of him. Of love lost.

As my instructor gets to one, I shake my head. This is not about *him*. This is me. I smile. My heart pounds.

“Go. Go. Go,” Todd shouts.

I dive. Gravity takes over.

“Fuck yeah!” I shout into the open air.

This is the most freeing, exhilarating experience. Like landing a double backflip for the first time. I fist-punch the sky. I can’t help it.

My chute deploys and pulls me up. *Unfuckingbelievable!* I did it.

Too soon my feet hit solid ground. The parachute follows behind, and my friends rush toward me. Fists are pumping. A couple of them yell questions at me. I’m floating. The adrenaline high is insane. I want to go back up—higher this time—and do it all over again.

But I can’t. Because tomorrow I have to be at the Staple Center for first-round practice. The joys of riding motocross professionally, I suppose. I love my job, but every once in a while I enjoy getting away from reality for a short time.

“Damn, man. How do you feel after that?” Brian asks me.

“Better than pullin’ a No-Handed Superman. I can promise you that. You’ll have to come with me next time.”

“Hell yeah. Would have been there this time, if the doc hadn’t sidelined me after the last crash.” Brian laughs, punches me in the shoulder, and heads back to the runway where I’m sure his fiancée is waiting for him.

Lucky bastard. He and Shanna have been together for a few years. None of us can figure out why they haven’t tied the knot already.

I want what Brian has. Can’t have it though. Even if being gay was fine in this industry, the man I love—loved—left.

As I start gathering my gear, my thoughts wander back to that night. The night before everything went to hell. The night before he...

No. I won’t think about *him*. It hasn’t done me any good the last few years. No reason to think anything will change now.

“Hunter.” Clint, another member of Metal Riot, stands in front of me. He’s wearing a smirk, and I know he’s caught me zoning out.

“What do you want?” I ask.

He comes to my side and helps me get everything. My instructor is making his way over as well.

Clint is the only one who knows my preferences. Mostly because he prefers men too. Although, most of the time, I’m pretty sure he’ll fuck anyone who’s interested. Despite his incessant need to get laid, the asshole is a maniac on the back of a bike, so we keep him around.

“The crew elected me to drive our sorry butts around tonight. Figured I’d come try and talk you into partying with us. I don’t want to be the only sober lameass.”

“Great jump, Hunter.” Todd shakes my hand. “You get a few more solid jumps in like that, and I’ll take ya higher.”

“Sounds good to me. I’ll call and schedule some time.”

Todd takes my gear and leaves me with Clint. I stare at my instructor’s tight rear end and shiver at the memory of his fingers brushing over my waist. Fuck. I need to get laid... quick. Between the memories and my constant state of horniness, I’ll be sure to screw up this weekend if I don’t relieve some pressure. That’s not a risk I can afford. Not when I’m so close to the top. This stop is our last one before the X-Games. I will win Freestyle Moto. I have to. The gold is mine.

Don't look back. Don't back down. It's the key to my success.

"So you in or am I alone?"

I forget about Clint being there until he speaks again. I turn to face him. "Alone, my ass. The whole crew is going. Impossible to be alone, man."

"And I'm staying sober. Alone. These pussies," Clint waves to the parking lot, "are going to make complete fools of themselves. By the end of the night, it'll be a miracle if none of them land some time in the tank."

I laugh. He's right. If I were a good friend... nah, Clint wouldn't return the favor, even if I do help him out tonight.

"What's in it for me?"

We walk toward the main building. I need to shower and change if I'm going out tonight, which I will. But I've got to make him sweat for a while.

"Always about you," he mumbles. "Fine. You come along and keep me company and dinner's on me."

"Hmm. Babysitting you and them. Worth more than one dinner. Better make it a week."

"You eat like a damn elephant." Clint is such a whiny bastard.

"And I know you've got more money than you know what to do with, trust fund baby." When I elbow him in the ribs, he grunts and flinches. *Shit.* I must have hit him where he fell on top of his bike a week before. I start to apologize, but he shakes his head.

"I'm good. Spot's a little tender still, but it's healing."

"Tell me Doc cleared you to run this weekend."

"Fuck off, Hunt. You're not my mother," Clint growls.

"Retract the fucking claws, brother. As your friend, it's my duty to bust your balls. You going to buy my dinner this week, or am I hanging at home tonight enjoying some peace and quiet?"

"Fine. Dinner. One week. You join the fun tonight."

We shake on it and part ways. He'll text me later and let me know when I need to be ready.

Three hours later, I'm climbing into the front seat of Brian's Escalade. Brian's driving for now. Clint and Luke are in the second row while Gun, Ty, and Matt have squeezed into the last row.

"Hunter," Gun calls out, "heard I missed a helluva show this afternoon."

I smile. "Sure did. Hear you have the delusional belief you think you can actually land a seven-twenty this weekend."

It's been a while since I've seen Gun—otherwise known as Gunner. He's been off training in hopes of knocking me out of the top spot. We've traded back and forth throughout the season, but I'm determined. Only way he has a chance is to actually hit the seven-twenty, which he won't. No one has. Not even the greats.

"Oh I'm going to. You're going to need a box of tissues on Sunday."

"Why's that?" I shoot back.

"All the tears you'll shed when I kick your ass."

"I'm not worried. Even if I was, this is best trick. The race that really matters is still a month away. You, pretty boy, should be worried."

The truck explodes with noise. Half the guys slamming me, the other half Gun.

"What's the game plan tonight, boys?" Luke interrupts the boisterous ribbing.

"Food, drinks, and kicking your asses tomorrow," Ty answers.

"Don't care. Ready for a release." I grin at Brian. He loves his fiancée, but we all know how much he's dialed down his partying for her.

"Release. Right. You'll go home and snuggle up with Shanna tonight. We all know that. She's got you wrapped around her little finger."

"Shut it, Hunt. Okay. I'm picking dinner. The rest of you jerkoffs can argue about the bar."

I lay my head against the headrest and close my eyes. Lately, I haven't been hanging out with these idiots, and I miss them. There are times though. when everything gets to be too much. I miss *him*, and it's easier to hide the hurt when I'm by myself.

"Hunter, man, that jump was insane. Didn't realize you weren't going tandem today."

I smirk, not surprised Ty's the one who spoke up first. He's the most observant of all of us. Todd wanted one more tandem, but I needed the rush of going by myself. Since I met the requirements after my last jump, he didn't have much room to argue.

"Yeah, that's what you told me yesterday," Clint adds.

"Changed my mind. Talked to Todd this morning. We switched things around. Worth it, too. Tandem and diving alone are nothing alike."

Brian pulls into a parking spot at some diner I've never heard of, and we all climb out of the car. Clint grabs me and keeps me back while everyone else goes inside. Brian looks at the two of us and lowers his chin slightly. Apparently he and Clint planned this ambush. Go figure.

"You okay, Hunt?"

"Sure. Why wouldn't I be?"

"I'm your best friend. I know all your secrets. Something's off and I'm not letting you go inside until you tell me what it is."

Do I tell him about the letter I got in the mail today? Clint knows about *him*. Knows how much damage was done. He's the only one. I'm not sure I'm ready for any of this. Tomorrow. The next day. Now. If I talk about it then it's real. Right now... it's nothing more than a letter. Paper and ink.

"Bastian's home." Then again, maybe I need to get this off my chest.

"What the fuck?"

My thoughts exactly. As soon as I saw the handwriting, I knew who it was from. Three years and the guy's chicken scratch is still the same.

I take a deep breath, close my eyes, and slowly let it out. "Got a letter from him yesterday."

"Letter. Like via mail?"

"Yep. Guess he sent it on his way out of the sandbox."

"Boy always was good at theatrics. Gotta give him that. So he's home. What else did he have to say?"

I shake my head. Now is definitely not the time to tell Clint that my ex, who wants to talk, will be at the Center tomorrow. Even more, I can't tell him that Bastian will be there as part of the medical personnel. From what I can tell, he's putting his medical training into practice as soon as possible.

“Later. Don’t want to ruin tonight. I just want to put this behind me and let go.”

“Right.” Clint pats me on the back, and we head inside to join everyone else. “You think we can get them drunk and hung-over enough they screw up this weekend?”

I chuckle. “Probably not. Don’t need to, though. I intend to beat all of you without breaking a sweat. Tomorrow’s just practice anyway. We’d have to do this again, which I won’t do. I love ya like a brother, but after a few passes I’m going to head out and get some rest.”

And worry about Bastian. ’Cause no doubt he’ll try to corner me. I hope I can convince him to wait until after the final run.

“Damn.” Clint gives a dramatic sigh. As if I’m that much of a sucker.

I make it through the night without more inquisitions from Clint. Barely. Midway through the bar hop he tries to get me to talk, but I put him off again. Only Ty and Gun need help getting out to the SUV at the end of the night, so I’m grateful for that.

As I lay in bed much later, I wonder if I shouldn’t have had a beer or ten. I quit drinking four years ago, after being arrested for drunk and disorderly and my sponsors threatened to pull my ride. That’ll straighten a rider out real damn quick. The tossing and turning is making me reconsider sobriety.

Damn Bastian for coming back. Damn him for leaving. Just... damn.

Chapter Two

I ride to the top of the ramp and visualize my first jump. A Rock Solid Backflip. My heart races as I imagine throwing the bike into a backflip, letting go and stretching my body all the way out before the bike rotates around, and I land.

There are so many things that could mess up here, but I don't think about all that. The only thing I focus on is completing the trick.

They tell me I'm up. I adjust my helmet. Tap my foot against the footpeg. The bike sounds good. No misses in the engine. Everything's set. I'm ready to go.

On the way down the ramp the bike builds speed. I hit the apex, throw my weight into the trick, and let gravity take over. As I settle back onto the seat, I let out a breath. Fuck yeah! I'm going to nail this. It's all mine. The front wheel hits the dirt, and I look up.

He's right there. Straight ahead. Shit. I jerk the handlebars to the left, and the bike veers in the same direction. So fucking close to a perfect ride, and I lose it. Because of Bastian. I have never paid attention to the crowd until my run was over—until today.

It's his fault my bike rolls to the side with me still on it. I'm going down, and there's not a damn thing I can do to stop it. Seeing Bastian in all his muscled glory has frozen me in place—the absolute worst possible place.

"Motherfucker." My ankle is throbbing. I don't think it's broken. Just bruised—I hope. Hell, my whole left side hurts.

Then someone's hands are on me. Their touch is hesitant, and I know they are checking for injuries. I hear the medic crew talking, asking me questions, but I can't focus on anything other than the stabs of pain rocketing through my body.

"Ugh." I try to sit up and feel an arm drape across my shoulders. Whoever is behind me gives me a nudge. One step at a time, I get off the dirt. Thankfully this is just practice, so I don't have to smile and wave. No need to put on a happy face.

"Hunter. What the hell, man?" Clint's at my side now.

"Umm." I look around for the offender. I know he's near. Bastian and I are connected in a way I've never experienced with anyone else. We sense each

other when we're in the same area. I don't need to see or hear him to know he's there.

I find him lifting my bike off the dirt. A small part of me is thankful it's Bastian. At least I trust him. Not that I don't trust the others, but I don't know them. Like it or not, I know my old lover. Better than I know myself—at least that's the way it had been before. Now, I'm not so sure.

Clint must see him at the same time I do, because he stiffens and hisses in my ear. "That son of a bitch is the reason you wrecked, isn't he?"

I'm in too much pain to hide and argue, so I just nod.

"You knew he'd be here. Wait. Is he...? No way. Bastian's a medic?"

"Yeah." I grab my ribs and take a breath. "Guess they were shorthanded or something. Don't know exactly. Just know he's working the event."

We walk back to First Aid in silence. What's there to say? I don't owe Clint an explanation, despite what I'm certain he thinks. He's as much my brother as anyone—most of the time. We have our own past, which he thinks entitles him to know everything. I have a tendency to disagree.

"Your bike looks okay." The deep timbre of his voice makes my sore body numb, erasing the injuries for a few seconds. And I'm more than grateful. Until I look at him and everything between us rushes back into focus.

Alcohol.

Fight.

No more contact.

Three years.

Love.

My heart beats so hard I fear it'll burst out of my chest. Why is he here? Why didn't he stay away?

Unfortunately, the burning in my eyes isn't caused by the failed jump. The reason is standing in front of me. Over six feet of muscle. Short, military-cut blond hair. Brown eyes with gold flecks throughout. He was built before he left. Now, I'm speechless. Even in the plain black T-shirt, I can see the definition of his chest.

I want to yell at him. I want to pound my fist into his sexy-as-hell face. Make him hurt the way he made me hurt. Every. Damn. Day.

I want to hug him. Press my lips against his. Taste him. Get on my knees and swallow his thick cock.

I want all of it. Good and bad. But I can't have any of it, because there are too many people standing around us. Don't ask me who they are. I don't know. The only person I see is Bastian. In this moment, he is everything.

"Hunter." Clint pulls me out of my haze. "Come on. Let's get you back to your room. Doc says you need to rest tonight, and you can ride tomorrow."

Don't look back. Don't back down.

I rub the blank spot on my chest. Bastian reaches for my arm, the one where my motto is written. We make eye contact again, and I look at the words beneath his hand and nod.

"Hunter, you have to..."

"Not now, Bastian. Not here."

Clint grips Bastian's shoulder and pulls him away from me. Bastian's eyes plead with me. He wants to talk. I know that. And I want to know why he didn't tell me they were shipping him to Afghanistan. Why he didn't keep in touch after leaving in the middle of the night. I got to see him for a short time after boot camp. Then he was gone.

Except, that's the past, and I don't talk about the past. I try not to think about it—most days I'm successful. Today's different, because my past, and everything I love and hate about it, is staring at me, pleading with his eyes.

"I need to get out of here." My words are directed at Clint while my gaze is locked on Bastian. Leaving is a good idea. What I really want is to get on my bike and ride until I can't ride any more.

"You're not going out there," Clint scolds me at the same time he helps me off the bed I've been resting on.

His warning doesn't come as a surprise. All of us have a place to go when we need to relieve stress. Brian goes to his fiancée. Clint goes for a ball-busting run. I find a dirt track. Not a freestyle track, but an outdoor motocross track, where I can run at top speed.

Speed. Adrenaline. Those are the things I need right now. Definitely not rest.

"Don't worry. I'm fine."

I don't look over my shoulder when we leave. If I did, I'd go to Bastian. If he wants to talk, he'll have to come find me.

I'm an asshole for testing him. I know this. Doesn't stop me, though.

"Doc told you to take it easy. Killing yourself on the track is the opposite of his instructions."

"Right. When have you known me to listen to what people tell me to do?"

"Never," Clint mumbles. "You have to ride tomorrow, Hunt."

"Yep. I will. No more tricks. I promise. But I'm not going to sit around the rest of the day." I stop and turn to face my friend. "I'm going alone. Don't follow. Don't show up unexpectedly in a couple of hours to check on me. I don't want to see anyone until tomorrow morning."

"Hunter. Don't. You're letting him..."

"This isn't about him. This is about me. What I need. Be the friend you say you are, and leave me alone."

I don't give Clint time to answer. Mistakenly, I look over his shoulder. Bastian is within hearing range. He knows what I've just asked. He nods. Yeah. He'll find me.

Damn if I can stop the grin that slips out.

Chapter Three

Five laps in, Bastian shows up. *Didn't take him long to find me.* I wonder if Clint told him where to look. Then I remember the way our eyes met right before I left practice, and I know he got here on his own.

I hear him rev the engine of another bike. A smile forms on my lips. Good. We're going to beat each other on the track before we get to the verbal sparring.

Maybe things haven't changed too much after all.

For the next couple of hours, we race each other. Sometimes I win. Others Bastian takes the hypothetical checkered flag. Since it's only the two of us out here, we make our own rules. We don't have to stop and talk. Instinctually, each of us knows when one race ends and the next one begins. It's always been like that. I don't realize until I'm mid-turn on our last lap how much I've missed the ease Bastian and I have with each other. I've missed him, but I've forgotten about all the little things.

I realize how much I needed this time. Not the speed. Or the adrenaline rush. I needed him. Bastian.

We stop side-by-side. I straddle my bike and slide off my helmet. He hasn't cut his engine, but I know he's watching me. Waiting. Giving me first go.

"Might as well get this over with," I say as I start to walk my bike to the trailer.

A deep chuckle sounds behind me, and my body tingles all over.

Bastian is parked next to me. We can easily set up a couple of chairs between the trailers and talk, uninterrupted, for however long we want. While he secures his bike, I pull out a folding chair and have a seat. I've already got a bottle of water and bag of chips in hand when Bastian joins me.

"Still filling yourself full of shit food I see." He reaches across the space and snags my bag of chips then tosses an apple in my lap.

"Still a food Nazi, I see."

"Seems like someone needs to take care of you. How you managed to survive the last three years without me, I don't know."

His words are meant to be a joke, not intended to cut me. His joke backfires. It took me a year to get on track after Bastian left. He has no idea what I dealt

with. For now I choose not to tell him all the dirty details. The trouble I caused. I may not have been drinking, but trust me when I say I got into some serious trouble without alcohol to use as an excuse.

“Yeah. You wouldn’t know. Then again, an email, text, or even a letter wouldn’t have killed you.”

Bastian tilts his head to the sky and releases a long, slow breath. I bite into the apple. My heart tells me to say something. Apologize for my snippy comment. Too bad for emotions, ’cause my head has a whole different plan. I want—need—answers.

“Okay. Ask me. Whatever you want to know, I’ll tell ya. For the next hour, I’m an open book. After that, I want to put all of this behind us and move forward. I love you, Hunter. I have for years. As much as I hate the distance between us, I get it. So let’s do this.”

He loves me. Those three words almost make me rethink everything I want to say. I love him too, but I owe myself answers. I’m afraid if I don’t understand why, I’ll always worry it’ll happen again. Next time, he may not come back.

I sit up straight in my chair. One hour. Then we are done with the past. I can work with that.

“You left me in the middle of the night. You shipped off to the hellhole of Afghanistan and left me wondering, until yesterday, whether or not I’d ever see you again.”

“I’ve accepted my fuck up. That’s why I’m not arguing or trying to avoid your questions. We need to move beyond. I saw what you’ve got on your arm. Don’t look back. Don’t back down. That’s what I’m saying. It’s why I want to resolve this now.”

He makes sense. I understand what he’s saying, but this only brings up more questions. Like what his plans are now that he’s home. Does he plan on doing another tour? How did he keep all of this a secret?

“You. Left. Me. We’d seen each other for a few weeks at most. I know you enlisted for school and for your dad. Hell, I took you to camp and left you there. One of the hardest things I had to do, because I knew what it meant. But then you came home. I thought we were good. That we’d make our relationship—if we had one—work throughout your enlistment. Then you left. Fucking left in the middle of the night. Why?” My voice rises with each word

and cracks on the last one. I'm seconds away from giving up on this talking bullshit.

"Not without a word, Hunter. The note was the best I could give you." Bastian isn't looking at me. Which is fine, because in no way do I want him to see the tears in my eyes.

"Yeah. You were such a mother-fucking pussy you couldn't at least wake me up and tell me you loved me or that you would talk to me later. A Dear John letter is all I got."

Bastian shakes his head. "Not a Dear John letter. Never that. I've always planned to come back to you."

"Then why?" My voice cracks and Bastian looks at me.

"I fucking loved you. Too much." Bastian stands up and runs his fingers through his hair. He starts out yelling. Unlike me, each word softens, becomes pain-filled. "I had to do it that way for me."

Rage replaces heartache. I stand in front of my best friend and stare him down. He left me, and all he has to say is that he loved me too much to wake me that night. "I spent a year in hell. Every time I turned on the news, I had to pray I wouldn't see your name flash as a soldier killed or missing in action. Do you know what that did to me?"

He shakes his head. My hands fist at my side. "I'm sorry." Bastian's apology is so quiet I almost miss it.

Without thinking, I pull my arm back and let the right hook go. Bastian's head pops back and he yells, but doesn't fight me. The seconds of relief are good, but not enough. I somehow find my way back to my chair.

Bastian falls back into his seat then leans forward and presses his head into his hands. He's still the Bastian I love. Sensitive. Caring. Loyal. So damn hot. On its own accord, my hand moves to caress his close-shaved hair.

"I love you so much, Bastian. Admitting just how much freaks me the hell out."

I continue to stroke his head, down his neck, his shoulders. Back up. Then down. We both sit in silence. The warm air starts to cool, and the skies begin to turn from blue to reddish orange. I've lost track of how long we've sat out here. At some point Bastian sits up; I don't stop touching him. He scoots closer to me and rests his hand on my knee. Before I say anything, I whisper a prayer that he'll answer. Because if he doesn't, I'm not sure where we go from here.

Don't look back. Don't back down.

"Bastian." I wait for him to look at me. "Three years. I heard nothing from you. Why?"

The silence that follows is all consuming. I'm worried he won't tell me. Or worse, whatever he has to say won't ease my fear. The last thing I want him to say is he found someone else while deployed. I know the idea is ludicrous. Even without "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" it's not like men can readily come out. But that's not to say he didn't find a partner that would keep their relationship quiet.

"For eighteen months I was in the sandbox. Surrounded by heat, sand, and hours of nothing to do. We had to be on guard no matter what. Alert. Ready to kill at a moment's notice. As a medic, things weren't the same for me. Didn't change the atmosphere as a whole. Being over there is the greatest mindfuck you'll ever experience."

Bastian presses his lips against mine. I want to pull away, but my heart overrules my head this time. He needs this. It's comfort. Safety. Not sexual.

"Bas..."

"Wait. Let me finish."

I nod. Bastian reaches behind him and pulls out his wallet. Inside he has a picture of us. We are standing at the top of a ramp. I'm straddling my bike; my helmet is tucked under my arm. Bastian is on my left, his arm draped across my shoulders, and Clint is on my right. He's giving the camera a thumbs-up. I remember the picture. Luke is behind the lens. It's the last competition Bastian was at. A week later he left.

"Every morning, I looked at this. It was hidden in the bottom of my locker. Before lights out I saw it again. On the days I didn't get to see you, I struggled staying in my head. For eighteen months I told myself stories about what you were doing. Where you traveled. Before they shipped me out there, I kept up with racing news."

So he thought about me. Kept tabs on me. Yet, he still hasn't answered my question.

Bastian's not done. "If I'd reached out to you—even once—I would have needed to hear your voice, talk to you every day. That wasn't possible. So I chose to cut ties completely."

“And me? You didn’t think about what it would do to me?”

“I couldn’t, Hunter. Trust me. I know how bad that sounds. It would have made everything so much worse if I thought about how badly I’d hurt you. The only thing for me to do was hope that you’d take me back. I’ll do whatever it takes.” He brushes his thumb down my cheek then grips my chin and lifts my head so we are eye to eye. “There was no one else. I know you’re afraid I’m going to tell you there was—or is. I won’t. Because there isn’t. You are the only one I’ve ever wanted. Will ever want. I. Love. You.”

“Sappy bastard.” I smile. The truth is there in his eyes. Every part of me believes him. My heart and head are no longer battling each other. The reasons don’t ease the heartache. Understanding the why is two-thirds of the battle for me.

“I love you too. I missed you so damn much, Bastian. I’m still mad. We aren’t through with this. Won’t be for a long time.” I lick my lips. “I want you, Babe. Now.”

He smiles and kisses me again. His calloused fingers slip under my T-shirt.

“Need you too, Babe.” Bastian tries to pull my shirt over my head, but I stop him.

“Not here. Too much of a risk. Can’t be caught.”

“Fine. We’re going to talk about that too. I won’t keep you a secret. When I want to kiss you, I’m going to. To hell with anyone who has a problem with it.”

I start to move, but before I turn away, I run my hand down his chest to the bulge in his pants. I grip his cock and jack my hand up and down.

“You’re the one who wants to wait, Hunt. That’s not helping.”

“I know. Don’t want you to lose momentum on the way back. Want to be sure you’re ready the minute we get behind closed doors.”

“Definitely not a problem.”

I chuckle and smack his ass. “Good. Let’s go.”

Bastian follows me to my hotel. I’m not far from home, but it’s still a drive, and I’d rather not have to drive more than necessary. On the way over, I’m both glad we are in separate trucks and disappointed. Now that he’s back, I don’t want to let Bastian out of my sight. The alone time gives me a chance to process.

I keep replaying his explanations. Halfway to the hotel it hits me. Never will there be a time I can truly know how Bastian felt. If we want what we had—and more—then the only choice for me is to take him at his word. To trust that what he did, by cutting me off, was the right thing for him.

He's already told me he's not happy with the decision he made. He didn't dodge my questions. Bastian isn't trying to hide from me.

And that kiss. My semi hardens in an instant. *Looks like I'll be as ready to go as I wanted him.* Good. A few good kisses were not enough. I rub my crotch. Naked images of Bastian flash through my mind making it difficult to pay attention to the road. I have to calm down.

To keep from wrecking, I go back to my dilemma. To pursue more or not. For each excuse why we shouldn't, I come up with a reason we should.

Don't look back. Don't back down. As Bastian said, it applies to us.

I pull into an empty spot at the back of the hotel lot, and Bastian parks next to me. It takes me a minute or two and a few deep breaths to calm my nerves enough to get out of the truck. My hands are sweating. My heart is racing. I'm about to go into my room for a reunion with the man who left me three years ago. The love of my life. As pathetic as some may say I sound, Bastian's ruined me for anyone else.

Women have tried. Track bunnies. Friends tried to set me up. Clint and I gave it a shot—albeit a very short one. But none of them were Bastian. None of them turned me inside out and upside down the way he does.

He doesn't pressure me to get out, which calms the turmoil in my head. This is the right thing to do. It has to be, since I'm pretty sure I won't be able to handle the consequences if it's not.

The door creaks as I open it, and Bastian looks over his shoulder at me. He's perched on the hood of his truck. "You good, Babe?" he asks without turning around completely.

"Yeah. I am."

I meet him at the front of our trucks, and he jumps to the ground. I grab his hand and intertwine our fingers. When I glance at him, he's grinning, and I return his smile.

"Want you so bad." He shifts behind me, and we make the quick walk inside, my back pressed against his front. Awkward. But I don't care.

We come to the door, and I hesitate with the key card poised in front of the lock. Bastian slides his hand to the buttons of my pants and pops the first one free. Then the second. Warm breath flows across my neck, and my cock twitches.

“Bastian.” I draw out his name.

“Open the door, Hunter. You did this to me.” He rocks his hips, and the thick length of his cock presses into my ass.

“Someone will see us,” I whisper.

“Then I suggest you move a little faster, Babe. Unless you don’t want this. If that’s the case, then speak up now, because once I have you in that room, there is absolutely no fucking way I’m leaving or letting you leave.” Bastian takes my earlobe between his teeth. The bite of pain has me rocking back into him. Any lingering doubts disappear. I want him. I want him now.

The door opens, and the only reason I don’t fall to the floor is Bastian’s grip around my waist. I don’t know where the room key lands, since I’m too busy yanking my shirt over my head.

Unbelievably, by the time I’ve got my pants to my knees, Bastian is standing before me naked. His erect shaft, long and thick, bounces against his belly. My mouth waters, and I lick my lips. Inside my chest, my heart pounds so fast I’m afraid I’m going to have to sit down. Rather than finishing the chore of undressing, I fall to my knees in front of him.

“You don’t—”

He doesn’t finish, because I’ve already taken him in my mouth.

Holy fuck, does he taste good. Salty. Musky. Pure male. Mine. All mine.

When I moan around his length, I feel him pulse against my tongue.

“Slow down, Babe. I want to last. Don’t want this to end.” Bastian grabs handfuls of my hair and tugs me off his dick.

“We’ve got all night, Bastian. Unless you don’t plan on staying.” I lean forward; the pain from him pulling my hair makes me wince and edge back.

“I’m not going anywhere. Stop that train of thought right now. If you think I’m the only one who’s going to blow like a virgin, you’re wrong.”

Confused and frustrated, I rest on my heels and look up at Bastian.

“Get rid of your jeans and get on the bed.”

While I do as he instructed, he goes to the bathroom. What feels like an eternity, but more than likely is no more than a minute or two, my lover comes to the side of the bed and lays a towel between us. Bastian crawls onto the bed with his head at my feet.

“Yes,” I groan.

Bastian shackles my ankles with his hands and yanks me down so I’m flat on my back. He straddles my chest so his balls dangle in my face.

“Same time, Hunter. We come together. Got it?”

The command in his words sends shivers through me. Without warning, Bastian engulfs my prick in his hot mouth. My hips buck off the bed, and the smack he plants on my ass is sure to leave a mark.

Together. We’re supposed to come together. From past memories, I know he’ll torment me if I don’t get to work. Before taking him down my throat again I lick his ass, getting him nice and wet so he can take my finger. Bastian pushes against me when I nudge his hole.

I lick his shaft, suck his balls, and then return to his ass. With each pass I can tell he’s getting closer. He takes me deep and sucks hard as he pulls off, forcing my body to react. I can’t resist any more and let go. His balls tighten, and seconds later his seed is shooting down my throat.

We stay silent as we clean each other up. Bastian gets rid of the towel, and I pull back the comforter to climb into bed. I’m not done for the night, but after that orgasm I’m in definite need of recovery time. Bastian joins me and enfolds me in his arms. As my eyes drift closed, he presses his lips to my forehead.

“Love you so much, Babe.” His whispered words are the last thing I hear before drifting off. “I’m back, and I don’t plan on leaving. One tour. That’s all I’m doing. Now that I’m home, I plan to go to school and make up with you. Please don’t give up on me.”

I can’t respond to Bastian’s plea, and he doesn’t push. I hear the honesty in his words. I want to believe him. My heart is already his, always was. In time, my mind will catch up. For now, we’ll have to take it slowly.

“Holy shit. The ghost of years past is back.” I smile when Brian jogs over to us and gives Bastian a quick hug. “Good to see you, bro. Military didn’t fuck with you too much did they?”

Bastian's low chuckle vibrates through me. After waking up to his punishing kisses and his hand wrapped around my cock, I didn't think I'd have any problems today. Should have known better.

"Good to see you, Brian. Pretty sure I fucked them more."

"Lookie there. The inconsiderate prick returns." Clint joins our group with his hands on his hips, glaring at Bastian.

"Stop it, Clint. You don't know what you're talking about." I glance from Clint to Brian and then Bastian. This is not the place or time.

"Right. Later then." Clint huffs and walks away.

"Bastard needs to get laid," Brian quips. He squeezes my shoulder. "Don't worry, brother. I know about you and Bastian. Glad to see he's home in one piece and you finally get who you want." With a wink and a smirk, Brian leaves Bastian and I alone.

"Well, that was interesting," Bastian says.

"Umm. Yeah. I had no idea."

"Guess it's one less thing we have to worry about. Clint on the other hand..." Bastian looks off in the direction my friend headed toward.

I sigh. "Clint was there when you left. He..." The sharp intake of breath and glare from Bastian catches me off guard. I hold my hands up in surrender. "Slow down, Bastian. We kissed, once. Both of us were drunk. Afterward, we talked and agreed it wouldn't work. I won't lie and tell you I was a saint. You left with no word. I may not have been celibate, but none of them meant anything." I step closer to him and rest my hand on his waist. We could so easily get caught, but right now I don't care. This needs to be said. "I love you, Bastian. Nothing, no one, no matter how long we were apart, will change that."

Bastian studies me before wrapping his hand around my neck and jerking me forward until our lips collide.

The years of pain and heartache were worth a lifetime spent with the man in front of me. I have no doubt we'll find a way to make things right between us. Our relationship will never be what it was before. We've both grown up to be different people. But this is one homecoming I will never forget, and hope to never repeat.

Epilogue

I look at my arm. *Don't look back. Don't back down.*

I place my hand over my chest. The empty space no longer bare. After I won the Best Trick competition, I went with Bastian and had the space filled. An American flag with dog tags draped over it now covers the skin.

This is my final run. With Bastian home, I've decided to retire. It was an easy decision to make.

My heart pounds.

The engine revs when I turn the throttle. X Games gold is mine.

I run the course, and Bastian meets me at the end. He's mine as much as I am his. I have everything I'll ever need in him.

The End

Author Bio

Born and raised in Texas, Jennah is a transplant to Missouri long enough ago she should probably consider that her hometown. But she will forever be a Texan. She loves to write any story that will make a reader smile, laugh, and maybe even cry (although you won't ever hear her admit that she cries). Whether the next story she writes is contemporary, urban fantasy, LGBT, or whatever other crazy idea she comes up with, there will always be love and romance in the midst of trials and turmoil.

When she's not writing, you can find her on Twitter, with her family, or buried in a book trying to escape reality for just a minute.

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