

# LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

## HIS, NO MATTER WHAT

S.J. Lenox

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## HIS, NO MATTER WHAT

**By S.J. Lenox**

### 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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[Arizona sunrise](#), [Yellow sunset with boats](#)

[Poollicht](#), [Perfect white beach](#)

[Sunset in Prague](#), [Purple mountain sunset](#)

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## Photo Description

The young man, his defined chest bared and jeans hanging loosely around his hips, stares out from the picture. From beneath the shadow of his sweater's hood his eyes glitter, dark and enticing but troubled. His hands are clasped behind his back, as though he's trying to stop himself from reaching out to grab something or someone.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*I'm both nervous and excited about my big brother attending my college graduation.*

*I've always looked up to him, but something changed when I was about thirteen. He'd gone away to college and came home for Thanksgiving. Any lingering doubts about my sexuality vanished. It had just been a few months, but somehow he looked very different: older, hotter, more sophisticated.*

*I know I shouldn't feel this way about my brother, and I swear I've tried to stop thinking of him in that way. But no guy I've been with has measured up to him. I haven't seen him since before I started college, but I'll never forget the way he looked at me that last time. It gave me hope that he might feel the same for me.*

*This weekend, I'm going to find out.*

*{Please no BDSM, violence, or abuse. Prefer contemporary or urban fantasy, but please no shifters or vampires. Angst is always welcome, and please feel free to crank up the heat as high as you dare. While the boys should hook up (at least) once, whether they decide to pursue any kind of sexual or romantic relationship in the end is up to you. Thank you!}*

*Sincerely,*

*C.M.*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** incest, reunited, long time coming, homophobia, college, businessman, family drama, angst

**Word Count:** 21,123

# HIS, NO MATTER WHAT

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Adam Keene watched those winking droplets of water trail down the hard chest, and wondered what the slick, taut skin would taste like on his tongue. He swallowed. Maybe it would taste like honey, the golden color of the skin reminding him of the syrupy, sticky spread. Sweet and earthy, he'd bet the flavor would curl around his tongue and saturate his senses, leaving a lingering aftertaste he'd savor for days.

His hands itched to reach out and touch the slabs of firm muscle, to stroke the dusting of damp hair over the nicely defined pecs. His riveted gaze followed the trail of dark hair lower, he also wouldn't miss the opportunity to run his fingers over the ridges of the tight abs as he explored down.

Adam took a step closer, already imagining what he'd do after he tugged free the white towel precariously draped around those lean hips, when a big hand suddenly gripped at the front of it, barring the tantalizing view.

"Morning," Patrick's deep voice rumbled. His hand clutched at the towel as he tried to secure the tuck that'd slowly come undone under Adam's anticipatory gaze.

Reluctantly, Adam tore his eyes away from the view he'd been enjoying and looked up to greet the owner of the body he should never have been caught ogling.

Late morning sunlight shone brightly through his bedroom window out into the hallway, picking up the blue in Patrick's inky hair, the almost steely shade of blue dull in comparison to the dark, swirling indigo of the thickly lashed eyes staring at him inquisitively. Adam realized he was taking too long to respond.

He cleared his throat, trying to clear it of the husky roughness of sleep and surreptitiously angle his body away, hoping Patrick wouldn't notice the bulge growing in Adam's pants—although if he did, maybe he'd chalk it down to morning wood.

"Morning," Adam greeted, curving his mouth up into what hopefully looked like a casual smile, as if he hadn't just been close to attacking Patrick's glorious body with his hands and mouth.

“Didn’t think I’d see you this morning.” Patrick grinned.

Adam shifted uncomfortably with an answering little laugh as Patrick’s smile went straight to his pants. The white, steam-dampened door caught his eye as he tried to look anywhere but at the nearly naked man directly in front of him.

“My sleep’s been all outta whack since exams started,” Adam explained. “Are you done with the bathroom?”

“Yeah, go right ahead.”

“Thanks,” Adam replied. He hastily took up the opportunity for escape and slipped into the bathroom, trying his best not to sneak a last peak. He sagged against the door as it clicked shut and absently rubbed at his right arm. The area tingled hotly from where it’d brushed up against Patrick’s warm, damp skin in Adam’s haste to leave the awkwardness in the hallway. Well, awkwardness on *his* part. After all, it was normal to make small talk with the half-naked man you catch in your hallway—wasn’t it?

It was the blatant, panting perusal and hardening erection Adam had subjected him to that was cause for embarrassed panic. His dick throbbed in disagreement. As he had come to do in the stressful frenzy of the last month, Adam ignored it, and flipped the lock and pushed off the door. He peeled off his clothes and headed straight for the refuge of the shower. Steam quickly billowed out of the glass door as he turned on the water and stepped under the spray.

Adam sighed and rolled his shoulders as water, hot enough to melt away the first few layers of skin, sluiced over him, easing his tense muscles.

He’d forgotten Patrick had returned for the weekend. When Adam had returned home late last night to find Patrick waiting for him, Patrick had nearly been brained with a backpack full of textbooks. Tall and broad-shouldered, he’d melted out of the shadow of the porch, stalking toward Adam as though Adam was some juicy prey he’d like to skin and wear.

The last thing Adam had been expecting, his mind overloaded with a frantic montage of serial killers, was a pair of arms to wrap him up in a tight embrace. Adam tensed, ready to aim a swift kick to any part of his attacker’s body he could get when he heard his name being called in that deep, all-too-familiar voice.

*Shocked* was too mild a word to describe his reaction. Adam froze, sagged, tensed and pushed against the hard body holding his. He stumbled back, his



eyes wide as he took in the man before him. No doubt like a fish, his mouth had opened and closed wordlessly as he tried to process whether his over-squeezed brain was playing a trick on him for shits and giggles after he'd put it through the ringer of a week of exams, or if Patrick was really standing on his doorstep.

The worried, blue gaze and the firm hand that reached out to squeeze his had been all too real. Patrick was really back.

It wasn't until after Adam shakily let them both into the house and settled Patrick into his old room that Adam got the reason for Patrick's return. Barely sparing a glance at the bed, harder and bigger than the one he'd left, or the empty gray walls, devoid of any personal touch, Patrick explained the reason for his sudden return home.

Apparently—and Adam still had a hard time believing this—Patrick hadn't wanted to miss Adam's graduation—four years of hard work was nothing to sneer at. Still in a state of disbelief, Adam had pointed out that it wasn't as if he were graduating top of his class in Aerospace Engineering or something, it was just Business, and even if he got top grades—which he hadn't been embarrassed to admit he did—he was surprised Patrick had come home after all this time for *that*. Even their mom wasn't bothering to attend, Adam had tossed, wincing inwardly when Patrick's expression darkened, whether at the mention of Jane Keene or at her absence at her son's graduation ceremony, Adam wasn't sure.

Too late in the evening to demand detailed answers to all the questions swirling inside of him, Adam had returned to his room confused, happy and exhausted.

Confusion because, *seriously*, after nine years? And happy, because despite Patrick having left Adam behind like some used condom in the alley after a rough quickie, he'd still come back. For Adam.

The exhaustion... well, that had been plaguing him since he'd gotten up at what felt like the crack of dawn to spend a day cramming at the library in preparation for his last exam, the one he'd just come stumbling back from. There was nothing like the tense, overloaded-with-stress atmosphere that hung heavily over campus to really invigorate a body.

So yes, it was no wonder he'd woken up this morning with no recollection of last night's late night reunion until he'd nearly molested his brother in the hallway.

His *brother*.

Adam groaned and scrubbed his hands up his face and through the tangled wet mop of hair that desperately needed a cut again.

It had been bad when he'd last seen Patrick, that Thanksgiving all those years ago, but Adam had a feeling that these next two days would be a whole lot worse.

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At thirteen years old, Adam had just barely figured out he was gay when he started having thoughts about Patrick. Very *unbrotherly* thoughts.

At the time, he had lived every pubescent boy's nightmare trying to hide, explain and deal with a constant raging erection and flushed face, except it seemed to only be constant around Patrick.

The relief Adam had felt that day, toward the end of summer, when Patrick finally left for college several hours away, was like the neighborhood and the nearby national park had been lifted off his narrow, scrawny shoulders. He had expected his feelings for Patrick to fade, for him to start noticing instead, the gangly, awkward boys whom he shared the locker rooms with, who strutted nakedly around, proud of their changing physique, and totally unaware of the gay guy in their midst.

That hope had been quickly dashed when he realized he was comparing every bulky arm and narrow chest to Patrick's and finding them, and all their other bits, severely lacking. And then came the long days of missing Patrick, of rushing to his room after school to tell him about his day only to find the room empty and loneliness suffusing him.

He had hoped that what he was feeling was a product of imprinting, since as a kid he'd always tagged after his brother. Horribly shy, he hadn't been one to make friends easily; even now he could count all his friends on one hand. Patrick hadn't been ashamed of Adam and his clinginess either, unlike what he'd heard of the other kids in his class and their older siblings. Like a duckling, he'd followed Patrick everywhere he could, and tried to everywhere he couldn't. Since the death of their father by the hands of a drunken trucker, the family of four rapidly shrunk into a family of two. Though still with them, their mother, Jane Keene, not particularly warm to begin with, after the death of her husband, had drifted even further away into the twittering, gossiping bosom of her church group.

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*Nine Years Ago*

5:42 p.m. Adam flicked his gaze back to the red screen and watched distractedly as bullets rained through his body. Barely glancing at the file of his mission results, he slid his thumb downwards, pressing to continue. Back from the dead, he cocked his gun and raised it as he stealthily scanned the tunnel, and charged ahead for the fifth time in an hour. Minutes later and he faced the same viscous, red liquid dripping down his screen. He tossed the controller onto the couch beside him and sank back into the cushions. There was no point. He hadn't been able to focus on anything since he'd gotten up and called Patrick early this morning to confirm his return for Thanksgiving. Adam's insides relived the melting they'd received at Patrick's soft laughter, affirming that he would definitely be on Adam's doorstep no later than six, traffic and weather permitting.

Only months had passed since Patrick had left for college, but Adam felt each and every one of those days down to the minute. Loneliness seemed to be constantly gnawing on his insides and though he had friends—okay, *a* friend—nothing could seem to fill the void his brother left. Adam spread his arms and dropped them back onto the couch on either side of him with a heaving sigh. Thirteen years old and his shyness had now nicely evolved into a case of extreme awkwardness. Some people were just blessed.

Adam pulled his eyes away from the broken antique metal clock—time must have moved backward three centuries ago—and picked at the dark bangs poking him in the eyes. It was definitely time for a haircut. His hair, already mop-like in its usual state, was growing into something that made him resemble Cousin Itt—wearing a wig.

The sudden knock at the door followed by the click of the lock disengaging had Adam jumping off the couch and racing toward it. He opened the solid oak door. Adam's happiness bubbled over and hitched at the sight on his doorstep. Hotter, and somehow looking more mature than when he'd left only a few months ago, Patrick's wide, full smile sent butterflies fluttering low in Adam's stomach.

"Adam!" Patrick greeted enthusiastically. "Shit, you've grown!" he said with a warm laugh, as he stepped forward to grab the young boy in a tight hug.

Adam flushed, the deeper tone of his brother's voice and the hard chest pressed against his cheek seemingly new to him. He wriggled, the warmth he felt had to be from his joy at seeing Patrick again, and tried to ignore the

stirring inside. He laughed in agreement to his brother's exclamation. After all, he *had* grown... even if it wasn't by much.

The hug was over all too soon. Adam hid the sharpness of his disappointment and accepted the hair tousel, moving out of the doorway to let his brother inside. Eyes glued to Patrick, it wasn't until his brother motioned to his side that Adam realized there was someone else there.

The bright smile Adam hoped to have to himself all weekend suddenly turned on the blond standing closely at Patrick's side. "This is Jason," Patrick said, resting his hand on the slender stranger's—Jason's—shoulder.

"Jason, this is Adam."

"So, you're Adam." Jason stepped forward. "Your brother talks about you non-stop." He grinned lopsidedly, holding out his hand.

Adam smiled faintly and mumbled a greeting, pumping Jason's hand once before dropping it. He noted that Patrick still hadn't moved his hand off the guy's shoulder.

"Patrick, you're here," Jane Keene greeted, stepping out from the kitchen. Her thin body was wrapped in an apron, dusted with flour, as she tried to wipe the excess off her hands with a dishtowel she promptly pushed back into the apron pocket. Adam hadn't seen his mother quite so domesticated in a while.

"Hey, Mom." Patrick bent down to give the petite figure a quick hug and kiss, uncaring of the puffs of white settling on his dark coat. "I brought Jason, the friend I mentioned."

Jason quickly stepped forward to greet Jane.

"Come on in," she said, lifting a cool, soft hand to quickly shake Jason's outstretched one. Her topaz eyes, exactly the same shade and shape as her younger son's, except lacking their warmth, took in the young stranger standing in her entranceway. The ear piercings, tight black jeans and tattered sneakers didn't go unnoticed.

Jane turned back to Patrick and gestured upstairs. "I already took out the air mattress for you. You'll be fine in Patrick's room, won't you, Jason?" she asked absently, already turning around to head back into the kitchen without waiting for a reply.

"That's fine with me, ma'am," Jason replied, undeterred by his cool reception.

“Dinner will be ready in an hour,” Jane’s voice called through the kitchen.

Adam watched his brother lead Jason upstairs with their bags and tried to shake off his disappointment. Of course Patrick had made new friends in college. Had Adam really expected Patrick to sit in his room all day, hating himself for leaving Adam behind, only going out to attend class. Adam didn’t like the answer he had for that question.

He slid back onto the couch and picked up his console to boot up the stage again. In an effort to keep his mind off the unfamiliar twinge in his chest, he started up his game again, this time intending to reach Mission Seven. It was okay; his dark, rather cruel good looks were needed here to save the day. He *did not* keep an ear cocked to the floor upstairs.

Not a scratch on his expensive tailored suit. Adam nodded in satisfaction and crossed his arms across his wide chest as he stepped into the freight elevator. The thick metal doors closed on the scene of carnage left in the silo. There was something to be said about saving the day.

“New game?” Patrick asked with interest as he dropped onto the space next to Adam on the couch. The love seat, as always, seemed intent on living up to its name, the soft, springy cushions dipping toward the middle when more than one seat was in use. Adam slanted toward Patrick, his shoulder and bare arm resting against his brother’s warm, solid one. Adam resisted the urge to rub against it.

The heat of Patrick’s skin was swiftly replaced by cold air and again that sense of disappointment as Patrick leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees to watch the TV screen avidly. Jason, Adam noted, dropped to the ground, sitting extremely close to Patrick’s legs, his back resting against the arm post.

Adam started up the next mission and shifted uncomfortably, trying not to notice Jason’s hand occasionally touching Patrick’s ankle.

“I borrowed it off a friend.” His one friend, Steven, seemed to be the only guy lacking more interpersonal skills than Adam. A zealous game player, Steven had been lending Adam his favorite games ever since their stilted bonding session over a truly perfectly timed pavement kiss—Steven, not Adam—and an assist to the infirmary. So far, they had progressed to more than five word conversations, although their topic hadn’t widened further than which game Adam needed to try next.

Adam paused the game and held out the controller. “Do you want to have a go?”

“Boys, dinner’s ready,” Jane announced, stepping into the room. She eyed the screen with disapproval. “You shouldn’t be playing so many of those violent games.” She sniffed with distaste.

Adam placed the controller onto the table and clicked off the TV with a mumble. It wasn’t the first time he had heard Jane’s censure. She seemed to disapprove of many of the things Adam and Patrick did, never mind that aside from their gaming tendencies—and the occasional spats—they always tried their best to make her happy.

“How about I show you how the game’s really played, later?” Patrick challenged cockily, with a conspiratorial wink, his dimple flashing.

Adam snorted, some things hadn’t changed. He filed into the dining room after the older boys, a happy smile on his face.

\*\*\*\*

Adam excused himself and waddled to the bathroom full of turkey, stuffing and eight other kinds of dishes that only made an appearance during this time of year. He didn’t think he’d be eating again for the rest of the month. His stomach gurgled, and apparently having decided that the overstretched waistband of Adam’s straining pants would make a good second dessert, promptly sealed itself around it trying to swallow it through his skin.

Adam pulled at his pants, fighting against his stomach. Scratch that, *the rest of the year*.

Adam returned to the dining room, ready to veg out in the living room with Patrick, as was their tradition in dealing with the aftermath of Thanksgiving. He faltered as the table, set for four, came into view, and with it, the sight of Patrick’s very masculine hand reaching for Jason’s. Shock filled him as he tried to process the sight of Patrick’s thumb stroking the back of Jason’s smaller hand. The gesture, glaringly intimate and tender, had Adam reeling as he realized what it was he was seeing. Patrick and Jason were together. *Together together*.

As though sensing him, Patrick turned to look over his shoulder. Adam dimly noted how quickly Patrick’s hand released Jason’s to drop back to his side innocently.

“Hey, there you are. Mom wants to know if you want anymore? I think I’ve eaten enough to make it through to Christmas, though,” Patrick joked.

Adam gave a negative shake of his head and turned toward his mother, not looking at Patrick. “Thanks, Mom, the food was great. Do you need help with clean up?” When his mother declined his offer to help, he turned on his heel and headed upstairs, needing the solace of his room.

*Patrick’s got a boyfriend*, Adam repeated to himself tonelessly, and then, *Patrick’s gay*.

Adam couldn’t believe it. Had Patrick always been gay? Why hadn’t he told Adam? Okay, so he hadn’t told Patrick he himself was gay yet, but still... Was Adam not trustworthy enough to tell? The questions continued to swirl around in him unanswered. He had to talk to Patrick.

Amongst all this, Adam couldn’t ignore the small flare of happiness at the knowledge that his brother wouldn’t find Adam’s desire for the same sex disgusting. He hadn’t told anyone yet, but he figured it was only time before someone noticed. He already knew from firsthand experience that kids had an unnatural knack for ferreting out what was different and making sure they would suffer for it.

Adam stiffened at the sudden thought of anyone finding out he had the hots for Patrick. His body felt icy as he imagined what everyone would say, what his mom—what Patrick—

Adam nearly doubled over, queasy to his stomach. *No*, he wouldn’t say anything to Patrick. He couldn’t.

The abrupt knock and swift opening of his door had Adam sitting up, tensed.

“Hey, you okay?” Patrick asked, his long legs eating up the distance from the door to Adam’s bed. He stopped in front of Adam, his dark brows knitted together as he looked down at Adam in brotherly concern.

Adam swallowed, pasting a smile on his wan face. He patted his stomach. “I’m good—think I just ate too much.”

Patrick didn’t look too convinced. “You sure?”

Adam stood up and brushed past Patrick, needing some space. “Yeah, I—” Adam broke off, staring down at the big hand suddenly wrapped around his thin wrist, halting his escape to his desk. Long, tanned fingers tapered with blunt,

square nails, the slightly roughed callouses of his palm burned into Adam's skin. He swallowed, unbidden; he wondered how they would feel stroking his body. Small shivers broke out on his skin; his breath hitched then puffed out shallowly from the images crashing through his mind.

"Adam?" The tense worry in Patrick's voice jerked Adam back from the reel of entwined limbs, bare skin and fevered hands.

"Sorry," Adam said breathlessly. His tongue darted out trying to moisten his suddenly dry lips. He looked up to find Patrick's eyes focused intently on his mouth, the black swallowing the deep indigo.

Patrick reached out to sweep an errant brown lock from Adam's temple, the pad of his finger running reverently down the side of Adam's face to his jaw. Adam's heart pounded, every part of his being focused on the trail of sensation. Patrick's warm hushed breath caressed Adam's cheek, the smell of pastry and sweet potatoes faintly brushing up against his skin.

"Hey, ready to go?" the question snapped through the room, jolting them apart.

Adam stumbled back, his calves hitting the bed. Despite the cheerfulness in his voice, the quickly concealed, dark frown and the rigidity in Jason's postures as he stood in the doorway made it clear that he knew he had interrupted something. *Something that definitely shouldn't have been happening.* Adam tensed, his gaze dropping intently on the dark green carpet as Jason's cold gaze swept over him.

The sound of Patrick clearing his throat filled the tense room. "Adam's not feeling well. He said he's going to stay here."

"All right, we'd better get going before they close," Jason said stiffly, spinning on his heel.

"We're just going to go pick up some stuff at the store. Won't be long," Patrick explained to Adam, a strained expression on his face as he looked from Jason's retreating figure back to Adam. Adam opened his mouth to ask Patrick to stay, to explain to Adam what had just happened—so Adam could explain what happened, but he couldn't get the words out. He could do nothing but watch as Patrick turned to hastily follow after Jason.

Adam collapsed onto his bed, his knees giving out as soon as Patrick left. He squeezed his eyes shut and dropped his head into his hands, unable to sort through the turbulent mass of emotions inside of him. Confusion, desire and



shame battled it out, each trying to swallow him whole as he thought back to what had just happened. His fingers brushed against his cheek. He could still feel the heat of Patrick's fingers there.

Adam curled his fingers tightly against his palm, the bite of pain from his nails digging into the soft flesh doing little to settle the anxiety eating at him. What he felt for Patrick was wrong. He'd known that the moment he had started having these feelings for him, but he hadn't realized until now how much having them could screw up everything. Patrick didn't need a little brother who imagined kissing him, touching him—who was *in* love with him.

Adam grit his teeth and steeled himself as he came to a resolution when the muffled sound of low, arguing voices drifted in through Adam's sealed window. Confused at the disturbance coming from so close, Adam climbed over his bed to the other side, looking through the glass to find the source.

The voices were coming from directly below him. Adam looked down, barely making out the dark figures of Jason and his brother. Under the deeper shadow of the small orange tree, where moonlight could still peek through the full branches, he saw the smaller figure savagely tear his wrist from the other's grip. Adam tried to move away from the window, not wanting to watch a lovers' argument, but he couldn't get his body to move. He watched as someone, he wasn't sure who, hissed an angry response, then the tall, broad figure pushed the slighter one into the trunk of the tree and kissed him furiously.

Before Adam could wrench his eyes away from the painful sight, the sound of the backdoor crashing open cracked through the still of the night.

"You disgusting, dirty filth!" his mother screamed, her voice shrill and furious as she stormed out of the kitchen door into the garden, the light from the interior pooling out onto the yard.

She stabbed a shaky hand at her eldest son and his companion, "How dare you bring your sickness into my house!" she hissed furiously. Her hand jerked back to violently fist at her side.

Jane's small shoulders shook with rage, her spine tight enough to snap as she sprayed vitriol at the shaking, young figure. "You're vile! Sick, if you think your abominable—"

"Please!" Patrick interjected pleadingly, his voice sounded painfully young and shaky. "Please, it's not like that." He gestured desperately behind him, the rest of his words low and lost to Adam's hearing.

“Don’t you dare spout that evil—”

Patrick tried again, stumbling forward. His voice hoarse with entreaty, “Mom—”

The sharp crack of Jane’s hand, hard across Patrick’s face, wrenched through the stillness of the night air. “Get out,” her voice, hard and cold as ice, sent tremors down Adam’s spine. “Get out of my house.”

“Mrs. Keene,” Jason protested, trying to step out from behind Patrick. Patrick held out his arm, halting him. Adam couldn’t catch the words Patrick said to him, but Jason rendered a worried, searching look at him before he turned to walk away from the raging woman.

His form rigid, Patrick glared coldly at the woman he had called Mom for the last eighteen years. Adam couldn’t even begin to imagine what Patrick was thinking as he stepped around her and stalked back into the house, his footsteps thundering up the stairs.

Adam scrambled over his bed in a panic. He tripped over his feet as he tried to rush out of his room to intercept Patrick. He stumbled through Patrick’s doorway to find him furiously shoving the few personal items and extra clothing he had left behind in his move to college into a big black duffle.

“Patrick?” Adam called tentatively, his voice wobbling. His heart throbbed with more pain than his thirteen-year-old self knew how to bear.

Patrick looked up, the violent jerking motions of his hands pausing. Pain bloomed through the rage frosting his hard eyes.

“I’m sorry, Adam. You shouldn’t have had to hear that,” he said stiffly. He tore his eyes away; jerking shut the zipper of the bag, and slung it onto his rigid shoulder. He bent to pick up the overnight bags next to the door as he walked out.

“You’re coming back, aren’t you?” Adam choked anxiously, his voice small. “Patrick?”

Patrick stopped; his shoulders drooped before Adam’s overwrought gaze. He gave a small, sharp shake of his head. “Sorry, Adam.” Without turning around, he was down the stairs and out the door before Adam realized what was happening.

Adam stumbled down the stairs of the ominously quiet house, and rushed out of the house onto the lawn in time to see Patrick toss the bags into the

backseat of his car where Jason waited in the passenger seat, facing forward resolutely.

Patrick slammed the back door shut and bent to pull open the driver's door.

"Patrick!" Adam yelled, tears streamed down his face as he tried to step around his mother's coldly raging form, but she held him back, her arm unrelenting.

Patrick looked up, the overwhelming pain in his dark eyes threatening Adam's ability to stay standing. He looked back at Jane, his eyes hardening to black ice. Adam shook, his breath coming out in hitching gasps as he watched Patrick slide into the driver's seat and start the ignition. His heart shattered as the car disappeared down the road from view.

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### *Present Day*

Adam pulled himself from the horrible memory seared into his head and picked up the bar of soap. He scrubbed hard, as though he could clean himself of the vile words his mother had thrown out that night, and made himself concentrate on the routine motions. He refused to let his mind relive the way he had shattered when their mom had thrown Patrick out of the house that night. Told never to return, Patrick had left and done just that.

Shortly after, their mother had torn apart Patrick's room, ripping out every last piece of Patrick that he had left behind in his haste to leave, until not even a shred of him had been left in the house.

Adam shuddered, quickly rinsing the soap from his skin. He hated thinking back on that night. In the end, he needn't have agonized over his desire for Patrick ruining their relationship. His mom had done that for them and more. If he had known then that he wouldn't see Patrick again, would he have made the decision to lock away his feelings, would he have pulled Patrick down for a kiss uncaring that Jason was barging into his room?

Adam shook his head; it was moot thinking that way. It always was. What had happened in the space of less than an hour that night had happened, and rehashing it wasn't going to change the outcome. He'd realized he'd fallen in love with Patrick, and just as effectively, lost him.

Adam cringed, this was sounding worse than the gothic novel he'd studied in the English Lit class he'd been forced to take.

Adam realized he'd stayed in the shower for too long as the dark recollections stormed his usually calm morning shower ritual. He swiftly turned off the water and dried off. The erection he'd been sporting earlier, he noted, had flagged during his happy trip down memory lane.

Adam slung the damp towel around his waist and swiped up the clothes scattered on the floor to dump in the hamper on his way out. The fragrant scent of eggs and onions assailed him as he opened the door, his stomach growling appreciatively.

He hurried back to his room and rummaged through the pile of clothes he'd dumped on the side of his desk sometime earlier that week. He pulled out something that—his accompanying verified sniff confirmed—was clean, and quickly dressed to head downstairs.

"Smells good," Adam called out as he turned toward the kitchen. He stopped short as he reached the arched entranceway. A nice, firm ass atop a set of long lean legs encased in soft black jeans greeted him. He felt his cock twitch back to life.

"Hey, you're just in time," Patrick said as he stretched up, turning around to reveal the two plates in his hand. "Had a hard time finding these, I thought they were above the dishwasher?"

"Oh, yeah. Mom, uh, rearranged some stuff," Adam explained, wincing inwardly as Patrick's now cold, sterile room flashed to mind. He stepped forward to grab a pair of glasses from their new place on the shelf next to the fridge. "Water?"

"Yeah, thanks." Patrick set the plates next to the already found, and set out, cutlery, filling them each with half of what he'd whipped up in the pan.

Adam placed the filled glasses onto the table next to each respective place setting, appreciatively eyeing the colorful bits of pepper, onion, what looked like potato, and something else peeking through the soft, fluffy pile of eggs.

"Go right ahead." Patrick grinned, gesturing with his fork to the bottle of ketchup that had been set on the table to Adam's right. "If I remember right, you don't like anything that's predominantly eggs unless it's drowned in ketchup."

Adam grinned sheepishly. "Still the same," he admitted. He wasted no time in dousing his plate with the syrupy, red condiment until it resembled something out of a horror movie. Satisfied, he swapped the bottle out for his fork and dug in.

“Mish hoo ood,” Adam moaned around the mouthful he’d managed to fit in his mouth. While he’d been cramming for exam after exam, he had survived on junk and takeout since their mom had left for her fortnight-long, spirituality-finding retreat with her friends several days ago. The first taste of real home-cooked food had Adam almost delirious.

Patrick paused, his fork halfway to his mouth as he took in Adam’s euphoric expression. “I’m glad you appreciate my attempts at domestication,” he chuckled, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “If it weren’t for this, I’d still be living off instant noodles. Although, since I learned to make this during sophomore year, my recipe stockpile has managed to get bigger... somewhat.”

Adam swallowed, his throat tightening as he watched Patrick chuckle ruefully. Lines, where previously there hadn’t been any, fanned out from the corner of his dark blue eyes, matching the new tiny grooves creased around Patrick’s wide, full mouth. They caught Adam’s eyes, reminding him of all the years they’d spent apart, years that had added their touch to Patrick’s face.

Adam looked away with a pang and quickly demolished what was left on his plate. He didn’t look up again until he was finished.

“You must have really needed that,” Patrick said with a cocked brow as he polished off his own plate.

Adam shrugged and grinned, as though inhaling every meal was the norm for him. “You’re a good cook.”

Patrick laughed and the sight had Adam wishing he had food he could busy himself eating again. The uncomfortable knot of *something* swelling up in his stomach next to the rapidly consumed breakfast—lunch—made him aware, all over again, of just how much he’d missed that smooth, low sound.

Adam pushed back from the table and escaped to the sink with his empty plate and glass in hand.

“Guess that means I’ll be cooking this weekend,” Patrick joked as he stepped up next to Adam, setting his own used dishes in the sink to give them a perfunctory wash before placing them, and the used pan and utensils, into the dishwasher next to Adam’s.

Adam shuffled back as Patrick brushed against him. Heat rose to his cheeks as Patrick’s bare torso flashed to mind before he could stop it. He had to get a grip on himself. He wasn’t thirteen anymore. Hadn’t nine years taught him any self-control? The weekend loomed before Adam, uncomfortable and awkward.

The thought of two more days of this had him wincing. He turned toward Patrick, resolute in his desire to have things be as normal as possible.

“You know I make a mean fried rice,” Patrick continued, completely unaware of the turmoil going through Adam. “And a really good beef and broccoli with fungus.”

“*Fungus?!?*”

“Yeah, it’s this black wood ear—*Let’s* just say fungus never tasted so good,” Patrick quickly concluded at the look of horror Adam could feel on his face.

“How about, I trade you a meal of *fried rice*—no fungus, black or otherwise, necessary—for a meal of my famous grilled cheese sandwiches?” Adam bartered. He swallowed the sigh of relief at the dissipation of the tense atmosphere. He didn’t think he’d ever say it, but *thank God* for fungus.

“Deal.”

They quickly cleaned up the kitchen. Adam finished up and placed the ketchup back in the fridge as Patrick wiped down the table and cleared away any remnants of breakfast.

Patrick set the towel down next to the sink and dried his hands on the dishcloth hanging by the side before checking his watch. “Should we go grocery shopping later? There’s not much else in the fridge, and I’ll need some ingredients for tonight’s dinner... Unless you can somehow make one of your famous grilled cheese sandwiches without any cheese, or bread?”

Adam frowned. “Yeah... I don’t think that’ll be possible—they’d be a lot more famous if I could though. Guess we’re going grocery shopping.”

Patrick grinned. “Great. It’s twelve-fifty right now, so how about we head out around three? I’ve got a bit of work I need to do, but after that I’m all yours.”

*Ha! I wish.*

Adam opened his mouth to answer with a more appropriate response when the jingle and buzzing of a phone call coming through cut in first.

They both turned toward the source of the noise, Patrick reaching out to swipe his phone from the counter. He glanced at the screen and frowned. “Sorry, I gotta take this,” he apologized, already turning to leave the kitchen.

“Hey, Tim...” Adam heard him greet as Patrick disappeared upstairs. He sagged against the sink as the soft nick of the door being closed whispered down the stairs. Adam rubbed his chest in an effort to dispel the tightness there and expelled a sigh. *It was going to be a long weekend.*

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Adam turned from his position, half in and half out of the closet, toward the door, sensing his brother's presence. He swallowed, instinctively clenching at the items of clothing he held in both hands. If he hadn't known his brother didn't have a streak of vanity, Adam would have thought Patrick leaned against his doorjamb *just so* to perfectly showcase his tall well-built frame. Adam's eyes zeroed in on the sharp, defined muscles outlined on the arm resting against the wall, wondering if Patrick could bench-press him.

“Wow, it hasn't changed all that much, has it?” Patrick said with no small amount of wonder, looking into Adam's bedroom.

Adam had yet to move from his position as he watched Patrick step into his bedroom and compare the changes to the bedroom of the thirteen-year-old kid brother he'd left behind nine years ago.

“Macro-economics, huh?” Patrick noted. He appeared impressed as he scanned the titles on the spines of the textbooks piled haphazardly on Adam's bedside table. Patrick sank onto the bed, seemingly categorizing the changes to the décor. The walls had never been covered in various posters, but in place of video games strewn haphazardly around the room were various articles belonging to a young man. Among the pairs of worn, tattered shoes shone a pair of new shiny dress shoes, a standard interview and job-hunting pair.

The sight of Patrick on his bed had Adam finally releasing the items in his hands and stumbling out of the closet. “Sorry about the mess,” he said, toeing aside a pair of pants he was still contemplating whether to take with him or not.

The sight of the black suitcase hidden between the end of the bed and the desk in the corner seemed to have caught Patrick's eye. “You're packing?” He asked, tilting his head at the half-filled suitcase.

“Yeah, I'm supposed to be leaving next Saturday.” Adam flipped close the suitcase lid so Patrick wouldn't see how little progress he'd made. He'd hoped to have at least a little of his clothing sorted while he waited, but his mind had decided to spend the time more productively elsewhere. Three guesses as to where.

Patrick swiveled around to stare at Adam. "You're leaving?"

Adam nodded, half-kicking and dumping what he could pick and scoop off of the ground onto the floor of his closet. "One of the jobs I applied for before grad offered me a position. I'll be working for their branch in Seattle."

Adam couldn't quite decipher the look Patrick gave him in response. "Hmmm," Patrick said. "Seattle's pretty far from here."

The uncomfortable tightening in his chest returned. "Yeah, it is." This town was the only place tying him to Patrick now.

Adam tried to momentarily push the depressing thought from his mind. He grabbed his keys from where he'd left them on the desk and turned to the door briskly. "Anyway, should we head out?"

Patrick frowned but stood up to follow. "Sure, let's go."

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Adam locked the front door and followed his brother to the unfamiliar blue car. Its presence in the driveway had somehow gone unnoticed last night. "Did you drive here?" he asked, sliding into the passenger seat.

"It's a rental I picked up at the airport. I left my car in Raleigh."

"Raleigh," Adam echoed, pained at how easily it fell from Patrick's mouth. For years, he'd had no idea where his brother had been living, if he was still in the same country or even alive. For at least some of the time he'd stayed out of contact, he'd been half a day away. Adam refused to think on what that meant.

"You're living in Raleigh?" Adam tried to ask casually.

"Yeah, I've been there for the last two years," Patrick answered; unaware of the turmoil he was causing Adam. "I was in Denver for three years before that. I got offered a job there after graduation."

"Congratulations on graduating," Adam said softly.

He flushed, realizing how stupid he must have sounded, and clamped his mouth shut. He turned to look out the window and grimaced, biting back a groan. *Stupid! Why had he said that?* ...Except, he wanted *someone* in the family to congratulate Patrick on his achievement. God knows, it wasn't as though the last four years had been a breeze for Adam.

The warm, smooth sound of Patrick's chuckle rolled through Adam, slightly lessening his need to throw open the car door and toss himself out.



“Thanks. A couple more days and I’ll be saying the same to you... and you’ll be leaving for your job not long after,” Patrick reminded. The corner of his mouth pulled up fondly. “My kid brother, all grown up.”

Adam blew out a breath. “I’m not a kid,” he argued, unfortunately sounding frustratingly petulant.

They turned into the supermarket’s parking lot and slid into the first available parking space not too far from the entrance. The engine rumbled to a stop as Patrick pulled the key from the ignition. Neither moved to get out.

Patrick turned to face Adam with a quirk of his lips.

“Guess not,” Patrick said softly, running those fathomless eyes down Adam’s form. Adam resisted the urge to shift in his seat as fluttering broke out in the pit of his stomach.

“Your hair’s still like a kid’s though,” Patrick joked, fingering the long, messy strands slightly curling around Adam’s ear and down his neck. His rough fingers trailed down the lock, his knuckles brushing against Adam’s neck, teasing the rapidly beating pulse there. Adam’s breath hitched, every nerve focused on Patrick’s touch.

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Patrick couldn’t stop himself from touching the soft skin that had been tempting him from the corner of his eye throughout the drive. The fluttering heartbeat under his knuckles set his own heart pounding, enticing him to lean forward and have a taste, to see if the creamy skin was as sweet as it looked.

The sharp shrill of a car horn broke through the tense anticipation. Patrick reluctantly dropped his hand and, pasting a smile on his face, turned to get out of the car. The sound of the traffic and the parking lot was harsh and loud in comparison to the muffled cocoon of the car’s interior. Patrick took a deep breath, trying to get his head straight as Adam exited the vehicle.

They briskly walked into the cool interior of the supermarket in silence.

Patrick dropped the packet of raspberries into the cart, and tried to remember what was on the grocery list he had left on the counter next to the fridge, instead of focusing on the distracting figure trailing behind him. He realized that he wasn’t doing such a good job of it when the carton he dropped into the cart next to the bunch of bananas turned out to be a tub of packaged tofu. He shook his head and placed it back on the shelf, before giving in to the

urge to glance over his shoulder. He found Adam distractedly picking at grapefruit.

Patrick suggested that they head on to the next section, turning away as Adam startled and nodded, following after him.

Determined not to forget something on his already forgotten list, Patrick ended up filling the cart with more than enough food to see them through the weekend. Adam probably wouldn't have to go grocery shopping for the rest of his time at home. Patrick's jaw clenched. *Shit*, he still couldn't believe their mother didn't have the decency to make an effort to attend her youngest son's graduation. Not only that, she wouldn't even be there to see Adam off for Seattle. Patrick wondered why he was even a little surprised. It wasn't as though she had always been a model of maternity.

Patrick had been furious when he had found out from an old acquaintance that he'd bumped into in Raleigh, that their mother wouldn't be attending Adam's graduation. It was one thing to not attend Patrick's—there was no way they could go back from what had transpired that night on Thanksgiving—but to not even show up for Adam's when it was four years coming, was something else all together.

Patrick had swiftly asked for the Friday and Monday of the graduation ceremony off. His boss hadn't been too pleased, considering the huge project they were currently trying to acquire. However, the invaluableness of Patrick's skill and knowledge had meant, a quick, if grudging, assent when it really came down to losing Patrick for a few days or indefinitely.

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Adam balanced the eggs on top of the box of cereal and snack foods, their corners jutting out haphazardly, careful to cushion them with the loaf of bread and roll of paper towels. He eyed them warily before stepping back to let Patrick maneuver through the thick throng of weekend shoppers ahead of him. The faint sound of his name being called had Adam pausing.

"Adam," the voice repeated, sounding rather familiar the closer it got. Adam swiveled his head, scanning the aisle in attempt to find the source. Although not as tall as Patrick's six foot one, Adam's still tall height meant he could catch the sight of heads, unfamiliar and bobbing, parted as a dark head, somewhat familiar, advanced through.

"Knew it was you," the slender figure declared as he sauntered up to Adam, his usual disarming grin dangling from the corner of his wide mouth. It figured

that if the crowd's swift parting had been for anyone, it'd have had to be for Oliver. Trust him to induce a reaction in even the most mundane of places. Dressed in a dark leather jacket opened to a tight white T-shirt and a pair of mustard jeans, fitted in all the right places, Oliver knew how to make the most of his assets. He topped the outfit off with a thin scarf and his trademark scuffed combat boots, the chunky heels adding an extra inch to his shorter height.

"Oliver," Adam greeted warmly. "You're back."

"Holland wasn't as fun as I thought it'd be," he said with a shrug. Adam took it to mean that the guys over there hadn't been to Oliver's liking.

"Because it's a lot more fun here?" Adam asked skeptically.

Oliver snorted. "You've got a point there."

"I did miss those brown eyes, though," he said softly, faint sadness momentarily reflecting in his gray eyes. It was gone as quickly as it had come though, his usual joking flirtatiousness quickly sliding back into full-force.

He slid up closer, those slate gray eyes running appreciatively down Adam's body. "I hear you're graduating on Monday."

Adam nodded, leery of the Cheshire grin slowly slicing across Oliver's air of innocent inquiry.

"You know," he drawled, looking up at Adam through his lashes coyly. "I think a present is in order." He gave a nod of his head, as though he was thinking it over and deciding that that had to be the case. He reached up to fiddle with the sleeve of Adam's T-shirt. "Presents are *really* important." His dark head gave another decisive nod. "Especially *big* presents you'd get dirty—" he paused, flicking a meaningful glance to Adam's crotch. "...unwrapping," he finished huskily, his innuendo loud and clear enough to leave the aisle in no doubt as to what the present might entail.

Adam couldn't help himself, he full out laughed. It was just like Oliver to unashamedly churn out horribly clichéd innuendos, regardless of the time, place or location.

"Seriously though, how about a drink at my place tonight? We can catch up, it's been a while... I've missed you."

Adam shook his head, his eyes softening. What they'd had had ended not long after it started, and he wasn't going to go there again. "Sorry, I'm busy this

weekend—” He looked over his shoulder to find Patrick stonily watching the byplay from the end of the aisle where he'd been waiting for Adam.

At Adam's sudden frown, Oliver turned and caught onto Adam's source of silence. “Mmmm, with him?” he asked, his interest clearly perking.

Patrick seemed to have enough of waiting. “Um, sorry. I gotta go,” Adam said distractedly, as Patrick turned and left.

Oliver reached out, grabbing Adam's wrist. “You sure?” he asked.

Adam turned back, torn between wanting to hurry after Patrick's retreating figure and not wanting to just run out on Oliver. “Sorry,” Adam said, and they both knew it was for more than Adam rushing off. “It was nice seeing you again though, Oliver.”

Oliver smiled resignedly and released Adam's wrist. He stepped back and seemed to get a hold of his usual carefree demeanor as his wide grin returned. “Well, if you're allowed out, you know where to find me,” Oliver called out blithely.

Adam rolled his eyes and waved his hand in parting, ignoring the teasing farewell as he tried to maneuver through the throng of people and shopping carts suddenly barricading the aisle.

By the time he found Patrick at the cashier, a third of the groceries had already been loaded onto the conveyor belt. Adam reached out to help with the rest, noticing the hardness of Patrick's jaw and tense profile. Unease slid through him when his offer to pay was met with a cold, tight look.

“I've got it,” Patrick said, his words clipped. The protest died in Adam's throat.

Items bagged and paid for, they headed back to the car. The drive home was tense, Adam's tentative attempts at making conversation met with stony silence.

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Patrick piled the last of the bags of groceries onto the small kitchen table and the two of them began the laborious task of putting away the various items. Patrick grabbed several cans and stalked to the pantry, leaving Adam fiddling with the top of the milk bottle.

“Uh, thanks for all this,” Adam said quietly, catching Patrick's attention. He glanced up through his lashes at Patrick, his expression cautious and worried.

Patrick paused in the act of stacking the canned tomatoes and took a breath, hating how unreasonable he was being. "It's all good, didn't want you resorting to instant noodles after I leave." He looked away and resumed sliding the cans to the back of the shelf. He felt like a dick, his stony mood obviously hurting Adam who had no idea what had brought it on. But *fuck*, when he'd seen that scrawny, flashy guy sidling up to Adam and touching him in that familiar way, he'd known instantly that there was something between them.

Hell, everyone within a ten-foot radius of the two had to have grasped that. Even worse though, was the easy way Adam had taken those looks and touches, as though they were nothing new to him. Patrick's blood boiled unreasonably. He knew it was jealousy, there was no other name for that dark churning in the pit of his stomach, and the need to wrench Adam away from that guy and keep him safely tucked away somewhere.

*Somewhere* meant anywhere other than here. *Far from here*. From *her*.

Patrick shuddered at the thought of what their mother would do if she found out her other son was gay as well. It was obvious she didn't know it yet if Adam was still here—and Patrick didn't think she'd have changed *that* much in the last nine years to know and not care—but it was only time, especially if Adam was that, for lack of a better word, *defenseless*, in public. Patrick turned back to the table and caught Adam's attention, his expression harsh and serious.

"Adam, you know I'm not judging you," he said, ignoring Adam's frown of confusion. "But you can't flaunt your relationship with your boyfriend like that in public." Patrick ignored the shock on Adam's face and continued, "You know what it's like." *What she's like*.

Adam's face twisted. "Of course I do," he said darkly as he forcefully yanked open the refrigerator door and slid the milk onto the top shelf. The tension seemed to drain out of him, his shoulders losing their rigidity as he paused then turned back. "Don't worry, Mom doesn't know," Adam said, resignation in his voice. "Besides, I'm leaving soon, and I doubt I'll be back much," he added.

He picked up the bags of chips. "And Oliver isn't my boyfriend."

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Relief at Adam's words flashed clearly across Patrick's face. Adam didn't let himself think that a small part of it might have been at him not being with Oliver. There was no way Patrick's black mood had had anything to do with

jealousy. He stuffed the chips in the basket on the lower shelf and left a bag out on the bench for later snacking.

Another thought had Adam frowning at his brother. "How did you know I'm gay?"

*Gay.* That word, spoken in this house, had Adam inwardly wincing. Caught up on the uncomfortable feeling, Adam missed Patrick's look of unease.

"Patrick?"

"Gay-man superpowers?"

Adam barked out a laugh at the serious answer. "*Seriously?*" He snorted. "You mean gaydar, right?"

Patrick shrugged and handed over a carton of eggs. "One man's gaydar is another gay man's superpower."

Adam snickered and placed the eggs in the refrigerator next to the milk. "*Right.*" Adam tried to keep the lightness in his tone at his next words. "So, does your supposed superpower help you out in Raleigh?"

Patrick fielded the pack of bacon and block of cheese across the table. He didn't seem ill at ease at Adam's question. "It sometimes goes on the fritz. Guess it's hard to keep it working smoothly if I hardly ever use it. Work's got me so busy these past few months, I'm starting to think I should bring a sleeping bag to work."

Adam tried not to think about the relief Patrick's answer brought.

They made quick work of the rest of the groceries.

"Oh yeah, I nearly forgot," Adam suddenly exclaimed, closing the pantry door on the last item. He turned and left the kitchen to disappear up the stairs, leaving Patrick to stare after him in confusion.

"Look what I found in my stuff earlier," Adam said excitedly as he rushed back into the kitchen. He brandished the thin square case in his hand, holding it out like a trophy. The way Patrick eyed the case warily—a dubious, dark brow cocking up as he read the title—had Adam grinning.

"Thought we could do with a rematch," Adam proposed challengingly, his eyes sparkling.

Patrick paused, looking from the game to Adam's eager face and back again. A broad shoulder lifted up in a cocky shrug. "Why not?" He smirked. "I guess I didn't teach you a good enough lesson last time."

Adam snorted derisively, his answer a roll of his eyes.

Adam loped upstairs to retrieve the console while Patrick retrieved two sodas from the fridge for their gaming session. High atop boxes of junk and old memorabilia, stacked on the topmost shelf, nestled the old PlayStation. Adam reached up and swiped at the box, grunting when he only managing to coat his fingers in dust.

The sudden heat pressed up against his back had him frozen in the midst of reaching for the box again. The cool, dry air of the wardrobe became hot and charged all too quickly as Adam remained rooted on the spot unable to do more than dimly note the growing cacophony in his head at Patrick's proximity.

"Here, let me." Warm breath rustled through his hair as a pair of solid arms brushed against his outstretched ones, rubbing against the sensitive hair that dusted there. Adam's nostrils flared at the spicy scent of Patrick as it enveloped him, his brother's movements doing nothing to reign in the caress of musk and soap.

The unmistakable caress of a large cock sliding against his ass as Adam sank slowly back down onto his heels had his toes curling, his heart pounding like crazy. Adam clenched his buttocks involuntarily, seared by the heat flush behind him.

He held his breath, his body humming and buzzing. Disappointment was sharp when Patrick stepped back with a puff of dust motes, the ancient boxed console in his large hands. Adam shivered at the sudden absence of heat. Surreptitiously trying to shift the seam of his jeans now digging uncomfortably into his excited cock, Adam turned back around reluctantly to face his brother, his hands strategically hanging in front of him. He hoped his face, and cock for that matter, showed nothing of his response to Patrick's closeness.

"I came to see what was taking you so long."

"Thanks," Adam mumbled hoarsely. He cleared his throat. "Shall we go?" He tossed calmly over his shoulder, walking briskly out of the closet toward the door.

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Hours and a stack of old unearthed games later, Adam and Patrick found themselves jeering and shouting at the two figures circling each other viciously on the flat screen. What had started as a short, friendly battle of tactile memory and dexterous thumbs on the couch had rapidly spiraled into a six hour, all-out war on the floor, as close to the scene of action as possible. Far from the meal

they had planned at the beginning of the day, dinner had been a lavish affair of ham sandwiches and potato chips, washed down with enough soda to fuel another round of tactical strategizing.

Adam furiously tapped on his controller, his reflexes punching in combinations faster than he could think them up.

“You’ve got to be kidding me, what the hell!” Adam hissed, his brow furrowed in tense concentration. The ache in his tightly clenched hands had been lost to him a couple of hours ago. Adam slashed downwards with his sword, spinning around to avoid Patrick’s spinning drop kick.

He swore as his character sustained serious damage from a surprise-backhand body-spike combo. Grimly eyeing his rapidly deteriorating life bar, Adam looked away in disgust as his character was thrown to the ground with a dirty combination.

“Does anyone know how much of an asshole your gaming alter-ego is?” Adam muttered darkly. He slid a glare to the teeth baring, hunched over gargoyle that had morphed from his usually nicely cool and collected brother. It had always been like this—regardless of who you were to him, when Patrick had a console in his hands, nothing mattered except his opponent’s total annihilation.

Patrick’s gleeful whoop and victorious howl had Adam quickly turning back to the screen to see his character lying broken and defeated in a heap on the arena floor.

Adam threw back his head in frustration. “How are you beating me?!” he groaned. The glimpse of Patrick’s satisfied smirk from the corner of his eye had Adam snapping back up as he turned to glare at him.

Something in Patrick’s smug snicker had suspicion flashing through Adam. “You asshole. There’s no way... You’re cheating, aren’t you?” The answering quirk of Patrick’s lips all but confirmed it. “Bastard!” It was one thing to cheat outside, but it was sacrilege to cheat inside this house. Adam tossed aside his controller and narrowed his eyes menacingly at his cheating brother.

“Now, now,” Patrick soothed, holding out his hands placatingly. His amused, entertained laughter as he tried to roll away from Adam’s furious swiping had Adam growling low in his throat.

*There was no way he was going to sweet talk his way out of this.* Adam saw an opening as Patrick nearly slid on his own controller and lunged. “You—!” Adam growled, his words cutting off as he landed hard against Patrick’s chest.



The hard heartbeat against Adam's faintly smarting cheek pounded loudly in his ear, his own ricocheting as Patrick's scent once again enveloped him tightly. The hard thigh under his hand flexed, shifting slightly. Time seemed to slow, every nerve in Adam humming, strung tight, as he slowly moved his eyes upwards. The top button of Patrick's plaid shirt was undone, revealing the beating pulse at the bottom of his throat. Adam swallowed and continued his progress; not pausing to nip at the pulse, no matter how much his teeth ached to.

Dark stubble that would no doubt be rough rubbing against Adam's tender skin peppered his sharp jaw, framing the hard slash of Patrick's mouth. The firm lips, parting slightly under Adam's trapped, hungry gaze, compressed quickly back into a tense line. Unable to stop himself, Adam leaned forward to capture the fuller bottom lip between his teeth, tugging gently. Patrick's quick draw of breath had his lips softening and parting. Urged on by the warm breath brushing against his tingling lips, Adam leaned in, connecting against the warm, soft mouth. He sighed against it and pushed forward, seeking. His tongue flicked out, swiping against the slightly parted seam, the hint of Patrick's taste already causing his head to spin.

All of a sudden, the suppressed desire unfurled like wildfire, burning up the last of Adam's faintly protesting principles. Hungrily, he sought out the mouth, his tongue demanding and persistent. When it looked like Patrick was going to respond, strong hands suddenly clamped onto his shoulders, yanking him back.

"Sorry, Adam," Patrick said quietly, his voice shaky from his heaving chest. He looked away. "I can't."

Adam scrambled backward, shame and disgust at himself flooding him violently. He stumbled to his feet and dashed upstairs before Patrick could look back at him in disgust. He closed his door to the sound of Patrick calling his name.

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"Shit!" Patrick swore, hurling the controller by his side at the couch furiously. The anger drained out of him as quickly as it had come, replaced by bitter, painful resignation.

He had always loved Adam. It hadn't been hard; the quiet, wide-eyed boy who'd trailed after him had always made it ridiculously easy to do so. Maybe that was why, without him noticing, it had evolved into something deeper and

far from familial, until that day he hadn't been able to look at Adam's sweetly inquisitive face without wanting to kiss him, to touch him and burn him up.

*It would have been almost bearable*, he thought, *if he hadn't realized Adam had begun to look at him in the same way.* At first, it hadn't seemed possible, he'd disregarded the long looks and hasty glances, putting them down to nothing more than sibling adoration, but the more he tried to ignore them the more painfully aware he became. So much so that those last few months before his move had been hell.

He'd left for college, hoping the new surroundings and hectic timetable would put to rest the anxious feelings churning inside him, but he found himself looking forward to Adam's calls, squirreling away amusing things he'd seen or heard during the days to tell Adam, just so he could hear the soft laughter.

When Thanksgiving was just days away, Patrick panicked, realizing that if he returned home, with him and Adam alone in their respective bedrooms upstairs, even if his mom was in the house, he'd do something he'd regret. So he'd invited the guy whom he'd drunkenly kissed at a party, and who had somehow turned out to be a good friend. Jason had been surprised at the sudden invitation, but nonetheless happily accepted it.

He'd known taking Jason home with him that Thanksgiving had been a mistake, especially when he'd arrived home to Adam's eager, joyous face. With that wide smile, framed by the two flashing dimples and big, liquid-brown eyes shining through the mop of coffee-colored hair, Adam had been totally unaware of the turmoil he was already stirring up again in Patrick.

The breath had caught in Patrick's throat, and he realized with a sinking feeling that the guy behind him wouldn't make any difference. He'd tried though; he'd pulled away quickly from Adam when they got too close, concentrated on the man at his side, and planned on talking to Jason after Thanksgiving about taking their relationship further.

But then *that moment* had happened, up in Adam's bedroom. He'd been so close to screwing everything up, ruining it all, when Jason had walked in. There was no doubt he'd known exactly what he'd interrupted and so Patrick had no other choice than to go after Jason, even though turning his back on Adam's wide-eyed and confused, pained look had been excruciating.

When he'd reached Jason out in the yard, no amount of desperate explaining could have shielded him from the truth in Jason's horrid accusations, slicing icily through him. Furious at himself, at his actions and Jason's words, before he realized it, he was pushing Jason up against the old orange tree, claiming his

mouth in an angry kiss. The resulting scene with his mother was bitterly seared into him.

When he had walked out of that house with what little possessions he could find among the things he'd left, quickly stuffed into his bag, Patrick had planned to stay away for good.

Adam was just hitting the cusp of his teenage years, and he hadn't needed Patrick's dark, churning hunger or Jane's vile hatred shaping them. Patrick had known that once he left, his mother would burn every last shred of his presence and convince herself she'd only birthed one son, and from the unrecognizable furniture and walls in the coldly empty room he'd slept in the night before, he'd been right.

It had to have been painful for Adam, but at least he wouldn't have had to deal with his mother's bitter vitriol every time Patrick came home. And as naïve as it sounded to him now, he had desperately hoped that whatever Adam had felt for him was a phase. Something he'd grow out of without Patrick's presence in his life.

Those first months cut off from Adam had been excruciating, but he hadn't let it sway his determination, and Jason had been there, trying to help. Patrick had tried to make it work, but both hadn't been able to push aside what had happened. In the end, they had decided it was best to end things. Jason had cut all ties after that.

Patrick didn't blame him. On top of that night, suspecting the guy you liked harboring feelings toward his own brother—anyone would have run, and run fast.

Patrick shook his head. Nine years later and nothing had changed. Patrick did have feelings for Adam, and he was still Patrick's brother.

It was still *wrong*.

Patrick shook his head in an effort to dispel the bleak thought and ran shaky hands down his face. His fingers stilled at the wetness on his lips. His tongue flicked out, swiping at it. The heady taste of desire and hunger bloomed on his tongue. *Adam*.

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The tentative knock on his door had Adam hastily scrambling up from where he'd flopped onto the bed after running away from Patrick. He'd spent the last several minutes metaphorically castrating himself for throwing himself

like a fool at Patrick. *Of course Patrick would have been disgusted and repulsed by him*, Adam thought despairingly. The shattering Adam had felt when Patrick pushed him away was still sharply slicing up his insides. He hadn't even been able to *look* at Adam.

Adam groaned. Just because Patrick was gay, didn't mean he was willing to indulge Adam's twisted desire. Even if for a moment there Adam had been certain Patrick was going to respond. Adam snorted at himself derisively, *no wonder Patrick had stayed away*.

The knock sounded again, firmer this time.

Adam hastily scrubbed his face and straightened his clothes as the door swung open. Patrick stood there, the expression on his face unreadable.

"I thought we could both do with one of these," Patrick said, the two opened beers in his hand stretched out in a peace offering.

"Thanks," Adam said quietly, accepting it. He avoided looking at Patrick as he took an icy bottle.

The bed sunk down as Patrick lowered himself onto it next to him. "Didn't think you'd ever get old enough to share one of these with me," Patrick commented offhandedly, his voice normal in contrast to the mess slamming inside of Adam.

Adam snorted halfheartedly. It seemed he'd only grown up on the outside. Silence ticked by.

"Listen," Patrick began. "About before..."

Adam tensed. "Don't," he interjected. He couldn't have Patrick telling him it was wrong, or that he thought it was a joke. His lower lip trembled. He stretched out to set the bottle of untouched beer on the windowsill next to his bed.

Patrick frowned, setting his own bottle on the bedside table with a soft *clink*. He turned to face Adam, his expression resolute.

"About before," he began, again persistently, his voice hard. "It shouldn't have happened. We're family." He looked intently at Adam's profile, pain etched on his face. "You're my kid brother. It's wrong. You know it's—"

Adam pushed off the bed angrily, his hands fisting with fury. "What?" he yelled, face flushed with anger, "It's *disgusting? Sick? Twisted?*" He flung the

harsh adjectives out; ignoring that way Patrick flinched back. “So what? So fucking what!”

*It wasn't like he wanted this!*

He rounded on Patrick, his usually liquid-brown eyes coldly snapping fire. “I don't care if it's sick, if it's so fucking wrong!” He threw his hands out, shoving at Patrick's broad shoulders as hard as he could. “Do you think I *like* feeling this way?” His chest heaved from the violent outpour of emotion, his eyes glittering. “Do you think I *want* to want my brother to *fuck me*?”

Patrick's continued silence—*he wasn't so keen on talking* now was *he*—only further fueled Adam's rage. Ignoring the warning glittering dangerously in Patrick's narrowed eyes, Adam shoved at him again, enjoying the dark sense of satisfaction at Patrick's grunt.

He felt his mouth twist into something akin to a grin and sneered. “*Fuck. You.*”

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Patrick snapped, grabbing the sides of Adam's angrily flushed face, he crashed his mouth hard against his brother's. Anger and resentment for himself, for Adam, and for the unfairness of the whole situation poured out through the rough, biting kiss. The faint metallic tang of blood only heightened the dark cocktail of emotions raging through them.

Adam pushed back roughly, bruising his lips against Patrick's, his mouth, teeth and tongue battling it out fiercely. Need and rage seemed to consume them as Adam's hands twisted into Patrick's hair, yanking hard on the dark locks.

Patrick wrenched an arm around Adam and crushed him flush against his chest, yanking him onto his lap. He pulled his mouth off Adam's swollen lips, and scraped his teeth along the side of the flushed jaw to where the frantic pulse hammered rapidly, pounding in time with Patrick's throbbing, straining cock. Unable to resist, he nipped at the pulse with enough force to leave a mark, *his* mark. Dark satisfaction curled low in Patrick's stomach as he fingered the dark red bruise blooming on the soft skin.

Adam arched up with a moan and ground his cock against Patrick's own painful erection, showing his approval. It didn't appear to be enough though as Adam began impatiently tugging at Patrick's shirt. He managed to rip open the first few buttons. They pinged off the near wall and furniture, and rolled onto

the ground unheeded. The remaining buttons joined them as Adam yanked harder, finally baring Patrick's chest.

Patrick shivered, unable to hold back his moan at the bite of pain as Adam scraped his nails down Patrick's middle—hard enough to leave faint pink trails down the taut skin, before reaching the waistband of Patrick's pants. Before Adam could tug open the fly, Patrick rolled him over and pinned him under his heavy body, watching the way Adam's nose flared and his eyes blinked wide as Patrick covered him.

“Don't think you're the only who gets to have fun,” Patrick growled as he fisted the hem of the offending T-shirt, and savagely yanked it up and over Adam's head, baring the pale chest. Trembles danced across the unblemished skin. Smooth and narrow, it was perfect.

Patrick reached down to snap open Adam's fly with urgency. He bared his teeth in satisfaction when Adam eagerly lifted his hips, urging Patrick to hurry when he shoved down the jeans and underwear. Quickly divesting himself of the rest of his own clothing, Patrick slanted his mouth back over Adam's, blanketing the tightly strung body. Heat from the other male singed him, the sensation of the hard, dripping cock urgently grinding against his stomach driving Patrick wild.

Patrick unsealed his mouth from Adam's and dipped down to press hot, open-mouthed kisses down Adam's neck. He stopped only long enough to tease the frantic pulse at the base of Adam's throat, before trailing his mouth down lower to taste the quivering chest.

Patrick could feel the tension and anticipation humming through Adam as he progressed downwards, stopping at a flat, brown nipple. He reached up and flicked it lightly with his thumbnail. Adam hissed in pleasure, moaning Patrick's name.

“You're sensitive here, aren't you?” He looked up to find Adam's heavy-lidded gaze on him, desire slashing across the tautness of his cheekbones as need glittered in the dark brown depths. Patrick had to remember to breathe as his body responded to Adam's blatant arousal.

Wanting to hear more of Adam's cries, he dipped his head back down to take the tight bud of Adam's nipple between his teeth. He pulled at, biting down gently and curling his tongue around one hard nub and then the other until he felt Adam's hands tugging at his hair and his voice calling out incoherently.

Patrick gave the reddened nipple a gentle kiss before withdrawing. He braced himself on one elbow and reached his other hand down toward the crisp hairs tickling him, zeroing in on the source of the hard heat digging into his stomach. When the wet tip hotly kissed the palm of Patrick's rough hand, he angled his hand down and gripped the shaft tightly. The cock in his hand pulsed as he stroked and squeezed it. He settled into a slow, hard rhythm as Adam's hips pumped demandingly against him. He wrung a strangled cry from Adam as he swirled his thumb over the sticky tip and he pressed down onto the slit.

"Please, Patrick," Adam begged with a sob, his knuckles flushed white as they fisted the bedding under him.

Patrick pushed up and leant forward to press a hard, fevered kiss against Adam's mouth, his own breathing harsh. "Lube?"

"T-top drawer," Adam panted. When Patrick took too long to find the inconspicuous bottle hidden among the junk, Adam leaned over and dumped the entire drawer on the floor. The small blue bottle rolled out from beneath a magazine.

Patrick snatched up the lube and snapped open the lid. Hands fumbling a little, he managed to squeeze a generous amount onto his fingers and palm. Adam's wide, excited eyes were glued to the movement of that hand, trembling with impatience. Satisfied with the amount he'd poured out, Patrick tossed the bottle aside and took a deep breath, making a forceful effort to slow down his heaving chest and cantering desire—if he didn't get a hold of himself now, he wouldn't even make it inside of Adam.

Patrick leaned down again and pressed another kiss to Adam's lips. His tongue swept into the parted mouth, seeking the hot, sweet taste of Adam. Adam jolted against him as Patrick wrapped his hand around Adam's straining cock once more, the lube cold against his heated skin. It quickly warmed up under a couple of short, sharp strokes. Patrick gave the swollen, weeping head a teasing flick of his thumb before progressing downwards toward his real destination.

Adam moaned against Patrick's mouth as Patrick's slick hand moved down his shaft at an agonizingly slow pace. When he reached the base, he gave the cock a teasing squeeze then worked his thumb lower along the seam of Adam's balls, exploring the soft skin there.

Patrick felt Adam tense beneath him when his thumb made contact against Adam's hole. He pushed up to watch Adam's face as he rubbed against the

puckered opening and circled it with light strokes. Dark-winged brows knitted down as Patrick tested the tight rim, probing at it as it nervously quivered under his thick, insistent digit.

Adam's breath expelled in a *whoosh* as Patrick's thumb slid in, thick and unyielding. He rubbed his thumb against the sensitive skin, trying to get it to relax against the unknown intruder. When it was no longer biting down quite so tightly, Patrick replaced his thumb with two fingers and scissored them in the hot channel, stretching and softening Adam's hole.

"Fuck me, Patrick. Please!" Adam gasped. His head thrashed to the side as his hands fisted the sheet beneath him. His hips bucked up, his puckered hole voraciously sucking Patrick's fingers in deeper.

Unable to wait any longer, Patrick slid his fingers out from the tight heat and reached for the bottle of lube, dumping more of the slippery liquid into his palm. Shakily, he gripped his cock and pressed it up against the tight opening. He looked down at Adam, drinking in the hunger and need glittering in the wide, deep brown eyes.

There wouldn't be any going back from this.

"Are you sure, Adam?" Patrick asked, his voice shaky with need. He wasn't sure how he'd be able to stop if Adam said no at this point, but he knew he wouldn't be able to go any further either without hearing it from Adam.

"Yes, yes!"

That was all he needed. The room seemed to hold its breath as Patrick pushed forward. Adam whimpered, his breath hitching as Patrick pushed past the initial resistance and the head of his cock pushed in. Slowly it gained inch by inch.

"Christ, you're tight," Patrick groaned. Adam's body clamped down tight on Patrick's cock as it slid home.

Patrick paused, reveling in the tight heat enveloping him as he waited for Adam's body to adjust to the intrusion. He stroked his hand up and down Adam's trembling side soothingly, all the while resisting the animalistic urge to snap his hips back and surge back in.

Under him, Adam wriggled his hips tentatively, gasping at the sensation of Patrick filling him.

"Adam," Patrick growled, low and urgent. He watched tightly as Adam bit his lip and carefully moved his hips again, testing. Patrick could see the myriad



of expressions flickering across Adam's face as his body adjusted. The tightness around his eyes slowly dissolved, and then he was rocking his hips against Patrick's urgently.

Patrick growled under the undulating of Adam's hips, his eyes narrowed. Adam's movements were pushing his control to the limits. Patrick grabbed Adam's knee and pushed it high onto the smaller man's chest, angling his lower half upwards. Unable to hold back any longer, Patrick pulled back and slammed back into the hot hole. He had meant to go slowly, but he couldn't manage to stop the wild snap of his hips as he speared Adam. In and out he drove, all thoughts in his head consumed by the fire licking throughout his body.

The gasps of pleasure and hitches in Patrick's name as it left Adam's parted lips only drove him on. Patrick angled his hips up, seeking that rough knot of tissue as he pounded into the young man beneath him. When Adam's swallowed cry let him know he'd found it, he concentrated on hitting it over and over with every stroke.

A hoarse cry ripped out of Adam as he arched up tight and crashed over the edge. Adam's hole clamped down tightly on Patrick's almost-bursting cock, pulling him over the edge with him.

"Oh fuck, Adam," Patrick bellowed. All his muscles simultaneously tightened under his skin as he threw back his head and painted Adam's insides white.

Sound returned first, the soft panting of a body well-spent and satisfied. Then Patrick's vision was full of the warm, pliant body lying beneath him and then those familiar brown eyes. Reality and what they'd just done slammed into Patrick in the same moment it did to Adam if the sudden tension and rigidity of the body beneath him was anything to go by. The panic staring back at him had him pulling out before he realized the effect of his jerking action on the body still tightly gripping him.

Patrick swore at Adam's wince of discomfort. "Fuck, Adam—I'm sorry, we shouldn't have, *shit*, I shouldn't have—"

"Hey." Adam's hand was steady as it gripped onto Patrick's shaky arm. "It's no big deal."

Patrick let out a shaky laugh. Disgust at himself—that he'd lost all control and let it get this far—burnt like acid and had him snapping back harshly. "*Like hell!*" He shook the hand off and scrambled off the bed, running shaky hands through his hair. "Adam, you're my *brother* and I just fucking *screwed* you!" his words ended on a yell.

Patrick waited for Adam to grasp the severity of the situation, for him to look at him with accusation and revulsion—but it didn't come. Adam blew out a breath and turned away to swipe at the ground. His hand came back up with the ruined shirt. He proceeded to clean himself up indifferent to the hysterics necessary in this situation "Like I said before, it's no big deal. It's not like we're not both adults."

"You've got to be—"

Patrick cut off as Adam threw the balled up shirt at him, hitting him in the stomach. Adam glared. "Look, isn't it fine if we both wanted it. I asked you to fuck me and you did."

Patrick felt the fight and hysteria drain out of him as he stared at Adam's closed, hard expression.

He dropped the shirt onto the ground and came back to sit on the bed, facing Adam. "You know it's not that easy, Adam."

"Why the hell not? It's not like anyone else is here and will know what we're up to. I wanted it, and it looks like you did too." The look he slid down at Patrick's still glistening, spent cock had Patrick shifting as blood pooled in his cheeks. Adam wasn't wrong though. "So what can it hurt?"

Patrick opened his mouth to answer, but all the words of reason and common sense got stuck somewhere in his throat, where they lodged, thick and uncomfortable.

Adam looked away at Patrick's beseeching look. When he turned back again, wariness dimmed his usually warm brown eyes. "I told you before that I wanted this," he gestured to the bed, "and it—we—were really good—weren't we?"

Patrick sighed. "Yeah, we were great," he answered softly, unable to blatantly lie and make it less than what it had been. Sex with Adam had been amazing—better than anything he'd had before. What did that say about him and his previous relationships?

"So why can't we just go with it for now? You're only here for another day, Patrick, then you'll be gone again, and then I'm leaving." The flash of uncertainty and imploration in his eyes belied the easy tone.

As if it would ever be that easy. It was already difficult as it was—even now Patrick itched to haul Adam back up against him and show him how much hotter it could get between them.

“It’s not like I’m asking for forever. It’s only the weekend.”

And Patrick knew right then that for all his shaky morals and earlier protestations, he wasn’t going to be able to say no.

“Maybe it won’t be so good the second time ’round.”

Patrick growled and crushed his mouth to Adam’s in answer to the mused comment. He pushed Adam back down onto the bed and proceeded to show him that that was clearly *not* the case.

And it *was* hotter.

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“Adam,” Patrick groaned, as he tried to brace his feet steadily on the wet shower floor on either side of Adam’s knees.

Adam circled his wet palm over the angry purple head, studying the way the erect cock twitched and jumped up at him, barely fitting in his hold. “No wonder it hurt so much last night,” Adam murmured. He shifted his knees slightly, feeling the slight twinge of pain throb dully in his ass. The burn as Patrick had entered him last night had given away to something so pleasurable it had been almost painful.

The cock in Adam’s hand seemed to bob in agreement. Adam gave a small shake of his head, pulling his attention back to the task at hand. The sticky drop oozing from the tip begged to be tasted, and Adam wasn’t going to deny himself. He stroked his thumb over the slit and popped it into his mouth, sucking at the salty fluid. The spicy taste of Patrick unfurled on Adam’s tongue, curling low in his stomach.

It wasn’t Patrick’s chest, but Adam was right, the taste did remind him of sweet, earthy honey—but with a kick of heat. Adam hummed in appreciation. Without an ounce of thought to the torture he was putting Patrick through, Adam licked and sucked his thumb with pleasure.

After wanting for so long, the small taste wasn’t enough. He needed more. Adam popped his thumb out of his mouth to run his hand down the shaft. He gripped the base of the swollen erection jerking impatiently in front of his face and looked up at Patrick through his lowered lashes. Adam grinned saucily and dripped his head, enveloping the pulsating bulb into the wet heat of his mouth.

Patrick hissed, his fingers carding through Adam’s wet hair. Adam could feel Patrick’s dark, intense gaze on him as he bobbed his head lower. He let

rough hands, tangled in his hair, guide him, the sharp tugs an indicator of when he'd found a particularly sensitive spot.

“Christ, Adam. Your mouth—” Patrick panted. The rest of his words were swallowed when Adam's tongue circled the tip teasingly, and then laved at the sensitive skin where his shaft met the underside of the head.

The soapy scent of Patrick's skin, damp and musky, hazed Adam's thought process. Adam sank his head lower to take the cock deeper into his mouth. He mapped out the hard shaft, tonguing the silky skin and running up the veins and around the head. As his mouth moved back up, he tightened his forefinger and thumb around the base and pumped them up and down, adding to the wet sensations of his mouth. It would also help with what he was going to do next.

Adam curled his lips around his teeth and swallowed Patrick's cock as far down as possible until his lips rested against his fingers, the curly pubic hairs tickling his nose. He paused and swallowed, waiting for his mouth to adjust. Above him, Patrick bit off a harsh groan.

Adam began tentatively bobbing his head up and down Patrick's cock, his other hand reaching up to grip Patrick's hip. Up and down he slid, his finger and thumb twisting around the base before moving down to roll Patrick's heavy balls in his palm. He lifted his head until only the soft helmet of the cock sat on his tongue and gave it a long, hard suck, reveling in its taste and feel, before swallowing the whole shaft again. Adam shifted his hips, his own hard-on becoming painful with its desire for release.

Patrick groaned, his fingers tightening in Adam's hair. “Adam,” he gasped, the name almost an entreaty. Adam could feel the trembles running across Patrick's body, the desperate tensing of strong thighs in front of him. He ignored the warning tug on his hair and instead moved his hand up to clamp firmly onto Patrick's hip. He tugged Patrick closer and sucked as hard as he could. Patrick seemed to get the message because not a moment later, his mouth was filled with gushes of warm, salty cum.

Adam's throat worked, trying to swallow up as much of it as possible as the cock in his mouth pumped and jerked. It finally stopped, giving a small twitch. With a plop, Adam released the still hard prick and sat back on his haunches, cum he'd been unable to swallow dripping from the corners of his mouth down his chin.

Adam looked up with satisfaction. Patrick stared down at him, his breathing harsh, and skin pulled tight across his high cheekbones. Adam didn't even have

a chance to react as Patrick suddenly hauled him up, and swiping at the cum on the sides of Adam's mouth, hotly crushed his lips to Adam's. His tongue dived in, unrelenting, as it curled around Adam's and licked their combined tastes from the insides of his mouth. Patrick's hand seemed to sear the skin there as it palmed the base of Adam's head and angled it toward Patrick's ferocious kiss.

Adam's moan was swallowed under Patrick's insistent mouth as he gripped Adam's own painful erection. Adam shifted up onto his toes and unlocked his lips from Patrick's to clamp them over the junction between Patrick's neck and shoulder and pulled at the taut skin there, anchoring himself as his hands dug into Patrick's shoulders.

Adam whimpered as his hips surged into the hand working his erection. Every part of him ached to come, he was so close, but he needed something more. As though reading Adam's mind, Patrick let go of Adam's head and reached back to run his fingers over the tight rim between Adam's tense cheeks. There was that slight burn again as Patrick pushed his fingers in, but it was gone as quickly as it had come as Patrick stroked over the knot of hidden flesh. Pleasure seared through Adam. Patrick's fingers stroked in tandem with his hand pumping Adam's cock and Adam knew he couldn't hold off much longer.

He felt his balls drew up tight and hard against his body and instinctively sank his teeth into Patrick's shoulder as his cock erupted, spilling burning, thick cum all over the fingers gripping him.

Adam released his mouth from Patrick's shoulder and slumped against the hard chest as his knees threatened to give out on him. He was dimly aware of Patrick's hardening cock against his hip, but Patrick seemed to be in no rush to do anything about it as he reached for the soap in the dish behind him. Adam sighed contentedly as the aftermath of his release tingled through him while Patrick gently washed him off.

Patrick turned off the water and handed Adam one of the towels as they stepped out of the shower.

"Thanks." Adam grinned as he took the proffered towel. He deliberately took his time drying, slowly rubbing the towel through his wet hair as he watched Patrick slather the lower half of his face in puffs of white foam for his morning shave. He ran his eyes appreciatively down the broad back, taut ass and strong columns of Patrick's legs, lazily taking it in, as he was unable to do so yesterday morning. His eyes moved back up to meet Patrick's in the misted mirror.

“Enjoying the view?”

Heat pooled in his cheeks but it didn't stop him grinning unabashedly at having been caught. “Just comparing it to the impressive earlier one I had from below.” The flush that worked its way up Patrick's neck had Adam unable to resist teasing him a bit more. “Now if you'll let me take a closer look...”

Patrick laughed and flicked a blob of shaving cream at him. “You're damn insatiable. Get out.”

Adam dodged the second flick and laughed, avoiding the white blob on the floor behind him as he backed toward the door. “Okay, okay I'm out.” He threw his towel into the hamper on the way out, giving Patrick a jaunty view of his ass. “Don't take too long.”

Adam would have never imagined he'd be waking up next to Patrick, stiff and sore after an intense night of sex. When he'd made that proposal to Patrick last night, he'd been tired, tired of pretending, of resisting. So he'd asked for the weekend and stoically refused to let Patrick in on how terrified he was of reverting back to their old relationship for their remaining day together.

He'd been stupid to think that once would be enough. When Patrick had agreed... Adam didn't think anything would ever compare to the relief and joy he'd felt at that moment. Now though, in the light of day, that relief felt fragile. A part of him couldn't help holding his breath while he waited for Patrick to call a sudden stop to all this.

So, more than insatiable, Adam wasn't going to waste an opportunity to be with the man he loved.

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Finally dressed and in the kitchen—after more fumbling and heated kisses when Patrick had sauntered back in the bedroom sans his own towel—Patrick lifted out four slices from the bagged loaf of bread and popped them into the toaster. He turned and leaned back against the counter, watching as Adam rummaged around the fridge looking for the butter.

Adam had a hard time remembering what exactly he was supposed to be doing when he could feel Patrick's heated gaze on him. His skin was starting to prickle again, and although they'd both just come not long ago, he could feel his body sit up and prepare itself for round two. He swallowed; *there was no way they were going to do it again so soon.*

Finally locating the bright yellow tub right in front of his eyes, he swiped it from the shelf and placed it on the table, ignoring Patrick's amused, knowing

smile. Thankfully, his accompanying search for the peanut butter and jelly had him locating them instantaneously without a stray thought of naked skin.

Adam gathered the spreads and turned toward the table, only to stumble back a step when Patrick stalked up to him. The jars were taken from his hands and placed back on a shelf behind him. Adam swallowed as Patrick's eyes narrowed, the blue hardly visible around the dark pupils. There was no mistaking that look.

"You know," Patrick drawled, running his finger under the collar of Adam's T-shirt. He lightly caressed the skin there as he advanced closer. "It's not fair that you were the only one who got a taste this morning." He flicked his eyes down to the front of Adam's pants, where the outline of Adam's growing erection pressed eagerly forward.

Adam shivered as Patrick's tongue came out to lick at his lips, the action almost obscene following his words. Adam panted, rooted to the spot. He couldn't stop his body leaning into the big hand running down his chest even if he wanted to. His T-shirt did nothing to muffle the heated touch. Patrick reached under the hem, and trailed that torturous finger along the waistline of Adam's pants, caressing the soft skin there.

His hot breath teased Adam's ear, "I think before breakfast, I want to have a taste of something else first."

Adam whimpered, trying not to swallow his tongue at Patrick's words. Adam could only follow as Patrick angled his body, guiding Adam toward the table and pressed him against it. Patrick stepped back to run his eyes over Adam's form, his gaze a scorching caress. Tightly coiled anticipation hummed through Adam as Patrick divested him of his T-shirt. He watched, eyes glued to every movement of those long fingers, as Patrick reached for his fly and snapped it open. His breath caught in his throat as Patrick knelt down and pulled at the zipper, slowly unveiling his prize. Adam's erection throbbed and pushed up against his underwear, his hips rolling forward of their own accord.

Adam's eyes glued to the dark head at his crotch.

"I don't think I'm the one insatiable," Adam stammered as Patrick leaned forward. *Ah, fuck.* Adam shuddered as Patrick mouthed his erect cock through the dark, damp underwear and sucked against the hard shaft. His dark eyes danced up at Adam, silently laughing at Adam's comment.

The thin layer of material didn't seem to provide any barrier at all, if anything, the roughness of his underwear heightened every movement of Patrick's exploring tongue.

Adam braced himself against the table and surrendered to Patrick's mouth. He wasn't even aware of his jeans being pushed down until the rough denim sat in a puddle around his ankles. His underwear followed their descent as Patrick hooked his thumbs into the waistband and pulled them down, releasing his cock from its damp confines.

Hard and dusky, his cock jutted out angrily from the nest of dark, wiry hair as it sprang free.

Patrick seemed too intent on taking his time, on drawing out the torture to Adam's cock as he curled one hand onto Adam's hip, his other trailing a finger up the straining shaft. When Adam thought he could take no more of the studied delay, Patrick leaned forward and ran his tongue over the weeping head, laving the sticky fluid. His moan of appreciation was already threatening Adam's ability to remain standing when he curled his tongue around the head and sucked hard, pushing his tongue against the sensitive slit.

Adam cantered his hips forward and tried to push his cock in deeper, seeking more of that wet heat. Disappointment wrung through him when Patrick released Adam's cock to give him a gentle, but stern, slap on the butt.

"Be good," Patrick reprimanded.

Adam whimpered and nodded, the smart of the slap only adding to his heightened state. *Good*, he could be good. If it meant Patrick not stopping the torturous pleasure, he'd be a fucking boy scout.

Adam had barely taken in Patrick's satisfied smirk when he lowered his mouth back onto the shiny head and engulfed Adam's cock in one smooth descent.

"*Shi—t*," Adam gasped. His fingers dug into the smooth wood of the table behind him—the only thing holding him up at this point.

The long, pulling draws on his cock seemed to suck out what was left of conscious thought. He felt Patrick's hands dig into his tight buttocks, and then Patrick was guiding Adam in and out of his mouth. Adam took the cue and thrust deeper into Patrick's mouth as the clever mouth sucked and nibbled at his erection. He felt his balls draw up and the warning tingle start when Patrick suddenly released him.

"What—?"

"Get on the table," Patrick demanded, roughly. It was obvious from his harsh expression, and the bulging vein on the side of his neck, that this was far from over.



Already on the edge, Adam was hasty to obey. He fumbled as he tried to escape from the confines of the underwear and jeans caught around his ankles. The few seconds it took to free himself seemed to take forever and then he was flinging them aside and sweeping the forgotten tub of butter to the side as he hoisted his ass onto the tabletop. The smooth wood was a cool balm to his heated skin.

“Put your feet up and spread yourself.”

Adam was glad for his pleasure-addled state, because he didn't think he would have been as hasty or eager to follow Patrick's words otherwise, as he pulled the soles of his feet up onto the edge of the table. The small flicker of self-consciousness was pushed aside as he wrapped his hands around his knees and splayed them, spreading himself on display to Patrick's hungry, dark stare.

His breath came out in shallow pants as he waited under Patrick's perusal. His erection bobbed against his taut stomach. It tingled from the sudden cool air after being enveloped in the wet heat of Patrick's mouth where it strained to return to.

“You're right, the view's pretty spectacular from down here,” Patrick said with a quirk to his lips. Adam wondered if this was payback for his earlier teasing as he gritted his teeth and resisted the urge to beg.

Patrick moved forward to run a rough finger down the shaft and along the seam of Adam's tightly drawn-up balls. The finger was replaced with a thumb as Patrick palmed one of Adam's balls and moved the thicker digit over the seam again, pressing a bit harder. Adam's breath hitched as it trailed down lower, pressing against the sensitive sliver of skin between his balls and his anus. He arched up into the hand in an effort to direct it fast to his eager hole.

“Patience,” Patrick admonished sternly, his voice rough with barely suppressed desire. Adam glared back but managed to still his hips.

Patrick's scent filled Adam's head as he leaned into Adam and reached for the tub of butter tottering dangerously on the edge of the table. The sound of the lid snapping off had Adam's head jerking in its direction. He wondered if his own face was as deeply etched with hunger, like Patrick's was, as he watched Patrick scoop out a big knob of the soft, greasy spread. The yellow butter glistened as he rubbed it between his thumb and fingers, warming it up and coating his fingers with it. Tense with anticipation, Adam clenched his ass instinctively as Patrick reached for him. He had to force himself to relax—and breathe—as Patrick teased the tight, resisting hole.

A hoarse cry gurgled from Adam's throat as Patrick leaned forward to swallow Adam's cock down to the base as two of his fingers pushed through the tight ring of muscle, penetrating Adam sharply. The talented mouth bobbed and sucked in time to the thrusting fingers, playing him like a harp.

Before the varying flicks of Patrick's tongue, the speed and pressure of his mouth and fingers could have Adam incoherent; he moved lower and sucked one heavy ball, and then the other into the warm cavern of his talented mouth.

As though sensing Adam's inability to handle much more, Patrick leaned back, placed his hands on Adam's buttocks and stroked the soft skin as he spread the cheeks. Adam felt himself twitching under Patrick's heavy-lidded scrutiny. He knew the sight must have been obscene, the shiny butter smeared over his rim and his hole clenching and unclenching, slightly loosened from Patrick's earlier fingering.

"Looks delicious," Patrick murmured as he leaned forward and licked at Adam's entrance, penetrating the soft ring. Adam moaned as the tongue speared him and then Patrick's hand was on his straining cock. He pumped the swelling shaft, flicking his wrist at the head before sliding down back into the hard, fast rhythm as his tongue fucked Adam to and over the edge.

"Patrick!"

Adam's mind went white as he came.

Aftershocks rippled through him, his sensitive, overloaded cock giving the occasional jerk amongst the copious amounts of pearly cum it'd sputtered over Patrick's hand. Adam somehow pried his stiff fingers from where they had, no doubt, left a myriad of bruises, and toppled backward, dropping his weak arms over his eyes. The rapid beat of his pulse roared through his head as his body twitched.

He felt Patrick place a gentle kiss onto his inner thigh and then onto the soft cock still gripped in his hand, and then Patrick was wiping him off with his discarded shirt. He let himself be pulled up and opened his eyes as Patrick pressed a kiss to his forehead.

Patrick's eyes crinkled down at him. "I think I'm ready for some breakfast now."

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The kitchen cleaned up, an extremely late lunch of grilled cheese sandwiches with soup, a change of shirts for Adam—no way was he wearing the sticky one he had picked up off the floor—some cold toast and a tub of

butter tossed in the bin later, Adam lay on the couch with his head on Patrick's solid, warm lap. They watched a rerun of an old comedy, Patrick's hand stroking over Adam's hair gently. Adam leaned into the big comforting hand; he didn't think Patrick even realized he was doing it.

The clattering and buzzing of Patrick's phone where he had left it last night on the coffee table startled them both. Patrick picked up the phone, intending to silence it when caller's ID flashed on the screen. He frowned.

"Sorry, I've got to take this," Patrick apologized. Adam moved, intending to leave the room to give Patrick privacy, when Patrick's hand tightened against him. *Stay*, he mouthed.

Adam gave a small nod, settling back onto Patrick's lap.

"It's a Sunday," Patrick grumbled at the caller, his annoyance clear. He huffed out a breath, running his hand through his hair. "Yes... yes, I read the info you sent over... No, I..." he trailed off, glancing down at Adam with an unreadable look. "Okay... Okay, give me a call when it's finalized."

Adam looked up as Patrick disconnected. "Is everything okay?" he asked, his brow creased in worry.

"It was just work," Patrick explained, his attention already back to the show as he guided Adam's head back down on his lap.

They spent the rest of the day watching TV and making love.

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Adam slipped off his T-shirt and climbed into bed, waiting for Patrick. He'd spent all day avoiding the issue, but come tomorrow, Patrick would be leaving. Patrick hadn't brought much for the weekend, and his intention of leaving straight after Adam's graduation ceremony was clear by the packed bag sitting next to the door. All of Patrick's toiletries and clothes, except the ones he'd be wearing tomorrow, were neatly zipped in the carryall.

Adam tried to hide his unease as Patrick walked into the bedroom, his chest bare and pants hanging loosely around his hips, revealing more skin with each roll of his hips. Adam knew that the chances of him seeing Patrick again after tomorrow would be slim to none. This weekend, for all the happiness it gave him, felt more like a true parting than that time nine years ago.

Despite all the intimate knowledge of Patrick Adam had gained, he knew about as much about Patrick's life as he had before Patrick had come back—that is to say, hardly anything at all. That wasn't to say he hadn't gleaned

anything at all from the things Patrick had let slip, but how would knowing Patrick liked to cook Chinese food, that he liked shopping around the markets for a various odd, unknown ingredients, help him when Patrick left? Adam couldn't very well stalk out all the Asian supermarkets around Raleigh.

Adam had avoided mentioning anything about the future after tomorrow, and Patrick hadn't been all that open about his thoughts on it either. Adam slid a look at his phone, sitting innocuously on his bedside table, the alarm waiting to go off tomorrow morning. If he slid through his contact list, he'd find Patrick's number, so it wasn't as though he couldn't get in touch with him if he wanted to, but how were they going to go back to being brothers—did he even know how to, and if he couldn't do that, and he couldn't be Patrick's lover, where did that leave him?

One thing seemed to be clear though, this—*whatever it was*—would be over come tomorrow, because it just wasn't possible to expect a future from a doomed relationship.

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Patrick flicked off the light and closed the door, moving toward the bed. While he'd come back after intending to stay away permanently, never had he imagined this happening. Oh sure, he had *imagined* being with his brother—being with *Adam*—but his dreams had been the product of nothing more than starving, unfilled desire for his younger brother, and what Patrick had thought he'd be like today. Not one of them though, could compare to the real thing he'd finally gotten into his arms.

He slid into the worn, soft sheets and reached out, gathering Adam to him. In the dark of the night, with only the moonlight barely able to peek in, Patrick kissed the man he had loved all his life. His heart throbbed as Adam unhesitatingly kissed him back, tasting of yearning and love. Patrick stroked the dark locks from the glittering gaze and pulled himself on top of the younger man, bracing him between his arms. He trailed tender kisses along Adam's forehead, one on top of each delicate eyelid, and then down the column of his slender nose to his mouth, He nibbled at the soft lips, and when they parted instinctively, delved in. The kiss was long and tender, full of everything he couldn't say.

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Adam reached up and winded his arms around the back of Patrick's neck, drawing the mouth deeper against his. Adam felt his heart break apart anew; this would be the last time.

The knowledge that this would be the last time cut sharply through him. Adam's desperation at their time left together transferred into the kiss as it deepened, flooding with urgency. Adam rocked his hips up against Patrick's and released his arms to run his hands down Patrick's back, up his sides and down his arms. He tried to remember every detail—the roughness of the smattering of hair on the wiry forearms, the grooves of taut muscles across the broad back—everything he could squirrel away for a lifetime without this again.

Without Patrick.

After so much lovemaking, Adam's body opened willingly to Patrick's preparing fingers. When Patrick finally slid home, Adam felt the final piece of his heart shatter. He held tightly to his brother as they rocked together, unable to stop the sob that broke out of him as they crashed down from the peak.

Patrick rolled to the side and pulled Adam's silently shaking form tight against him, stroking the dark head while he murmured soft words of comfort.

All Adam could hear was good-bye.

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Adam checked his reflection in the bathroom, blindly scanning over the puffy, dark shadows and wan skin. His haggard appearance barely registered as he replayed the events of the weekend over and over again in his head, not allowing even one detail to escape. After the ceremony today, Adam wouldn't likely see Patrick again. His heart shattered anew thinking that he wouldn't be able to kiss those firm lips or wake up next to those warm blue eyes again. Grossly oversleeping this morning, they had rushed out of the house with barely enough time to shower, let alone share a last kiss. As it was, Patrick was sitting somewhere in the audience with still-damp hair.

The echoing shout of the ceremony coordinator and tapping of hurried shoes down the corridor filtered into the restroom. Adam pushed away from the sink. Unable to do anything about the solemn expression on his face, he stepped out of the restroom and fell into step with the other students of his graduating class as they ambled over to the entryway in an excited chatter of nervous voices and laughter. The sea of excitement and joy on the other students' faces were a huge disparity to the heartbreak on Adam's solitary one.

Adam stepped into line woodenly; he barely flinched when the coordinator manhandled him into his correct place, her sharp nails digging into his arm. The music signaled the start of the procession, and then he was filing out. His eyes

darted around the audience as the sea of students were paraded to their seats. *There*, to Adam's left, in the section of seats closest to the stage, sat Patrick, beaming down at him, pride evident in his strong features. Adam's lips curled up into a smile in response; at least Patrick was still here for now.

Adam kept his eyes on Patrick through the entire procession as he filed after the student in front of him. He made it to his correct seat without incident and sat down, unwilling to let his eyes wander from Patrick for more than a moment. The rest of the ceremony passed in a blur.

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Adam stood up as the band began playing the final march, his eyes seeking the familiar face among the crowds of happy well-wishers. Where Adam had last seen him, to his left, second row from the front, now stood a lone, empty seat.

Pain, sharp and agonizing sliced through Adam, nearly bringing him to his knees. Blind to the concerned student next to him, asking him if he was okay, Adam bit back a sob and stumbled as he tried to get out of there without falling apart. The hall seemed to rapidly confine itself as Adam pushed through the swarm of other people's relatives, family and friends, his chest tightening with every step.

*Just get home. Then you can fall apart.*

Adam didn't know how he made it, but he got through the doors and out into the fresh air. He didn't stop as he stumbled down the steps toward the bus stop. Although Patrick had driven them here, and Adam had planned to take the bus back, he had thought he'd at least get to say good-bye. He might have begged Patrick to stay, gripped onto him and cried and cursed and make a fool of himself, but at least he'd have gotten one last look, one last touch.

He clenched the side of the railing of the cement steps and swiped at his nose as he lifted his head toward the car park. Next to the pedestrian crossing, under the tree, Patrick had parked his rental... Adam blinked. *Patrick's car was still there.* And it wasn't unaccompanied. A tall figure in dark dress pants and a charcoal pullover stood next to the car, talking on his cell phone.

As though hearing the commotion of the crowd swarming out of the hall, Patrick looked up, his gaze connecting with Adam's. He lifted a hand in a small wave his smile wide.

Adam didn't think. His hand released the railing as he stumbled forward and ran down the stairs, barely remembering to look both ways as he rushed across

the road. He stopped short in front of Patrick, his breath coming out in short, sharp pants from the mad dash.

Patrick disconnected and slipped his phone into his pants pocket. He smiled at Adam, his gaze warm. "Congratulations," he said softly.

Censure and confusion lined his brow as he huffed. "What are you—? I thought you left." His tone betrayed the pain still tight in his chest.

"Without saying good-bye?" Patrick frowned.

Adam looked away. *Yes*, that was what he had thought. Patrick's hand came up to cup the side of his face.

"I told you I wouldn't miss my little brother's graduation for the world, and I meant it," Patrick said, with a tender look. "I was so proud of you walking up there."

Adam swallowed. He wanted more than brotherly pride. He wanted... he just wanted *more*. Adam kept his eyes down, unable to meet Patrick's clear gaze. He was afraid he'd start sobbing and begging him not to leave him again if he did, and those deep blue eyes saw everything, they stripped Adam raw.

"Adam," Patrick's soft voice curled around him. "Adam," Patrick intoned again. The intimate timbre of his voice was too much. Adam tried to swallow around the tightening of his throat as his vision wobbled. He was not going to cry. He grit his teeth and refused to let Patrick see he was too close to falling to pieces. Patrick must have noticed though—hadn't he always?

Patrick groaned and gathered the younger man to him.

Adam couldn't help the shudder that ran through him as Patrick enveloped him against his chest. The familiar heat and smell of Patrick seeped into his skin, calming the ache in his chest. It felt like home.

So caught up in Patrick holding him again, Adam almost missed Patrick's words.

"I don't know how I'm going to be able to leave you alone for a month," Patrick said, his voice tortured. He pressed his face into the dark hair that hadn't been able to be tamed, even for such a serious occasion. "The first time was hard enough."

Adam's head nearly clipped Patrick's as it shot back. "A month?"

"I'm sorry I had to rush out at the end of the ceremony." Patrick grimaced. "That was my boss again—he's the one who's been calling me all weekend."

Patrick laid his hands on Adam's shoulders and stepped back, the look on his face hesitant. "I told you I work for a firm in Raleigh, right?"

Adam nodded.

"I was going to say something when you told me you're moving there, but there've been a few issues, so I didn't want to say anything until it was finalized and I was certain. I mentioned to you before how busy work's been—it's been hell because they've been trying to free me up for this contract. It's for a big project in Seattle—and they want me to head up the production team." He paused. "If all goes as scheduled, I'll be there in a month."

"Seattle?" Adam echoed dimly.

Patrick nodded, the smile that had had Adam almost swallowing his tongue halfway through the explanation dimming as Adam frowned back at him in confusion. "You're going to be in Seattle? *You're going to be in Seattle!*"

"I'm going to be in Seattle," Patrick confirmed. He almost stumbled back when Adam leapt against him to fling his arms around the back of his neck. Adam felt Patrick's arms tighten around him as he buried his head into the crook of Patrick's neck; *this wouldn't be their last time together*. "That's if you're willing to wait for me. It might take longer."

Adam laughed into the dark hair tickling his nose. "Stupid." A month might be long, but compared to the time it had taken them to get here, it was going to be nothing.

Patrick pulled back but kept his arms circled around Adam's waist. "You proposed a weekend, but I only got one day. Though I think it's clear that that would never have been enough." The wry smile left his mouth as his arms tightened. "You know, even if I wasn't being transferred, I would still have made it to wherever you are, Adam. I wasn't going to let you go a second time. I love you."

Adam's heart hitched. He took in the fierce expression and the love reflecting so brightly in those deep blue eyes that refused to let him go and he felt that ever present tightness in his chest slowly unravel and dissolve into the still, warm air, carried away by the excited chatter indistinct in the background.

He'd been in love with this man for nearly a decade, and though it had never been easy—and it probably still never would be—he knew right then that it had always been worth it.

It would always be worth it.



“I love you, Patrick.”

“You’re mine,” Patrick growled low, pressing his mouth against Adam’s.

Adam sighed, melting into the kiss. *Yes*, he thought. *His*. No matter what, he’d always been his.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*S.J. Lenox started creating her own stories at a young age after devouring everything in her small-town library and needing more of that spine-tingling, gut-clenching, butterfly-inducing feeling that comes from a good book and a happily-ever-after.*

*Writing is, and has always been, her favorite outlet for the steamy, sweet, painful, and funny situations the people who share her headspace charge on through on a daily basis. It also helps when it gets a bit too crowded up there.*

*These days when she's not busy trying to make enough to up and explore the world several times over, she can be found painting, baking or dreaming up hot, thigh-clenching romances—either that or watching actions, old and new and wondering how she can work a good explosion into her next work.*

## **Contact & Media Info**

*S.J. Lenox would love to hear from all her readers.*

[Email](#)