

LOVE Has

NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

CARRY ON
Cam Kennedy

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

CARRY ON

By Cam Kennedy

Introduction

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

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

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

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

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

Words of Caution

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

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

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Photo Description

A dark room, illuminated by a large window set in the wall. A boy, dressed in a short-sleeved white dress shirt and nothing else, is chained and sitting on the floor. His arms are crossed on his bent knees, and his head rests on them, his longish brown hair hiding his face.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

He's alone and in utter despair. He has long lost hope that his situation will change.

Is he a kidnap victim?

Is he a new shifter waiting for his first change?

Is he a vampire's blood slave or a sex-slave?

Is he being abused by his captor(s)?

The final choice is up to you.

I'm open to any genre - contemporary, paranormal, fantasy, etcetera, with the only restriction being no BDSM. If it's slave fiction, then it should be in the hurt/comfort style—non-con/dub-con can be included though.

And an HEA please!

Sincerely,

SueM

Story Info

Genre: sci-fi

Tags: alternate universe, spy/special forces, age gap, children, coming of age, child abuse, slavery, homophobia

Content warnings: mention of underage sex, abuse, and/or dub-con situations

Word count: 12,496

Dedication

SueM, I hope this story is exactly what you were looking for.
Thank you for inspiring me.

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PROLOGUE

I thought I was safe when the equality laws were passed here. When the world broke apart over the issue of homosexuality, I thought I was lucky to live on this side of the world—the side that chose equality over religion. The world broke apart and reordered itself. The eastern half of the world stood strong with the big religious “Three”, and the western half decided that religion would rule them no longer, because it wasn’t financially beneficial to them.

Of course, not everyone over here in the west or the east thought that way, but that’s the way that it ended up. The western half of the world formed the UWA, United Western Alliance. For a time, the borders opened up as people fled the east—and of course, some fled the west.

What I hadn’t counted on was the fact that medical science had had a “breakthrough”. They could now detect the potential for a person to be homosexual by a simple blood test. I also hadn’t counted on my parents forcing everyone in our family to be tested. The problem was that the test couldn’t really discern homosexual, from bisexual, from whatever. It was too black and white. I was fifteen when I was tested. I thought my parents believed in equality. I thought they would love me no matter what. I thought wrong. How could they hate me overnight? Living in their home became unbearable. They didn’t see me. They didn’t speak to me. It was as if I wasn’t even there. They were edging me out of their lives. My brother and sister stopped talking to me, too.

I cried myself to sleep every night. I wasn’t even sure that I *was* gay. I wasn’t attracted to anyone in particular. A few androgynous-looking people at school were a little attractive, but I didn’t feel a distinctive pull one way or another. I just wanted to be a kid, and play video games and hang out with my friends. I was only fifteen.

At first, I was still allowed to eat at the dinner table, to sleep in my bed, to go to school with my friends. Then one day I came home from school, and all my things had been moved to the attic. I got a cot to sleep on. A few weeks later, my keycard no longer worked in the door, and I had to wait for my parents to get home to get into the house. My parents provided my attic with a microwave and I was allowed one frozen dinner a day. I was heartbroken. I couldn't tell anyone. What would I say? That my parents were freaks who had lost their minds? They weren't abusing me, at least not legally, since I was provided with two meals at school. They just were no longer my loving family.

This went on for almost a year. I no longer had the newest clothes or shoes, or the latest gadgets and games. I no longer had much in common with my classmates. I slowly lost all my friends. I isolated myself. It was easier to pretend it didn't matter than it was to deal with trying to make up lame excuses why I wasn't allowed to do anything. It was like I had disappeared, and no one even bothered to notice. I tried to comfort myself with the fact that I would only have to live there for two more years. There was an end in sight. I would be able to find people to care about me.

I came home just after my sixteenth birthday to find a few bags of my stuff by the front door. My family was standing there with a man in a flashy suit, and a politician's smile. My mother looked away as they led me to the transport. I didn't know it then, but my parents had sold me to scientists looking to "cure" being gay. I wonder what they told people when I no longer showed up to school.

I bet you are wondering why I didn't fight or stand up for myself. Sometimes I wonder the same thing. I wonder why I didn't just run away. I guess I thought that they would change. When I looked in their faces, I still saw the mother who sang me to sleep when I was scared of the dark, who held my hand when we crossed the street, who told me that I could be anything I wanted to be. When I looked at my father, I saw the man who put Band-Aids on my skinned knees that time I wrecked my bike, who helped me build that tree house when I was eight, who tutored me in math when I just couldn't

seem to get it. I looked at them, and I still remembered the love that they showered on me. They looked at me and saw some *thing* that they couldn't wait to be rid of.

My name is Kelsey Graeme Sterling and this is my story.

I was numb when they put me in the transport. Too numb to realize, until after I was inside, that there were no handles on the doors. There was no way to escape. A tall man in an expensive suit and mirrored sunglasses was already inside. He looked toward me, I think. It was hard to tell. His voice sounded bored. "It would really just be easier for you to cooperate, boy. You won't like the consequences of not cooperating." A cold shiver went down my spine. I buckled my seatbelt and stared out the window. At some point I must have fallen asleep. I was awoken to a sharp slap at the side of my head. "Wake up, boy. We've arrived."

The building we entered looked like a big normal office building in the business section of a city I didn't recognize. Inside were security officers sitting at a desk. They seemed to see through me, but addressed the suit who gripped my elbow. The suit guided me to a bank of elevators. It was strange. There were no buttons for floors, just a keypad and a scanner. The suit scanned his finger and punched in a code. The elevator lurched downward.

Once we left the elevator, I was shuffled into a sterile-looking exam room where someone in a lab coat waited. I was forced to take off my clothes. I am sure I shivered, naked and exposed. I was scared to death. He quickly examined me and again sent me off with the suit. I was led, still naked, into a gray room with rows of cots. It looked as though there was a window, but it was really a bank of computers set into the wall. After he placed my hand on one of the screens so I could be scanned into their system, I was handed a T-shirt and underwear. Once I'd gotten dressed, the suit led me to a cot and wrapped a padded cuff attached to a chain around my wrist, and it sealed shut. I later learned that it was keyed with the guards' fingerprints to allow it to release. It was then that my numbness finally faded, and I began to panic.

“What are you doing to me? Why am I here?” I am ashamed to say I cried. I didn’t fight or lash out. I merely cried.

The suit smiled a nasty sort of smile, and in a mocking voice said, “Why Kelsey, your parents sold you to science. You are going to help us cure homosexuality.” He ran a cold hand down my slender arm, and for a moment I was sickeningly afraid that he’d touch me sexually. Instead, he turned and walked out the door. I never learned his name, but I’ll never forget him.

I quickly learned there were worse things than the suited man and his cold indifference. Living in this facility was worse than prison, or what I imagined prison to be. Some of the guards were physically cruel. Punching, slapping, kicking us; they were just vicious. Then there were the ones that used words to inflict pain, those never bothered me much. I’d have rather dealt with them. Then there were the worst ones, the guards who were kind to you and then expected sexual favors. I always wondered how they passed the blood test. I guess “pedophile” didn’t show up. Maybe they should have been trying to develop a blood test for that.

I wasn’t built to be a fighter. I was pretty much the epitome of what someone thinks of when they think of a twink—and not a muscle-y one either. Slim, slight of build, longish blond hair, bright blue eyes, and to add insult to injury, I looked quite a bit younger than sixteen. I was a magnet to the pedos, but I eventually turned that to my advantage, or as much of an advantage as you could get in there.

Everyone’s soul has a price, mine was relatively low.

The scientists/doctors were all business, though. They took blood, and sometimes semen samples, but it was all very professional. We were treated like lab rats by them. Not cruelly, but not as if we had any real significance either. We were simply another cog in the machine.

I stopped counting time after the first year. I think I lost hope then. Actually, I lost hope when I realized I would rather trade my body for favors from the guards than have broken ribs. I had never been successful at making friends with the others being held in the facility. It was highly discouraged,

and if it looked as though any of us were becoming friendly, one of us would be transferred out. At least trading myself to the guards made me feel as though I had a purpose. I could pretend for a few moments that someone gave a shit about me. I am not going to go into detail except to say that, regardless of whether I enjoyed it or not, it was always my choice. I'm grateful for that at least. I was asked to do things, but I was never forced. I forced myself, for sure. But I was determined to survive.

Once my hope died it was easier to adjust to being there. And through careful trading, I attained some measure of freedom. I was no longer chained to a cot constantly. I could move about the facility with at least a little ease. I was a trustee of sorts since I had never fought being there. I delivered meals and did other odd jobs. Everyone knew how I had achieved my status though, and I was often spit at and treated badly by the other children. I was a traitor in their minds. In my own, I was just trying to survive. I'm not proud of it. It's just the way it was.

I had my own room, and a decent bed instead of the hard cot. I was getting a little more comfortable there. I thought I had found my place in the scheme of things. That's why I was so surprised when I was told that I was being transferred. I guess I became too old, too muscular, too whatever. I was moved to a smaller facility. This one, at least the front rooms, gave the appearance of an orphanage or group home. The back was an entirely different matter. I had a feeling I was going to die there. I would soon realize how close that was to the truth.

During the day we were given more freedom than at the other facility. We were allowed to watch entertainment vids on the computer and play board games. Our meals were also better. At night though, we were locked into these bunk-bed-like cages. Some of the younger kids got beaten regularly for soiling the bedding at night. That always made me sad, because it's not like they could help it. I hated the nighttime and the sounds and noises that the others made. I always looked forward to morning and being let out of my cage.

For some reason, there were a few days when we were not allowed out of the cages. It appeared that the smaller children were being fed, but none of us

older ones. One morning, people didn't show up to work. They didn't come the next day, either, or the next. Until days jumbled together and the crying stopped—then the dying started. The smell was unbearable. Waiting to die was excruciating. I prayed for death. I think the only reason I am alive is that it rained for several days, and the ceiling leaked, so I had water from that. Not a lot, just enough to make me thirsty and forget about the hunger for awhile.

Still, when the lights came on, I was sure that I was dead or dreaming. When I saw him, I thought that he was an angel. The light was shining behind him, and it lit up his auburn hair. I remember big, green eyes as he broke the lock and lifted my wasted body from the soiled bed. He held me close, as if I were the most precious person in the world. I don't remember much after that. I must have passed out.

When I awoke, I was in a hospital bed surrounded by machines, but it didn't really look like a hospital room. It was more like the first facility I was at. I am ashamed to say I was relieved. It was a known situation, and I had survived it. I was a little stunned when I realized that other than the IVs, I was not in any way restrained or strapped or chained to the bed. I wasn't really sure what to think of that. A small sliver of me began to hope, which was terrifying. I was very nervous when I saw my rescuer enter the tiny room. In the harsh fluorescent light, his features took on a sharper look. His frown marred his features and made him appear terrifying, and all my experience had taught me that when people were angry with me, I suffered for it.

He reached a hand towards me, probably to comfort me, but I cringed away and screamed. I had never felt more like an animal than at that moment. He was visibly upset, but I was completely unable to keep from reacting that way, despite the logical portion of my brain telling me not to. Several people rushed in, and a sharp jab in my arm had me sinking back into the blackness.

When I surfaced the next time, an older bald gentleman in an immaculate suit waited in a chair at my bedside. He had kind eyes, and he spoke in a soothing voice, "Hello, Kelsey. My name is Mr. Smith. We are here to help you." This, of course, made me instantly suspicious.

“H-how do you kn-know my name? Where am I?” My head was spinning.

Mr. Smith’s kind smile never wavered. “Calm down, young man. The facility kept meticulous records, or so it appears. I guess at least it will be easier to give the other children a decent burial. As for where you are, you are at a private facility which houses our headquarters.”

I swallowed hard. I didn’t want to think about those other children. I didn’t want to think of the screaming and the crying and the smell. It all washed over me in a wave, and I started shaking. I forced myself to ask, “Was I the only one who...”

Mr. Smith looked unbearably sad, “An infant, the only one at the facility, as far as we can tell, and a couple other teens, also in cages close to the leaky roof. You are the only adult that survived.”

I blinked. I didn’t think of myself as an adult, but I suppose I was now. “What now?”

The older man smiled at me again, “Well, that depends largely on you and what you want to do. First and foremost, you are going to get healthy. Kelsey, I don’t want to mention this, but it’s important, and you have decisions to make. When we tested the infant who was rescued, biologically he is your child. Did you know about him?”

I shook my head. I felt lost. I hadn’t even finished high school. I was unwanted and alone. I was just a waste of space with no purpose. I was so overwhelmed. Where would I go? I had a child? How was I supposed to handle that? I couldn’t raise a kid that I didn’t even know about. I didn’t even participate in his conception. They couldn’t keep me here forever, could they? I must have been completely transparent because Mr. Smith patted the rail of the bed and said I had plenty of time to decide what actions I needed to take to ensure the well-being of the child. He went on to tell me about the couple that the baby would be staying with. It was one of the team members and his partner. I was relieved. I couldn’t handle anything else piled onto me.

He stood then and made to exit the room. At the doorway, he stopped and said, “Skylar, the agent that led the rescue team, wants to check in on you later. Would that be okay?”

“I-I guess.” I stammered, already slipping back into sleep.

It was several more days before I could stay awake for any real length of time. My body was trying to recharge itself. It was a very confusing time for me—lots of faces I didn’t recognize. I thought that my “angel” came to visit me a few times, but I wasn’t really coherent enough to remember. When I finally started feeling better and was awake for a longer period, he was there, though.

He walked into the room like he owned it, confident and sure. His auburn hair shone even under those horrible fluorescent bulbs. I felt shy, and small, and unattractive. Wait, why did I even care about being attractive? I was an eighteen-year-old waste of space, and he was a larger-than-life hero. He’d saved my life. I could still remember feeling his arms around me, cradling me, as if I somehow were worth something. That wasn’t a feeling I’d felt too often in my life, or at all since I was fifteen.

I’m pretty sure my big blue eyes were about to pop out of my head when he sat in the chair next to my bed and spoke. He had a gravelly voice that sent shivers up my spine. I didn’t even know that was possible. I thought that was something that was made up for romance novels. My life certainly wasn’t one of those. More like a horror novel. I was so distracted by the sound of his voice that it took me several moments to clue into what he was saying.

“...Kelsey?”

My skin flushed bright red. “Sorry, I didn’t hear you.” My voice was quiet and timid, as if I were somehow afraid of scaring him off.

He smiled kindly, reaching out to touch my arm hesitantly. “I said my name is Skylar Donovan. I’m the leader of the team that rescued you. I was just coming by to check on you. Actually, I’ve been by several times, but you’ve been sleeping.” He frowned slightly. “I didn’t mean to scare you the last time.”

I groaned, embarrassed. “My brain was confused. I knew you weren’t a threat, but I couldn’t stop...” I trailed off, unsure how to explain.

Skylar nodded. “It’s okay. I understand. You’ve been through a lot. We have people on-site, if you’d like to talk to someone. It would probably be a good idea, since within the next few days one of the investigators, probably Katie or Rose, will be down to ask you questions about what happened to you. We have many reports and documents, even a few vids, but hearing it from you would really be helpful in trying to locate the heads of the organization that held you.”

I swallowed hard. I didn’t really want to think about it, but I wanted to help them, so maybe more kids wouldn’t be hurt. “Maybe talking to someone would be a good idea. They’ve been giving me meds to sleep, but I don’t want to rely on those. I have nightmares though.”

“I’ll talk to Mr. Smith about that. And we need to see about getting you up and moving. And maybe getting you a shower, and something to wear other than a hospital gown.”

I smiled slightly, feeling overwhelmed again. “That’s a lot of ands.” I paused before asking in a small voice, “How do I go on from this?”

I couldn’t help but stare as he grinned at me and patted my arm again, his muscles moving beneath his clothing. I’m pretty sure that I was getting ready to start drooling when he said, “You just carry on, Kelsey. Don’t worry, we’ll get you squared away, kid. James and Robbie would like to adopt Matthew, the baby, if that’s what you want.”

Kid. My stomach plummeted to the floor. That was not how I wanted this man to see me. He was the first person, no, the first thing at all that I’d wanted for myself, ever, and he thought of me as a child. I stared at the thin blanket covering my legs, as he walked out the door.

He was true to his word. He got the ball rolling. I started talking to a counselor, I got a shower and clothes, and I had the dubious pleasure of “helping” Katie and Rose with their questions. To be honest, I didn’t really

think I remembered anything of importance, but I answered what I could. I told them of the chains and the tests, about the guards, and trading myself for easier treatment. That was extremely difficult for me. Harder than I thought it would be. For the first time I was embarrassed. At the time it was happening, I could reduce it down to needing to survive. Now, I didn't want anyone, particularly Skylar and his friends, to think badly of me. They all made sympathetic noises, but in my mind they were laughing at me behind my back. I finally decided to let Robbie and James adopt the baby. I couldn't see myself being able to raise a child, at least not right then, and probably not for a long time.

It was difficult to rejoin the world. For almost two years, I had been completely cut off. Parts of the Eastern Hemisphere were literally fighting against the religious regimes. My parents had completely disappeared. Whether they left the country, or just went into hiding, no one knew at that time. That was particularly devastating. I guess some part of me hoped that they'd changed their minds and were missing me as much as I missed the parents they used to be.

It seemed that every turn highlighted that I was "less than"; that I wasn't worthy of love or respect. Even with some pretty intense therapy, I was still having a difficult time believing that my survival wasn't a big cosmic joke. And none of it was *really* about being gay. It was about people finding *me*, as a person, unlovable for whatever reason. Every person in my family had turned their back on me. I couldn't comprehend anyone truly wanting me around.

Despite the way I felt, Mr. Smith, Skylar, and his team took me under their wing. I was never left alone for long, even once I became more independent and moved out on my own about a year or so after my rescue. There was always someone stopping by to talk or to take me to dinner. Over time, they became my best friends. They were all so different, but they had bonded together as a family and just welcomed me in. I pushed the attraction to Skylar to the side, choosing to concentrate on myself for the very first time in my life. I'm sure that Skylar knew how I felt. He'd caught me watching him more than

once, but he never really let on, and he never made me feel ashamed for it. My attraction also did nothing to keep him away.

Being friends was a good thing, though. I learned that he loved his job, liked scary movies, and hated comedies. He liked kettle corn over regular popcorn. (Yuck.) He wanted a dog someday, but wasn't home enough to have one right now. He was fun to argue with. He never seemed to lose his cool no matter how much I tried to irritate him. More or less, I just found more and more reasons to fall in love with him.

I completed my GED. I started university. I made friends. I even had a boyfriend or two, but none of them were Skylar, and I never got past the making-out stage with any of them. He didn't seem overly thrilled when I started dating, either. It led to a particularly unpleasant disagreement where our cards were pretty much laid bare on the table.

Skylar had been hanging around my apartment a lot, so it wasn't really a surprise when I got out of class to find him waiting at my door. It was, however, a surprise to find the guy that I'd went out with a few times, Brent, there as well. Neither man looked happy. I wondered how long they'd been waiting together and what had been said. I approached my door with caution, fumbling with my key card until Skylar gently extricated it and growled, "I'll get the door. You greet your friend." I couldn't help but take a step back. He'd never spoken that way to me before, and despite it being a little scary, that growly sound was causing my cock to stir. I slowly turned back to Brent and found he was gazing at me with this sad pissed-off look.

He spoke quietly, "Should I even bother trying to figure out what's going on here?"

I was truly confused at this point. "There is nothing going on. I just got back from class. My friend Skylar and you were here waiting for me. What do you mean figure out what's going on?"

Skylar glared at me and stalked into the apartment slamming the door.

Brent shook his head, "You know, you could have told me if you already had a boyfriend. It would have made this a whole lot less awkward."

I started laughing, and I'm sure it had a slightly hysterical edge. "Skylar is most definitely not my boyfriend. He's a friend who rescued me from a very horrible place in my life. Sky would never even look twice at someone like me." I moved toward him, and he shuffled back.

"Look, Kelsey. You are a great guy, but obviously you have feelings for your friend, and I pretty much think that he feels the same way. I totally don't need any extra drama in my life, so I'll um, see you around, okay?" Brent more or less ran from my building, leaving me standing outside my apartment, still confused as hell. Slowly, sound filtered back in. I could hear Skylar banging around my apartment, and I got angry. I flung my door open and stomped inside. I threw my backpack in a chair and slammed the door.

"What. The. Hell. Was that about, Sky? What did you say to Brent?" By this point I was right in Skylar's face, or at least as close as I could get, my five foot nine coming in several inches shorter than his six foot four.

Sky smirked, which just pissed me off more. "What's the matter? Did your little boyfriend go running?"

I poked him in the chest. "As a matter of fact, he did. Right after he accused *you* of being my boyfriend." Of course, as I was poking him in the chest, I couldn't help but notice how hard his muscles were. It took everything I had to stay on course and have it out with him.

He looked guilty for a moment, before his face hardened and he spat back, "You don't need to get involved with that creep anyway!"

I let out a huff. "He's not a creep, Sky. He's a good guy."

"He's not right for you" was his rejoinder, jaw clenched.

"How would I know, Skylar? I've only gone out with him twice. Am I supposed to just sit around and wait until the 'right' guy comes along? Do you already know who that is? Do you have to approve? Is there an interview process you forgot to let me know about? I am almost twenty-one years old. I think I can make my own decisions."

“*No!* I’m the right guy, Kels, but I can’t. You are so damn young and you’ve been through absolute hell.” He turned to look out the window, and it seemed as if he folded in on himself, crossing his arms and gripping his elbows tightly. He looked sad and pissed off. I felt guilty for having caused it. Men like him were larger than life, and to see him almost shrink before my very eyes was humbling.

I was at a loss for words. What was I supposed to say to that? He gave me everything I wanted and took it all away in the same sentence. I hesitated only a moment, though, before crossing the room and wrapping my arms around his waist and laying my head on his back. For a moment, he tensed up even more, but slowly the tension seemed to leak from his frame. For a long time, we just stood there in the silence, neither of us having words nor answers for the other.

Then he began to talk. “The moment I saw you, and I held you in my arms, I knew you were mine. But, at that point, we didn’t even know if you’d survive the horror that you’d gone through. And even if you did survive, we didn’t know where you would be mentally. Then you started healing, and I started getting to know you. You are one of the most amazing people I’ve ever met, to have survived what you have, and you just continue to carry on.”

I smiled into his back and tightened my arms around his waist, squeezing. “I thought you were an angel come to save me. Only, at that point, I was praying for death. Learning to live again, to want to live again, wasn’t easy, Sky, but I had you and your team and Mr. Smith. You all let me know that I was worth it. That my life was worth living.”

Sky turned in my arms and took my face in his hands. My heart was beating so hard I was almost certain that he could hear it. “You are worth everything, Kelsey. You deserve so many good things. What your parents did, what those guards did to you, none of that was your fault. It was a sickness in their heads. I know you know that in here.” He touched the top of my head lightly. “But you need to believe it in here.” He laid his hand on my heart, which I was sure was about to pop straight out of my chest.

“You know, you are the one who gave me the strength to overcome a lot of this,” I whispered, almost afraid of speaking completely out loud, sure that if I did, the mood would shatter, or this would turn out to be just a dream.

“How’s that Kels?” He murmured, his lips against my forehead.

“When I was in the med bay, and I asked you how I was supposed to move forward, you told me that I just needed to carry on. It meant a lot that you didn’t give me false platitudes about how everything was going to be okay. That if I just kept moving forward then eventually things would even out.”

“Fuck, Kelsey. You deserve someone who can make everything okay.” He tipped my face up towards his and his lips were aimed right at mine. Just as his lips met mine, and I sank into the only kiss that had ever really mattered, his com-link went off, and he jumped away from me with a guilty expression on his face. Dammit. And here I thought that we had made progress. I guess I at least knew where his feelings were, and I wasn’t giving up. Not by a long shot.

I moved away from him and watched him converse with Mr. Smith. When he wrapped up his conversation, he looked up at me, his heart in his eyes. “Kels, I have to—”

I cut him off. “Go? I figured. Mission?” I knew Skylar’s job was dangerous. Working for the generically named Agency and being assigned to the also generically labeled Tactical Team, he often was sent into places that were not in the safest locations. I was acutely aware that every time I saw him might be the last. I was also aware that I might never know if something happened to him. I liked to comfort myself that I was friends with his boss, and that he would let me know, but that was iffy at best.

He nodded tightly, his brain obviously already elsewhere. I wanted to latch onto him and never let him go. Some of that must have reflected in my face, because he moved forward again to kiss my lips lightly. “I may be out of touch for a while. And, Kels, don’t wait.” He released me and moved towards the door. He was almost there when his words registered.

With a strength and speed I wasn’t aware of possessing, I slammed Skylar’s back against the door and, with a hand on his neck, tugged his mouth

down to my own. The kiss was like nothing I'd ever dreamed of experiencing. It rode that fine line between passion and violence, and when it ended, both of us were flushed and breathing hard. Fisting his shirt in my hand I told him, "We aren't finished. You don't get to just walk out the door and tell me to find someone else."

He touched his lips, turned, and walked out of my door. I'm not sure how long I stood in the doorway staring at the empty hallway before slipping back inside.

At first, time passed slowly, and I slogged through school and homework, then midterms and finals. I rearranged my tiny apartment. I tried desperately to keep myself busy. None of the team members came by, so I guessed that they were all still working on whatever mission they had been assigned to. Mr. Smith occasionally called to check up on me, but soon the days passed to weeks and the weeks passed to months with very little to break up the monotony. I realized that I had no real friends outside of the team, so I made a concentrated effort to be more outgoing. It didn't really go well. My peers had a light-heartedness about their lives that I would never possess. I spent more time at the Agency learning to defend myself. I had gotten paranoid that there was someone following me around campus.

Once the holidays hit, I was depressed. I had been hoping my friends would be around to celebrate with me. I was hoping Skylar would be there. I had bought them all gifts for Yule, and there I was sitting in front of a sad little tree, with a mountain of gifts around it, all alone. I looked at the com unit and was tempted to send Skylar and his team a *Happy Holiday* message, but none of my previous messages had been answered. I just hoped they were okay. Bored and lonely, I went to bed early.

Near midnight I heard a banging at my door. It took a moment for me to realize that I was safe in my apartment, and that the banging wasn't just my imagination. I threw off the eight-hundred thread count sheets that I had bought myself to celebrate my twenty-first birthday, grabbed a pair of pajama

pants out of the dresser, and struggled to put them on. I also located the stun gun I kept in my nightstand and armed myself. You couldn't be too careful.

I expected Skylar to be on the other side of the door. I was wrong. When I opened the door I was shocked to see my younger brother and sister. They looked scared, but I couldn't process that at first. "What are you doing here?" I asked flatly. The reality that Sky wasn't at my door left me feeling shaky, and the stun gun wavered in my hand for a moment before I steadied myself. I was not about to let them in without some sort of explanation.

Detached, I looked at how much they'd grown. When I was sent away at sixteen, they were eight and twelve. Now I could see the teenager that my sister Julia was becoming. She was still in that awkward, arms-and-legs-too-long-for-her-body, acne-dotting-the-edges-of-her-face stage. Still, she was beautiful. Her hair had gotten long, reaching the middle of her back. It was blonde like mine. In fact, other than being female, she looked eerily similar to me. We were definitely siblings. I idly wondered if looking at her caused my parents any thoughts of guilt or grief. Our brother Malcolm, on the other hand, was our opposite, dark hair where we had light. His eyes were more of a gray than blue, and he was bulky in that teenage-jock kind of way.

He gripped our sister's shoulder and edged her behind him, protecting her from me. I glanced down then at the stun gun and lowered it quickly. He didn't really relax. They both looked tired. I tried asking again, more gently, "Why are you here?"

Malcolm swallowed hard and croaked, "Kelsey?" It seemed like he didn't know what to say. Julia had no such issues. She slid out of Malcolm's grasp and launched herself at me, twining her too-thin arms around my neck. I could do nothing but hold her as she talked a mile a minute. I didn't understand a single word she said. It felt too good to hold my baby sister. I looked up into Malcolm's face, and I don't think I'd ever seen such naked longing. Dropping the stun gun, I opened my arms wide, and Mal joined in the hug. After a few moments, we all let go, and I picked up my dropped weapon. We moved inside and closed the door.

Awkwardly, we sat on the couch looking at each other.

Finally Malcolm spoke. “Your friend told us where you were. There were men with guns everywhere, arresting everyone. I should feel guilty, but I’m just relieved to be out of there.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! Slow down. What friend? Men with guns? Arresting who?” I shook my head, overwhelmed and confused.

Mal shot Julia a look. She was slumped over on my couch doing her best to stay awake, but obviously whatever they’d gone through had taken its toll, and she was completely wiped out. I sighed. Obviously the story was going to have to wait a bit. Somehow I bet Sky had something to do with this.

“Okay, let’s get her into bed, and then you and I can talk, Malcolm.”

Malcolm helped me rouse Julia enough to get her to stumble off to my spare bedroom, where a lonely twin bed occupied a corner. I hurriedly cleaned off the papers and school books. She climbed into bed, and I couldn’t help tucking the covers around her as I had when she was little. She smiled at me and reached to touch my cheek, mumbling, “Missed you so much Kels. So happy to see you,” as her eyes drifted closed. I stood there in the doorway just looking at her, tears in my eyes. I hadn’t let myself miss them in so long that it almost broke me to realize that they had suffered my absence as much as I had suffered theirs.

I was startled by Malcolm’s hand upon my back. I couldn’t help but tense and flinch. He smiled a very sad smile and one far too wise for a seventeen-year-old boy. “She’s right you know. We missed you so much. It wasn’t the same after... well, after the stupid test that ruined our lives.” I could see so much anger in him. That was something I’d never really had. I felt sad, and lonely, abandoned, frustrated, abused, but never really angry. Maybe I felt, in some way, like I deserved the way I’d been treated. I’m not sure, but I could almost feel the rage rolling off of him. Hesitantly, I turned and touched his arm.

He surprised me by hugging me close and sobbing into my neck. That was quite a feat since I was so much shorter than him. He had to equal Sky’s six foot four or be taller. I awkwardly rubbed circles on his back while he was

mumbling apologies. “Shhhh,” I crooned, as I rocked slightly from side to side, just holding my baby brother. No matter how old or big, he’d still be that little bundle mom brought home from the hospital when I was four years old.

He came back down from his crying jag, and we moved away from each other. “How about something to drink?”

He nodded, and then asked, “Bathroom?”

I pointed the way and headed to my tiny galley kitchen to fix a couple of mugs of hot chocolate. I had just finished putting the tiny marshmallows that usually only Skylar used in Malcolm’s mug when he filled the doorway. I smiled and asked, “Still like marshmallows in your hot chocolate?”

“Of course! Do you still hate them?”

I grinned and nodded. He shook his head like I was hopeless. The familiarity was so sweet and painful. It opened wounds that I didn’t even realize that I had.

“So...” I started, my expression turning serious.

Malcolm blew out a breath and said, “I don’t even know where to start, Kels. Long story short for the moment, Mom and Dad got involved with this anti-gay cult. It was horrible. Both Jules and I knew these people were crazy, but Mom and Dad just got sucked in. They were talking about bombings and facilities. It was scary. We’ve been living with those people for a few years, but everything was just getting worse. Then a few months ago some new people came in. One of them said he was your friend. His name was Skylar? Anyway, he gave me your address and said that if Jules and I could get away, to come here, and that he bet you’d be willing to let us stay. We were under such strict supervision, though. We didn’t have a chance until last night, when the place was raided. We slipped out in all the confusion. We didn’t have time to bring anything other than our backpacks. I had tried to keep them packed with food and emergency supplies.” He looked at me, pleading with me to understand.

“It’s okay, Mal. You’re here now, and you’re safe. You were just a kid. You couldn’t control what our parents were doing.” It was a relatively empty

sentiment, because who knew better than I how unreasonable guilt and sorrow could eat at you? Obviously Malcolm felt the same, because he fished a soggy marshmallow out of his hot chocolate and flung it at me. I stepped aside and watched it splat on the floor, with a grimace. “Gross, Mal!” We shared a grin which was interrupted by Malcolm’s wide yawn.

“Sleep is in order.” I was feeling it, too. It was a lot to take in, and I was still worried about Sky. As I led Malcolm back to the living room and dug in the linen closet for pillows and blankets so he could crash on the couch, I asked in an attempt at nonchalance, “So how long ago did you see Sky? Did he seem okay?”

I could see Malcolm go on high alert, his body tensed. “I saw him day before yesterday. I assume he is the one who called in the authorities. Why Kels? What is Skylar to you?”

I smiled slightly. “If you would have asked me several months ago, I would have said that he was my best friend. I guess he still is. But he’s more than that, too. I’m hoping that someday he’ll be my lover and eventually my partner.”

Malcolm frowned, “But he’s a guy, Kels.”

I laughed, and threw a pillow at my brother, a little irritated. “Well, Mal, the last time I checked gay men tend to be in relationships with men.”

“But you’re not even... never mind.” Malcolm had caught the pillow and threw it, and himself, down on the couch, pulling the blanket over him. “Night, Kels. Love you.”

“Love you too, kid. Talk to you in the morning.” It had been so very long since anyone had said those words to me that I had to go in the bathroom and cry before coming back out. I locked up, gathered up my abandoned weaponry, and finally slipped in between my chilled sheets. I lay for a long time, staring up at the ceiling and wondering if I’d even be able to get back to sleep.

I was so unused to noise in my home that the moment I heard someone moving around the apartment, I was immediately awake and aware. Luckily, I recalled the previous night's events before I did something crazy like attack the intruder. Grudgingly, I stumbled out of bed and into clothes when the scent of coffee breached my blanket cocoon. Thank goodness for automated coffee dispensers.

When I reached the kitchen, I found Julia happily munching on some generic cereal that I didn't even remember buying, her hair and clothes a disheveled mess from sleep. I couldn't seem to help ruffling her hair further as I passed by the counter to reach the coffee pot. I prepared my cup and sat next to her at the counter, the sound of Malcolm's soft snores breaking the silence. Poor Jules looked shy and unsure in the morning light and so much younger than her thirteen years. I rubbed my hand along her back and leaned my head lightly on her shoulder. "Happy Yule, kiddo. I am so glad you are here. We'll figure things out. Don't worry."

Julia beamed at me with tears in her eyes, but before we could bask any further in our sentimentality, my rarely used com device went off, which could only mean that someone from the Agency was attempting to contact me. I was desperately hoping it was Skylar, but was disappointed when I heard Mr. Smith's voice. "Happy Yule, Kelsey. I trust you are well."

"Of course, Mr. Smith. I have some unexpected but welcome houseguests." I got up from the counter at this point and headed back toward my room where Julia wouldn't be able to hear my conversation. "I assume, though, that since you contacted me on the secure line rather than my personal one, that it was to do more than exchange pleasantries."

"Indeed, Kelsey. I know we discussed waiting to start your employment within the Agency until after your graduation in the spring, but I need to know if you'll be able to handle starting sooner. You will, of course, need to give immediate notice at your campus job." To say I was confused was an understatement. In fact, it seemed I'd taken residence in the land of confusion. I was also overwhelmed. Actually, I was probably beyond that point. I cleared my throat, trying to buy some time before answering. It wasn't as if I really

needed the campus job. It was my bid for freedom. I didn't want to feel overly beholden to the Agency. They already held my life in their hands. Plus it kept me busy, but I wouldn't be sad to leave it either. Working for the Agency would also allow me to provide for my brother and sister, because I had no intention of letting them slip back out of my life now that Sky had given them back. However, I quickly came round to the thought that I had been the one insisting I was ready to start working early, and Mr. Smith had put me off on numerous occasions, saying there were plenty of language experts available and that I needed to concentrate on school.

“Mr. Smith, why am I being called to service early?” My heart was pounding because suddenly I knew that something was very wrong.

In the pregnant silence, about a million scenarios went through my far-too-active imagination. I was surprised to hear Mr. Smith chuckle. “So suspicious, my young friend. I thought you might want to be instrumental in bringing down the ring that held you captive.”

“So there is nothing wrong with S... the Team?”

“Mr. Donovan is fine, Kelsey, as is the rest of his team. I imagine you'll be getting overrun soon.” My heart leapt in my chest, and a slow smile crept over my face. Soon I was smiling so hard it hurt. I said my good-bye and thank you to Mr. Smith and rushed to the kitchen. I started pulling food out to prepare a dinner for the holiday. My sister and brother had obviously been talking quietly and looked at me like I was crazy.

Malcolm cleared his throat and said, “Kels, we need to talk about what's going to happen now.”

I stopped, my head still in the icebox. I stood up and slowly turned around. “What exactly is there to talk about, Mal?”

“Where are we going to live? What are we going to wear? What about school? Kels, what are we going to do?” Malcolm rushed everything out.

I could see Malcolm trying so hard to be the adult that he almost was, but it wasn't his place to figure any of this out. That was my job. I was the adult, and they were the kids, and while we needed to decide things together, the burden

certainly didn't rest on their shoulders. I put my arms around him and hugged him close. "Malcolm, we will figure all that out. Good news is that I just finished talking to Mr. Smith my boss, and my real, after-college job is going to start early, so money isn't going to be an issue. We will look for a bigger place. We'll shop for clothes and get school sorted. You don't have to stress, because I'm here. I'm the adult and the older brother. I'll take care of it, and that doesn't mean I won't need help and that you and Jules won't have input, but I get the heavy load of worrying, okay?"

Malcolm's shoulders relaxed, and I moved back. "Now, we have a dinner to prepare. I am expecting company. Jules, go in my room, get a pair of sweatpants and a T-shirt out of the bottom drawer of my dresser, then go take a shower and brush your hair. There are towels in the linen closet in the hallway."

I rushed around, trying to get a turkey in the oven and various side dishes going. Malcolm was surprisingly competent in the kitchen, and took over pie-making after he shooed me into the shower after Julia finished. I kept watching the clock, hoping against hope that Sky would show up. What was taking him so long?

The afternoon dragged on and eventually when the only thing that hadn't come out of the oven was the turkey, we settled down to watch a movie, my little sister sprawled across me. When the door chimed to alert us that our guests had arrived I sat up quickly, earning me a glare from Julia who almost landed on the floor. I rushed over to the door, pausing to straighten my T-shirt before I realized how ridiculous I was being. I took a deep breath and was disappointed to find Rose and Katie at the door. I smiled and let them in, since their arms were overflowing with gifts. Their teammate Robbie, and his husband James, came in next with three year old Matthew. That baby was getting so big, and I was so thankful that I had made the right choice in letting them adopt him. Following them was Skylar, his face lit up in the most amazing smile I had ever seen, and his arms were full of bags and boxes as well. I was on the verge of tears just seeing him. I had missed him so much,

and I was so grateful to him for pushing my brother and sister back into my life.

I turned to introduce everyone to my brother and sister, surprised at all the stuff and people coming into my home. Both Katie and Rose were holding up bags, and I gestured that presents could go near the tree and food to the tiny kitchen. It was a lot to cram into my small apartment. Malcolm took everyone's coats, and needing a break, I took them to my former office and threw them on Julia's bed. When I turned around, Sky was filling the doorway. He opened his arms wide, and I practically threw myself across the room and into his arms.

It took only a moment before our lips found each other, and barely a second after that before we were short of breath and hungry for something other than food. Skylar broke off the kiss and moved back just a little. His hands cradled my face, and in that moment, I felt as if I were the most precious person in the world. There was so much feeling in his eyes. It was that moment when I truly realized how much he loved me. I'm sure my eyes reflected much the same. Both of our eyes filled with tears, as our arms reached out to clutch each other close. "I missed you so much, Kelsey."

"Missed you, too, Skylar, so much."

Whatever words we might have said were lost when Malcolm cleared his throat, and we separated reluctantly. Malcolm held a lone coat up as apology. Sky twined his fingers with mine and all but dragged me to the living room where everyone was gathered. Added to the multitude of gifts that I'd bought for everyone, my friends had brought tons of gifts for my brother and sister. My heart was so full I could hardly stand it.

Poor Julia and Malcolm were overwhelmed with all the gifts and all the new people. Julia had obviously made friends with Matthew, and seeing them together made it obvious where Matthew got his blond hair and blue eyes. Both of them seemed fascinated with how much they looked alike. Glancing over at Robbie and James, I was happy to see that they were at ease and not bothered by the resemblance. I hadn't had much contact with Matthew over the last three years because I truly didn't feel all that connected to him. He

wasn't created with my consent, so therefore in my mind he wasn't mine. Still, I was grateful that the couple was happy to let us treat him as a nephew of sorts.

James walked over and slung his arm across my shoulder, hugging me from the side. "We are family, Kelsey. You gave us the greatest gift in the world, you know. You and Julia and Malcolm are welcome to see Matthew anytime you like. In fact, maybe we'll hit you up for some babysitting duty every once in a while." The sincerity in James' gesture was so apparent that I teared up a little, even as I grinned and replied, "Sure, now that the potty-training phase is over, I'd be happy to babysit for you guys."

It was then that I spied Mr. Smith smiling proudly in a corner, as if he were a patriarch supremely proud of the family that he had built. I suppose he did build this family, though. We were all connected through circumstance, but our family was far stronger than my biological one had ever been.

As the evening went on, food was eaten, presents were opened, and conversations were had—all I could think of was Skylar, and trying to catch a few stolen moments. We were all gathered in my living room, and although dining room chairs had been dragged in to accommodate everyone, there were still people seated on the floor.

Skylar, looking nervous, cleared his throat. "There is one more thing. Not exactly a present, but a question and a promise." Turning to me at this point, he grasped my hand between his and looked into my eyes. "Kelsey, for three years, since the moment I first saw you, I have loved you. I've loved your ability to overcome every obstacle and to carry on even when it seemed as if there was no hope. I would be incredibly honored if you, Julia and Malcolm would move in with me. I want us to become a family. You don't have to carry this burden alone. You have all of us here to help you."

I sniffled and nodded as I squeezed his hands. Hearing out loud that he loved me momentarily robbed me of my ability to speak. When I was finally able to say something, my voice cracked. "I love you too, Sky. I'd love it if we could move into your much-too-large-for-one-person home." I had long teased Skylar that his five bedroom home was a crazy expense for a single man.

We were basking in the love for each other and the hardy round of applause that went around the room, when Malcolm practically roared, “But how can you love him, Kels? He’s a guy.”

I was afraid that our parents’ view of the world had corrupted my younger brother. I knew the possibility existed, but it pierced my heart to find that it was a reality. “If you don’t want to stay with a gay couple, Malcolm, I’m sure we could arrange other accommodations for you.” My voice, like my heart in that moment, was cold.

Malcolm looked frustrated. “But, Kelsey, you aren’t gay.”

I lifted an eyebrow and got to my feet, “Of course I am, Malcolm—why else do you think that our parents discarded me?”

His face flushed, and there was a guilty look in his eye. He spoke softly, “But they mixed up the tests, Kels. A letter came in the mail after you were sent away. *I’m* the gay one, not you. I hid the letter. I’m so sorry, Kelsey.” My seventeen-year-old brute of a brother burst into noisy sobs. The whole time, my mind was spinning out of control.

I looked up at Skylar and saw the frown across his face, like he was rethinking everything over the past three years. I quickly moved to his side while also grabbing my brother’s hand. “Look, I don’t know if I’m gay or not. I’ve only ever felt attracted to one person, man or woman, and that is Skylar. I don’t think that it matters, because I love Skylar, and no blood test is going to change that. Malcolm, I understand, and I forgive you. You were a twelve-year-old boy who was scared. You had to do a crappy thing to survive. Well, you aren’t the only one, okay? I don’t blame you. I love you, okay?”

Both Malcolm and Skylar sniffled a little, but Malcolm calmed down and Skylar looked incredibly proud. Mr. Smith chose that moment to step in and suggest we all pack a bag. He said that he would take charge of Julia and Malcolm for the evening, and that Skylar and I could go to figure out how we wanted to move things over to Skylar’s home. Julia and Malcolm began packing up all their Yule presents to take with them, and our friends

commenced with cleanup. It was a time of somewhat organized chaos that lightened the mood considerably.

Later that evening, when we were in front of his door, Skylar hesitated. “You know it’s okay, Kelsey. If you don’t love me, I am not going to say that it won’t hurt like hell, but it’s okay.”

I laughed. “You stupid, idiotic man. I love you. Simple as that. I’ve waited a long time for you to come around, Mr. Donovan. Don’t think for one second I’m going to let you slip through my fingers.” I rose up on my toes and whispered in his ear, my tongue darting out to taste the shell. “Now, take me inside and make love to me.”

He shuddered, and his voice wavered. “I don’t want to rush you.”

“Rush me, hell! Three years is rushing?” I demanded.

“You’re not all that experienced. I want you to be sure.”

“I’m a what? Virgin? Honey, I’m not. I wish that I were for you, but I’m not. A whore, maybe at one time, but not a virgin, not since I was sixteen.” I was a little sad at having to burst his bubble, but I wanted him to love me for who I really was, not for the false ideal that he’d built of me over the last three years.

He led me inside and whispered, “You are in every way that really matters. I want our first time to be perfect.”

I was horny and frustrated with the man I adored so much. Didn’t he get it? All that we needed for it to be perfect was each other. We didn’t need candles or romance or any of those things. All we needed was to love each other. Instead of trying to explain this to him again, I asked, “Where is our bedroom?”

Skylar pointed up the staircase and said, “Second door on the right.”

Silently, I slipped my hand from his and started up the stairs, discarding my coat as I went. Then I pulled my T-shirt over my head and, holding it in my hand, turned and said, “Coming?” I threw my shirt to Skylar as he looked

on, dumbfounded. Something must have clicked for him, though, because he was up the stairs like a shot and, much like the night he rescued me, cradled me in his arms like I was the most precious thing in the world.

Happily, I wound my arms around his neck, pressing kisses to his face. When I moved down to his neck and nuzzled, he sighed. When I latched onto his neck and suckled lightly, he groaned, and then I was being tossed through the air to land in the center of a soft, king-sized bed. Skylar was absolutely predatory as he discarded his coat and shirt. I couldn't help but admire the bronzed muscles stretched across his frame. I couldn't wait to find out how the crisp hair covering his chest felt against my own hairless one. My gaze was riveted on his hands as he rubbed hard against the front of his bulging jeans. I licked my lips. I couldn't wait to see what lay beneath his clothes.

However, instead of removing his own jeans, he bent to flick open the button on mine, then eased the zipper down to reveal my leaking cock, framed by a light dusting of blond curls. "Fuck," he whispered, obviously turned on that I hadn't worn underwear. He left a trail of kisses along my exposed belly and hip before tugging my pants the rest of the way off. I propped myself up on my elbows to try and capture Skylar's lips. He grinned and backed away, leaving me pouting. He quickly shucked his own jeans and underwear, letting them drop onto the floor, and slid over me. I hardly got to look at his body, and while disappointed, I knew that there would be plenty of time in the future.

His kisses were everything I ever dreamed kisses could be. I was lost in sensation. His leaking cock sliding up against my own caused me to arch and grind into him. His fingers twined with mine and he brought my arms above my head, effectively pinning me to the bed. "You are making me completely lose control, Kels!"

I grinned against his mouth, arching against him again. He released my hands and scooted down to capture a pink nipple in his mouth. "Fuck, Sky."

His chuckle vibrated against my chest, and then he was kissing downward, murmuring words like *pretty* and *beautiful* all the while he worshipped me.

I can't even tell you what it felt like when those full lips captured my dripping cock between them, his hand splayed across my abdomen to hold me down. He took his time licking and sucking until I was a whimpering mass of need. When I thought for sure that I was going to come, he pulled off with a loud *pop* and moved further down, sucking my balls into that tight wet heat. I was a babbling, incoherent mess by this point and barely noticed that he was pushing my legs up, exposing my puckered hole to his gaze. Softly, he blew air across my opening, causing it to clench. He must have brought lube with him, because slick fingers probed my hole. First one, which reminded of me how long it had been since anyone had been in my ass, but the sting quickly changed, and soon I was fucking myself on his hand.

The whole time, he was never quiet. There was a constant litany of how beautiful I was, how sexy, how much he loved me. I had never heard Sky speak so much. Then suddenly, his fingers were gone, and he was on his knees, grabbing a pillow, slipping it under my hips. The blunt head of his cock was pushing insistently against the ring of muscles, and then he was breaching me. At first, I was shocked by the intense flare of pain. It felt as though he were trying to shove a tree trunk up there. It didn't take long for me to relax and strain towards him, needing more. The slow slide of him inside me felt so good, despite the burn of my inner muscles struggling to accommodate him. Once he found a rhythm, pleasure overcame all the pain. Each time he slid forward, he nudged my gland, and I was seeing stars. All too soon it was over, leaving us sweating and panting against each other, my semen cooling between us, his dripping out my ass. The fact that we hadn't used protection definitely concerned me now that the heat of the moment was over. I had never had sex without a condom, and the experience without it had been incredibly intense. I trusted Skylar, loved him, but it was something we should have discussed beforehand.

I was reluctant to break the mood, so I waited silently while he pulled away from me and went to the bathroom to grab a cloth to wipe us up. When he came back and was cleaning me up, I said, "Sky, um, we didn't use a condom."

Sky flushed and looked guilty, “I hadn’t intended on getting quite so intense, but I was just tested for work and, to be honest, there hasn’t been anyone since you came into my life three years ago. It’s always been you.”

“That’s sweet, Sky, but not the point. The point is that if we are together, we need to make these very important decisions together. You don’t get to choose for me, and that’s what you did. I know you’re clean. I know you wouldn’t put me at risk like that. I trust you.”

Skylar’s eyes went wide and teared up as if I had given him an amazing gift. Perhaps I had. No one knew better than him, how I struggled with trust issues after everything I’d gone through. I meant it, too. I did trust him. I also wanted him to trust me to be able to make decisions for myself. I wanted us to be in a relationship together. I didn’t need for him to take on a big brother or father-type role with me just because he was a decade older than I.

“I get it, Kels, and I shouldn’t have decided for you. We should have discussed it first.” My smile beamed. I was completely appeased. I grabbed his hand and pulled him down to snuggle. Each of us found sleep quickly, as we knew the next day would be hectic with moving and settling the kids in a new place.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER

Fourteen-year-old Julia sat perched on the edge of her seat between Skylar and me, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. Skylar and I shared a smile over her head and then turned our attention back to the commencement ceremony in front of us. I was so proud of Malcolm. He’d taken his last year and a half of high school by storm, ending up the valedictorian of his class. It didn’t seem fair that he was both a hell of a football player and a scholar.

No one clapped harder or yelled louder than us when Malcolm got up to give his speech. And no one cried harder than me when I realized how much I meant to my brother, as he detailed it to his senior class. He talked about hate, and doing the right thing, and forgiveness as all being life lessons he’d learned from me. I was floored.

The last year and a half hadn't been easy. We'd had our ups and downs with Malcolm and Julia. Two teenagers ripped from everything they knew and dumped with a brother they hadn't seen for five years. We fought, but in the end we were family, and we stuck together.

I was pretty sure my life would never get any better than at that moment. I had everything I never dreamed I could have, all because I never gave up. I kept moving forward. I didn't let what happened to me define my life. We just carried on.

THE END

Author Bio

Cam Kennedy is an award winning poet who stumbled onto m/m romance accidentally in 2010. As a member of the LGBTQIA community herself, she had never realized that m/m existed outside her favorite fandoms, which she had been involved in since the late 90s. Impressed with the quality of writing in the m/m genre, she began writing reviews and never had any intention of sharing any of her own work. In her spare time, she is the single mother of three, a dutiful (kinda) daughter, and a rabid advocate on behalf of what she believes.

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