

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



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SO HOT WITH LOVE

J.H. Knight

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

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By J.H. Knight

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.

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Photo Description

Two men are kissing and holding each other in a loving embrace in a bright room with hardwood floors and sunshine spilling through the window. It is a joyful and sweet scene.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

These two men are getting married this evening and are taking a last few quiet moments together. The man in the black T-shirt is remembering a day that almost ended their relationship. It started with some trouble with a thong and a fireman and the whole day just went downhill from there! Please tell us about this unbelievable day.

Sincerely,

Susan

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: established couple, sweet, humor, wedding, men with pets, little or no sex, fluff

Word Count: 9,244

SO HOT WITH LOVE

By J.H. Knight

Nine years might not seem like much compared to a lifetime, but to Chris it felt like forever. In a good way. Especially when he considered everything they'd been through. A one-night stand that turned out to be The One. The one neither of them had believed in nor even cared about enough to hope for. The one that would carry them through unemployment (temporary), a gay bashing (not theirs), Chris's parents who would never understand or accept them, a hit and run, the death of a beloved pet, head colds, bills to pay, holidays, and every good thing they took for granted. Their home, their friends, Greg's mom who loved them both and was overjoyed when they finally settled down together. Music and dancing and laughter. Lots of laughter.

No, nine years didn't sound like much, but Chris figured it was more than days, more than minutes ticking away on a clock that made up their life together. They'd already been through good times and bad, better and worse, sickness and health.

Now, wrapped around each other in an overstuffed beanbag chair on the morning of their official wedding day, Greg pressed closer as Chris tightened his arms around him. They'd talked about everything. Those first few curious fumbles in the bathroom stall of the bar they'd met in, those early days when they didn't leave Greg's tiny studio apartment even for food. Days spent in bed together, touching, laughing, fucking. Even when it was too early for love or commitment or fidelity, they both knew there was something between them. Something good and right and worth all the bullshit life had to offer.

When they finally did part ways after that first long weekend together, Chris carried around an ache in the pit of his stomach that only eased when he thought about Greg.

He'd never called a guy after a hookup before.

Nearly a decade later, he was still glad he made that call.

Now, their lips were touching but they were both on the verge of laughter. They had been teasing each other all day, reflecting on the ups and downs they'd shared. "No, that one was definitely your fault," Chris whispered as the laugh they'd both been holding back finally broke free.

"I think you're remembering it wrong, darlin'," Greg corrected him. His Texas drawl still made Chris's toes curl. "That fire was all *your* fault."

Chris scowled playfully at him and shook his head. "That could've happened to anyone. Me standing out in the middle of the street in a sparkly red thong was *your* fault. You picked the damn thing out."

"I wish I'd taken a picture," Greg teased as he hugged Chris closer, kissing him even as Chris turned his head away in mock irritation.

"I'm sure it's on *YouTube* somewhere. I've been too chicken to search it."

Greg laughed again as he started to shift out from Chris's embrace and reached for his phone. Chris tightened his arm harder against him and grabbed Greg's wrist in a death grip. "Don't even think about it. If you look that up, you're walking down the aisle alone tonight."

Greg glanced at Chris's teasing smile—probably knowing it was an empty threat—and didn't make any more moves for his phone.

Chris slipped his fingers into Greg's short brown hair and tugged gently while Sherlock—their fat and sassy ginger cat—padded around the hardwood floors and cleaned himself in the sun spilling through the windows.

"You should wear that thong tonight," Greg murmured, tipping his head back at the tug to his hair, obviously looking for another kiss.

"I wasn't planning on either one of us wearing anything tonight," Chris whispered in return, giving Greg what he wanted by brushing their lips together. "Besides," he added after they parted, "I gave the thong to the fireman."

Greg pulled back, narrowing his crystal blue eyes. "And just when did *that* happen?"

With a smug grin, Chris said, “When he came back two weeks later to see how I was doing and to find out if I was single again.”

“Should I be jealous?”

Chris knew him well. He knew no matter how teasing and casual Greg was trying to sound, there was an undercurrent of very real, very heated possessiveness simmering just under the surface. It was something Chris always found oddly arousing. Seeing that glint of desire mingled with a hint of insecurity and a dash of anger was a recipe for an instant erection. He’d be lying if he said he never played with it on purpose. More than once when they were out at the clubs together Chris would let a stranger dance just a little closer than he really wanted, or let someone touch his ass just so Greg would see it. Greg wasn’t a Neanderthal. It didn’t spark a fight and no one ever got decked in the middle of the bar, but it was a sure way for Chris to get a rough tug and a nice stinging bite on his shoulder or his neck. It was a sure way to keep Greg close the rest of the night and get Chris fucked so hard he felt it for days afterward.

“Jealousy is very unbecoming,” Chris chided, teasing.

“So is flirting with a hot fireman while your apartment burns to the ground.”

Laughing out loud at that, Chris reminded him, “The only things that burned to the ground were the curtains and my favorite dresser. Don’t be such a drama queen.”

Greg made an incredulous sound, shifting his position so he could nuzzle against Chris’s neck. Then he bit him. “You’re queenier than me. Drama or otherwise.”

It was probably true, but Chris still felt the need to defend himself. “Queenier isn’t even a word.”

“I can see why you were so good on your debate team in high school. With an argument like that...”

“Jackass,” Chris whispered, grinning as he kissed Greg again.

Greg's lithe frame seemed to go all limp in Chris's arms, sighing into the kiss. When he pulled back, his eyes glittered with mischief and he said, "You never answered my question."

Arching a brow, Chris tilted his head to the side. "I forgot there was a question."

"Should I be jealous?"

"Of a guy I met three years ago, under a haze—literally—of smoke, ash, and humiliation, when all I could think about was getting to you?"

"I don't think there's any such thing as a literal haze of humiliation."

"The humiliation haze was figurative," Chris told him, narrowing his eyes even as he was laughing. "Remind me to ask the minister to add *won't be a jackass* to your vows tonight."

"How poetic. But I thought we were sticking to vows we had a chance of keeping. I distinctly remember *obey* being struck early on..."

"I think all we have left now is cooking at least once a week and taking turns watering the plants."

With a soft chuckle, Greg shifted in Chris's arms. "We already do that."

"So we know we can keep it up."

Greg's eyes flashed with a spark of need and he skimmed his hand over Chris's body. He traced a small pattern at the collar of Chris's T-shirt, stroking the warm skin of his neck with his fingertips. "We've never had a problem keeping it up..."

"I suppose you want me to make a remark that would lead you to groping me so I'll get all hot and bothered and let you fuck me. Hours before our wedding. And break our three-week-long abstinence."

"That was pretty much my plan, yes."

"Abstaining was your idea." Chris reminded him.

"It was a really stupid idea."

“That’s what I said at the time, but you were pretty convincing about how hot it would be if we deferred gratification. You even wanted it to be a month.”

Greg’s tone hung somewhere between seductive and playful. “I’ve changed my mind.”

Chris let out a moan that was almost silent and spread his long legs wider before wrapping them around Greg’s waist. He trailed his hand down Greg’s back and slid it into the top of his jeans. He was getting hard, no doubt about it. They both were. His breath came out in a soft rush against Greg’s face, warm and full of want, as he cupped Greg’s jaw and drew their mouths together for a scorching kiss that had Greg grinding his hips against Chris. As they pulled back, Chris wet his lips. His skin flushed with the same heat he always felt when they touched each other. He whispered, “Sucks to be you, then.”

Greg dropped his head to Chris’s chest with an exasperated groan. “You could’ve just said no. You didn’t have to tease me first.”

Chris pulled his hand out from Greg’s jeans, grinning. “I suppose I could’ve, but that wouldn’t have been nearly as much fun.”

Greg glared but he was laughing as he asked, “Why am I marrying you, again?”

“Because you don’t wanna live without me. You said so yourself.”

As Greg turned around again, his back resting against Chris’s chest, he said, “There’s an eighties hair band ballad in there somewhere, I’m sure.”

Chris laced their fingers together and sighed happily. They were getting married in a few short hours. They were going to spend the rest of their lives together. Come hell, high water, or revolution. It was a good day.

“Tell me again,” Chris whispered, lost in thought and memory.

“That we’re an eighties hair band ballad?”

He pressed a kiss to Greg’s temple and said, “About when you decided you wanted to be with me forever.”

“You’re such a girl.”

“My erection begs to differ.”

“You were there, why do you want me to tell you?”

“Because, I like the way you say it.”

“I’m tired of talking. If we can’t have sex, I’m taking a nap.”

He bit Greg’s ear and said, “Tell me anyway.”

Greg yelped and then laughed. “I don’t wanna.”

“You’d deny me such a simple request on our wedding day?”

“I’m a real bastard. You sure you wanna marry me?”

Chris paused as if he were thinking it over. “I guess. But don’t blame me when we grow old and all I do is bitch about you.”

“All you do is bitch about me now. How is growing older gonna change that?”

“I’ll be all wrinkly with a potbelly. And you’ll be stuck with me.”

“Will you be bald too?”

“Yes.”

“...Hot.”

“Freak.”

“You oughta know.”

Chris closed his eyes, his arms snug around Greg. He was surprisingly relaxed given the whole wedding thing taking place in a few hours, but that was mostly due to his control-freak-soon-to-be-mother-in-law. She’d taken over every detail, right down to their colors. In truth, he was glad for all her efforts.

When he and Greg had signed all the paperwork for domestic partnership, it was more like a business transaction with a little vacation tacked on at the end. It all would have converted to a marriage a year after the new law passed,

but they were getting a little more sentimental as the years went by. Having their friends and families dress up and buy them presents and watch them take their vows and shove cake in each other's faces was a better plan.

And besides, they'd attended plenty of weddings over the last nine years. And they'd bought enough gifts to pay for their own wedding (people still registered at Tiffany's for Christ sake) at least twice.

He could feel Greg relaxing in his arms, probably drifting off to sleep just as he'd threatened to do. A nap right there in the middle of the living room floor sounded pretty damn good, but Chris was still revisiting their past.

Two Years Earlier

Chris woke up on the couch. He'd fallen asleep after their niece had gone home.

Kaylee was only five at the time and they'd had her for the whole weekend. He didn't know how his sister did it. Two and a half days of chasing her all over the city had nearly killed them. She scared the hell out of them when she nearly scalded herself with hot water on the stove. Gave them both minor heart attacks when she'd wandered off from them at the zoo. And Chris had been apoplectic when he'd turned around from buying her an ice cream and found her talking to some stranger who was offering her a stick of gum. And he had Greg there the whole time. He couldn't imagine how single parents managed it with their sanity intact.

After too many brushes with death for a lifetime, they'd decided her last day with them would be spent at home doing anything she wanted. It turned out what she wanted was to have a spa day and then dress up for a tea party. Chris did Kaylee's hair and Greg painted her fingers and toes and did her makeup. They all wore feather boas and hats and served apple tea and Snickerdoodles to her and a teddy bear named Boston. Even Sherlock wore a scarf for the occasion. (He still held a grudge, Chris could tell.)

By the time Shawna picked up her offspring—Hurricane Kaylee as they'd started calling her—Chris was beyond exhausted. He'd only meant to sit down

for a minute and then help Greg clear away the wreckage, maybe cook some dinner that didn't involve macaroni and cheese or French fries.

So much for plans. His sit-down turned into "just resting my eyes" which turned into a three-hour nap.

Chris was sure he was going to wake up to an ugly scene. Something along the lines of Greg having cleaned up and made dinner—for *one*—all while glaring at him asleep on the couch, snoring through it all.

Instead, when Chris blinked his eyes open, he'd found a clean, but empty, apartment.

As his sleep-addled brain was trying to decide if he should worry over Greg's absence, his gaze caught a note on the table. When he reached for it, he noticed that his fingernails were a bright, glittery red. It looked like he was wearing Dorothy's ruby slippers on the ends of his fingers. He was certain they weren't like that before he'd fallen asleep. Chris rolled his eyes and read the note.

Gone to get some dinner, back soon. You look fabulous, by the way.

Chris shook his head as he grabbed his phone and sent a quick text.

Please tell me there's nail polish remover.

He snapped his phone shut and went to the bathroom. Before he even had his jeans undone, Chris glanced in the mirror. He had red lipstick to match the nails and bright blue eye shadow. He'd slept harder than he realized.

His phone was buzzing in his pocket. Greg had replied. Sort of.

We're men. Why would we have nail polish remover?

Laughing and wanting to choke him at the same time, Chris texted back quickly.

Because I look like an ugly drag queen.

He'd forgotten he had to piss and was washing his face when his phone buzzed again.

You'd make a gorgeous drag queen. You've got fabulous legs. Do you want sauce for your dumplings, dumpling?

Chris laughed and shot back another text.

Acetone for mine, arsenic for yours. Dumpling.

The next text made him smile.

I'm hurt, but I love you anyway. Home soon.

Chris couldn't help grinning as he sent his simple response.

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When Greg walked through the door, Chris had gotten the makeup off, but he was sitting on the couch looking at his sparkly red toenails. He had only just noticed them. "Did you slip me a sleeping pill and I didn't notice?" he asked, getting up to help Greg with the bags he was carrying.

Snorting a laugh, Greg passed a sack that smelled like Chinese food over to Chris. "If I ever have to slip you a pill to make you sleep like the dead, I'll know pigs are flying and the devil is ice skating to work."

They set everything on the counter that separated the kitchen from the living room. Greg handed him a little brown paper bag. "Got this for you. Well, for the nails."

Chris should've caught the look in Greg's eyes, should've seen the mischievous gleam there. He should've investigated more closely before he got excited. "Finally. If I'd had to leave the house like this I would've killed you," he said as he reached inside. His fingers closed around a scratchy bit of fabric rather than a bottle of polish remover. As he pulled it out he glanced up at Greg. He was bouncing on the balls of his feet, grinning like a kid at Disneyland.

"What the hell is this?" Chris asked, looking at a bright red thong covered in tiny sequins.

Greg was still beaming at him. “I thought it would look good with your nails.”

“It looks like Liberace’s dental floss.”

“You don’t like it?” Greg asked in playful disappointment. “I thought your ass would look great in it.”

“Wouldn’t my ass look great without it?”

“It lifts and separates.”

“My ass needs lifting and separating?”

“It would make things easier on occasion.”

“I hate you.”

Greg was laughing hard now, reaching for Chris and trying to pull him close. “But I *love* you, baby.”

The mild spring had rolled into a blazing summer. Leo and Krista were sitting with Chris at a bistro across from their small advertising firm. They were the only two coworkers he spent time with away from the office.

“How’ve things been with you and Greg? You ever get him back for the makeover?” Leo asked, trying to change the subject from his own monumental fuckup of forgetting his wife’s birthday the night before.

Chris had spent several weeks trying to repay Greg for the ambush makeup prank. He’d bought Greg’s favorite Oreo cookies and filled them with toothpaste only to have Greg come out from the kitchen, foaming at the mouth, and grinning. He’d switched the sugar with the salt late one night, only to have Greg kiss him goodbye the following morning and tell him that he was running too late for coffee, but there was a fresh pot for him. Chris had been afraid to drink it.

Krista’s idea involving wallpaper paste and feathers might have been funny, but Chris would have been the one on cleanup duty. And Leo’s best

idea was to sign Greg up on various fetish sites. That could have ended with an epic backfire.

In the end, he'd given up because the suggestions from their friends were potentially lethal or extremely messy.

Chris laughed and shook his head. "I threw in the towel. Greg is always two steps ahead of me. It's unnerving."

Krista piped in, "Better to be with someone two steps ahead than two steps behind."

Chris shot her a playful glare. "So you're saying it's better to be me than him in this relationship?"

She grinned at him around a mouthful of pasta salad in response. After she swallowed, she asked, "Seriously, though, how are you two? Are you still... slumpy?"

"God, don't put it like that. It makes it sound like our dry spell is because of erectile dysfunction and not... whatever the actual reason is."

"How long has it been?" Leo asked, latching onto the new subject.

Chris shrugged and tried to focus on his food, but he could feel their eyes on him. "Two weeks."

Leo sounded disgusted when he asked, "That's all? Two weeks without sex? That's your massive dry spell?"

Lifting his head, Chris sighed and asked, "How long does it have to be?"

"Two months, minimum."

"Seriously?" Chris was horrified. "I hope that's because you're straight and not because you've been together for fifteen years."

Krista snorted a laugh. "It's because he forgets his wife's birthday."

Chris and Leo said in unison, "Fair point."

"Anyway, maybe you guys just need to spice things up a little," Krista suggested. "Maybe have a threesome or something..."

Leo looked at her like she'd grown a second head. "They're *gay*. You want them to have sex with a woman?" Krista simply lifted her brow and waited for Leo to catch up. When he did, he said, "Oh. Right. Them and another guy."

Chris laughed at the two of them, but then he said, "We did that a few years back. It was okay, but neither of us really wanted to do it again." After he thought about it, he added, "Besides, with me working late and him working weekends, we're too tired to do each other. I doubt adding another guy into the mix would make it easier."

As they started packing up their things, Krista said, "What do I know? If I knew anything about the workings of the male mind, I'd be home nights having wild monkey sex with my husband rather than making little voodoo dolls of my ex-boyfriends. And my vibrator wouldn't need new batteries so often."

Chris laughed out loud at that, but Leo asked, "Do you really make little voodoo dolls of your ex-boyfriends?"

"Only when I've had too much wine."

"I've seen your recycle bin," Leo told her. "You might as well have said only on days ending in Y."

It started out like any other day. Well, almost any other day. Chris went to work a little early and slammed through his tasks as efficiently as possible. He skipped lunch and as soon as he'd gotten home from work, Chris decided to paint his toenails and fingernails again. He didn't want to examine why it turned Greg on, but, what the hell? It wasn't like Greg had suddenly revealed he was into scat after seven years of living together, right? And the time Chris had confessed he'd always wanted to tie Greg up and be the dominant one (for once), Greg had been game. Despite the fact that they had both ended up a little... bored, to be honest. But that was another story.

So, in an effort to "spice things up" as Krista had suggested the week before, Chris was walking around their apartment with the same bright red,

glittery nail polish that Greg had (weirdly) liked so much and wearing the thong that Greg was so eager to see him in.

By five o'clock, the house was clean and a nice array of new and unusual toys was laid out on the nightstand. Maybe it wasn't the most creative thing Chris could think of, but he figured the toys would come in handy if his less-than-subtle seduction plan didn't work out. And, hell, who could complain about a shiny new butt plug and a vibrating cock ring, right?

Greg was due home in twenty minutes. Chris stood in front of the full-length mirror. In truth, he felt a little ridiculous. He looked like a go-go dancer. At least his hours spent at the gym and jogging and swimming paid off. Silly little thong or not, he looked pretty damn hot. If he did say so himself.

Glancing at the clock, Chris decided it was time for the final touches and started to light all the candles he'd put up around the room. At first he'd considered going with something even more cliché and even sillier like a multi-colored disco ball, but candles were nice. (If he could keep Sherlock out of the room. The last time the cat had gotten curious around fire, he'd ended up walking into furniture and getting stuck in small spaces for months because he'd scorched half his whiskers off. At least they grew back.)

That many candles in one room put out a lot of heat. In retrospect, he would have been better off turning on the AC they'd never used. In retrospect, he should have moved the candles from the dresser in front of the window he decided to open. In retrospect, sheer curtains were a mistake. Those things lifted on the slightest breeze and when they got near an open flame...

Well.

"Shitshitshit! Shit!" He watched as the fire caught on one tiny tail end of one piece of fabric. That alone wouldn't have been much of a problem, but when the flames skittered all the way up, over the top, and back down to the nightstand in a matter of seconds, the panic really kicked in.

His mind raced with an avalanche of options. What were the fire protocols? He hadn't thought about it since he was a child and was forced to draw an escape route for their house in grammar school. He vaguely remembered

something about smoke and crawling, but running seemed like a much better idea. Fire extinguisher? They had one in the kitchen. 911? It wasn't that big of a fire, but it was spreading fast and the far wall of their bedroom was starting to look like the mouth of Hell.

As he rushed into the kitchen, Chris grabbed his phone. His hands were shaking, and punching those three tiny buttons seemed like an impossible task. Trying to hold the phone between his shoulder and his ear while he found the fire extinguisher, read the instructions, and ran back to the bedroom was even worse. Just as the emergency operator answered with the standard response, the phone flew from its resting place and landed on the couch.

His reaction to that was less than poised. He dove for the phone screaming, "Fire!"

Clambering to his feet again, Chris tried to explain with a little more detail and a little less hysteria the nature of the emergency. On his way to the bedroom, he told the woman on the other end of the line that he had a fire extinguisher and was about to spray down the area, but when he tried to pull the safety off, he jerked it in the wrong direction. The extinguisher slipped from his hand, hit the nightstand (sending dildos and butt plugs flying) and exploded.

On the downside, he was covered in a thick coating of white powder which made a sort of sparkly paste in the gel body glitter he'd skimmed on. On the upside, some of it had actually hit the fire and things were looking slightly less hellish.

He'd dropped the phone (again) and was trying to find it. When he finally did, he heard the responder's voice saying, "Sir? You need to get out of the apartment. A unit is on the way. Go outside and wait for them. Sir?"

Looking back, she sounded more annoyed than concerned, but he figured that was fair. In a matter of minutes he'd managed to nearly kill himself three times and make more work for the poor folks on their way over there.

"Sir? Did you hear me? Sir? You need to get out of the apartment and let the fire department handle it."

“Okay,” he finally answered, thinking he should at least try to find Sherlock. It didn’t take much time. The cat was sitting by the front door, looking at Chris as if to say *I can’t leave you alone for a second*.

He scooped Sherlock up and left his door standing open so they wouldn’t use an axe on it when they arrived.

Chris could hear the sirens over the building’s fire alarm as he ran down the stairs with a few other stragglers from his floor. When he got outside, there were people standing in the street, looking up into the inky evening sky to see the cloud of black smoke billowing from his apartment window.

To his credit, Chris’s first reaction was concern for his neighbors—their belongings and their lives. Especially Mrs. Sherman who was eighty years old and gave him blueberry muffins when he brought her paper in for her or walked her little wiener dog. When he saw her standing on the corner, safe and sound, with her dog tucked under her arm, he was so relieved he nearly cried.

Tammy from next door looked a little rattled, but when she saw Chris, she laughed long and hard. “What the hell have you done now?”

Chris blinked at her, still feeling a little shell shocked from the last—fifteen minutes or fifteen hours, he wasn’t sure. “It was an accident. Did you guys get out okay?”

“It’s always an accident with you,” she said good-naturedly as she stepped closer to him. “When you broke that water pipe in your kitchen and flooded my apartment, it was an accident. When you backed up your toilet because you flushed condoms down it and they had to shut my water off for an entire day too, it was an accident. When you ran into my car in the parking garage, it was an accident...” She smiled at him and wrapped an arm around Chris’s shoulder. “I was the only one home and I’m just fine,” she told him, finally answering his question as they watched the fire trucks roll in and get to work. “Wanna tell me why you’re damn near naked?”

“Wha—Oh, Jesus!” He’d forgotten what he was wearing. Or, more specifically, not wearing. He clung tighter to Sherlock, wishing for the first

time that he was a massive dog. One big enough to crawl under. Sherlock twitched his tail as if he could hear Chris's thoughts.

Wagging her eyebrows at Chris, Tammy said, "Guess you had a big night planned."

"Something like that," he muttered. His skin flushed hotly under the soot and—*oh God*—body glitter. Then he remembered the giant bottle of lube, the butt plugs and dildos all over the room, and the paddle on the foot of the bed. Not to mention the porn DVDs—one of which was playing on the television. If he'd been wearing clothes, he might have fled the scene. "Think they'd let me run back in there to—"

"Find some clothes and hide your porn?"

Chris nodded in answer, cringing as Tammy laughed again. He might not have forgiven her for that, but when a group of guys walked past him, slinging a few choice insults, Tammy didn't give Chris a chance to respond to them. Instead she stepped in front of Chris and yelled, "Fuck off before I shove a fire hose up your ass!"

Okay, she took delight in mocking Chris's series of unfortunate incidents, but he knew her well enough to be sure she'd die trying to get a fire hose up one of their asses on his behalf. And she'd forgotten about the time he'd accidentally given her food poisoning. Chicken salad should *never* be left out overnight. Lesson learned.

By the time he looked over at the apartment again, there were two fire engines and three ambulances. The EMTs—thankfully—had nothing to do but pass out blankets and bottles of water and one of the fire crews were already packing back up and climbing into their truck.

He watched three men in full gear walk out of the building, one carrying a cat that was trying to claw his face off.

The one in the lead grabbed a blanket off the aid unit and made a straight shot for Chris. His panic started to swell again. This guy was huge and he looked damned intimidating in the boots and helmet and... well, he looked incredibly hot too, but Chris was fairly sure he was about to get cussed out by

a hulking, hot fireman about the dangers of candles and curtains and wind and antique dressers that were basically kindling and, oh yeah, a room full of gay porn and dildos. If he got through it without hearing the fire had been a warning from God, Chris decided he'd count it a win.

"I'm guessing it was your apartment?" he asked as he wrapped a blanket around Chris's shoulders and tucked the ends into his folded arms around Sherlock.

"What gave it away?" Chris asked dryly, looking over his shoulder for Tammy. She'd abandoned him, slinking off to talk to one of the neighbors.

Firefighter Hottie actually laughed and said, "Just a hunch." His grin was bright enough to start a fire of its own. If Chris was single. Which he wasn't. Though he seriously wondered if he would be once Greg saw the apartment. "I'm Sam, by the way."

At first Chris only nodded, still in a daze. Then he clumsily offered, "I'm Chris. Uh... I can't decide if I should apologize or thank you guys."

Sam laughed and said, "Neither. Though, I'd really appreciate it if you installed some dimmer switches for any future mood lighting needs."

If he hadn't been covered in fire extinguisher powder and ash and soot, Chris knew he'd be as red as his thong. "I'm pretty sure my boyfriend will take care of that personally." Okay, he wasn't sure Sam-the-hot-fireman was flirting with him, but better safe than sorry, right? Besides, the guy had just seen a pretty serious collection of sex toys and probably noticed a rather graphic gangbang scene set on a ranch where they were *training* the new farm hand. Not to mention the G-string that was edging its way further up his ass with every step he took. Chris couldn't let anyone think that was how he spent his Friday night alone.

Sam gave another laugh and went over a few details about the fire. He told Chris that it wasn't anything serious, but he did the right thing by calling since things like that can smolder and... then his voice started to fade in and out and the pavement seemed like it was jumping up at Chris's face. Sam steadied him, but not quick enough to stop Sherlock from bolting out of Chris's arms

and darting through the crowd. “Whoa, you okay?” Sam asked, his strong arm still around Chris’s shoulders. “Need to sit down?”

Chris nodded in response but it didn’t help with the whole *swooning* thing. He was the first to admit that he wasn’t exactly butch, but he’d never passed out before. Or nearly passed out, as it were. That was something his grandmother did when she didn’t take her meds in the right order. Or pregnant women. Or... old ladies in Jane Austen books.

“It’s probably just an adrenaline crash,” Sam told him as they walked over to one of the aid units. “Let’s get you checked out just in case, though.”

He could hear his name being called, but it was beyond him to figure out who or why until the strained voice got closer. “Chris!” Greg sounded frantic as he screamed for him.

Looking over his shoulder, around Sam’s massive outline, Chris caught sight of Greg struggling to get through the crowd. He was out of breath when he finally got to them. “Jesus, are you okay?” he asked. Despite the fact that Chris was nodding in answer (still a bad idea), Greg asked Sam the same question, “Is he okay? He looks...” There were so many ways to end that sentence; Greg was probably having a hard time choosing.

“He’s fine. We’re gonna have him looked at just in case, though. Probably a little shocky,” Sam told him, sounding capable and—it was probably his imagination, but Chris could swear—disappointed.

“Yeah, okay.” It was Greg’s turn to nod. He was trying to catch his breath, Chris could tell, but at the moment, all Chris wanted to do was sit down and get a drink of water. “Okay,” Greg said again, looking up at their apartment building. “What happened?”

The question was directed at Sam, but Chris wanted to explain. The words that came out of his mouth, though, were, “Sherlock ran away.”

“Did he set fire to the place before he left?” Greg asked.

That got a chuckle out of Sam, who was pulling back from their little huddle as Tammy walked over to them. She had a very annoyed-looking Sherlock in her arms.

It took hours before they were allowed to go back in and get a few things to take with them to the hotel that night. Yes, a hotel. Because their bedroom had been drenched by the fire hose, and it was going to take at least a week for the apartment manager—who had put them on the top of her shit list—to get the place sorted out and livable again.

Chris was feeling better as they stood in the bedroom and looked at the damage. Mostly because he'd found a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie in the dryer. Chronically procrastinating putting his clean laundry away had finally worked to his benefit.

Greg, on the other hand, had gone from worried out of his mind, to relieved, to shocked, to, well, shouting. "Seriously?" He was standing at the foot of their bed, looking at the charred pile that was once Chris's dresser. "It didn't occur to you to... to... *Seriously?*" It was rare for Greg to be at a loss for words. Nothing of his was ruined. Well, except for the vintage movie poster of *The Fifty Foot Woman* that Greg had on the wall. Chris secretly hated that poster, but he felt bad for its destruction nonetheless.

"I was trying to surprise you..." Chris's voice sounded feeble even to his own ears.

"Oh, I'm *surprised*, all right!" Eyes wide, hair wild, fists clenched... so not the way he'd wanted Greg to look when he got home. "Thank Christ I had my laptop with me." Greg was muttering to himself as he shoved a few things into a duffel bag and grabbed his shave kit from the bathroom.

One of the firefighters must have turned off the television because there was no more rowdy cowboy gangbang playing in the background. Which was probably for the best. It was one of Chris's favorites, and he didn't want any more negative associations with it than he already had that night.

“You ready?” Greg was standing by the door. He looked impatient. He was working his jaw like he was trying to chew a piece of especially tough meat. He wouldn’t look at Chris.

“Yeah, just lemme get Sherlock’s food and his dishes for Tammy.” Chris’s answer was met with another huff of breath, another set of rolled eyes, and another tap of Greg’s foot. At Greg’s reaction, Chris dropped the bag of cat food on the kitchen floor. “It’s not like I *wanted* this to happen, okay?”

“That’s a comfort at least,” Greg told him flatly. “I’d hate to think that you decided to burn our apartment down after deciding to, what? Host an orgy? What did you do all day, anyway?”

Chris could have explained. He could have told Greg that he’d spent the day getting things ready in the hopes that maybe they could break their three-week-long dry spell and maybe put a little heat back into their relationship. He could have told him that he’d cleaned the house and done the laundry and watered the plants and went shopping and did ridiculous things in the hopes of pleasing him and maybe turning him on. Instead Chris rolled his eyes, picked up the cat food again, and said, “I sat around jerking off and trying to see how big of a dildo I could use on myself without pulling a muscle.”

“And then torched the place?”

“Yep.” Chris didn’t bother looking at him as he walked out the door.

“Fabulous.”

It wasn’t until much later that night, when they were settled back in a nice king-size bed, that either of them spoke another word.

Chris was trying not to toss and turn, so he was lying flat on his back and looking up at the shadows on the ceiling. He could tell Greg was awake as well, but he didn’t know what to say so he didn’t say anything at all.

Greg broke the silence. “I’m sorry,” he whispered, as if he wasn’t sure how well his apology would be taken.

Chris turned then and reached across the two feet separating them. "I'm sorry too," he said softly as he set a hesitant hand on Greg's shoulder.

"I know, baby. I'm sorry I was such an asshole about it. I..."

"It's okay. I should've been more careful."

Greg huffed out a laugh and rolled onto his side to face Chris. They both scooted closer until they were pressed against each other. Greg wrapped his arm around Chris's shoulder and slid their bare feet together under the blankets. "Yeah, you should've. But... it freaked me out, ya know?"

It was Chris's turn to laugh then. "I could tell."

Greg shook his head softly and leaned in close, kissing the tip of Chris's nose before brushing their lips together. "No, I mean... coming home and seeing the street blocked off and smoke and fire trucks, it scared the hell out of me."

"I know, I should've called you or something, I was just so—"

"Shut up," Greg murmured tenderly, a teasing smile evident in his tone. "It wasn't just that. I mean, all I could think about was finding you and what if you were hurt and what if you were at the hospital or... What if I had to deal with some asshole that wouldn't let me in to see you because, on paper, we're nothing? And, what if your mother showed up and told them I couldn't even visit you?"

Chris started to point out that the odds on either of his parents showing up for anything were slim, but Greg put a fingertip on Chris's mouth and whispered, "Let me finish." Chris nodded and waited quietly as Greg went on. "I want us to get all the paperwork and do the whole domestic partnership thing."

Chris could feel his eyes widen in surprise. Up until that point they'd both said they didn't need paperwork or approval or a wedding. They were together, they were happy, and that was all they needed.

"You can talk now."

"I thought you were going to say you wanted out."

There was a long pause before Greg spoke again. When he did, the confusion in his voice was nearly comical. “Wanted out of... *us*?”

“Yeah.” Chris felt like an idiot now that he’d said it out loud, but he tried to explain anyway. “We’ve been so busy and tired all the time and not really... ya know, like we used to be and I just figured you were getting done with it all and then tonight was a total disaster and you were so pissed and I just thought maybe you were over... me.”

Greg touched the tip of Chris’s chin and tilted his face so they could see each other in the dim lights scattering through the curtains. “You’re such an idiot.” He softened the words with a deep kiss that had them both breathless when Greg pulled back. “I’ll *never* be over you.”

“And if you are, you want it in writing that you can pull my plug?”

Greg leaned in again, grinning as he whispered, “That’s right, so you better behave.” He kissed Chris again before he said, “You still haven’t given me an answer.”

“You didn’t actually ask me anything.”

Greg’s exasperated sigh made Chris smile. Greg asked, “Will you everything-but-marry me?”

He was going to tease and make Greg wait a minute longer, but his mouth jumped ahead of his brain and he simply said, “Yes.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

It took them a few minutes to wrestle out of their clothes. Neither one of them wanted to pull away from each other long enough to shed their T-shirts and Chris’s boxer shorts and Greg’s pajama bottoms.

Their touches that night were slow and quiet, tender. Until they were naked and pressed together, then everything turned greedy and full of want, full of the heat Chris had been afraid they’d lost over the years. He realized then, as

Greg was pushing inside him, as their breath was catching and their groans were mingling into the night, that they would never truly lose anything—the spark, the passion, each other—as long as they both kept showing up.

Just when Chris felt like he was going to fly apart, just when he was about to come, Greg shifted and pushed him harder into the bed. He laced their fingers together and pinned Chris beneath him. His thrusts slowed, his rhythm turned steady and deep, and when Greg leaned close and took Chris's mouth in a hard kiss, Chris cried out against it. His climax swept through him in a heavy rush that felt like a shock through his system, setting off a series of shudders and gasps that rocked him until Greg was coming with him.

They collapsed together, hearts pounding, panting, slick with sweat. They didn't even bother to clean up. Instead they fell asleep together in a sticky, tangled heap.

When Chris woke up in the early morning, he didn't disturb Greg. He looked at Greg for a long moment and thought, *This is the guy*. Just like he secretly, sappily, thought to himself after their very first night. Who knew that could actually happen to people?

Present Day

It was the first time Chris had ever worn a tux. In high school, when most of the guys dressed to the nines and took their dates to the prom, Chris had gotten himself a fake ID and went to a gay bar.

That night he'd gotten his first blowjob, and he thought nothing would ever compare to it. Life and experience had taught him otherwise. Now, standing in front of a mirror and checking himself, he thought this day was the thing that nothing would ever compare to and wondered if he was wrong about that, too. Would there be other things, even better things to come? He hoped so, but in that moment he couldn't imagine it.

When Greg's mother had told them what they'd be wearing, he'd been hesitant. Aqua is an awfully bright color and, at the time, he didn't even know what *aubergine* was. Turned out it was purple, and it looked great next to

aqua. So, there he stood in a classic black tux with a bright blue bow tie and a purple calla lily in his lapel.

Greg came up behind him and wrapped his arms around Chris's waist. "You look incredible like that."

Chris grinned, looking at their reflection. He wished the photographer were there to snap a picture because this was the moment he wanted to remember forever. Greg looking sexy and perfectly put together, smiling and happy. "So do you," he said, already counting down the minutes until they were supposed to leave together and walk each other down the aisle. "You're gonna wrinkle us if you're not careful, though."

Laughing at that, Greg dropped his arms from around Chris. "I'm gonna do a lot more than wrinkle us later," he warned. "Now help me get this boutonniere on right."

Chris adjusted the flower and then took a good look at Greg. "Perfect," he whispered. He wasn't just talking about how Greg looked or what they had planned for the evening.

Chris didn't expect to be so nervous when he took his vows. His palms were sweating and he felt like they were in a spotlight together on a stage in a massive arena. In reality it was a small arch with fresh flowers and greenery woven into it and there were only about a hundred guests watching them.

When the minister told their guests that it was time for them to exchange rings and share the vows they'd written, Chris thought he might pass out. Thankfully, Greg was going first.

"There was a time when I didn't believe in all this stuff," he said softly, looking at Chris and holding his hand. "I thought we could live our lives together and be happy. I thought we could leave the doors wide open, let each other stay or go as we pleased. Until one night, not too long ago, when I realized that you *are* my life. The best part of it, anyway, and... when I thought I might have lost you it was like everything ended for me. I didn't care about anything else. I didn't care about getting a promotion or buying a house

or living or dying anymore. Not if you weren't there with me for all of it." Greg took a steadying breath and Chris could feel his own brow furrow as his emotions threatened to overwhelm him. These were the words he'd wanted to hear earlier and they meant so much more to him now.

Greg smiled at him as if he had guessed what Chris was thinking. He flashed him a little wink before going on. "I decided it was time to lock the door and throw away the key." Their friends and family laughed softly and so did Chris. When the room fell silent again, Greg continued. "Chris, I promise you I'll come home every night. I'll watch your stupid sci-fi shows with you. I'll pick up your socks and remind you to charge your phone. I'll clean the cat box and let you listen to loud music and make you laugh when you're sad and hold you when you sleep and talk to you when there's a thunderstorm and most of all I promise you that I will always love you and I will always be there." He swallowed hard there and took another deep breath. "And I promise to try not to be a jackass." With the last, he slipped the ring on Chris's finger.

What the hell could he say to all that? "I promise you I'll make it worth the effort." Chris nearly stopped there because, really, that was the best promise either of them could make for each other. Instead, though, he said, "I promise to be there when you come home to me. I promise to laugh at your jokes and remind you of how amazing you are when you forget. I promise to trust you and honor you and what we have. I promise to never take you for granted, and I promise that I will always love you. And I promise to pick up my own socks once in a while."

Neither of them cried, but Chris could feel the backs of his eyes burning and he knew that if Greg said one more word, he would lose it. But Greg was grinning at him and the minister was telling them they were legally wed. Their kiss was a sweet one, playful and happy.

Later that night, in a ballroom that smelled like lilacs and roses, they danced together to "The Book of Love" by The Magnetic Fields. They fed each other cake in the messiest way possible. They drank and talked and laughed. They ran down the steps in a shower of purple flower petals. And

when they finally tumbled into bed together, it was the same as it always was: full of heat and tenderness.

Chris didn't know what the next day or the next decade would bring, but he knew that he'd have Greg with him every step of the way. Good and bad, up and down, sorrow and joy, and he figured that was happily ever after enough for him.

THE END

Author Bio

J.H. Knight has been writing love stories since the second grade. When she's not catering to the whims of her imaginary friends (whom she sometimes refers to as "characters"), she's usually found driving her four children all over the planet, working on a school project, or saying things like "Not until your homework is done!"

A Pacific Northwest native, she loves the outdoors in every season whether she's in the city, the mountains, or building sloppy sandcastles with her kids on the beach. On her best days, she's cuddled up with a good book, and on her worst days she's tearing her hair out as she tries to decide if her sentence needs a comma or a semicolon. She gratefully bows down in awe of editors, since she usually gets it wrong.

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