

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

BRING HIM HOME

Sammy Goode

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

BRING HIM HOME

By Sammy Goode

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.

All rights reserved worldwide.

This eBook may be distributed freely in its entirety courtesy of the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group*. This eBook may not be sold, manipulated or reproduced in any format without the express written permission of the author.

Bring Him Home, Copyright © 2013 Sammy Goode

Cover Design by Goodreads M/M Romance Group

This ebook is published by the *M/M Romance Group* and is not directly endorsed by or affiliated with Goodreads Inc.

BRING HIM HOME

By Sammy Goode

Photo Description

One man sits, leg drawn up, his head resting on his knee. He and the man kneeling behind him are naked. The other man has his arm wrapped around the seated man, holding his hand. Their eyes are closed and their posture cries out their love and care for each other.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

These two military medics have been through it all together. From living the horrors of war to falling in love. Will their love survive a life altering injury and PTSD?

Please write these guys a story where they find peace and a HEA with each other. I don't expect it to come easily.

Lots of sexual tension would be nice if it fits and I would like to see this scene at some point in the story.

****I strongly request that this story WILL NOT include cheating, ménage, or sex with other people****

Sincerely,

Heather C

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: military, medics, war, amputation, PTSD

Word count: 12,450

A Brief Dedication...

A special thanks to Anna Larson for helping me portray military life as accurately as possible. Any inaccuracies left are deliberate and are meant to support the fiction aspect of this short story. Also, a huge thanks to my beta readers, Shaz, Kaje, and John for helping me along the way. And finally, this story is dedicated to our U. S. Military forces—may they all come home safely one day soon.

BRING HIM HOME

By Sammy Goode

Michael glanced down at the orders in his hand again and absently rubbed his now churning gut. *Camp Manhattan, Iraq*, he was being deployed to fucking Iraq. Well, Habbiniyah to be exact, some godforsaken strip of desert that lay close to fucking Fallujah, the land of IEDs and sniper fire and one hundred-twenty degrees in the shade. *Christ!*

He knew the deployment had been coming for a while now. After all, it had been a couple of weeks since he and his group of medics had finished up their sixteen-week training at Fort Sam Houston. Since then, there had been a lot of hurry up and wait, endless tactical training in desert-like conditions, review of field training, no leave... and Finn.

Finn McCullan. As if the very thought of the man could conjure his appearance, Finn was suddenly there in the distance, striding across the field toward Michael. Hazel-eyed with dark hair, Finn's beauty preceded him—was the first thing everyone seemed to notice, causing women and, yes, even some men to do a double take.

Michael squinted against the sun and watched Finn's long legs start to churn up the turf as he raced to meet him. This was a dangerous man. Michael had no doubt, fearless Finn McCullan, as the others jokingly called the medic, was the one thing that could break through his otherwise calm demeanor and set his blood to boiling. And *not* because the man made him angry, no, anger was the last thing on his mind when he thought of Finn.

Lowering his eyes to avoid giving away the crazy idea that so often raced through his mind—the one about grabbing Finn and pinning him down so he could grind his dick against him till they both came hard and fast, Michael glanced again at the papers in his hand. He remembered, with clarity, the original orders that had brought him to the fort and introduced him to the man who now seemed to make his fucking knees go weak with just a look in his direction.

“So, Cap how’s the meatloaf today?”

Michael looked down at the tomato-glazed slice of what he hoped was edible ground beef and then over at the annoying medic-in-training that had been assigned to his group as of today at 0800. When his gaze connected with the intense stare of the chirpy little bastard who seemed to be everyone’s best friend since his arrival that morning, Michael felt an odd stirring... a bit of a jolt deep down, and recognized it for what it was, desire.

Oh no, this was so not happening. He was a physician, in charge of getting these “wet behind the ears” recruits ready in little more than four months to care for the wounded on a battlefield. He definitely did NOT have time to fuck around with any of them, especially not this pretty boy.

“That’s Captain Bradshaw to you, Private, and don’t forget it.”

Michael refused to acknowledge the slightly bewildered look in Finn’s eyes and, instead, turned away to find a seat at the Officer’s table. He heard a slow exhale of breath behind him and then the muttered, “Sorry, Captain Bradshaw, won’t happen again.” He knew he should be smiling at taking the cocky private down a notch but, instead, all he felt was shame at the way he’d reacted.

Christ, he thought, the kid was harmless, just friendly, that’s all. Ease the fuck up.

Michael turned to apologize to the private just in time to see him leave the mess hall, his body language indicating he was a bit embarrassed at being called out. Suddenly the meatloaf no longer held any appeal; instead, he shoved the plate onto the dirty tray rack, and followed the retreating figure of his new recruit. This military shit was getting to him. There was no need to act like an asshole just to remind a private of who was in charge. Moving quickly to catch the private, Michael managed to grab at his arm just as he stepped through the barracks door. Deserted due to it being chow time, the room was also cast in shadow and Finn’s face was barely discernible in the deepening gloom.

“Hey, listen, sorry about pulling rank back there. It’s been a long day and I shouldn’t have taken it out on you. Especially since I haven’t even welcomed you to our group yet. I’m Michael Bradshaw and you must be...”

“It’s Finn, Finn McCullan, Sir.”

Michael watched as a huge smile lit up the soldier’s face, and felt a responding twitch of his lips as they pulled into a grin. He shook the outstretched hand and felt how Finn held on for just a second longer than normal. The two men looked at each other and just then, something sparked; some sort of recognition took place in that knowing glance. In that fast few seconds, each man realized that the other was wired just like him. And that knowledge resonated deep inside Michael, cracking open the door to the place where lust lay hidden and waiting.

Slowly, Michael withdrew his hand. He watched as Finn’s easy smile faded just for a second only to be replaced with an expression that spoke of hunger... need? Did he really see that, or was his overactive libido so frustrated he imagined it. Just as quickly as it flared, the look was gone and, with a lick of his lips, Finn’s smile returned, as bright as before. But Michael wasn’t fooled, no, he knew what he had seen, and if the slight swell of his cock behind his fatigues was any indication, his body recognized it as well.

“Well, welcome aboard then, Private. I’ll see you at the briefing tomorrow morning at 0700.”

Finn cleared his throat and nodded his head. Michael turned and walked out into the courtyard. As the door swung closed behind him, he paused to watch small groups of enlisted men stroll toward their barracks. He raised a hand and wiped away a fine sheen of sweat from his forehead that had risen despite the fact that it was a cool summer evening. He saw the fine tremors in his hand and let out a low, shaky laugh.

Jesus, Bradshaw, you’re like a damn schoolgirl with a secret crush.

He looked around at the door that still swung ever so slightly to and fro. He could hear Finn moving around inside and leaned in to see if he could catch one more glimpse. Just then, the outdoor compound halogens turned on,

casting everything in a soft purple glow. Michael rocked backward, startled, and then turned smartly, walking at first and then jogging across the courtyard, all the while, trying to escape the fierce need to go back in and grab Finn McCullan by the neck and kiss that grin right off his face.

The sight of Finn running toward him pulled Michael back to the present. He smiled as he saw Finn raise a hand to catch his eye. A slight breeze rustled the papers in his hands and caused him to look down at the orders once more. Iraq. Well, at least he knew his guys were ready. They had not only completed their sixteen week course with flying colors, they had also shown real expertise at handling the more advanced equipment medics would be carrying in their packs these days.

They had trained both in the classroom and on maneuvers, trying their best to create what it would be like in the theater on deployment. Every one of his medics knew how to react in combat situations. He recalled being hunkered down during one maneuver, with Finn acting as the downed soldier.

He was monitoring another of his medics as he used the FAST 1 for the first time, right on Finn's chest. Damn guy was fearless, volunteering to have another medic punch a hole in his sternum to plant the IV line so that fluids could be directed straight to the heart. It was only to be used when normal access to set up an IV line failed. Finn had been joking around through the entire process. Michael was pretty damn sure that was when he began to really like Finn McCullan. After that exercise, he found himself seeking out the medic more and more often.

The two of them began to naturally gravitate toward each other no matter where they were. Casual "bumping into one other" had morphed into secretly meeting far away from base to have a drink or just blow off some steam at the pool hall.

As weeks passed, Michael found himself looking at Finn less and less as just a "friend" and more and more as a potential lover. He knew Finn felt the same just by some of the looks and accidental touching that had been happening with more frequency when they were hanging out. But this was the army and to let anyone know that both men were gay, and worse, wanting to

hump like bunnies, was a very bad idea. So cold showers and jacking off solo in the early morning hours had to suffice. Plus, just because he looked forward to seeing the cocky bastard every damn day didn't mean he was falling in love or some stupid shit like that. He just really... liked the guy that was all.

It was for the best anyway, Michael thought, since now it looked as though he and Finn would be parting ways courtesy of their upcoming deployments. Lost in thought, Michael turned to head back toward his barracks. He stopped just outside them when he heard Finn calling to him.

“Doc, hey Doc. Wait up, I have something to tell you.”

Michael looked up into the face that had come to mean so much to him. Damn kid was going to get them both in trouble for calling him Doc instead of Captain. But before Michael could let the warning sound from his mouth he saw Finn smile and, as usual, that smile lit Michael up inside. No matter how many times he tried to remind himself that the private smiled like that at everyone, he knew he was just fooling himself. Finn was an open book to Michael, and with just a nod, Michael was pretty sure he could have that sweet body beneath his own, hot and ready.

The deployment papers in Michael's hand rustled in the wind again, reminding him that despite how much he wanted to spend more time getting to know Finn intimately, this was no doubt one of the last times he would be seeing him. The combat medics that had trained with him would also have gotten their orders and it was almost impossible that any of them would be deployed to the same unit. No, more than likely, they would be assigned to different platoons and be shipping out to opposite ends of the arena.

“Hey there, *Private* Finn. I'm guessing you got your orders today. Where are you shipping out to?”

“Fucking gorgeous Camp Manhattan, home of the 506th Airborne Regiment, *and* unless my sources are mistaken, future home of one Captain Michael Bradshaw!”

Finn let out a whoop of joy and grabbed Michael around the waist, swinging him around and clapping him on the back. When the dust settled and

the earth stopped spinning, Michael was still held tight in the circle of Finn's arms and their faces were so close that Michael could feel the gentle huffs of breath coming from Finn. Then he heard Finn's breath catch and stop, his mouth open, his tongue darting out to moisten his lips. And for one brief moment, Michael allowed himself to gaze at Finn and wonder for the hundredth time how sweet he would taste. Just as quickly, where they were and who could see them came rushing back to mind and the two men separated. The close call did nothing to dispel Finn's excitement, however, and he leaned in slightly, uttering words only meant for Michael's ears.

"We're going to be in the same unit, Doc." In the back of his mind, Michael scrambled to make sense of Finn's whispered remark. But the heat, the brief feel of those arms around him, the overwhelming desire to take that one step forward that would allow him to press himself against Finn once more was all he could process. He felt himself begin to lean in, the urge to push his groin up against that lean, hard body swamping his senses, his cock swelling, and his need sharp and visceral.

With a low cry, Finn met him, stomachs brushing, chests rubbing together and then, oh god, then, hard dicks rutting in time. The kiss followed, full on, unexpected, bruising. Lips crushing together, Michael's tongue prodding Finn's closed mouth, demanding entry; Finn relenting and, with a soft moan, opening to a hot, seeking tongue.

There, in the shade of the empty barracks, months of wanting, of hungry need, erupted in a moment that rocked both men to their very core. Michael managed to pull back first, his breath coming in harsh pants, his hands continuing to rub across Finn's back.

"Fucking want you, Finn. Tell me you need it as much as I do. Tell me you..."

Michael got no further as Finn's mouth crashed into his once more and he felt himself being propelled backwards through the door leading to his quarters. He heard a soft, high-pitched whine, like an animal in pain, and realized it was him, his voice, and his desire to touch Finn, forcing quiet, unearthly sounds from his throat.

Hands flew everywhere, army-issue fatigues being pulled away from heated flesh, fingers groping and grasping. Michael only let go of Finn long enough to work open his green webbed belt and tear apart his fly, pushing it aside to reach in past the boxers and grab the wet-tipped cock that seemed to come alive at his touch.

Finn gasped and moaned out loud. Michael's rough hands reaching around Finn and thrusting down his pants to grab the well-muscled ass that had taunted him every time it had walked away from him, but not this time. This time Finn held on and thrust his cock hard against the warm hand that held him, pulling Michael closer, as if he could somehow crawl inside him.

The air filled with grunts and whispered curses, as pants hit the floor and Michael released Finn only to spin him around and drop to his knees, spreading his cheeks with both hands and burying his tongue deep inside him. Finn clutched the wall in front of him, and shoved his ass back into Michael's thrusting tongue, his knees suddenly weak and his cock dripping.

Seconds turned to minutes as spit-slicked fingers replaced the seeking tongue. With the crook of a finger and a slight bit of pressure, Finn raised up on his toes at Michael's touch.

"Fuck, Doc. You keep that up and I'm going to cum all over this damn wall."

Michael chuckled and pushed deep inside Finn again—brushing against that little nub that made Finn whimper and buck hard into his hand.

"Oh god, god, Doc, tell me you have lube and a damn condom somewhere... please."

"Get on your fucking hands and knees and don't move, Private."

Finn dropped down as Michael reached across the bunk to his kit and snatched up the supplies. Fumbling briefly to pull back the lid on the bottle of slick, Michael tore at the wrapper of the condom with his teeth. In a near obscene gesture, he balanced the lube on Finn's ass while he rolled the condom down over his aching dick. Grabbing it up, he squirted a generous dollop into his hand and stroked down his length, getting it wet and ready.

Tossing the bottle aside, he knelt down behind Finn and positioned his cock at Finn's pucker and pushed in.

So tight, so hot, Finn's hole spasmed as Michael pushed past the first ring and drove home, fully seating his cock inside, his balls lightly slapping against Finn's ass. Both men groaned aloud as Michael paused, waiting for Finn to relax enough so that he could pull out again and thrust back in. Finn's head hung down, his labored breathing harsh in the stillness of the barracks.

“Fucking hell, move Doc, please, I need you to move.”

Michael didn't need any further encouragement. Pulling back he jammed his cock back into that seductive heat and began to pound away, months of pent-up lust and frustration driving his need.

The air filled with the sounds of balls slapping and whispered encouragements, as Michael rode Finn hard and fast, their desires pushing all else aside. Sweat trickled down the side of Michael's face as he fucked Finn with abandon, his movements jerky and erratic as he felt his orgasm building. Leaning over so that he was laying chest to back, Michael reached around and grabbed hold of Finn's cock, using the drops of cum already flowing from the tip to ease his strokes. Up and down he worked Finn's shaft as Finn rolled and bucked and pushed back against the cock filling up his ass. Michael was so close... so fucking close. With one last heave and thrust into Finn, he felt his cock swell and jerk, shooting hot cum into the condom. Giving one last stroke, Michael felt Finn's back seize and then his dick erupted all over his hand.

Finn collapsed into a heap on the floor, falling to his side and carrying Michael with him. They landed heavily, breath coming in gasps, bodies still jerking. Michael wrapped his arms around Finn, pulling him back into his chest, spooning him on the cold, hard concrete that neither man felt at that moment.

“Christ, Finn, that was fucking amazing.”

“Yeah, Doc, yeah.”

They lay there together, Michael's cock softening inside Finn's ass, prompting him to move and get the condom off. Finn let out a slightly pained

sigh as Michael withdrew to tie off the rubber. Reaching back, Michael grabbed at Finn's shoulders to lift him off the floor.

"C'mon Private, let's take this to a more comfortable location."

Both men moved to sit on the edge of Michael's bunk. Finn chuckled as he looked down at their crumpled uniforms still tangled in their boots.

Michael took in the direction of his glance and tapped his booted feet, causing Finn to laugh out loud and collapse backwards across the bunk, pulling Michael with him.

They lay side by side, their chuckles diminishing until silence reigned. Michael turned to look at Finn's smiling face. He reached out with one hand and brushed some dirt off Finn's cheek and smiled in return. They stared at one another, both hesitant to speak, not wanting to break the comfortable silence. Finally, Finn spoke.

"So, now what do we do, Doc?"

Michael looked into Finn's questioning gaze and, for just a moment, felt the weight of what they had done... of what they had unleashed. Then, breathing out a calming breath, he said the only thing that made sense.

"Now we go to Iraq, do our job, and..."

Michael paused as he reached for the courage to finish.

Gently, Finn reached out a finger and stroked Michael's cheek.

"And, what?"

"And make sure we bring each other home safe."

"I like the sound of that."

Michael leaned in and kissed Finn softly as he sent up a fervent prayer that they would do just that... both come home, safe and whole.

The desert was fucking hot and dusty. And went on for miles and miles and miles. Michael washed his hands and dispensed more anti-diarrhea medicine and the same tired admonition to "please wash your damn hands."

Between the lousy porta-johns and the desert heat, he was seeing more stomach issues than anything else. Not that he was complaining. Anything was better than seeing someone who'd just had a limb blown off by stumbling onto a roadside IED. Fucking explosives were worse than sniper fire.

A hot, dusty breeze blew in as the door to the makeshift hospital opened and a few soldiers walked in, along with Finn, the battalion's combat medic. From the laughter, it was obvious Finn had told yet another of his seemingly endless supply of dirty jokes. Michael watched the group approach, wondering what crazy-ass shenanigans they were up to this time. Finn should have been in bed—literally. One of the ways that command ensured the safety of the men was to make sure that both helicopter crews and medical staff followed a strict twelve-on, twelve-off tour. In other words, you worked twelve hours, you rested twelve and most of that “resting” twelve should be done sleeping. Finn had a difficult time understanding the concept of resting.

Unfortunately, this also meant that Finn skirted the edge of placing himself and, by forfeit, his chopper crew in less than desirable circumstances. A tired medic was a slow medic and sometimes speed was what kept you from taking on unwanted enemy fire in a war zone. Already high-strung and full of erratic energy, a tired Finn was a dangerous Finn and Michael gritted his teeth once more at the signs of obvious exhaustion that were etched across Finn's face.

He tried to understand why Finn put himself at risk time and again all because he refused to sleep. After one of the very few times he'd managed to get Finn alone, he asked Finn to explain it to him—why he had such a hard time relaxing and why Finn would not let Michael help him by prescribing a mild sedative to help him sleep. Huge mistake. Finn got pissed, and just a bit offended, and that was an understatement. He could still see Finn's reaction had played out.

“Are you kidding? You want to knock me out? No way, Doc. That shit fucks with my head. Nope, absolutely not.”

“But Finn, you have to get some rest. If you keep going at this rate, you're going to be pulled off the active duty roster and put on cleaning bedpans in the infirmary.”

“Only if you put me on report. And you would never do that right? Doc? Right?”

“Listen Finn, I didn’t want to but it’s just not safe, I mean...”

“You did it? You reported me? Shit! How the hell could you do that? Why? Why would you make the request to have me taken off active duty? Jesus, what am I gonna do now? How in the hell am I gonna keep you safe? You promised me—you promised we’d keep each other—watch each other’s backs. Home safe—that’s what you said. Did you forget what we said back at Fort Sam? Christ, how could you do this to me? What am I going to do? How am I going to keep my promise now? Tell me, goddammit! HOW IN THE FUCK AM I GOING TO DO THAT FROM THE FUCKING INFIRMARY?”

Michael stared at Finn, hardly able to believe that the screaming lunatic standing before him was the same man who had gone down on his knees not twelve hours earlier and swallowed his dick, laughing and moaning and grabbing his ass. Where had that man gone? Michael had no idea when he had requested that Finn be taken off extraction and put on mandatory duty at the Infirmary for the next two weeks, just how close to the edge Finn really was. But now he saw clearly that Finn was a ticking time bomb, just waiting to go off. He reached out to stroke Finn’s arm to calm him and reared back as Finn shook him off and stalked to the window across the room. There he stood, chest heaving, obviously trying to get a grip on the emotions that were waging a pretty hefty war of their own inside Finn’s head.

Michael approached him slowly, once more reaching out, this time to gently stroke Finn’s back. He felt the shudder run through Finn, causing him to tremble violently. He reached an arm around Finn’s chest and caught him just as the man collapsed against Michael’s hard body. Michael felt Finn shake as the tears came, ugly, gulping tears that men cry when they’ve been pushed to the brink and left there far too long.

He shushed and petted Finn, squeezing him tight, stroking his hair and whispering quiet nonsense in his ear. Michael felt so inadequate, not knowing how to comfort the man in his arms but wanting to nonetheless. Slowly, Finn’s sobs lessened and Michael felt his body relax into his own. He gave Finn a few

minutes more, hoping he would speak and tell Michael that he was going to be okay, that he would rest and not fight Michael anymore about the change in duty and the need for rest. True to form, Finn began with a dry laugh.

“Damn, I hate this shit. I feel so weak over here, Doc. Every time I feel like I got it together, some damn IED explodes and our guys get fucked over. Christ I didn’t mean to cry like a damn girl. Probably sounds like I’m a section eight eh, Doc?”

“Shhh Finn, of course not.”

“Nah, it’s okay, I get it. I even knew it was coming. I’ve been so wired lately. For Christ’s sake I’m a medic. I’ve been trained to see the signs of combat stress. Guess I’m just piss-poor at seeing it in myself.”

“Finn, why do you think one of the most famous sayings concerning doctors is ‘Physician, heal thyself’? We’re notorious for missing our own problems but aces at diagnosing everyone else. It’s okay, you just need to rest—get some sleep. I just requested you be given a few days, Finn, that’s all, then you can go right back on active duty roster, I swear. Hell, I’ll even sign the paperwork now, saying you’re ready for active duty early—postdate it to the day after tomorrow, if it will make you feel better.”

Michael began to step away to grab the forms needed to do what he had just promised to Finn, but Finn snatched at him like he was a life preserver and pulled him in tight to himself, clutching at Michael.

“Shhh Finn, it’s okay, I have you, it’s just a few days and then back to...”

“No, it’s not that, it’s just. Shit, Doc, I want you... please, I just need to feel normal, just for a few minutes.”

Michael looked at his lover and saw the lust behind the exhaustion. This was dangerous. Anyone could step in and discover them. But the need pouring off Finn was so palpable that Michael found himself unable to say no. Reaching out to briefly touch Finn’s cheek in reassurance, Michael stepped around him and locked the door to his office. Turning back, he grabbed Finn by the hand and took him behind the curtained exam area where he leaned in to kiss him. Finn devoured Michael’s lips. Michael felt his cock harden and

push against the placket of his camo pants as Finn pushed his body flush up against Michael, grinding their cocks together.

Breaking off the kiss, Finn kneeled down and frantically tore at Michael's belt and zipper. He worked Michael's cock free from his boxers and greedily bent to suck him down, gagging in the process. Pulling back, Finn went down again and again, each time swirling his tongue around the tip of Michael's dick, and sucking hard up and down.

Michael leaned back against the exam table, thrusting into Finn's face, fucking his throat. Their harsh, guttural breathing broke the otherwise silent room, as Finn continued to work Michael's cock as if his life depended on seeing Michael cum as quickly as possible. Within minutes, Michael was ramming his cock down Finn's throat and doing just that in long, hot spurts.

Finn groaned as he sucked on Michael, not letting up until Michael pushed him off his now sensitive cock. Without pausing to draw a deep breath, Michael watched as Finn tore his zipper down and released his hard, weeping cock. A few strokes and Finn came all over his hand, his sweating head collapsing onto Michael's thigh.

The two men gulped in air as they came down off the heat of the moment. Michael reached down and stroked Finn's hair and smiled as Finn turned his head ever so slightly and nuzzled into his hand. Michael pulled Finn to his feet. Slowly, they cleaned up and reassembled their clothing.

Finn kissed Michael and hugged him tight for a brief second.

"I promise I'll sleep. Just let me stay on active duty, okay? Please fix it, Doc—and I won't let you down."

Michael felt himself nod his head and knew that he would ask that his own request be denied. He would lie and say that Finn was okay for active duty, that Finn had gotten the needed rest. He felt his chest tighten as he glanced down at the dark head that rested on his shoulder and sincerely hoped that his lie would not come back to haunt him in the end.

Six months in this fucking hole of a country. Six long months that should've ended with him and Finn catching a boat out of there for a month-long leave. For sure, Michael had sent his share of severely wounded to the medical transport ship that sat in the Persian Gulf but had never set foot on the boat himself.

Michael passed a weary hand over his face, scrubbing at what felt like permanent layers of grit and dust. He sat at his desk in the infirmary and looked once more at the paper laying in front of him. The words seem to swim and dance as his tired brain tried to make sense of them. The words *denied leave* and *six remaining months* jumped off the page and slammed into his brain. He glanced up at the door leading outside and wondered if Finn had gotten a similar order. He imagined so... after all they were a medical team sent to this godforsaken post together, he imagined they would leave at the same time as well.

He wondered how Finn would take this setback. Just the previous day, they had managed to steal a precious hour under the guise of taking stock for the upcoming supply run. In fact, they had fucked in the makeshift closet, urging each other on with strained whispers and a quick slap of slick applied to government-issue rubbers bought at the PX. Frantic hands groping each other, searing kisses and then Michael pushing into that hot tight ass. Finn crying out just briefly after insisting that a quick shove of two fingers had been enough prep to take Michael's straining cock.

Rutting deep and fast, heedless of the shelves they banged into and the bandages and IV tubing raining down on them, all they could see and feel was each other and their frantic need to feel alive. It had been weeks since they had last found the time and place to be together. All niceties, any thoughts of careful and slow lovemaking, had been thrown aside as their lust clawed its way to the surface and iron-hard dicks ground together in desperation. Never before had Michael felt such a deep urgency to be inside Finn, mark him, fucking *claim* him.

Afterwards, they'd stood with their harsh breaths rending the air around them. Michael held onto Finn by the back of his neck, pressing their foreheads

to each other. Finally, Finn had spoken the words that had surely been eating away at him ever since that first time back at Fort Sam.

“We gotta get the hell out of here Doc. This place is killing me. The army and all its stupid, fucking rules are making me crazy. Not touching you, having to fuck like scared rabbits in a goddamn closet, never being able to lie down next to you... hold you... ah shit...”

Finn’s voice broke and Michael’s hand clenched around his neck, pulling his lover in even closer, as if by pressing into him, Michael could make all the buried hurt and frustration Finn was feeling go away. This wasn’t how things were supposed to be. They should be kicking back on a sofa, sipping coffee and reading the Sunday paper after a leisurely morning of lovemaking. Each day almost boring in its routine and each night climbing into bed together with hours to explore the body that lay next to them, caress the warm flesh, kiss the places that drove each other insane with desire.

Normal, their lives should be fucking normal. They should be able to tell each other they loved each other. Instead, the words remained locked away, always near the surface but never spoken aloud for fear that if they were, if they truly revealed how deeply they had come to need each other, one of them would be snatched away, or the victim of a hidden IED, the receiving end of a sniper’s bullet.

Michael felt Finn’s body shudder in the stillness, dry sobs racking his too-thin frame, and once again felt the anger over wasted lives and time spent in a country they had no place being, fill him. He wanted to lash out and destroy something, his anger white hot and corrosive. Instead, he drew in a deep breath, willing himself to calm down and focus on just holding Finn in his arms, soothing him with his voice and hands.

“It’s gonna be okay Finn, shhh, we’re going to get out of here soon. Our tour is almost up and then we head home.”

Finn looked up at Michael’s face, his own awash in anxiety and for the first time, Michael thought he saw fear as well.

“Together, right Doc? We leave this shitty hole together. We promised each other, home safe, yeah? Doc?”

Michael looked into the eyes of the only man he had ever thought it possible to love and felt the promise rise to his lips once again.

“Home safe, Finn. You and me, home safe.”

The words rushed through Michael’s memory with the speed of lightening, causing his eyes to fill with unshed tears as he stared at the paper that consigned him to no leave and more months of hell. He pinched the bridge of his nose between two fingers and thrust the paper aside. He needed to find Finn and make sure he was okay, that the orders hadn’t sent Finn over the edge.

He knew exactly where to find him. He would be sitting right at the edge of camp, there at the mouth of the endless desert. He called it his “thinking place”. Michael knew it was just a shitty little corner of camp near the constantly humming generators that few of the men ever ventured toward. It was a perfect place to have a few minutes alone, to just think or breathe for a minute. After all, sleeping in a tent with thirteen other guys every night wore thin, and any spare minute you could be alone felt like a bit of heaven.

Finn was currently on his twelve hours off rotation and Michael knew that he rarely slept more than a few hours during that time. He rose, stepping out around his desk, snatching up his cap, and making his way to the door when the call came across his radio for a dust off.

The alert was for the medevac to fire up and go in to pick up casualties. As he grabbed his gear, Michael recalled hearing that a small group of soldiers had been sent out to secure a village not far from base camp. There had been intelligence reports that insurgents were holed up there, using the few remaining villagers as human shields against military attack. The radio chatter meant they had taken on injured who were now waiting to be airlifted back to base hospital for treatment.

Michael took precious minutes strapping on his body armor and then his molle vest complete with extra rounds of ammo for his M4 rifle. He hated

carrying a gun but since the enemy failed to follow any Geneva Convention rules, he was as vulnerable as the next man out in the field. Finally, he grabbed his helmet and slung his medic bag over his shoulder. With no thought to the additional equipment weighing him down, he began to sprint toward the landing zone and the waiting helicopter and her crew. Other than the pilot, there would be three others with Michael, the copilot, flight tech and the door gunner. The Blackhawk flying today could easily carry the four men and have room for two or three litters as well.

Michael jumped on board and was greeted with a small chorus of “Welcome aboard, Doc.” Nodding to the others, Michael began to turn and take his seat. Glancing behind him he nearly dropped his weapon at the sight of Finn running full out with all his gear toward the medevac.

“Hey, looks like fearless Finn is going to join us this trip, Doc. Did you request an additional medic?”

Michael felt himself shake his head as he watched with growing anger at the fast approaching medic. As Finn launched himself into the helicopter, Michael grabbed his arm and lurched forward to shout in his ear. The helicopter’s engines were producing a deafening sound, drowning out most, if not all communication.

“What the fuck are you doing, Finn? You’re not supposed to be on for another six hours. This is my call and you know it. Now get the fuck off this bird and go back to your bunk.”

Finn grinned and tapped his ears, helplessly shrugging, as if to indicate he hadn’t heard a word Michael had said. With growing frustration, Michael watched as Finn strapped himself in for the ride and then ground his teeth together as the flight tech tapped him on the arm to indicate he should do the same. Once strapped in, the pilot cleared them for takeoff and they became airborne. Desperately wanting to talk to Finn, Michael grabbed his headset only to realize that all the team members on the flight would hear anything he said to the private.

Michael sat and thought about just how much he was going to enjoy chewing Finn’s ass off when they got back to base camp. Maybe he would

request that Finn be grounded for a couple of days just to teach the cocky medic a lesson. Michael smiled at the idea of watching Finn throw a fit over the possible punishment.

The sound of enemy fire pulled Michael from his gloating thoughts to the mission at hand. As he listened, the copilot went over the plan for extracting two soldiers who were critically injured and in need of immediate care.

He glanced sideways at Finn, noting how he sat forward, nodding as each piece of information was given over the headsets.

Despite being pissed that Finn had once again skirted the rules, Michael was actually glad Finn was along for the ride. The medic was not only efficient but rarely anything less than calm and collected in high-stress situations, which from the sounds of it, was exactly what they were headed toward.

Apparently, there had been skirmishes most of the morning on the outskirts of the village with gunfire being exchanged off and on for several hours. According to reports from the theater, there were snipers set up both in and around the outlying area. Two soldiers had been picked off as they were running into position on the west bank. Both of the wounded were critically injured and needed to be medevaced back to the base hospital for further treatment.

This was a straight shot in and out. No big deal on paper. But Michael felt his stomach roll as the thought of all that could go wrong began to bloom in his mind. Although they had been assured that the snipers had been subdued, no one knew for certain if they had managed to flush them all out into the open. Because of that, two heavily armed soldiers would meet them at the landing site and escort Michael and Finn to the waiting soldiers.

Once the medics assessed their patients' needs and did whatever they could in the field, those same soldiers would help carry the litters back to the helicopter. And that was the most dangerous time, when everyone was running full-out back to the chopper with very little ground cover except for their body armor.

As the Blackhawk began its descent, Michael had no more time to contemplate the dangers. Instead, he turned to Finn and gave him the “eyes on me” motion with his two fingers. Finn nodded his understanding that he was to follow Michael as they approached the place where the wounded lay.

In the last remaining seconds, Michael closed his eyes and sent up a prayer for safety. While he wasn't super religious, he figured they would need all the help they could get in pulling off a safe extraction. Then the chopper touched down and what should have been routine was shot to hell and Michael's worst nightmare began.

Three days later, as Michael watched the helicopter carrying Finn take off for the Persian Gulf and the navy ship, USNS Comfort, the memory of that dust off continued to ricochet through his memory and fill his every waking moment.

“Sure am gonna miss Finn, Doc, but he was damn lucky to have you there. Christ, that boy would be going home in a body bag if it hadn't been for you.”

The sergeant clapped him on the back and moved off, leaving Michael to stare at the receding Blackhawk. Michael bit back a near sob and turned, blindly heading for the infirmary and his office. Once there he closed the door and went to the window, not bothering to move the sheet that served as the curtain keeping the heat of the day at bay.

He leaned his forehead against the window and finally let go, his harsh, gulping sobs filling the air. As he cried, his palm slapped against the cement wall next to the window and he cursed the day he had met Finn McCullan.

Why the fuck had he come along on that extraction? Why couldn't that stupid son of a bitch ever follow the damn rules? Why? Fucking hell, why hadn't it been Michael who caught the sniper's bullet?

The questions tore at the final edges of Michael's sanity as he realized that he might never see Finn again. His leg... oh shit, his leg. Michael couldn't stop the bleeding. He'd kept applying pressure but the bullet had hit the femoral artery and it just kept pouring out. He should have used the tourniquet

earlier but he had hesitated because there was the chance that Finn might lose his leg due to lack of oxygen getting to his lower extremity. Now, none of that really seemed to matter because Finn was currently on flight to the Comfort and from there, eventually to home.

It all sounded great till you remembered that he would be travelling in order to be fitted for a prosthesis that would replace the lower half of his left leg. Too much blood loss, the surgeon had confirmed. The tourniquet had been on too long while the chopper had been pinned down due to the enemy fire that had suddenly erupted all around them. Minutes had turned into hours as Finn lay half delirious from pain, and his leg continued to bleed.

Every hour they were grounded, Michael would loosen the tourniquet for a few minutes, hoping it would be enough to oxygenate the lower portion of his leg and delay toxicity; but each time he did it, the blood loss increased until he could no longer justify messing with it at all.

Michael felt his “golden hour” slip by, that precious block of time to treat and retrieve the wounded, move them to a facility where full medical care could be administered. As one hour flowed into the next, Finn’s chances for surviving intact became less and less and still Michael cared for him, doing everything within his power to extend that window of time.

Michael drew in a ragged breath and wiped his eyes with the back of his sleeve. He was so tired. In the last seventy-two hours he had barely slept, spending most of his time at Finn’s bedside when he wasn’t on duty. Finn had woken several times, but it wasn’t until he had managed to keep down some fluids that the surgeon had told him about the leg and the impending trip. Michael sat by his side as the doctor had droned on and on about how Finn was lucky to have survived and that he could still lead a full and productive life. The entire time Finn looked at Michael only once and when he did Michael felt his stomach drop like a stone.

This is exactly why there were no fraternization rules. Michael had fucked up beyond measure, not only falling for another soldier but one under his command. Christ, how would he ever get the sight of Finn going down under that sniper fire out of his mind? This was his fault, he had put both Finn and

himself and every soldier on that chopper in danger and for what? A quick fuck in the supply closet because he couldn't keep it in his pants? No, Jesus, Finn was worth so much more than that. The self-loathing Michael felt only increased when he'd finally caught a glimpse of Finn's face.

Finn's eyes had a defeated look that spoke volumes, and Michael knew in that instant that Finn would have preferred death over having to live the rest of his life crippled. But Michael could never let that happen.

Michael moved from the window and sat down heavily on his desk chair. He dropped his head into his hands and tried to shut down the memory of his last visit with Finn prior to his being airlifted out.

“Finn, you'll be home before you know it. Hell, by the time you're out of rehab, I'll be home. This is it for me, no more army, going to resign my commission and try to make it in a hospital somewhere or maybe even private practice. I'm going to need a good physician's assistant. We can meet up, figure out where we want to live and go from there. Just like you always wanted right, Finn?”

Michael paused and watched as a lone tear rolled down Finn's cheek. He felt as though his heart was being torn in half. Finn had not spoken to him since finding out his leg had been amputated and now Michael was fucking helpless to know how to pull Finn back from the nowhere land he seemed intent on dwelling in. Instinctively, Michael reached out to wipe away Finn's tear, only to be stopped by the harsh tone of Finn's voice.

“Don't touch me.”

“What? What did you say, Finn?”

Finally after days of silence, Finn turned to face Michael, his eyes blazing, his face flushed.

“I said, Captain Bradshaw, don't fucking touch me. I'm not your patient.”

“What the fuck do you mean you're not my patient? I never said you were. But you are my...”

“Your what? Your boyfriend? Your lover? No? Can’t figure it out? How can this be? The great doctor doesn’t have a nice neat label for what I was? Well, how about I help you out. Maybe I was just another warm body. Something to use when you got a little bored out here in the desert. What do they call that Captain? Oh yeah... a fuckbuddy, right? Maybe that’s what I was to you, A CONVENIENT FUCKBUDDY!”

Finn’s voice grew louder with each question. Michael felt himself flinch at the disdain and anger that dripped off every word Finn uttered. Then, just when it seemed that Finn was going to lose it completely, he seemed to cave in on himself, his voice weakening and his body slumping back into the bed from where he’d risen during his outburst. The next time he spoke it was barely above a whisper.

“Well, I’m not your concern anymore. So, if you don’t mind, I’d like you to leave so I can get ready for transport.”

“No, wait Finn, we made a promise to each other, remember? We were going to get each other home sa...”

But before Michael could finish, Finn spoke again, this time stronger, steadier, with conviction in his voice.

“Just go, Michael, and don’t come back anymore. I don’t want you here.”

“But Finn...”

This time Finn turned and the words Michael was about to utter died on his lips as he saw the look on his lover’s face.

“I don’t need you anymore. I can find my own way home... alone.”

Somehow, despite the numbing cold Michael felt creeping over his body as Finn uttered those final words, Michael was able to leave the infirmary, mumbling some halfhearted statement about returning to see Finn off the next day. During the last twelve hours Finn was on base, Michael moved in a fog through his job and then managed to walk with leaden feet to the tarmac in time to see Finn being boarded onto the big Blackhawk that would carry him out to sea to the Comfort.

Michael raised his head to stare at the place that would keep him captive for six more months. Placing both hands on his desk, he struggled to his feet, exhaustion threatening to overwhelm him. Slowly he pulled open the left drawer of his desk and bent down to retrieve the picture from his days at Fort Sam. He traced Finn's smiling face with the tip of one finger and blew out a shaky breath.

Somehow he had to reach beyond this guilt that was eating away at him from the inside out. Somehow he had to make it up to Finn, to prove to him that he was worthy of the sacrifice Finn had made. If it took every day for the rest of his life, he would show Finn what he meant to him. Michael was just beginning to understand that both of them had lost something that day, not just Finn but Michael as well. Finn had lost his leg, but Michael had lost faith in himself, in his ability to be the man Finn had expected him to be, the man who Finn trusted to bring him home safe.

Well, that was going to change. Right here, right now. No more tears. No more fucking whiny-ass crying. This was not over. He and Finn were not through. He had nothing but time on his hands to plan how to fix this. Six more months to find a way to get Finn back. He needed to concentrate now, be ready. Fuckbuddy! Oh Finn, you are so wrong. You were never something so casual, so disposable. You were so much more than that. It was time to set Finn McCullan straight. Michael was ready to fight for what was his. He was ready to bring Finn home. Bring him home safe, just like he promised.

Michael folded the picture in half and shoved it in his pocket. Scrubbing his face once more to erase any trace of the tears he had shed, Michael turned toward the door, his mind already ticking down the moments until he would see Finn again.

Six long months in the desert had not been kind to Captain Michael Bradshaw. By the time he stepped onto the tarmac at Joint Base Lewis-McCord in Washington, he was whippet-thin, with dark shadows beneath his eyes and an intense look that made most people reluctant to speak to him.

He was, in a word, a driven man. The burning need to see Finn had only increased exponentially in the last few months until Michael felt it would consume him with its overwhelming need. If he had thought seeing Finn leave on that litter was hell, he had in no way been prepared for what had come next. Silence. Deep, total, suffocating silence.

It had been six months of returned letters. Unanswered emails. Endless, increasingly frantic voice messages left on a phone Michael was not even sure Finn still used. No communication whatsoever.

The passing time had nearly broken Michael and, in the end, had finally made him come to terms with the idea that Finn might be lost to him forever.

And that, Michael thought, well, that was just a bitch, especially since in those long, dark months Michael had come to the firm realization that he was in love with the stubborn and elusive Private First Class Finn McCullan. Of course what was happening in Finn's life wasn't a mystery anymore, not since Finn's Aunt Sharen had contacted Michael. She had tracked down Michael while he was still in Iraq. All those voice messages had finally been heard by someone.

She told him that while Finn might be physically recovering and was, in fact, doing well with his prosthetic leg, she was sure something was still very wrong with her nephew.

Michael had listened, as Sharen described how Finn seemed to drift through his days. He was living with her in Baltimore, still going to therapy but doing little else. Recently, Sharen had been encouraging Finn to get out more, meet people. She said he muttered something about needing more time and then retreated to his bedroom for three days.

The hand holding the phone began to shake as Michael listened. Closing his eyes, he recalled the many times he had stayed behind in the barracks, supposedly resting while all the other off duty guys went off to pitch a ball and blow off steam. He knew what Finn needed—to just be alone. The silence was always preferable to all the noise around that made you feel like you were going to jump out of your own skin

“Honestly, Dr. Bradshaw, I thought he was dead it was so quiet. Well, during the day anyway. But not at night, no, not at night.”

Michael heard the worry in her voice and gently asked her what she meant. He had a good idea what she was going to say but he needed to be sure, so he prodded her to answer.

“Well, he has these awful nightmares. Some nights, he just lets loose with one of those horrible, bone-chilling screams and then I hear him call out your name, over and over again. It’s why I knew I needed to track you down. I think Finn needs you. I think he believes that you’ll keep him safe. It’s what he always cries about, you know, when he’s dreaming. It just breaks my heart.”

She broke down then and Michael tried to comfort her, but the memories were rolling in on him so fast he could barely breathe much less speak. Nightmares. He had them as well. Over and over, on an endless loop, that day played out in Michael’s dreams.

Finn running, calling back over his shoulder for Michael to stay low. The sharp report of a gun and then the slight whine as the bullet flew past him and seemed to explode into Finn. The burst of red that turned so quickly to black as the sand colored pants drank in all that blood. Finn’s blood. The moment when Finn fell, crying out, and then lay so very still.

Michael felt the familiar dread bubble up, as time seemed to slow to a stop. For just a moment, standing there, vaguely listening to Aunt Sharen’s concerns, Michael was right back in the desert. Suddenly all Michael could hear were the screams that tore from his own throat night after night as he was ripped from his sleep by the horrifying dream of Finn getting shot. How many times had he woken up with his chest heaving, tears running down his face? Too many to count. He knew exactly what demons haunted Finn. Michael clawed his way back from that dark memory to hear himself promising to visit as soon as he got stateside. And now here he was, finally back and Finn just a few hours away.

Two more days dragged by until Michael was able to book a flight heading for BWI airport.

Michael carefully made his way through the concourse, watching for the signs indicating taxi service. He was so close to Finn he swore he could almost feel the man. Finally seeing the exit indicating a taxi stand, Michael jogged down the ramp and out through the doors toward the nearest yellow and black cab that had a lit sign. Tapping on the passenger side window, he impatiently waited as the cabbie pressed the button to lower the window.

“I need to get into the city, by the Inner Harbor, to 987 Light Street, can you get me there?”

The cabbie grunted his assent and Michael threw his bag in the trunk and slid into the back seat. After making sure Michael could pay the fare, the taxi slid into traffic and onto the highway leading into downtown, Baltimore.

Michael fidgeted in the back seat, his thin leg bouncing out a shaky rhythm, as the city loomed closer and closer. He looked over the skyline and all he could think was Finn. Finn was there, so close now.

When the cab finally maneuvered into a spot in front of Sharen’s townhouse, Michael was nearly vibrating with excitement. Handing the driver his fare plus a healthy tip, Michael bounded out of the cab, grabbed his suitcase and jogged up the stairs to the front door. And then it hit him.

What if Finn refused to see him? What if he disappeared into that damn bedroom and closed the door in Michael’s face? Holy god, what if he didn’t believe that Michael had come home so he could tell him how much he’d missed him, how much he loved him?

The questions raced one after another through Michael’s ramped-up brain, causing his heart to race and his palms to actually begin sweating. He was so close. Surely Finn would see him? Taking a deep breath, Michael raised his fist and knocked. When the door opened, a pair of hazel green eyes surrounded by a thick head of black hair peered out at him. Michael held his breath, waiting for some sign that Finn was happy, glad to see him.

Confusion knit Finn’s brow, causing him to squint at Michael and then, recognition dawned in his eyes. Staggering forward, his limbs more

uncoordinated than usual, Finn stepped down, forcing his trim body into the space barely large enough for Michael to stand.

Reaching out with one hand, Finn's expression became that of wonderment, as he touched Michael's face, stroking a finger down his cheek, stopping to hover over his lips.

"You came."

Slowly, Michael reached up and wrapped his hand around the finger poised over his mouth, and gently drew it close, kissing the tip of it. He watched as Finn's eyes drifted shut and a look of utter joy claimed his beautiful face. Pulling the hand downward, Michael closed the remaining distance and leaned in to kiss Finn. Just as their lips touched, Finn gave a startled cry, and stepped backwards, his arms wheeling in the air as his prosthetic leg failed to shift properly, causing him to lose his balance.

Michael's hand shot out to grab Finn's arm, helping him to straighten and regain his equilibrium. As if Michael's very touch burned him, Finn snatched his arm away and stepped back up into the doorway.

"Thank you Michael, but I don't need your help. Please, come in, my Aunt Sharen went down to the store just a few minutes ago but she should be back soon. I'm sure she'd like to meet you."

The icy invitation hung in the air. Michael blinked and almost shook his head at Finn's quick mood change. He watched as Finn moved into the house, leaving the door open behind him for Michael to follow.

Michael stepped inside and, after leaving his suitcase by the front door, joined Finn in the living room. He was sitting on the sofa, the fingers of his right hand tapping out a pattern on his thigh. Michael noticed that Finn sat at the nearest end of the sofa, allowing him to angle his body so that his injured leg was tucked against the side.

The anxiety rolled off of Finn in waves and Michael realized what he was seeing for the first time. The signs were all there: the anxiousness, the burst of anger when he had tried to help Finn, herky-jerky body language that cried out how very uncomfortable Finn was at the moment. All of them pointed to

PTSD, and Michael wondered if he was right to think that Finn might be suffering from the disorder.

Michael felt himself slowly relax. This was familiar territory. He had certainly seen it often enough in the desert. Hell, he had danced with this devil himself. Finn was, in essence, reliving the trauma of being shot and losing his leg over and over again. Michael recognized it because he, too, had grappled with his own nightmares. The truth of it was that the time spent in Iraq had broken something within both of them. But now, together, they stood the chance of healing, of getting stronger, together. If only Finn would let him stay. If only Finn could forgive him.

Finn cleared his throat and jerked his eyes toward Michael.

“So, I guess you heard I, uhm, am getting a medical discharge from the service. What about you? Are you just here on leave or are you...”

Finn left the question unfinished and hanging in the air. Michael could see the mix of fear and hope in his eyes.

“No, I’m done as well. My resignation is in the works and I’m finally getting to use up all that excess leave I have. So after checking in, I came directly here from the base in Washington.”

Finn stopped and stared at Michael, understanding dawning on his face, as he figured out that Michael had flown directly to see him, not even stopping off to see his own parents. As Michael watched, Finn’s expression crumpled inward and tears started running down his cheeks. His sobs coming in big gulps, shaking his entire body. Michael dove off his seat and caught Finn up in his arms.

“Shhh, Finn, shhh, I have you. It’s okay. Everything is going to be okay. I’m here now and we’re both safe. Home safe, just like we promised to each other.”

Michael flinched as Finn jerked his body back and snapped out a response.

“Everything is going to be okay? How does that work, Doc? You got some magic pill that’s going to miraculously regrow my fucking leg? Or make these

damn nightmares go away for good? Jesus Christ! Why the hell did you come here? So you could pity the poor fucking cripple?"

He watched as Finn angrily brushed aside his tears and struggled to control himself. But Michael had heard enough; he began to pace back and forth, trying to explain to Finn how he had it all wrong.

"What? Finn, no. Pity the cripple? Jesus, Finn, I would never, oh god, no. Finn, I came here because I missed you, because I love you and needed to see you. I'm here because every goddamn day away from you ate at my gut like acid. Don't you see? I had to come—I had to ask you—beg you to forgive me."

Finn looked up at Michael in shock.

"Forgive you? For what?"

Michael stopped short. Here was his chance to set the record straight once and for all and let go of all the guilt he had eaten for so long.

"It was my fault. You getting shot... it was all my fault. I was your commanding officer. I was responsible and I let you get hurt. It should have been me who took that bullet, not you. Never you, Finn. All I've done for the past six months is think about getting back to you. Of telling you how sorry I was. To have just one more chance to show you how much I love you and see if you still felt the same. To ask you if you could forgive me. But, I think I might be too late."

Finn cried out as Michael moved to turn away. And then he was there, in Michael's arms, sobbing and asking Michael to stay.

Finn cried as Michael rocked him in his arms, stroking his back, patting his hair. Slowly, the tender touches became more intimate as Michael began kissing the side of Finn's neck and cheek, and he felt him arch into his touch. Turning his face to Michael, Finn lifted his mouth for a kiss and Michael swept in, gently at first and then harder, crushing Finn's mouth beneath his own, plunging his tongue in, tasting the man he had only been able to dream about for months.

When they broke apart, both men were breathing heavily. Finn's cheeks were still wet from his spent tears and Michael reached out to wipe the last remaining few away. Finn gave a shaky laugh, and then reached up to cup Michael's head in his hands and drew him forward for one more soft, slow kiss. Releasing his hold on Michael, Finn leaned back, took a deep breath and spoke.

"There's nothing to forgive, Doc. Neither one of us should have been out there that day, but we were. God, I missed you so much, Doc. It's been so hard, so fucking hard. You have to know I never blamed you—not ever. I was so messed up over having to leave you and then trying to deal with the leg. Doc, you can't blame yourself. Please, please don't do that."

Michael stroked Finn's cheek and softly kissed his lips one more time. For the first time in what seemed like forever he began to realize that this thing that had nearly broken him would always be with him. Maybe, together he and Finn could heal, one piece at a time. Michael wasn't really sure because Finn was different now, and so was he. They would never be able to go back to who they were; the time in Iraq had changed them forever. But that was okay.

Somehow, they were stronger now. They could survive this together; that was the key. With Finn at his side, Michael could battle his demons and help Finn beat back his. The therapy, the medicines, they might ease the way, but they were never really the answer. This man, this warm body pressed against his own and the strong heart that beat against his chest, this was his redemption. His saving grace.

Michael sat down and held out his hand for Finn to sit beside him.

"Tell me about rehab, Finn. Tell me what's been going on with you these last six months."

Slowly, Finn began to recount what had happened after he got stateside.

"Everything happened so fast after they shipped me out. Once they cleaned my leg up on the ship, they started me on PT right away, fitted me up for the prosthetic. As soon as I was able to stand up and make some headway with a walker, they got me a flight home.

“I went right into Walter Reed Hospital and spent the next couple of months recovering, doing PT every day. Fucking stump ached like a son of a bitch, Doc. And some of the pain? It was that phantom pain stuff they kept trying to tell me about. Jesus, I thought I was going crazy, feeling all kinds of shit from a leg that no longer existed. You know Doc until you feel something that just shouldn’t be there it just doesn’t really compute.

“Anyway, when they released me from the program I came here to live with my Aunt. I thought everything was going to be okay. I thought I could wait to see if you still wanted to make a go of it, with me. But then the nightmares started and I got to feeling all jittery and shit.”

Finn stopped for a moment, gathering his courage to say the rest, to confess it all to Michael.

“Doc? I can’t sleep most nights. I just keep seeing that bullet hit my leg and hear the sniper fire all around me. And I know—in my head I know it’s not real. I do. But I can’t make it stop. Ah fuck. Listen, you should know, before you say anything or do anything else, you should know, I think I might have that PTSD they keep talking about. You know we saw it in guys coming off combat duty all the time.

“Doc, I have all the symptoms. Christ! Listen, what I’m trying to say is that I’m pretty sure I’m fucking broken Doc, and I don’t know if I can fix myself. I just don’t know...”

Michael grabbed Finn close and pulled him in tight, kissing his hair and holding him.

“Shhh, it’s okay. Me too, Finn, me too. I understand. It’ll be all right. We can work on this together. We’ll get a good counselor and work through everything. I’ll be with you every step of the way. What happened in Iraq, it didn’t break us, Finn—we’re just a little banged up inside.”

Finn tucked his head into Michael’s shoulder. His voice came out muffled and low but Michael heard every word, just the same.

“You’ll stay with me, right, Doc? And we can be home safe, you and me, home safe together.”

Michael drew back, forcing Finn to look up into his eyes.

“Every day, Finn. I’ll be here every day. You listen to me now. I love you, Finn McCullan. It took me too damn long to understand, but I see it now. You’re my home, Finn and I’m never leaving your side again. Do you hear me, Private?”

Finn gave Michael a tentative smile at the commanding tone of his voice. Looking into his eyes, he reached up a hand and laid it gently on Michael’s cheek.

“I hear you, Captain Bradshaw. And I love you, too.”

Finn leaned in and kissed Michael. They settled into each other’s arms and slowly relaxed, talking quietly to one another.

When Sharen arrived home an hour later, she found them, wrapped around each other, fast asleep.

Epilogue

Six months later...

Michael stirred as the sun broke over the horizon and began to lift the darkness in the bedroom. He glanced over at the empty spot where Finn should have been sleeping soundly. As he rose to sit up and the fog of sleep cleared away he heard it, that soft keening noise Finn made when he was trying to push away the residue of a terrifying nightmare.

Although Finn was getting better and better every day, he still suffered from the horrible memories that disrupted his sleep and often left him trembling with aftershock. Michael’s own dreams had slowly faded to where he rarely had them at all anymore. He knew this was because, unlike Finn, his body didn’t bear a constant reminder of what had happened. For Finn, the loss of his leg had made his recovery slower.

Michael knew where he would find his lover. Quietly, he moved toward the small closet where Finn sat, still naked from their lovemaking the night before, crouched down with his head resting on his knee, his eyes closed.

Finn's other leg, free from the prosthetic rested on the floor of the closet. Michael carefully knelt down beside him, wrapping one arm around Finn's shoulder and using the other to brace himself against the wall. As Michael lowered his head to rest across Finn's broad back, he felt his hand being grasped tightly inside Finn's.

Gradually Finn's shaking began to ease as Michael murmured soft reassurances of his love for the beautiful man resting in his embrace. He waited for Finn to settle down and realize he was safe. Michael knew the moment Finn was back with him, leaving the nightmare of the desert behind. It was the moment Finn whispered quietly to himself, "*Home safe.*"

THE END

Author Bio

Sammy Goode makes her living as a playwright and teacher. This is the second year she has been involved in writing for the Goodreads M/M Group, and she thanks you kindly for taking the time to read her offering.