



Lou Sylve

Expect

the Unexpected

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

By Lou Sylvre

Introduction

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

What Is Love's Landscapes?

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

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

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

Words of Caution

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

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

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Photo Description

Picture shows a blond man, naked, midair in a jump into a pool, and another man across the pool taking a picture of him.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I'm gay and thank God my best friends are okay with it. This was supposed to be a weekend with the boys, and we had my uncle's freaking awesome house just to ourselves. Pool, lots of alcohol and my four best friends, it was going to be the perfect weekend for sure! But the thing is, three of those best friends ended up in bed with the flu since they were stupid enough to go skinny dipping in the fucking rain two days ago, and now it's just me and Josh (can change the name if you want) alone for two days in this house. Well, you can think it would still be great, as isn't he my best friend too? Yes, he's the one I'm most close to and that's the problem. I really want to be way more close to him, if you know what I mean, and I don't know how I will manage to hold myself back this time. Sometimes I think Josh gives me signs that he wants something more too, but how can I be sure? He's the silliest guy I ever knew, and everything is a joke to him, so how can I know he's serious? Should I try to take my chances and find out?

I'm a sucker for happy endings and sweet, silly moments, and yummy hot sex is always welcome. Feel free to do anything you want, I just want a sweet love story with two silly friends having fun like the pic shows.

Sincerely,

Gabi

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: friends to lovers, first time, masturbation, public activity, coming out, gay for you, voyeurism

Word Count: 10,644

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“*What?*” Sam Gallagher all but snarled the word, none too pleased about being roused from sleep. Although, if he had to wake up, Josh was certainly the person he would choose to do the waking. He got a whiff of Josh right away, and nonchalantly curled up on his side in an effort to bring his nose a little closer, to breathe in a little more of the man he most wanted in the whole world.

The man who would never want him back.

Sam thought, *It's not supposed to be like this! I'm not supposed to be in love with a heterosexual. What the fuck is wrong with me?*

“What the fuck is wrong with you, Sam?”

“What?”

Josh forced his breath out on a hiss, which Sam knew meant Josh had become exasperated with him. He knew that because he and Josh had been friends since second grade. And because he always watched Josh like he was the only person in any room. Sam even knew Josh had rolled his eyes, despite being unable to see his face, since Sam's eyes were level with Josh's thighs. Suntanned, strong, hottie thighs. Sam rolled a bit forward to hide his erection, while from far above, Josh said, “Blake, Terry, and Ramon all caught full-blown colds last night.”

“Who would have imagined,” Sam said, having found his tongue and his typical morning attitude, “that you could get sick skinny-dipping in the Pacific in an October storm at night... while drunk?”

Josh laughed, which Sam really liked, because Josh had this deep, sexy chuckle that always sounded like it was making love to Sam's ears. “Probably crazy people,” Josh said. “Maybe people as crazy as the person who could get drunk on lavender vodka and lemonade, sleep through the excitement, and feel all hung-over and pitiful the next day, right?”

“I didn't mean to.”

Josh patted Sam's shoulder, and if Sam thought his hand lingered there for a little while longer than it should have, he'd imagined it. He knew that.

"I know, Sammy," Josh said, and it sounded so much like care. Different from best friend care.

"I'm surprised you remember that, though—the skinny-dipping I mean."

"Barely. Last thing I really remember is you, bare-assed, jumping off that rock ledge into the pool. That, and being thankful I didn't have to rescue you afterward."

"Always the lifeguard," Josh said, and then added, "Anyway, I'm going to drive them home, so they can snuffle and cough in their own beds."

In a perfect traffic world, the drive from Sam's uncle's house in Newport Beach, where the five of them had gathered for their annual, four-day house-sitting party, to Pasadena, the city where they all lived, would take about an hour. But it always took longer, and Sam knew Josh wouldn't want to drive three hours or more just to spend the remainder of the weekend with him. Josh loved to party, do crazy things, go off on adventures. A wild man. And Sam? He worked helping to plan exhibits in a museum, played serious music on the piano, took an occasional swim—in a pool, thank you very much—and loved to read. Not up to Josh's speed at all. Subdued and tentative, Sam said, "So I'll see you..."

While Sam tried to think of how to end that sentence, Josh spoke up. "In maybe three hours." After a pause, he added, "It'll be just you and me, Sammy. Okay?"

"You're coming back?"

"Of course! I wouldn't miss the one weekend per year I still get to spend with my best friend." He laughed again.

Oh, dick of mine, lay down and shut up! Sam shook his head, wondering how a little chuckle could be that exciting. But he knew it wasn't that. It was the whole Joshua Heathcliff Brennan package—the white-blond hair, the red-hot body, round butt, quick wit, even that ridiculous middle name.

"You're shaking your head," Josh said, and plopped the aforementioned butt down on the bed, which placed his heterosexual crotch right in Sam's line of vision. "Don't you want to spend the weekend with me?"

If you only knew, Sam thought. Out loud he said, "No! I mean yes, yes I do!"

"Okay, then! I figure it'll be kind of like when we were kids and had that treehouse out back of your house."

Sam smiled. “Yeah,” he said. “We’ll have fun.” Josh had sounded almost as excited as that long-ago boy in the treehouse, and Sam couldn’t help but say that, even though he knew that for him it would more likely be torture.

By the time Sam rolled out of bed, the sun shone hot and golden through the west-facing window, having slipped down about halfway between noon and sunset. His first thoughts centered on Josh—who, Sam was sure, hadn’t returned after all. He’d expected as much—Josh had no doubt found something to do that would be more entertaining than spending the day with Sam. He’d allowed himself hope, anyway, but now he couldn’t tell whether he felt sad about his dashed hopes or relieved that he’d escaped a full day of having Josh all to himself, yet so *very* untouchable.

Sam deliberately turned his thoughts away from all things Josh, and noted a bright spot: his hangover had almost dissipated, all gone but for a bit of headache and mental fog. He threw his jeans on—commando, which amounted to a pretty daring act for Sam—and did some reconnaissance, combing the huge house to make sure nobody was there. All clear.

After he fed his Uncle Ricky’s two long-coat Akitas, Cub and Leo, he raked their fur real good and started coffee dripping. While it brewed, he picked up some of the detritus from the previous night in the den—horrified at the smell of leftover vodka—and made himself eggs and toast for breakfast. Or lunch. Late lunch, really.

The meal done, he took his coffee out by the pool, plunked his cup down on a glass table, and draped his long, slender body on a lounge, while the dogs settled in the deep shade of the cabana. Rick’s pool exceeded all expectations, built right into the cliff, with steps to climb up to a high rock ledge so you could jump off. Sam could have done without the fake boulders placed around the pool, but the palms, hibiscus, and bamboo created an outdoorsy feel without blocking the sun. Southern California in early autumn could be a risky business—cold and stormy one day, sunny and hot the next. This day exemplified the hot version, and Sam was fine with that. He lay back and let the sun slant over his skin, warming him like a lover.

A light breeze rattled the palm leaves, and when it ruffled the few hairs on Sam’s chest, teasing his nipples, he moaned. He imagined hands, not wind, caressing him. Generic hands at first, but then specifically Josh’s long, strong fingers. Thinking of things long and strong turned his mind to Josh’s penis,

which he'd never seen erect but imagined it *could* be, most likely *would* be, long and strong. And perhaps thick. Or curved.

Sam's own cock got hard thinking about it, of course. And commando in jeans with a hard-on, Sam learned, is not comfortable. He had two choices: he could go inside and get properly dressed, or he could set his cock free and let it dance in the open air to its heart's content. Hell, he might even give it a hand.

Why not? I'm alone.

Not at all a daredevil, Sam had never jerked himself off any place less private than his bedroom, and as he slid his jeans down and watched his cock leap to attention, he felt somehow illicit. And it *fucking* turned him on.

Truthfully, Sam had always loved his cock—the way it looked, that is. Oddly narrower at the tip and very thick at the base, not overly long but rather prettily curved. He pinched his nipples as a warm-up, then tongued his fingers, spread the moisture over the hard nubs, and let the breeze lick them dry. Still watching his cock, he reached around it with both hands to enjoy the silky feel of the skin over his balls. When a bead of crystal moisture appeared at the tip of his cock, he finally touched it, smoothing the slick precum over the head, teasing at the slit.

“Oh,” he said, “fuck yeah.” He started to stroke up and down the back of the shaft with his other hand, fast at first. But then he thought, *Sammy, if you're going to jerk off in the open air, why not make it last, really enjoy it? Who knows if you'll ever have the courage to do it again?*

Sam's penis argued against delay. Sam had studied long and hard since puberty, and when it came to pleasing his cock, practice had made perfect. Still, Sam reined in his dick's excitement, slowing down the strokes, moving both hands back to his balls, then one hand to a nipple. He sort of felt like closing his eyes, but he just wanted to go on looking at his hard-on, making his dick happy to be teased, knowing there would be an amazing orgasm as reward for patience.

He raised up his slender legs so he could reach his ass, ran a wet finger down from his balls and past his hole, making it pucker, begging for more. Sam didn't want to leave out any source of potential joy, so he slicked some more precum off the crown of his cock—resulting in an enormous wave of pleasure—and applied his middle finger to his ass. He circled his finger around the opening, then ran it up and down the cleft a few more times, letting the heel of his hand rest on his balls, massaging them with every movement. His other

hand alternated between nipples, pinching them hard for an exquisite pain that electrified his cock.

He moaned, “Oh, god, fuck, oh,” and dipped into the hole, loving the tightness of his puckered opening on his finger, loving the burn of his barely wet finger breaching his ass. At the same time, he moved his other hand down to his cock, circled the hardened tip in his curled palm, and then began to stroke.

That’s when he became aware that the whole time, he’d been picturing Josh standing at the end of the lounge, naked and engorged and watching him. He practically growled in the intensity of his desire, “Oh, Josh, Joshua, please!”

He knew there would be no more holding off, so he stroked his cock fast and hard, gave it a few twists, plunged as deep as he could into his ass teasing his slick prostate for a pleasure so intense he thought it could never be better—unless the real Joshua did the touching. Or perhaps sucking. Fucking...

He fairly shouted as he came, “Yes! Fuck me Josh! Fuck me!”

Sam came down slowly, enjoying the still-pulsing squeeze of his ass, gently pulling at his cock, avoiding the too-sensitized tip. When he’d milked that orgasm for all it was worth, he extricated his finger, wiped his dick, hands, and chest with his jeans—they were dirty anyway—and sighed. “God, Josh. That was good.”

Then, he heard someone breathing. And he noticed a shadow falling over his left shoulder. He turned his head, and there he was. Joshua Heathcliff Brennan.

Josh’s throat felt as dry as old paper, making him realize he’d been breathing open-mouthed, all but panting. His gaze stayed glued to Sam’s cock and his busy hands. And then Sam came—*oh, fuck!*

Josh had seen Sam jerk off before, more than once, though Sam didn’t know, and he’d felt like a peeping perv. But he couldn’t help it! He’d lusted after Sam since the first time he’d woke up across from him and seen his morning wood tenting the sheet, his chest bare and sculpted. At fifteen, Sam already had a swimmer’s body, perfect.

Josh’s eyes had opened to something brand new in that moment. Not only had he been surprised at how hard he’d been just watching as Sam, still asleep, moved his hand to touch his cock under the covers, but he’d realized he *loved*

Sam. Not romantically, maybe, but Sam had been with him through all the thick and thin moments of the previous eight years. Sam defined the word *friend* in Josh's mind, and nobody—save perhaps his mother, totally different—occupied such a huge space in his life. He'd wished then that he could climb under the covers and touch Sam, just to make him feel good, just to watch delight bloom on his face.

Still, though he'd do almost anything for a wild time, he hadn't dared to join Sam. He couldn't, because he *knew* Sam would never want him to. Yeah, Sam liked boys—that had become evident early on. But not Josh. Never Josh.

Six years had passed since that moment, and Josh had managed to see Sam masturbate in the shower twice. Then once, late at night when he'd intended to climb in through Sam's bedroom window, he'd seen Sam loving his cock and stayed outside balanced in the branches of their favorite tree, unable to look away. Truly, he hadn't felt too much like a perv because he'd had no desire to watch anyone else that way, and he'd only watched Sam because... he couldn't seem to help himself, back then. He *had* managed to tell himself 'no' by the time they were out of high school, and he'd stuck to that, because by then he *had* fallen in love—real love—with Sam. Somehow that meant he couldn't disrespect him by sneaking around and ogling him.

But, now... oh, lord! Josh didn't know what to think. Sam had been so beautiful, pleasuring his sweet cock, and...

When Josh heard Sam gasp in apparent alarm, he swept his gaze up Sam's body to his face, where he saw an expression way beyond surprise. He knew how easily embarrassed Sam was, and shy, so he wanted to stop that look from turning into one of horror. Josh tried to speak; he ached to articulate all the feelings he'd bottled up for six years. *Now is the moment*, he thought. But, always more a jock than an intellectual, he instead blurted out, "You said my name!"

Sam's face turned the reddest red and, *damn*, tears formed in the corners of his eyes. He licked his lips, and Josh thought he would speak, but he didn't, just looked absolutely mortified and shook his head, then shot up off the lounge. Josh reached out to stop him. He *knew* that if they could get to a calm moment, he'd be able to tell Sam the whole truth about how he felt. But Sam moved so fast, Josh didn't even manage to touch his arm before he was gone.

An instant later, Josh took off after him, desperate to explain, and hoping against odds that what he'd heard Sam say meant he returned Josh's feelings. The lounge chair somehow got tangled in his feet as he tried to clear it, and that

slowed him down, though thank heaven he didn't face plant. He collected himself and started to run again, but Leo and Cub apparently thought he was going to attack Sam, whom they'd known since puppyhood and would, of course, protect. Josh stopped and stood like a statue on the patio, with the dogs between him and the glass door, and Sam on the other side of it. Sam must have regained some of his faculties after the shock, because he didn't let the dogs eat Josh—he opened the slider and whistled for their attention, but as soon as their tails cleared the threshold, he slammed the door shut and, as Josh soon found out, locked it.

Josh stood outside hollering, "Sam, please let me in!" He begged, pleaded, even tried scolding. After carrying on for a good ten minutes, he stopped, but only because his throat was getting sore. Sam had long since disappeared deeper into the house, and finally Josh stepped away to stare into the blue waters of Rick's singular pool, totally defeated and looking for ideas. After he quieted, his brain resumed functioning, and he remembered that the patio slider wasn't the only way into the house. He slapped his forehead and ran around to the side door.

Locked.

Josh ran back the other way, fumbled the gate latch open, and ran along the side of the house toward the front. He pounded on the door, expecting it to be locked, too—and almost fell over when it swung open. When he recovered his balance, he looked up expecting to see Sam, but the space in the doorway stood empty. He realized the door had been hastily closed and not latched, and he worried about the implications. Still hoping, he stepped in, and then wandered through the house calling out for Sam.

But the house was empty, completely. Sam must have taken the dogs. And left in a hurry, judging from the clothes scattered in the bedroom and the watch and cell phone occupying the nightstand. Josh pictured Sam running out the door with his shirt half-buttoned, and he almost laughed. But, if Sam had run...

He was running away from me, Josh thought, and felt his heart break a little.

Josh wandered back to the front door, stared out at the yard desperately seeking a clue to where Sam went. He felt absolutely certain he'd blown a golden chance, possibly his *only* chance, to get through to Sam, to let him know the feelings he'd harbored in his heart for years. Despite defeat, he hoped he could resurrect the opportunity if only he could talk to Sam right away, while it was all still fresh.

As he stared outside, he tried to clear his head, feeling like he had missed something obvious and important. Then, all at once, the whole situation seemed like too much. And futile—he had never been able to figure out why Sammy didn't want to get close to him. Maybe Josh didn't seem like he had the potential to be gay enough, and that might bear some truth. He wasn't sure if he'd be gay for anyone besides Sam. It had never seemed to matter and still didn't, because even though Sammy had said his name while having an apparently huge orgasm, he probably hated Josh now—and who wouldn't? Josh had been standing there all perv-like watching him jerk-off. Sam's rejection of him had been plain in his expression before he ran, and the fact that he'd run away had made it even plainer. He no doubt hoped Josh would just leave.

Josh entertained the idea of doing exactly that, thought it might be best if he got out of Sam's sight altogether. He went to the kitchen, grabbed his keys and jacket from where he'd left them on the table, and headed out to his car. But he couldn't make himself go.

In the end he turned back around and went upstairs to the bedroom where Sam had slept. Where Josh had sat down so close to Sam he could feel his heat, and promised to spend the day with him. Where Josh had let his hand fall to Sam's shoulder, daring to touch him for a beat longer than seemed right for friends, even best friends. He recalled the way his own voice had gone tender: *'It'll be just you and me, Sammy,'* he'd said.

As Sam trotted down the stairs to the beach, all he could think amounted to variations of *oh god oh god oh god oh god*. When he got to the cove, he slipped his flip flops off and rolled up his pant legs, and then walked on until he got a little past the water's edge, so that the waves washed over his feet on the way in and pulled the sand from under them on the way out. He felt like that, too, like the shock of seeing Josh standing there watching him tend to his cock had washed over him in a terrible wave, and as it receded, everything that had to do with Josh and him was pulled away with it. Including his pointless pining over Josh, his secret lusting after him, and most importantly the friendship they had shared for so many years.

Gone... Ruined... All because for once in my life I did something a tiny bit daring, didn't think it through and weigh all the possible outcomes before acting. I just pulled my dick out and started stroking!

He wouldn't in a million years have chanced his solo session by the pool if for one minute he'd believed Josh would show up and catch him. Since it did happen, though, and he couldn't take it back, a small voice urged him to go right back, catch Josh before he left, and lay it all out, bare his heart, maybe even say, *Josh, I love you*. But the more realistic voice, the practical, cautious one he always listened to, scoffed at the idea. No, it would be best if he just gave Josh a chance to gather up his stuff and clear out. Maybe they could talk about it someday, even laugh, but Sam sincerely doubted that would happen. Ever.

Sam breathed deep, and walked through the water, meeting the waves where they were nearly spent, just deep enough at the end of their reach to roll over the tops of his feet. Clouds had formed overhead, dark and heavy, so much so that the wind that caught at Sam's hair and billowed his loose shirt hardly moved them. They seemed to be getting lower, as if they wanted to overtake the sun before it plunged into the sea, and Sam figured they were in for more rain after nightfall. Still, the vivid colors, cast by the sun against the clouds and the rippling water, couldn't be ignored. And gulls called, heading inland, and the seashore calmed Sam, as he'd known it would.

Soon, the clamoring and scolding and debating in his head quieted and once that happened, he heard another voice that sounded suspiciously wise.

Admit it, Sammy. You're not sorry, are you?

He did admit it. The thing that happened with Josh showing up was ridiculously unfortunate, but before that it had been good. Partly because... well, jerking off isn't unpleasant, but also because it had felt good to let loose, to do something a little bit wild.

And you want to do it again, don't you?

What? Masturbate? No!

But there's something else you want to do, isn't there? You want to throw caution to the wind and...

Yes. True. He wanted to strip off his clothes and go swimming in the Pacific.

So he did.

Well, not *all* of his clothes—he left his skivvies on. And he did look around first to make sure no one else was nearby. And he did walk back up to the dry sand and fold his clothes and stack them.

He happened to be wearing a pair of orchid pink satin briefs—because they matched his T-shirt—and he smiled when he remembered them. *So much the better*, he decided. Then, instead of proceeding slowly into the water, sliding his feet on the bottom in case mantas lurked unseen, checking the waves for jellyfish and floating sticks as he usually would, he ran out into the surf, full bore, even let out a whoop. The cold water didn't change his mind, didn't even slow him down. He made his way out to where the waves were deep enough to dive under, then let one tumble him back toward shore. Out again, and back, repeat. And the whole time the smile didn't leave his face.

Instead of moping about Joshua on dry land, he played, and he gave it everything he had. When finally he felt pleasingly played out, he left the water where the subtle current had taken him, near the headland that divided Little Corona cove from the big, popular beach at Corona Del Mar. He decided to let the wind dry him off before collecting his clothes. Besides, he wanted to be sure to leave Josh plenty of time to make his getaway. He climbed up to a perch on the steep rocky slope facing the ocean and carefully sat down, getting as comfortable as bare skin on rocks would allow.

The sheltered niche still radiated the warmth it had collected during the day, and it felt good to rest there. Sam let his mind go still, for once, and simply watched the last of the sunset.

He must have fallen asleep! The last he remembered, the sun had not quite disappeared, and when he awoke the night was full dark and the round moon was high. It took him a minute to realize what had pulled him back from slumber. Someone kept calling his name. He stood to look back along the beach, and easily identified the tall, athletic body, the long stride, and the blond head reflecting silver from the moonlight.

“Oh my god,” Sam whispered. “Joshua Heathcliff Brennan! He's still here.”

Sleeping in the bed where Sam's scent still lingered, Josh dreamt of Sam and the treehouse they'd had as boys. In the dream they were both grown men, and the treehouse was much larger and furnished with loungers like the ones by Rick's pool. The entire dream involved Josh trying again and again to kiss Sam, but every time he did, Sam got that horrified look on his face and melted—literally—once onto the pine floorboards, once into one of the loungers, once all over Josh's... boxers? Yes, boxers. In the end, when Josh tried to plant a kiss as Sam was exiting via the ladder, Sam melted right out of the treehouse and was absorbed into the new-mown grass below. Josh screamed and woke up.

Sam had left his phone on the nightstand, and it was whistling—a tune, not like a teakettle—which Josh recognized as the signal for an incoming call. He yelled, “Sam!” and wrestled himself free of the twisted sheets to reach for the device. As soon as he’d swiped the green icon, he repeated into the phone, “Sam!”

It came as quite a shock when Rick’s distinctive, deep baritone voice came through. “Who’s this? Josh, is that you?”

Realization dawned: it would be unlikely for Sam to call him when his cell phone sat on the bedside table. Feeling stupid and enduring another wave of worry for Sam and grief for their broken friendship, Josh took a minute to form his answer.

“Hello,” Rick said, making it sound like a demand.

“Yeah, Rick. Sorry. It’s me, Josh.”

“Sam’s not around?”

“No.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

Rick breathed out a deep audible sigh, and said, “Listen, Joshua. You sound upset, and you’re making me worry. What’s going on with my nephew?”

Josh scratched at his scalp, wishing he could take the whole damn day back and do it again. Into the phone, he said, “Well, we had a... confrontation, I guess.”

“You guess? You mean you had an argument? A fight? You and Sam?”

Rick sounded incredulous, and Josh understood. The entire history he and Sam shared included less than a handful of disagreements. Clearly Rick wanted more information, but Josh didn’t plan on describing the incident at the pool. So he skipped to the aftermath. “He left, ran out of the house.” Glancing out the window, Josh saw that night had fallen, so he checked the clock before adding, “Maybe three hours ago.”

“And he didn’t say where he was going?”

Why bother to explain they weren’t speaking at the time? “No,” Josh answered, and left it at that.

“But he left his cell phone,” Rick observed. “Is he driving?”

“No, he left on foot.”

“Well, did you *look* for him?”

“Of course... well, not much because I couldn't figure out where he could have gone.”

“Joshua, you've always been fairly bright. I'm going to assume you've been lacking sleep or something. Go down to the beach below the house. He's always spent a lot of time there, and there aren't too many other places nearby he could have gone on foot.”

“Oh, yeah. The beach!”

“I'm hanging up now. Let me know if... *when* you find him.”

Josh didn't wait to see if Rick had more to say; he had his pants on by the time the light went out on the phone. He pulled his shoes on without donning socks and without untying the laces, then headed out the front door, across the drive, and onto the path hidden behind the hibiscus hedge. Despite the dark, he risked leaping the stairs three at a time, not even slowing down after a near miss.

He should have felt relieved at having a logical place to search, but instead he felt foolish. Rick was right—Little Corona was the only place Sam could have and would have gone, and that was the obvious something Josh had been unable to put his mental finger on that afternoon. So convinced was he of this clear fact, that when he got to the beach he expected to see Sam as soon as his eyes adjusted to the moonlight. But when he scanned the beach he found it empty.

Josh fought off an initial wave of panic, and moved along the bottom of the steep slope, thinking Sam must be in the shadow of the cliffs. He made it to the end of the headland on the south end of the beach—no Sam. Again fighting to avoid jumping to conclusions, he walked straight across the beach toward the other headland. The tide was high and only a narrow strip of dry sand remained between the water's edge and the slope at the back of the beach—he could see most of the cove from the edge of the surf.

When he had gone a few strides, he noticed something odd in the combers rolling in—something perhaps floating on the surface, but dragging as if caught on a rock, or a shell—something in the sand. Josh's cargo shorts worked out well, because he had to wade several yards out into deeper water where the waves splashed up to his knees. As he drew near, he thought he knew what it

might be, and a chill that had nothing to do with water or wind snaked up his spine. But the moonlight had stolen all the color from the drowned thing, so he couldn't be sure—not until he was right up to it and fished it out of the water.

A T-shirt, and it belonged to Sam, no question. Who else would wear a purplish-pink T-shirt with “one does want a hint of color” printed in tiny letters above the pocket? Josh found himself chuckling absently when he recognized the shirt, remembering how Sam had chided him for not knowing the color's proper name. He pictured Sam wearing it, that color—whatever it was—so perfect with his dark hair and nearly black eyes.

Then, without warning, his wandering mind shot back to the present and presented him with a horrible possibility.

Spotting something else some distance up the beach, he trotted toward it and soon recognized Sam's stone-washed, butt-shaping jeans, soggy in the foam but apparently too heavy for the surf to drag out. Then, a bit farther on, he found one flip-flop tangled in a mound of seaweed along with the fine gold chain Sam *always* wore. Josh's heart threatened to beat its way out of his chest. He fought to control the flight his mind had taken.

It isn't that. Sammy would never...

Not on purpose, no, but... accidents happen.

No! He's a good swimmer.

In a pool.

Fuck you! Josh halted the internal conversation, not caring that he was swearing at himself. He knew the thing he contemplated but refused to even name couldn't be true; it just couldn't! Sam had to be here, somewhere on the beach, and Josh would find him alive and well.

Also, Josh belatedly thought to wonder, where are the dogs?

He continued his walk toward the jutting headland that marked the cove's northern boundary, scanning in all directions with every step. When clouds obscured the brilliant moon, Josh could no longer distinguish shapes. Then, he started seeing multiple Sams. He saw them everywhere—standing, lying, sitting, walking. And dogs; he saw them too. Even as he felt panic rise up again, he berated himself. He was adventurous, a gambler, an adrenaline junky. He wasn't supposed to panic and quiver like a fly on a web.

No, he would stay in control as always, he *insisted*. Not being able to see well, he began to walk up and down and across the beach, yelling Sam's name at the top of his lungs. And he kept doing it, repeating even though it felt like the wind kicked up right then for the sole purpose of scattering his voice in fragments.

At last he reached the spot where the foot of the headland was submerged by high tide, and stopped. Unable to go farther in that direction and sure that he'd covered the entire cove, Josh looked inland along the rocky outcrop. A gleam caught his eye, up where the sand was still dry, like a spark—or a pair of them—coming from the shadows under an overhanging ledge. Clutching Sam's wet shirt—*orchid, that's the color*—clutching it hard against his chest, he strode forward.

Leo and Cub grinned at him from the shadows, whining a little, but not moving from their shelter. The gleam Josh had seen came from their eyes. Sam, however, was nowhere to be found. Josh continued to stumble around, tripping on rocks, the shirt dripping down his arms and soaking his clothes, calling for Sam.

Finally, he allowed himself to ask the dreaded question: *Could Sam have drowned?*

He still didn't want to believe it possible, but... the scattered, soaked clothes in the surf, the dogs huddled and whining in the hollow under the cliff, and no Sam despite the fact that Josh had shouted for him until his throat felt as gritty as the sand under his feet. He shook his head in denial, but a moment came when he faced the possibility—probability—that Sam, whether by accident or intention, had gone under in the waves. Josh pivoted, faced the sea, walked once more out into the surf, the waves retreating now that the tide had turned. He looked out on the water, searching for a bobbing shape that he prayed he wouldn't see.

The Pacific seemed as dark as the clouded sky, and he could make out nothing at all beyond the breakers, not even ripples. Josh was about to give up, but when the moon broke through and cast silver light on the water, he renewed his scrutiny.

He still found no sign. Defeated and utterly exhausted, he felt tears burn his eyes. He shouted out Sam's name twice more putting all his energy behind it, and then fell to his knees. He let the water drench him, and he let a few tears run, but still he didn't believe, not all the way.

He had to hope!

He stood and walked back to the beach, heading for the trail back to Rick's house, thinking Sam had probably snuck back in for fresh clothes—or something. As he splashed through the shallows, he heard faint sounds following him and thought the dogs had given up their vigil too.

“Josh!”

The dogs wouldn't be calling his name.

“Josh!” Closer the second time.

Am I imagining? He was half-afraid to turn around, but he slowed his pace.

A hand landed on his shoulder. “Joshua!” Sam's voice, clearly Sam's voice.

Josh spun around, and there was Samuel Lee Gallagher in the flesh, looking troubled but absolutely alive. For the second time that day, Josh found himself unable to speak intelligent words.

Sam's words filled the vacuum. “Josh,” he said. “I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have done what I did this morning. I figure I've ruined our friendship—”

What is he babbling about?

“But I should have known you'd worry about me anyway, so I'm sor—”

Sam never finished whatever nonsense he was trying to spout, because Josh shut him up with a kiss, pressed his lips against Sam's, licked and pushed with his tongue until Sam let him in. Kissed him hard and then kissed him some more, trying to deliver by mouth-to-mouth the love he'd been saving just for Sam for an eternity. He caught his breath in fear when Sam pushed away. Josh forced his reluctant tongue to form words. “I've wanted to do that for so long!” But something in Sam's eyes scared him, made him doubt the possibility of a happy ending. Barely able to breathe, he whispered, “Don't you want me, Sam?”

Sam continued to stand silent before him, mouth open, wide-eyed, looking cornered and wild.

Josh asked again, louder this time, rough, “You don't want me? Sam? I thought...”

At last, Sam shook his head and spoke. “No! That's... I mean yes! I do... I just didn't expect you... to do that, kiss me like that.”

Sam's expression transformed, became so thoroughly 'Sam', cautious and amazed and sassy all at once, Josh couldn't help but chuckle. He put his arms around Sam, around the man he'd wanted to hold and never thought he would, and leaned down so their foreheads touched. "Sammy," he said. "Surely you know me well enough by now to expect the unexpected."

Sam felt Josh's arms wrap around him—welcome warmth and strength accompanied by the scent of the man he loved. Yet, everything seemed so unlikely that he didn't respond at all; he stood there with his shoulders and spine feeling stiff as a board. He thought maybe he hadn't actually woken up, maybe that kiss, those words from Josh had only happened in a dream.

If so, he thought, the dream-Josh kisses like a pro!

He chuckled at the thought, and Josh pulled back to look him in the face. "You're laughing, Sam."

Sam shook his head and tried to snuggle his face into Josh's neck, beginning to realize how very perfect he felt, with Josh's arms around him and his hard athlete's body protecting him from the night chill... *because I'm almost stark-ass naked! I wonder where my clothes are? And Cubby and Leo...*

He looked over his shoulder and saw the dogs waiting, watching him—probably hungry. But he couldn't locate his neatly folded stack of clothes.

Then he saw the soaking wet orchid-colored fabric Josh had dropped, lying at their feet. "My shirt!"

"Sam," Josh said, and then louder, giving him a little shake because Sam didn't respond—he was still searching the sand for the rest of his things—"Sam!"

"What?" He snarled the word more or less exactly as he had that morning—in the moment that had begun this unbelievable day. But when he looked into Josh's eyes, he saw hurt. "Oh," he said. "Josh..."

Josh's voice shook a little when he spoke again, sounding as though he chose each word carefully. "Sam, you're my friend. I know we're just friends. I've wanted you... *loved* you, for so long, but I knew... But then, this morning... Oh, god, Sammy, you were so beautiful I..."

"Josh," Sam said, smiling, feeling his heart melt away. "You need to work on finishing your sentences."

Josh looked surprised, but then he laughed, reached out to Sam, and pulled him tight to his body once more. Squeezing him almost hard enough to hurt, he pled, "Sammy, say it. Say you want me, please."

Reality struck Sam hard. *This is it!* He was living the moment he'd dreamed of so many times, and he'd hardly been paying attention. Josh's arms were holding him, their bodies pressed together, and Josh wanted him! His cock reacted, erect almost instantly. He pulled back, looked up into Josh's vivid blue eyes, and said, "Yes. *Fuck* yes! I want you! I've always wanted you! Since treehouse days!"

They both laughed, but Josh cut it short, covering Sam's lips with his own, as if he thought he could smother the scorching fire he'd lit in Sam's body.

"Oh," Josh said, barely breaking contact. "Now, Sammy!"

"Now?" Sam answered, even in that moment heeding the voice of caution in his head. "Here?"

Josh seemed almost angry. "Yes, here, now! I've been waiting years for this. Don't make me wait any longer." He seemed to flounder for a minute, but then forged ahead, more articulate than Sam had ever heard him sound. "Shit, Sam! You jerked off by the pool today, and I gather you went skivvy-dipping—you got brave and took chances and I *know* you loved it! Do this, Sammy. Take this chance with me!"

Sam wouldn't have been able to say no even if he'd wanted to; his dick was about ready to launch itself at Josh, with or without him. He fell against Josh, ran his hands under his shirt, snapped Josh's pants open and felt Josh's cock hard and hot and already slick.

"Oh," he panted, feeling a wave of pain and pleasure as Josh pinched one nipple, scraped canines over the tender flesh of his neck, and pushed Sam's briefs down, freeing his cock.

"Orchid," Josh said, and when Sam realized what he meant he giggled. Josh stopped the giggle with some hard, attention-getting strokes.

Sam felt much more serious then, and he breathed into Josh's ear, "I want to taste you. I want to suck you."

For a minute Sam worried that either Josh's knees would buckle or he'd burst into orgasm right then and there, but neither happened. Josh kissed Sam so hard, Sam thought their lips might stay like that forever. That flaming kiss claimed most of Sam's attention, but he was vaguely aware of Josh pushing and

pulling, maneuvering him away from his fallen orchid briefs and toward the shadows under the cliff.

Josh leaned his ass on a rounded outcrop of rock, and said, "Here." His lips brushed Sam's chest. "Dark. You won't have to worry about people seeing. Better? Okay?"

"Thank you," Sam whispered, and then kissed Josh, sucking in his bottom lip and scraping his teeth over the tender flesh inside, hoping that would be enough to show how very "okay" it was.

Josh pulled his long, strong erection out of his pants and pushed them down to his ankles. He spread his knees wide for Sam, and Sam didn't waste another second.

Kneeling before him, he placed his own throbbing cock against Josh's leg so he could move against him while he sucked his new lover—his forever lover, he hoped. Josh certainly had a cock Sam could love to the end of his days, beautiful in the moonlight, with the wet crown glistening like polished marble. He leaned forward, dragged his tongue over the taut head. *Oh, fuck.* Josh tasted even better than he'd imagined—better by far than any other cock he'd tasted, and he loved to suck dick, so he had a few to compare.

Josh groaned, then curled his fingers through Sam's hair, deliciously scraping nails over his scalp. Sam responded by diving deep down on the shaft, opening his throat and then letting the muscles at the back squeeze against the crown.

"Fuck," Josh said, and started to pump in and out of Sam's mouth. Sam pulled Josh's hairy, muscled shin against his cock and moved, begging for friction, and with his other hand took hold of Josh's balls. They felt perfect, too! Everything about Josh seemed perfect, better than he could have imagined.

Josh's movements became more urgent, but erratic, as he began to lose control. Sam stopped everything else, looking up into Josh's eyes and giving all his attention to what he was doing with his lips and tongue, making it as good as he knew how for the most perfect man in the world.

Josh's gaze didn't leave Sam's as his climax neared, and his eyes closed only the barest instant before he shot sweet, tangy, salty seed into Sam's hungry mouth.

As Josh came back from that orgasm, Sam began to feel desperate for his own release, and with his face buried in the thatch around Sam's softening cock, he began to move against Josh's leg hard and fast.

Josh stopped him, pulled him into his lap, putting Sam's back against his chest. He pinched nipples, flicked his fingernail across them, bit and sucked hard at the top of Sam's shoulder. He put one hand to excellent use on Sam's primed cock, stroking it as if he knew exactly how Sam liked it.

"Good," Sam breathed.

Josh responded, "Yes, Sammy. Yes," and then licked at Sam's ear, blew his breath across it, bit the lobe. "Come for me. Now. I've been waiting such a long time."

Sam did come—how could he not? His cock jerked hard, over and over, and jizz shot straight up, falling back to splash on his thigh and Josh's hand.

Nothing Sam had ever experienced had come remotely close to that orgasm, and when it subsided, he couldn't even speak. Josh turned him in his lap and held him, silent also, and they sat there together for a long time.

Rain began to fall, and they collected Sam's scattered things, called the dogs, and walked hand in hand across the cove and up the stairs to Rick's house.

Sam looked at Josh just as they stepped inside. "Best weekend ever," he said, smiling.

Once they were inside, with the front door closed, the lights on, and the dogs already noisily munching kibble, Josh supposed he'd have to let go of Sam's hand. He didn't want to. He felt like they'd entered a foreign country—or perhaps a different planet—where the customs were strange and doing the wrong thing could result in corporal punishment. As long as he held tight to Sam, as long as they negotiated this strange terrain together, they'd manage, and Josh would stay safe.

He knew he couldn't keep Sam's hand in his forever, but he wasn't sure he remembered how to let go. *All in all*, he thought, *an unaccustomed head space for a risk-taking jock like me*.

For once, Sam seemed to be unafraid in new territory. He leaned forward to catch Josh's eye, and when he had Josh's attention, he smiled softly, gave his hand a reassuring squeeze, and let go. He turned up the heat on the wall thermostat, and then asked, "Could you eat something?"

To his surprise, Josh recognized hunger gnawing at the underside of his ribs—he hadn't eaten anything since morning, and he'd used up a lot of fuel on

the day's ups and downs. Especially the ups. He nodded enthusiastically, and just in case that wasn't clear, said, "Yeah!"

Sam's smile grew, and he raised his eyebrows—a familiar expression, and Josh knew it meant Sam was mocking him. He didn't mind, because he knew it also meant Sam knew him well and liked what he knew.

"I'll tell you what," Sam said. "As soon as I put on some clothes, I'll make us some sandwiches, and you can make us a fire. Okay?"

At last! Something to do with his hands. And his brain.

Rick's fireplace nested in a hearth of polished, rounded stones, designed for beauty more than warmth. But Josh's lively blaze and the turkey sandwiches, red grapes, and tart white wine Sam put together thawed Josh's nerves—and his tongue. He reached across the tray they shared and popped a fat grape past Sam's lips, then asked his most pressing question. "So, what is this, Sam? What we're doing... what we are now?"

Sam looked a little saddened, but he met Josh's eyes and answered clearly and without hesitation. "It's whatever you want it to be, Joshua."

Josh didn't quite know what to make of that. Maybe Sam didn't want him the same way he wanted Sam. Maybe for Sam it had just been a sex thing. He waited for words to come, but serious conversation had never been his strong point, and the silence stretched on.

Sam, in his mercy, must have decided Josh needed more information. He drew in a deep breath and let it out on a sigh. "Josh, you're my friend. My oldest and best. If it's what you want, we can go on as before. I think I've revealed my secrets today—you must have figured out that I've wanted you... I'll even say *loved* you, for so long I can't even remember when it started. So, I'm yours if you want me. If not, I hope you'll still be my friend." Sam stopped, then let a mischievous grin take over his face. He giggled, "Or, I suppose we could be fuck buddies! That was pretty awesome sex, down there on the beach, right?"

Josh, still confused, or rather confused again, mumbled, "Uh... right."

"But," Sam went on, "I won't lie. My first choice would be for us to be *together*. Partners, friends, and lovers—the best kind of couple, I think."

That came through Josh's mental fog clear as a bell, and he smiled in relief. He couldn't make his reply eloquent like Sam's words, but when he could at last speak his heart, the words that rushed out seemed at least good enough.

“*That*, Sam. Us together. That’s what I want, too. And—I said it before on the beach, but maybe you didn’t know that I meant it—I love you, too.”

“Love me that way?”

“That way. For so long. *So much*.”

He stood and, smiling slyly at Sam, pulled the love seat over to situate it immediately in front of the fire. He held out his hand and Sam came to him and took it, and they sat together, sinking into the plush cushions. He and Sam turned to each other as if on cue, and Josh wrapped Sam in his arms—no urgency now, and he thought it might qualify as the best moment of his life.... *Well, second best*, he mentally noted, *the beach—that has to be first*.

“You’re grinning,” Sam observed.

Josh, chuckled, but didn’t try to explain. “I love you,” he repeated.

Sam laughed and hugged him, then laid his head on Josh’s shoulder. They watched the fire for a time, then Sam got up and poured them more wine. When he sat back down, he asked, “Will you tell me what ‘for so long’ means?”

That started a long conversation in which Josh confessed his voyeuristic Sam-lust sessions, and the gradual growth from amazement and possibly obsession to a need to be close, and finally to the knowledge that nobody else could ever fill the chamber in Josh’s soul that had been built around Sam.

“You *watched* me!” Sam turned the brightest shade of red Josh had ever seen him turn, and repeated it as a question. “You *watched* me?”

Josh felt his heart thud to the pit of his stomach, thinking he’d fucked his good thing up. He said, “Yes,” and was about to add an abject apology, but Sam jumped to his feet, suddenly antsy.

Dancing around as if he couldn’t sit still, he said, “That is *so fucking hot!*” His erection bloomed so quickly it visibly popped against the button fly of the washed out jeans he’d slipped on when they got to the house. Sam laid a hand over it and put the other hand over his mouth, making a picture both extremely hot and a bit comical.

Josh laughed—couldn’t help it. It turned out okay, though, because Sam laughed too. Then Josh stood up and pulled Sam into his arms, and they swayed together as if slow dancing, heated but not overwhelmed. Josh kissed Sam, then turned Sam’s question around. “What about you, Sammy? You said you’ve wanted me...”

“Oh,” Sam said, and gently broke Josh’s embrace. As he often did in emotional moments, Sam went to the piano—a baby grand that Rick had put in the house especially for his nephew. He began to play, and Josh leaned on his elbow on the closed lid, chin in hand, so he could watch Sam’s expressive face.

Whatever Josh knew about classical music, he’d learned from Sam—from things he’d said, from listening, from watching him play. Now, he could appreciate the music Sam made, but he fixed his attention only on his friend. As Sam touched the keys in slow, quiet, inevitable sounding chords, his face looked utterly peaceful, and sincere.

While he played, he spoke. “Beethoven,” he explained. “‘Appassionata’, second movement.” Josh quickly became entranced by Sam and his music, and it surprised him when, a few measures later, Sam spoke again. “You see, Joshua. You were my first crush, way back when. If I thought a person could make someone else gay, I’d say it was you that did it to me. And it’s been you ever since.”

Not a trace of smart-mouthed Sam, or cautious Sam, or insecure Sam—the Sam who let those words fall among the notes as if they were part of the music seemed supremely sure, serious, both joyful and sad.

“You,” Sam continued, “are the one I’ve always dreamed of. And ever since I was old enough to recognize love when I felt it, you’ve been the one I loved.”

Sam’s eyes were dry, his words calm, and his fingers played over the keys as if self-directed, now picking up into light, quick notes that even Josh could recognize as playful. Sam smiled then, and looked at him with his brows raised. “It’s as simple as that!”

When he got to the end of the passage, Sam abruptly stopped playing. Looking serious, perhaps a little scared now, he said, “But maybe it’s not simple at all, Josh.”

Before Josh could answer Sam started to play again—something totally different. A pop song, Josh thought.

“Colbie Caillat,” Sam said, a name Josh didn’t recognize, and a song title he didn’t remember ever hearing, “‘Realize’.”

But then Sam started to sing the lyrics. His voice couldn’t be described as exceptional, but it had a pleasant, sweet quality, and of course he carried the tune quite well. When Josh heard the words he understood why Sam had chosen that song—they were all about friends becoming lovers, not having to

spend the rest of their lives wondering if they'd missed out on something wonderful.

If Josh hadn't been so hypnotized by Sam's quiet performance, he might have cried, so much relief and contentment and hope flooded his heart. As it was, though, he waited in silence, scarcely breathing, until Sam stopped playing, stood up, and took his arm, pulling him toward the stairs.

"I think it's time for bed, Joshua. Don't you?"

He did indeed! He followed along and when they reached Sam's bed, they fell into it together and stretched out side by side, the full length of Sam's body snug against his own like the proverbial silver lining on a cloud.

This time, they made love, and it startled Josh to realize he'd never made love before in his life. He wanted to savor it, but mostly he wanted to *do* it, to direct his attentions to his fabulous lover until Sam tasted nirvana. He rolled so that Sam lay partially beneath him, snuggling his own cock against Sam's hip, and looked into Sam's dark eyes, delighted to find that Sam *waited* for him, open and ready for whatever Josh would do.

It stole his breath, but he recovered quickly, and bent to kiss Sam's compliant lips. He ran his hand down Sam's body, skimming over sensitive nipples, a ticklish spot near his groin, over the wet crown of his cock, and on down his thigh. On the return trip, he caressed the soft flesh high on the inside of Sam's thigh, and Sam opened his legs in response. When Josh rolled Sam's balls inside their loose covering of tender skin, Sam made a sound, broke his lips away from Josh's and bit down—not too gently—on the tender spot where Josh's neck and shoulder met.

Josh panted in response and licked at Sam's ear, moved his hand up to the hard shaft of Sam's erection, and began to stroke. Suddenly, he realized he had a deep, undeniable need to do something he'd never done before—taste a man's cock... Sam's cock. True to his adventurous soul, he immediately slid down to give it a try.

And loved it. Kept at it. Couldn't stop. Especially not when Sam made such delicious sounds, moaning, saying Josh's name, finally begging.

"Oh," he said. "Oh, Josh, please!" Sam started to buck his hips, but not so violently that Josh couldn't stay with him. And when Sam grabbed Josh's hair, pulled his head down, and screamed, coming hard and filling Josh's amazed mouth with a most wonderful salty tang, Josh moaned too, and sucked, and swallowed every drop.

Sam called his name after he'd quieted, and pulled at his shoulders, so Josh slid up to plant a kiss on the mouth of the friend he loved so helplessly.

He moved so that his whole body lay over Sam, taking some of the weight on his elbows and knees, which he'd spread to straddle Sam's hips, allowing him to move the way he wanted. He rocked his hips so that his cock had full contact with Sam's, discovering Sam already hardening again. *God!* Sam's body set Josh on fire, and he came like fireworks blooming one after the other on the Fourth of July.

He collapsed, rolled off Sam, said, "Fuck."

Sam giggled. "Next time."

Feeling shy again, but oh so right, Josh laughed too, and soon neither one seemed able to stop.

Until a shadow blocked the light from the doorway.

There stood Rick, clearly surprised, and Josh instinctively held Sam a little tighter, wanting to protect him from... whatever.

Rick soon recovered his composure though. He said, "I see you're home safe, Sammy. Glad of that." He turned to walk away—pulling the door closed behind him—and Josh distinctly heard him say, "I wondered when those two would figure it out."

The End

Author Bio

Lou Sylvre hails from southern California but now lives and writes on the rainy side of Washington State. When she's not writing, she's reading fiction from nearly every genre, romance in all its tints and shades, and the occasional book about history, physics, or police procedure. Not zombies, though. Her personal assistant is Boudreau, a large cat who never outgrew his kitten meow. Lou plays guitar (mostly where people can't hear her) and she loves to sing. She's usually smiling and laughs too much, some say. She also loves her family, her friends, the aforementioned Boudreau, a Chihuahua named Joe, and (in random order) coffee, chocolate, sunshine, and wild roses.

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