

A muscular man is shown from the waist up, shirtless, holding a brown football with both hands. He is wearing dark athletic shorts. The background is a bright blue sky with light clouds and a green football field with white yard lines. A tall stadium light pole is visible in the distance. The overall scene is outdoors and brightly lit.

***OPEN  
TACKLE***

***L.O. CHASE***

## **Free Short Fiction**

Distributed at [www.lcchase.com](http://www.lcchase.com) by L.C. Chase

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***For Nic B***

Written as part of the *Hot Summer Days* anthology  
for the M/M Romance Group on Goodreads.  
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**OPEN TACKLE**

by L.C. Chase

*I love you.*

The words bounced around inside Rory's skull like ping-pong balls in a wind tunnel.

*I love you.*

Did Owen really say that? Like he meant it in a non-brotherly, non-best-friend, I-want-to-get-naked-with-you way?

Rory kicked off the covers, threw his legs over the edge of the bed, and groaned when he glanced at the clock radio on his night table. Such an innocuous, inanimate object, yet it begged for his fist, the way it tauntingly displayed 4:47am in obnoxious digital green. He hardly slept more than an hour in fits and starts since Owen dropped the L-bomb on him and then ran for the hills.

He rolled out of bed, pulled on a pair of cotton briefs that were lying on the floor, and wandered across the small bedroom to stand in front of the window. From his third-story apartment, he could see Folsom Stadium, painted with the first blush of a sunrise kiss. Beyond the main CU-Boulder campus the infamous Flatirons reached for the heavens in all their glory. It was five miles from his apartment to the university, but in the clear mile-high Colorado air it appeared as close as crossing the block.

He could even see the campus dorms. Where he used to live with Owen.

He exhaled a heavy sigh. The gust of hot, moist breath collided with the cool glass surface and created a thin fog that clouded his view. He drew an O in the center with his fingertip and watched it vanish. A secret message left behind for discovery.

Last night, seven sleepless hours ago, when they'd been celebrating another game victory at a local sports pub, Owen Harris, his very best friend, told Rory he loved him. To say Rory had been stunned was an understatement. He'd fought saying those very words himself for so long now, dreamed of hearing them tumble off Owen's enticing tongue to

lick the shell of his ear. When he finally did hear them his brain short-circuited, throat closed, heart stopped. That the dream had manifested into reality was beyond surreal.

Especially considering Owen wasn't even gay.

Or so Rory had believed.

Rory's mental engine had stuttered and coughed as the ignition fought to fire. Coherent thought and speech danced just beyond his reach and left him sitting there, staring at Owen like he was from another planet, speaking a foreign language. Frozen with the overwhelming hope that what he was hearing was true, and paralyzed with the fear that he'd had a few too many tequila shots and imagined his friend's declaration.

But Owen, always quick to jump to conclusions, took his silence as rejection. *I'm sorry*, he said as his beautiful brown eyes began to glitter with moisture. *I am so sorry!* Then he turned and ran from the bar.

When Rory's motor finally kicked in and spurred him into action, he raced through the front doors and spilled out onto a near-deserted Pearl Street. Owen was gone.

*I love you.*

Rory braced his hands on either side of the window frame and laid his forehead against the glass. Almost twenty years they'd known each other. Almost twenty years they'd been inseparable. Ever since the cute little brunet with big puppy-dog eyes moved in two doors down and they became instant best friends. They did everything and went everywhere together. They finished each other's sentences, and developed that innate ability of silent communication generally reserved for old married couples.

Then puberty hit Rory like a semi truck, and he started to notice things about Owen he was pretty sure most boys didn't notice about other boys. Things like how long and thick his best friend's eyelashes were, or the high cheekbones they fanned. The guileless brown eyes flecked with gold, and the burning red that shimmered in fine threads through rich tawny hair when the summer sun fingered Owen's shaggy locks. And long fingers that graced hands he'd spent far too much time imagining how they'd feel caressing his bare skin. And for the next four years, Rory walked around in a constant state of arousal.

He so badly wanted to tell Owen what was going on with him, the feelings raging inside, but he was terrified of losing his best friend. Owen was his other half. The thought of losing him, losing the friendship they shared, that effortless connection, was unbearable. That they both played offense on the high school football team -- a team chock full of testosterone-overdosed he-men, where Rory Ballard was the star quarterback and Owen the star wide receiver -- also had the potential to put both their scholarships at risk.

There was no way he could come out to the one person in the world he should have been able to. So he mastered the art of denial. Almost believed it himself.

Until college.

Sharing a dorm room like they'd always planned had quickly become a living hell. Owen had added another four inches to his height and filled out, putting him just an inch taller than Rory's six feet three, and twenty pounds of solid muscle heavier. He was the most beautiful man Rory had ever seen. That long, lithe body was a sculptor's dream. And because Rory wasn't the sculptor and never would be, he began to pull away.

Owen sensed that something wasn't right and tried to understand, tried to help, but every time he asked what was wrong, Rory said he was just tired. College life, studies and the football team were a lot to keep up with. Every concerned touch that followed -- a hand on his back, an arm over his shoulder, a smack on the ass at practice -- became a stick poking a hornet's nest. And then came the final straw just over a month ago: Owen sitting beside him on his bed, rubbing slow circles on Rory's back with that big strong hand, the two of them wearing nothing more than workout shorts, bare thighs touching, had snapped the bounds of Rory's rapidly thinning resolve.

He saw himself pushing his best friend back on the bed, straddling his hips and sinking into that hard, pliant body. And right on the heels of that image, the deafening rattle of walls when the door slammed behind Owen's retreating back, leaving Rory in the dust with a hole in his chest that would never heal.

He shook the image away and shot off the bed like he'd been stuck with a cattle prod, then made the most heartbreaking decision of his entire life. He moved out of the dorm the next day, and pushed the only person who meant anything in his whole life further away.

*I love you.*

Anger welled up inside Rory with frightening intensity. Owen knew him better than that. Should have known no matter what he said, Rory wouldn't judge or turn away from him. Rory promptly shut down the little voice in the back of his mind that tried to point out the obvious. He didn't want to face the fact that while Owen should have known better, he should have too.

Hypocrisy was a bitter dish. He wasn't hungry.

"Fuck this," Rory said in a muted voice. He pushed off from the window and picked up a pair of jeans and his team jersey from the floor. He quickly dressed, grabbed his wallet and keys, and stormed out of the apartment.

THE TEMPERATURE WAS still comfortable in the early morning light, the world still in peaceful repose when he started walking. When walking quickly proved not enough to ebb his anger, he started to jog, accelerated into run, and then kicked it up another gear

into a full-out sprint. Breath wheezed harsh and loud through his throat, lungs heaved, and thighs burned and threatened to give out with every bone-jarring strike against the unforgiving pavement. Sweat flooded from his pores, drying into salty crystals on his skin as the arid climate sucked the fluids from his body almost as fast as he expelled it. His gritty eyes watered and vision doubled.

But he was not crying. Rory Ballard did not cry.

He'd outrun his emotions by the time he passed through the gates of Folsom Field. He hadn't intended to go to the field, but his feet led him there regardless. Abused muscles cried mutiny, and he collapsed on his back near the twenty-yard line. Dew-tipped grass cooled his overheated skin through his jersey, while his chest heaved and muscle fibers twitched from the intense morning exertion. He kicked off his shoes and socks so his sweaty feet could breathe, but didn't have the energy to sit up and take his jersey off.

If Owen had only stayed at the bar. If only he'd answered his phone the million times Rory had called last night, this could all be settled in a single, four-word sentence.

*I love you, too.*

Rory lost track of how long he lay there on the field, distantly aware that the sun had risen higher and the surface temperature of his skin increased. Familiar sounds of the world waking around him danced on the edge of his eardrums -- morning birds sang their merry tune, insects buzzed, street traffic echoed from beyond the stadium. His gaze followed an arcing contrail as it faded into a gossamer brush stroke across a canvas of deep blue.

Something hard bumped against his elbow, and he wasn't surprised when he turned his head to find a football rocking to a halt in the grass. He reached for the ball and turned it in his hands, then cradled it to his chest and released a long breath that whistled through his teeth. He looked in the direction the ball had come from, and saw Owen standing near the benches. He was wearing a Colorado Buffaloes team T-shirt that emphasized his chiseled, broad chest and solid biceps. Dark blue sweatpants hung low on a narrow waist. Red diamond highlights sparkled in spiky dark hair.

Rory's heart stuttered for a whole different reason.

With an unwavering gaze Owen moved silently into position thirty yards away. He planted his feet shoulder-width apart on the fifty-yard line, arms deceptively relaxed at his side, and waited.

It was a private ritual they started after their first home game when they played for the Rocky Mountain Lobos in high school. The morning after every game since, they'd meet on the field to toss the ball before the daily demands of life came calling -- reliving the previous night's game, shooting the shit, talking about anything and everything that came to mind. Just the two of them cocooned in an empty, 50,000-seat stadium that shut out the

world beyond its concrete walls.

“I’m an idiot,” Rory mumbled to himself. He looked back to the cerulean heavens for contradiction. The sky returned a mocking stare at him, as if to say, *Like that’s a news flash?*

Suddenly, it all became crystal clear, like he’d been wandering around having forgotten to take the protective plastic off the lenses of his vision. All the times Owen had reached out for Rory, all the subtle ways he’d tried to say through touch what he couldn’t say with words. But Rory was so dead-set on denial that he missed every subtle signal. He mistook the caress of a hopeful lover as nothing more than the kindness of a good friend. How many years had they danced around each other? How many times had he misread Owen’s friendship and pushed him further and further way, afraid he couldn’t control his desires, not realizing Owen wanted the same thing all along?

*You’re an idiot and a chickenshit, Rory Ballard.* No disagreement from above.

With a low groan, Rory heaved his disgruntled body off the ground and shook the grass from the back of his jersey. He cradled the ball in his hands for a moment, watching Owen, the tension radiating off his best friend’s tall body a tangible thing. Rory cupped the pointed end of the ball in his right hand, angled his shoulder back, and let the ball fly. Owen deftly caught it. His honed, naturally athletic form moved with the effortless, enviable grace that made him a highlight-reel darling, and he returned the toss.

For the next half hour, the only sounds were that of a leather ball whistling through the air as it volleyed back and forth, and the steady beat of a sunlit heart.

They paused only once by unspoken mutual agreement, to pull their shirts off and toss them aside as the morning temperature continued its relentless march toward the century mark.

Finally, Rory tucked the ball under an arm instead of returning the toss and wiped the heel of one hand across his forehead. “You’re my best friend, Owen.”

Owen looked down, seemingly finding something intriguing about his running shoes. “I’m so sorry, Ror.” He glanced up briefly, afraid to hold contact. “You’re my best friend too, and I-- I miss you.”

Rory took a step forward. “You got nothing to be sorry for.”

“No. I was drunk and feeling sorry for myself and didn’t know what I was saying,” his best friend said, eyes downcast, shoulders rolled forward. “You know I-- I do...love you. But you know, like brothers.”

Rory’s next step faltered. A hairline crack zigzagged over the surface of his heart and threatened to split it open. “Brothers?”



Owen nodded, shoved his hands deep into the pockets of his sweatpants, and flashed a quick, anxious glance over Rory's shoulder. He was lying. Rory knew it to the core of his soul.

"You're such a dumb-ass!" Rory yelled across the open space between them, making sure the smile in his voice was clear. Owen twitched but didn't raise his gaze. "Don't you think I know when you're lying? Did you never think I might feel the same?"

Owen's head shot up, and a comet of hope streaked across his dark eyes. "You aren't gay."

"Neither are you." Rory started walking again when Owen snorted in response, determined and confident as he crossed the thirty-yard line. "What if I told you I love you? What if I told you I want you?"

"Do you?" Owen's voice cut and shook like he'd veered off the side of the highway and hit a rumble strip. His gaze dropped back to the ground.

"I do," Rory said, willing Owen to hear his heart in his voice. He stepped over the forty-yard line. "More than anything in this world." Two more strides, closing the distance rapidly. "What do you want, Owen?"

Owen's chest rose and fell with quick, shallow breaths. His skin glistened like burnished gold in the late morning sun. Around his neck, a carved greenstone pendant in the shape of a triple twisted figure eight hung by a thin strip of black suede, reflected brightly. The pendant rested just below the hollow of his neck, and matched the one Rory wore. They'd gotten the necklaces when they'd taken a trip to New Zealand after high school, to celebrate their football scholarships. The path of life, it was called, the Maori symbol meaning two people bonded for life by friendship and loyalty.

Distance closed. Rory stood on one side of the fifty-yard line, Owen on the other. The narrow chalk-white line separated their bodies by mere inches. Tension sizzled in the heavy air between them, and still Owen didn't raise his gaze when he began, "I want..."

"What?"

Owen mumbled; his words were lost on a rising breeze.

"O..."

"*You.*" Owen raised his gaze and locked onto Rory's. Brown eyes darkened and intense, the way Rory had always dreamed Owen would look at him. Owen squared his shoulders and took a deep breath. His voice was low but sure when he said, "You, Rory. I want you."

RORY DIDN'T KNOW who reached for whom first, only knew that Owen's arms wrapped tight around his waist, and his arms wrapped around Owen. Their bodies clapped together with enough force to push the air from their lungs, and just before their lips met, Owen froze.

Breaths, rapid and harsh, mingled in the sliver that separated them from complete head-to-toe contact. The sharp scent of mint and arousing scent of male, of Owen, gusted over Rory's cheek and teased his senses. The heated press of Owen's bare chest against his, seared through skin and tissue and muscle and bone. Electric tingles raced the length of Rory's tall frame. Rory moved a hand to cradle the back of Owen's head, threaded his fingers into the silky locks, damp with sweat, and tentatively touched his mouth to Owen's. He waited for Owen to respond, and barely a heartbeat later, Owen leaned into the kiss.

The first kiss.

The kiss he'd dreamed of since he was thirteen years old. Owen's lips were soft as satin, hot as caramel on apple pie, and tasted just as sweet. They moved gently across his own -- testing, tasting, teasing -- and when they parted Rory didn't hesitate to accept the invitation. He swept his tongue inside and slid it against Owen's. He reveled in the subtle, rough texture on the surface and smooth underside as they twined around one another. A ragged moan rose up between them and Owen's lean, muscular body pushed harder against him. Every angle and ridge of bone and muscle fit into place as though it were made for only him.

Owen's hands burned a path up and down the expanse of Rory's back, from the base of his neck to the rise of his ass. Owen held the back of Rory's head with one hand, slanting their angle to deepen the kiss that had yet to break -- breathing be damned -- and cupped one butt cheek with the other, squeezing hard as he rocked his hips into Rory. The rigid, unyielding length of Owen's erection rode against Rory's, and a guttural growl vibrated against his skin as it surged up through Owen's chest.

And then Owen forced his hands between them. The heel of one hand followed the outline of Rory's cock through his thin denim while the other frantically worked to release the button. Rory rolled his pelvis back only far enough to give Owen the room he needed to complete the task. He wanted the material that separated their bodies gone. He wanted Owen to take him in hand and pull every day of the last seven longing years from his body.

Owen tucked his hands beneath the waistband of Rory's briefs, and pushed them and his jeans down together. Hot sun attacked his bare ass and he shivered. His cock sprang free of its confines and pointed toward Owen instinctively. The rough heat of Owen's hand wrapped around his shaft and Rory jerked forward, sparks shot in every direction and had him a heartbeat away from coming right then.

Rory broke the kiss for the first time and between gasping pants, said on a hoarse voice,

“Holy. Fuck. Owen.” He clamped his hands around Owen’s wrists. “You’re killing me.” He hooked a heel behind Owen’s knee, and with a quick push-pull, tackled his dazed best friend to the ground before he had a chance to counter the action.

Owen hit the forgiving turf with a startled grunt as Rory landed on top of him, wrists still tightly held in Rory’s grip. Rory pushed Owen’s legs apart with his knees and settled into the welcoming space between them. Owen looked up at Rory, his eyes dark and heavy-lidded with lust, his breath coming in shallow puffs, his heart pounding powerfully against Rory’s chest. “I’ve wanted this for so long,” Owen whispered, his deep reedy voice dripping with desire. He clenched his hands into fists against Rory’s unyielding hold, but Rory wouldn’t budge. “Kiss me, Ror.”

And Rory did. This time it wasn’t a gentle exploration. It was a frantic, mindless, desperate claiming. The release of too many years of longing, too many years of denying what he craved most. Rory devoured Owen’s mouth, sucked and swirled the length of his tongue. Lips swollen and hypersensitive pulsed with the rapid bass drum beat of his heart. Rory felt like he was trying to climb inside, and still he couldn’t get close enough, deep enough.

He rocked his hips into Owen, who bucked to meet each thrust in equal measure. Owen tried again to free his hands from Rory’s hold, but Rory kept him pinned tight to the ground while he had his way with that beautiful mouth. Too long he’d wanted. Too long he’d needed. And now that he finally had a taste of Owen, there was no way in hell he was letting go.

With a rumbling growl, Owen arched his body up off the ground and forcibly flipped them over, but instead of straddling Rory, he yanked him by the hands and hauled him to his feet. Rory swayed for a brief second, and then Owen was dragging him toward the locker rooms.

“What the hell, O?” Rory squawked as he held his pants up with his free hand and stumbled behind.

“Can’t wait, Ror.” Owen sounded nearly panicked. “Can’t wait.”

Rory laughed. He couldn’t wait either.

The slap of Rory’s bare feet and softer pound of Owen’s rubber-soled ones echoed off the tunnel walls as they ran from the field and into the empty locker room. Owen released Rory’s hand as soon as they were inside the door and reached for a garbage can along the wall.

“Doorbell,” he said as he rolled the large can in front of the door. “Just in case.”

Rory opened his mouth to tell Owen that was a good idea, but before he could get a word out, Owen was on him. His mouth fused to Rory’s in an aggressive, demanding kiss.

More hands than seemed possible dug into bare skin, tunneled through hair and tugged; shoved at his jeans until they shackled his ankles and threatened to topple him as Owen back-walked him. His calves hit one of three leather couches at the far end of the room, where the team gathered to study practice and game videos with their coaches.

The second Rory's butt sank into the plush leather Owen pushed him back and began tugging his jeans over his feet. Owen stood there, staring down at Rory, his desire palpable; jeans still clutched in his hand all but forgotten. "Heaven above..."

Rory held a hand out. "Come here."

Owen took the proffered hand and knelt between Rory's bare legs. Rory pulled him in and once again claimed those swollen, caramel apple lips. Owen stretched his body over Rory's and pressed their crotches together. Rory slowly slid his hands down Owen's strong back, tracing every angle and curve of muscle, over each bump of his spine, under the band of his sweatpants and down into the two dimpled valleys that hovered above a perfectly defined ass. He pushed the pants down with open palms, covering as much skin as possible as he went. And God, if that wasn't the softest skin he'd ever felt.

Owen leaned back, breaking their kiss. His lips, full and flush, glistened with moisture. He sat back on his heels and looked up at Rory with the expression of a child on Christmas morning. "Can I?" he whispered in a graveled voice.

"Please. Yes." His dick pulsed in agreement.

With hands firmly holding Rory's hips, Owen leaned forward and kissed him one more time on the lips before his tongue led his mouth on a journey from Rory's jaw, down the side of his neck where Owen nipped at the thick, corded muscle. He followed the line of Rory's clavicle into the hollow of his throat, then down the center of his chest and over to a hardened nipple. He teased it with his tongue and teeth and Rory dropped his head back against the couch. He closed his eyes to focus on the sensation of touch that swept through his body under Owen's devoted worship.

Owen continued his southbound journey until his chin bumped the head of Rory's cock, and a spike of electricity charged through Rory's every vein. "God, Owen, suck me. Please."

Rory caught his breath when Owen's tongue, hot and wet, twirled around the head of his straining shaft, and then down the underside to the base, before returning to the tip. And then he was engulfed in the most incredible heat he ever felt. All he'd known to this point was his own hand. Rory had never wanted another living soul as badly as he wanted Owen Harris. He wanted Owen to be his first everything.

Owen released his hips and wrapped one hand around the base of Rory's cock, while he moved the other down to cup and gently squeeze his balls.

“Damn, Owen. That feels amazing.” Rory lifted his head to watch as he carefully rocked his hips upward, pushing himself deeper into Owen’s glorious mouth. Owen looked up and met his gaze with an intensity Rory felt like a punch to the gut. His heart smashed against his ribcage with brutal force, perspiration broke out on his forehead and the telltale tingling began at the base of his spine.

Too visceral. Couldn’t be a dream.

“O...” Rory warned. He grabbed Owen’s head and tried to push him off his dick. But Owen wasn’t having any of that. He gave one shake and clamped down with his lips, then sucked back up so hard his cheeks hollowed. The crawling tingles exploded into blinding bolts of lightning that shocked Rory with their force. He shouted Owen’s name as his body ripped apart and scattered throughout the stratosphere. Owen didn’t let go, didn’t stop through that moment of pure, mindless bliss. He stayed with him, strong and protective, and carried him gently back to earth -- spent, sated, and speechless.

Owen slid his arms behind Rory’s back and dropped his head on Rory’s stomach. Rory had yet to detangle his fingers from Owen’s hair, couldn’t command any part of his body to move. He could only focus on the slowing aftershocks of the best orgasm of his life.

“I can’t believe how fucking good you taste,” Owen said with a note of awe in his voice.

“Share,” Rory said.

Owen crawled up Rory’s torso and kissed him open mouthed. His abdomen tightened when he tasted himself on Owen’s tongue. Need fluttered through his insides and Rory wanted more. Wanted everything. He pulled back, looked into those beautiful brown eyes and whispered, “I want you to fuck me.”

Owen’s eyes widened, desire and trepidation danced a slow waltz in their depths, his lips parted and his mouth worked silently. “I--” He lowered and raised his gaze. “I don’t know...what to do.”

Rory’s heart clenched at the admission. All these years he’d been pining for Owen while Owen had been waiting for him. Rory took Owen’s lips in a demanding, impassioned kiss. He didn’t really know what he was doing either, but he would do everything he could to make sure their first experience together was perfect. He pulled back slowly, nipping gently at Owen’s lips, and cupped Owen’s face in both hands. Smooth skin and rough stubble under his palm a pleasant contrast. “Don’t worry.” He smiled. “I know.”

Owen’s brow furrowed. “How do you know?”

“Gay porn, dude.”

Owen laughed and leaned his cheek into Rory’s hand. “Figures.” The nervous tension that had bunched in his best friend’s shoulders eased.

“Don’t suppose you have a condom, eh?”

Owen shook his head and Rory didn’t miss the fleeting shadow of disappointment that crossed over his features. He ruffled Owen’s spiky locks. “Let me up.”

He laughed when Owen smacked his ass as he stood to gather his jeans.

“What are you doing?” Owen asked, pulling himself up onto the couch and stretching out on his side to watch, head rested on his hand.

“What does every responsible college locker room for horny athletes have?”

Owen cracked a sly smile. “A condom dispenser.”

“Bingo, baby!” Rory winced inwardly at the total porn star dialogue, but paused when he saw the way Owen looked at him. The same way he’d looked at Rory in every single dream that had featured the only man he ever longed for -- with love and longing. A flush of heat spread over his skin.

Rory cleared his throat and pulled his gaze from Owen. Mission renewed, he dug into his jeans pockets, pulling out coins and tossing them onto the coffee table until he counted out enough to buy a condom and a pillow packet of lube. He gathered the money and raced to the showers, where there were dispensers for soap and shampoo, Band-Aids and ointments, lotions to cool or heat strained muscles -- and most important of all, condoms. Rory’s hands shook as he shoved the coins into the slot, pressed the correct buttons, collected his prizes, and ran back to where Owen waited.

He came up short when he saw Owen stretched out on the black leather couch. Golden skin glistened with a light sheen of sweat, defined lean muscle wrapped artistically around dense bone, sun-bleached hair dusted long legs that were made for running, a thick cock rose straight and proud from a course thatch of hair. Lips swollen from kissing, and eyes glazed with lust and desire. Rory’s knees just about buckled and his chest swelled.

Owen Harris was his. Finally.

“Good God, you’re beautiful,” he said. A pink flush colored Owen’s cheeks.

Rory dropped the two small packets on the table and knelt down at the end of the couch, before Owen’s feet. He clasped his hands over Owen’s ankles and leaned over to kiss the top of one foot and then the other. Mouth and tongue followed hands and fingers as Rory worked his way up Owen’s legs. He traced every dip and groove and expanse of skin and muscle and bone that made up the gorgeous man spread out before him. He continued his journey until he reached the sharp line where hip and thigh met groin. Rory slid one hand under Owen’s ass, while the other lightly covered his rock solid erection. Owen moaned

and pushed into Rory's palm, wanting more.

Rory licked at Owen's balls with the flat of his tongue, and breathed in the musky male scent that sent a spike of desire shooting up his center. He sucked one ball into his mouth and rolled it while Owen writhed beneath him, mumbling incoherently. He released it to give the other ball equal treatment, and then licked up the length of Owen's shaft to the leaking tip. The bittersweet taste that was all Owen trickled over his tongue and down his throat, and Rory knew he would be addicted to that flavor for the rest of his life.

Rory opened up and swallowed down that thick, velvet-covered cock until it bumped up at the back of his throat and he had to make a hasty retreat. Obviously deep-throating was a practiced skill, and damn if he wasn't looking forward to practicing as often and long as possible to perfect it. He smiled and chuckled with his mouth full of Owen, which caused Owen to clench his hands into Rory's hair and thrust up into his mouth.

"Yeah, Rory," he panted. "Yeah."

Rory hummed a response that drew a full-bodied shudder from Owen and gave Rory a sense of power, knowing he could give such pleasure to his best friend. He was the one able to reduce Owen to a babbling bowl of jell-O. Reveling in this new-found discovery, Rory continued to work Owen with his mouth and tongue and slight graze of teeth until Owen began to tense.

"Ror..." he groaned.

Rory released him with a pop and crawled on top of Owen to claim his lips in a bruising kiss. Owen immediately opened to him and their tongues fought for control. The need for each other once again escalated to panic level. Rory couldn't wait any longer. Every part of his body cried out for Owen.

Rory broke the battling kiss and reached over for their supplies. He rolled back to Owen and gruffly commanded, "Get me ready."

Owen took the packets with a shaky hand as they readjusted themselves. Rory stretched out on his back. Owen knelt between Rory's legs and pulled them to rest over his thighs. He looked down at Rory with questioning eyes.

"Cover your fingers with the lube, then slowly work around and into my hole. Start with just one and add more as the muscle relaxes. Then lube yourself up and take me."

"You learned this from watching porn?" Owen's expression shifted from uncertainty to amusement. "That's *so* not romantic."

Heat spread over his cheeks. "Shut up."

Owen gently traced the line of Rory's jaw with his fingertips, and then his teasing smile

faded. He worried his lower lip and with single-minded focus, looked down and tentatively pressed one finger against Rory's sensitive opening. The unfamiliar sensation sent a rush of goose bumps over his skin and drew a moan of pleasure from his throat. Owen worked him with a reverence and gentleness that flooded every corner of Rory's body with an overwhelming sense of belonging. He was no longer nervous, no longer afraid. This was Owen. The man he loved his whole life.

"Now, Owen," he said, his voice ragged with need. "Now."

Owen fumbled with the condom wrapper for a moment, then with a frustrated huff gave up and tossed onto Rory's chest. "Fingers are too slippery."

Rory opened the packet, slowly rolled the latex down Owen's straining length, and then held him in his hands. Burning into his memory what he would soon feel inside his body. Owen closed a hand over Rory's and their gazes locked in a moment of silent communication. Rory nodded his head once and let his hands fall away to rest on Owen's thighs. Owen shifted to line himself up. "Here we go, baby."

Owen looked down to where his cock pressed at Rory's entrance and held still. Anticipation built into narrowed, biting focus. There was only Rory and Owen and the matching beat of their racing hearts, and the harsh, rapid breaths that echoed in a room that had closed and wrapped around them with the weight of a heavy blanket. Nothing beyond existed.

"I don't know if I'll fit, Ror." Owen's whole body trembled. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You will and you won't, O. I promise. Just...just go. God, I need to feel you."

Owen squeezed his eyes shut and a long growl rose from deep within his chest as he pushed inside one slow inch by one slow inch. Rory felt the stretch of muscle, the slight burn and discomfort of invasion, and then a flooding wave of sweet, eye-watering pleasure as his body opened and Owen filled him completely. And two became one.

"Oh. My. God. Ror." Owen's voice a jagged whisper. "You feel incredible. So fucking tight and hot and...oh...God. I think I'm going to come right now."

"Don't you dare." Rory reached up for Owen's neck and tugged him down. The second their lips met, he rocked his hips up and gasped into Owen's mouth as the angle shifted and Owen rode over Rory's prostate. Every single nerve ending in his body ignited.

"Oh... God..."

Owen slid almost all the way out, and slowly pushed back. Rory matched Owen's movements and they settled into a steady, pounding rhythm that gained speed and force with each thrust until Rory's whole body sang with the exhilarating rush of Owen's taking, claiming -- loving. He always knew making love with Owen would be amazing, but the sheer perfection of it almost overwhelmed him. A gasp escaped his throat that



sounded dangerously close to a sob.

Owen broke their kiss and stared down at Rory with fire in his eyes. He took Rory in hand, and pulled and twisted Rory's cock in time with every hard, deep plunge into his body as they raced to crescendo together.

"I'm gonna... Ror... I..." Owen panted, his rhythm faltered and body jerked. Rory had never seen his best friend look more beautiful than right there in that moment, with his eyes squeezed shut and lips parted, buried so deep inside Rory's body he didn't think they'd ever come apart. "Holy God, Rory!" Owen shouted so loud Rory knew his ears would still be ringing the next morning. Before the last echo of Owen's roar faded in the team locker room, Rory's orgasm caught him by surprise and charged through his body with lightning speed, exploding in hot, wet strikes across his stomach. Sparks danced before his eyes, temporarily blinding him.

Owen carefully pulled out and collapsed on top of Rory in a boneless sweaty heaving heap, and Rory cherished the weight of his best friend, his lover, covering him. He threaded his fingers through Owen's hair as their breathing and pulses steadily throttled back.

"I can't believe we just did that," Owen mumbled against Rory's cheek.

"I can't believe it took us so long."

"We're both total idiots, you know."

"Yeah." Rory said. "And we totally deserve each other."

Owen chuckled and then said, "Will you move back in now?"

"No."

Owen fell silent and Rory felt the smile slip from his face. He gave Owen a playful shove. "You're moving in with me because you're too damn loud for us to share the dorm. We'd be kicked out in a week."

This time the silence that swirled around them was laced with pure contentment and a sense that all was right in the world.

"I did mean it," Owen said. "I love you."

Rory hugged him tighter to his chest and nuzzled his nose into Owen's hair. "I love you too," he whispered into Owen's ear. "I've always loved you."

~ Touchdown ~

### **About L.C. Chase**

Artist by day, author by night, L.C. Chase is a hopeless romantic and adventure seeker. Many of those adventures are fodder for her stories. The first time she left home, she traveled 1200 miles to California -- to be a rock star -- with two hundred dollars in her pocket. A four-year walkabout took her on a coast-to-coast back roads tour of the USA, across both of New Zealand's islands by bicycle, and a short road trip in Australia. Now that L.C. has two of the coolest nephews on the planet, she calls the Canadian West Coast home. When not writing, L.C. can be found reading, drawing, horseback riding, or running the trails with her goofy Australian Shepherd, who, if he were human, would be a stand-up comedian.

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