



PLAYING THE FIELD
SERVED!



J. M. SNYDER

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...The sand is still hot from the heat of the day. It slips between Colby's toes, the bottoms of his feet and the sole of his sandals, fine grit he has to shake off every few steps to keep it from chafing.

He doesn't get far before Van stops behind him. Their interlaced hands stretch taut between them, then Colby stumbles back, turning to laugh at his new friend. Van's arms come up around him, hemming him in; Colby finds himself in a tight embrace, one he's imagined all evening. With his forehead pressed against Van's, he stands a few inches taller than Van and has to look down into those mercurial eyes. "Hey," he whispers.

"Hey yourself." Van's eyes slip closed and Colby's heart hammers in his chest, his ears. He waits, not daring to shut his own eyes and miss the moment. Van angles his chin up until it brushes alongside Colby's cheek, then he turns ever so slightly and his lips touch Colby's in a barely-there kiss.

The faint press of Van's mouth on his nearly takes Colby's breath away.

So soft, those lips. After their first taste, they part to take Colby's lower lip between them, and he feels Van's teeth nibble gently. He tastes the beer, and salt from the pretzels they had at the bar. Van's arms tighten around Colby, hips jutting out to thrust the front of his cut-off jeans against Colby's shorts. There's no mistaking the hardness at Van's crotch—it rubs against Colby's own erection, warming the cloth that separates them. His lips open, forcing Colby to do the same, and Van's tongue licks into him, hungry. "Please," Van sighs before Colby kisses the word from him...

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BY

J. M. SNYDER

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It's a little after nine o'clock Friday evening and the seaside bar known the Oasis is just beginning to rock. A restaurant with outside seating, the Oasis sits on a pier off Wildwood's boardwalk, overlooking the Atlantic. Tonight twenty-five year old Colby Johnson sits on a hard stool at one end of the bar, nursing a cold draft and watching the moonlight flicker off the waves in the distance. Halogen lights hold back the night like a blanket suspended above the bar's patio, but beyond the short steps that lead down to the shore, the ocean mutters, dark and restless. Despite the crowd that's begun to trickle into the O, Colby stares out past the lights and feels the tension in his shoulders drain away.

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He just stopped in for a drink after his shift—he works on the boardwalk, at a pitching booth just off Morey's Pier, where he beguiles tourists with his winning smile. One dollar buys three multi-colored hackee sacks, those little footbags filled with tiny plastic pellets, and the object of the game is to pitch at least one of them into the wide neck of a fishbowl. It's harder than it looks—most nights Colby has to deal with any number of irate gamblers who swear they can pitch like Nolan Ryan, though they can't seem to land a little sack into a bowl at ten yards. They overthrow and blame him (like it's his fault). They say the game is rigged (it's not). They bitch and moan until he threatens to call the cops, which he had to do tonight. Some big hard-ass wanted to fight, but Colby doesn't get paid enough to argue. It's a summer job to him, and a stupid game to boot.

And it was only a dollar. Jesus. Colby shakes his head as he swigs down his beer. *You'd think I robbed that jerk blind the way he carried on.*

But it's over. With a deep breath, Colby lets the memory go. It is summer—Wildwood is a tourist town full of transients this time of the year, and Colby knows he'll never see the fellow again.

True, he agrees, his thoughts bitter. *Only tomorrow it'll be someone else, just as tough, looking to impress a girl and getting pissy with me when he ain't all that.*

Well, at least he's off work tomorrow, but he won't be relaxing. He's entered the Wildwood Beach Volleyball Tournament, which starts at eight A.M. sharp. So why's he here at the O, downing another brew? He needs to get some sleep, prepare himself for the game, get in the zone...

Another full mug appears on the bar before him as if by magic. He looks up and sees his cousin Megan, her cropped sandy hair a

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tumble of curls above her heart-shaped face. Dropping her chin, she peers at him over the top of her small, rectangular eyeglasses and says, “You better be on your game tomorrow, Col. I’m not playing alone out there.”

“I’ve got your back.” Colby gives her a wink that makes her laugh. It’s a bright sound, infectious, drawing from him the first genuine smile of the night. “This’ll be my last, I promise. Don’t you stay out too late, either.”

“I’m at work,” she reminds him as she wipes away a ring of condensation from the bar. Then her gaze flickers past his shoulder and her grin dissolves. “Uh-oh. Bimbo at two o’clock.”

Before Colby can turn to see who she means, a warm hand touches his shoulder. The next thing he knows, a busty blonde is sliding onto the barstool next to his, her smile dazzling. Colby gets a good look at those bright, white teeth and the nimbus of bleached blonde hair haloed above them, then soft breasts press against his arm. With a breathy sigh, the woman purrs, “Buy a girl a drink?”

Colby motions to Megan, who already has a fruity margarita in hand. She sets it on the bar a little too forcefully, sloshing it a bit. This time, she doesn’t bother wiping the mess away. Instead, she busies herself with straightening the glasses behind the bar, obviously waiting to hear what she knows is coming. Even if she isn’t facing him, Colby knows she’s struggling not to grin. This isn’t the first woman to approach him at the O.

As the newcomer sips at the margarita, Colby tells her, “Drink up, sweetie. It’s the only one you’re likely to get from me. I hate to be the one to tell you this, but...” He spreads his arm out, gently nudging her back with his elbow. Then he gives her his own stellar smile, the one that draws the tourists to his booth night after night. “I’m gay.”

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Behind the bar, Megan snickers. Satisfied, she flounces away, heading for a customer who signals for a refill.

Unperturbed, the woman beside Colby shrugs. "Oh, I know, honey. I called it from across the room."

Now Colby looks at her. The smile has been toned down, replaced with something a little more humane. High cheekbones, pert nose, warm eyes that seem to sparkle with a secret of their own. The blonde hair is just windblown, not teased, its color from the sun, not a bottle. A white puca shell choker accentuates the hollow of her throat. Now that she isn't shoving her boobs into him, she leans back against the bar, savoring her drink, her eyes assessing him.

He doesn't get it. "Then why...?"

Her gaze shifts and she nods out into the crowd. "See the blond dude over there?" she asks, pointing with the stirrer from her drink. "Big guy, broad shoulders, tight white tee? Up against the railing?"

Colby turns, intrigued. This is Wildwood in early August—just about everyone fits that description. But as he looks around, he knows exactly who she means. The guy is Colby's age, maybe a year or two younger, and leans on the railing like he sees something out in the darkness that interests him much more than the usual O crowd. As Colby watches, the guy turns and flashes him the same sexy smile he last saw on the woman beside him a moment ago. On her, it was pretty, but on him? *Hot damn.*

"My brother, Van." The woman sticks out a hand for Colby to shake, which he does without comment. "I'm Vallery. We're twins. And can I just say he's had his eye on you since you came in?"

As she finishes her drink, Vallery gets the scoop on Colby. Where he works, what he likes, where he went to school...she asks

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more questions than most online dating sites he's tried. He offers her a second margarita but she shakes her head, pushing away from the bar. "Order a Sam Adams," she says, slipping off the barstool. "That's Van's favorite. I'll send him over."

Apparently, Colby has passed her test. He signals Megan for two beers and turns to watch Vallery weave through the crowd to her brother's side. She touches Van's back, then sidles up to him so he can hear her over the music and the noise. Whatever she says makes him look up and, from across the patio, his gaze meets Colby's.

Colby raises his mug and nods. As a slow smile eases across Van's face, Colby's whole body flushes with sudden lust. This evening suddenly got a *lot* more interesting.

Two bottles clank onto the bar in front of Colby, who turns to find his cousin glaring at him. "You know we play tomorrow," she says.

Colby laughs. "I haven't even met the guy yet, Meg. Chill out."

With one hand on her hip, she warns, "Well, I don't plan on losing. I'll cut off your booze if I have to."

"Megan!" Colby shakes his head, grinning. "I've been gearing up for this damn tournament all summer, same as you. Don't threaten me. I'm a big boy. I can handle myself."

Her gaze flickers over his shoulder and she scowls. "Yeah, but can you handle *him*?"

This time when a warm hand claps him on the back, Colby's expecting it. He turns and finds himself face to face with Vander Byron. "*Don't tell him I told you that,*" Vallery warned earlier. "*He hates his full name. Just call him Van.*"

"Hey," Van says, one corner of his mouth rising in a sexy smirk. His gaze drops to take in Colby, a sweeping once-over that

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leaves Colby feeling giddy. This close, Van's eyes are a pale color—green? grey?—so translucent, they seem to reflect the lights shining above the bar. His blond hair is trimmed short on the sides and back but left thick in the front, hanging in wavy bangs that fall to one side of his face. Every now and then he shakes his head to the left in a poor attempt at trying to push those bangs out of his eyes.

Colby's hand clenches around the bottle before him, his fingers numbing over the cold glass. His other hand rests on the pocket of his shorts where his keys bulge; his fist closes over the keys, holding tight as he stares into those washed-out eyes. He wants to brush that errant hair aside, tuck it behind Van's ear, and he knows if he moves forward to do just that, nothing will stop him from leaning in closer until he falls right into the man beside him. His voice sounds breathy to his own ears as he sighs, "Hey yourself. Thirsty? I bought you a drink."

"Sam Adams," Van says with a grin. "My favorite. How'd you know?"

Van's laugh is deeper than his sister's. Colby feels it in his head, his chest, his dick. It curls through him like warm milk, settling somewhere just above his groin, where a steady throb has begun to pulse in time with his heart. Van eases onto the barstool beside Colby and, for a brief moment, his hips thrust forward as he steps up, pushing his crotch against Colby. Something hard and uncompromising hides in the front of those cut-off jeans—it brushes over Colby's hand that still holds his keys, and he relaxes just enough to trace the outline of Van's budding erection with his knuckle.

His barely-there touch makes Van's smile brighten. "I'm Van."

"I know." Colby takes a quick swig of his beer, embarrassed. "I

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mean—I'm sorry. I'm Colby, but I'm sure you already know that. Does your sister often screen guys for you?"

"Nah, man." Van dips his head down, hiding behind that wavy hair, but Colby sees the color pinking his cheeks and grins. So cute, this one. Same nose as his sister, same wide smile, same expressive eyes. Colby bends a little to peek up under those bangs and notices a dimple on Van's left cheek. Yes, he decides. *Damn* cute.

Van sees him looking and busies himself with his own bottle of beer to buy himself some time. "We have the same taste in men. I wasn't the only one checking you out when you came in." He brushes his bangs aside to meet Colby's gaze, smoothing the waves of hair behind his ear, but the moment his hand is gone, they spring back. "In Philly there's really no need to do a bait and switch like that, but you got to be careful here. She called it right away—she has wicked keen gaydar—but hey, her loss is my gain."

"Philly?" Colby frowns—he's not one for tourists. "So you're not from around here?"

With a disarming grin, Van says, "Val lives in Wildwood Crest. She says you work on the boards. Are you just here for the season?"

"I'm not a shubie, if that's what you mean." Colby uses the local term for *tourist* so Van knows he lives in Wildwood.

Van slides forward on his stool, pressing his bare knees against Colby's upper thigh. One rests on the fabric of his shorts but the other touches his skin and he feels giddy all over again. Boldly Colby lets his hand drop from the keys in his pocket down his thigh, to his knee, then over to Van's knee. Pale hair stands up like peach fuzz beneath his palm. When Van doesn't move away, Colby dares to rub a little higher, to the hem of Van's cut-offs,

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then down again to settle on his knee.

Oh, hell yes. He takes another swallow of ale. All the weariness he felt when he first wandered into the O off his shift is gone now, replaced with a humming desire that trills through him like electricity through wire. Leaning a little on Van's knee, Colby props his other arm up on the bar and rests his chin in his hand, his eyes focused on the man beside him. "So," he murmurs, accentuating his words with a squeeze on Van's knee. "You visit your sister often?"

Van winks, a gesture so quick, Colby almost thinks he imagined it. "I'm always looking for a good excuse to come down the shore."

* * *

Three beers later, Van has scooted his bar stool closer and turned his knees out so his hip rests alongside Colby's. The distance between them is gone; Colby's hand now rests high up on Van's thigh and he toys with the frayed fringe on Van's pocket, his fingers dangerously close to Van's crotch. Every now and then his pinkie finger touches the bulge at the front of Van's jeans, which looks like nothing more than the curve of his zipper, but Colby feels the hardness sheathed there and knows he isn't the only one sporting wood.

Van leans back against the bar, his cheek resting on his shoulder as he laughs at something Colby says. Bar lights flash in his eyes like stars and his lips glisten where he's licked them a time or two. His bangs fall casually to the side. His laughter ignites the night.

Colby's no longer hesitant—he reaches out, brushes back that

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curtain of curls, and twines one corkscrew around his forefinger. His whole body buzzes with booze and lust. Time has slowed to a crawl, and with each minute that trickles by, his hand moves closer to the promise coiled in Van's shorts. Without looking away from his new friend, he signals for another beer.

When the drinks arrive, the bottles slam down on the bar. The sound jolts them upright, startling them. Van grabs Colby's wrist and holds it against his thigh as if to keep it from disappearing. He gives Colby a furrowed look, then frowns at Megan, who glares at them from the other side of the bar. "This is it," she snaps. "Drink up."

As she storms away, Van stares warily at the bottle. "What's her problem?"

Colby admits, "That's my cousin. She'd rather I was home and in bed already." When Van waggles his eyebrow, Colby clarifies, "Alone."

"Where's the fun in that?" Van's pout disappears when he raises the bottle to his lips. He takes a long swallow, then sets it back on the bar, half empty. "What is she, your mother? Can't you have a little fun now and then?"

"Big day tomorrow." Colby sips at his beer, torn. Meg's right, he needs his sleep. But Van is charming and cute, his hands so warm where they rest on Colby's body. All summer long, it's been the pitching booth and volleyball—no time for himself, no time for fun. *No time for this*, he thinks, daring to poke at the erection straining the front of Van's shorts. With a glance at the clock above the bar, he makes himself a deal. *It's just after eleven now. Another hour and I'll get his number before heading home.* It takes less than ten minutes to walk from the boardwalk to the duplex apartment he shares with Megan, so if he leaves at midnight, he'll

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still get a good seven hours' sleep before he has to be at the tournament in the morning.

Seven hours. Hell, he lived on less than that his whole senior year at Rutgers. If he leaves at midnight, he'll still be on his game tomorrow.

Van touches his face, one forefinger tracing the curve of Colby's jaw. "Where'd you go, sexy? I lost you."

Colby lunges as he fakes a bite at that finger. "I'm right here. You want to go someplace a little more...I don't know, private?"

Van's eyes widen, as does his smile. "Where do you have in mind?"

"The beach." Colby nods past the bar at the exit gate, which leads down a short flight of wooden steps to the shore. One of the O's employees stands guard, a tough-looking guy with a buzz cut whose tattooed arms are crossed before a barrel chest as he stands beside a sign that reads *No Alcohol Beyond This Point*. Van glances at the guy, then back at Colby, his eyes alight. Colby prompts, "You want?"

Throwing back the rest of his beer, Van purrs, "Lead the way."

Colby leaves a twenty on the bar for the drinks, then takes Van's hand in his to pull him off the bar stool and into the crowd. Together they bump through the bodies blocking their way to the exit, Colby in front, Van's fingers curled warmly around his. At the gate Colby flashes the O guy a grin, which isn't returned, but since they left their beers at the bar, they're waved through.

The moment Colby steps out, he feels a cool breeze across his face, lifting the sandy hair from his brow. Though the O's patio is open to the elements, the press of the crowd had kept him from feeling the wind before, or hearing the soft surf crash against the shore. The sound soothes him now, calming his racing heart, and

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the alcohol in his veins seems to ebb and flow with the tide. At this late hour, the moon shines like a bright sliver high above them, a scuttle of gray clouds scurrying across its face. The beach is dark, illuminated only by the scant moon above and its ephemeral reflection on the churning waves in the distance. The tide line is a good mile from the O's pier, the sand heavy and thick to walk through, and still hot from the heat of the day. It slips between Colby's toes, the bottoms of his feet and the sole of his sandals, fine grit he has to shake off every few steps to keep it from chafing.

He doesn't get far before Van stops behind him. Their interlaced hands stretch taut between them, then Colby stumbles back, turning to laugh at his new friend. Van's arms come up around him, hemming him in; Colby finds himself in a tight embrace, one he's imagined all evening. With his forehead pressed against Van's, he stands a few inches taller than Van and has to look down into those mercurial eyes. "Hey," he whispers.

"Hey yourself." Van's eyes slip closed and Colby's heart hammers in his chest, his ears. He waits, not daring to shut his own eyes and miss the moment. Van angles his chin up until it brushes alongside Colby's cheek, then he turns ever so slightly and his lips touch Colby's in a barely-there kiss.

The faint press of Van's mouth on his nearly takes Colby's breath away.

So soft, those lips. After their first taste, they part to take Colby's lower lip between them, and he feels Van's teeth nibble gently. He tastes the beer, and salt from the pretzels they had at the bar. Van's arms tighten around Colby, hips jutting out to thrust the front of his cut-off jeans against Colby's shorts. There's no mistaking the hardness at Van's crotch—it rubs against Colby's

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own erection, warming the cloth that separates them. His lips open, forcing Colby to do the same, and Van's tongue licks into him, hungry. "Please," Van sighs before Colby kisses the word from him.

A loud laugh behind Van reminds Colby they're close to the Oasis, probably *too* close. Someone with a seat near the edge of the patio might be enjoying the view they offer, and Colby isn't one to put on a show. He rubs down Van's arms and plucks Van's hands from his hips as he takes a step back. Another, and a third, and one more to distance himself, trying to pull away from the sexy man before him whose divine kisses taste like ambrosia itself...

Van doesn't let him get far. Instead of breaking their kiss, he follows Colby into the shadows, away from the patio and its noisy crowds, away from the neon lights stuttering on the boardwalk, away from the tourists and games and rides. The beach is dark and quiet, a place where the two of them can be alone for a moment. *Have to be home by midnight*, Colby reminds himself, but the thought conjures up an image of Cinderella racing home from the ball, her gown deteriorating into rags as she runs, and he snickers against Van's lips.

Colby feels Van smile as he asks, "What?"

"Nothing." Colby kisses the corner of Van's mouth. When he glances down, he can't see the watch on his wrist and knows he'll probably miss his own self-imposed curfew. Ah well. There's no way he's stopping now. Leading Van another few steps onto the beach, he asks, "This private enough for you?"

"Perfect." Van's hand is warm in his. "If you'll just stop running away from me."

With a laugh, Colby backs up farther. "I'm not running away. I'm getting out of sight."

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“Afraid your cousin might watch?” Van teases.

“What about your sister?” Colby shoots back. He stumbles another step, tripping over the sand, and grabs Van’s wrist to keep from falling.

Strong hands clasp his upper arms, holding him. “Careful,” Van warns. Then he returns to Colby’s question, only partially asked in jest. “She’s already moved on, I’m sure. Found someone else to take her home tonight.”

Colby laughs. “I’m not *that* easy to forget.”

Van moves closer, his body brushing along Colby’s, his hands smoothing up Colby’s arms. His touch gives Colby goose bumps and he shivers in the stiff breeze blowing off the waves. As Van leans in, Colby sees the moon above reflected in those pale eyes of his, giving them a preternatural glow. Warm breath fans his cheek, heady with hops. Even in the darkness, Colby can see the shape Van’s lips make when he mouths the words, “Show me.”

Colby tries to be cute by taking one final step back—this is a battle of wills here, and he doesn’t want Van to think he’s easy. But his heel lands on something hard and brittle, a piece of driftwood maybe, or the discarded shell of a horseshoe crab. Whatever it is cracks beneath his weight, startling him. With a small gasp he grabs for Van as he sidesteps the object, but his feet get tangled together and he finds himself falling to the sand. His hands fist in Van’s shirt sleeves, pulling them along with him as he falls. “What the hell?”

Laughter pierces the night as Van shrugs out of his shirt, letting it fall along with Colby. He lands with a thud on his ass and scurries back, away from whatever he stepped on. In the night, the sand looks white, sculpted into waves by the wind, and Colby can’t see anything where he’d been standing. Above him, Van stands

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with arms akimbo, his bare chest darker than the white shirt now draped across Colby's lap. "Look to me like you're still running away."

Tossing the shirt aside, Colby jokes, "I'm getting comfortable. Want to join me?"

Without a word, Van drops to the sand before Colby. There's a smolder in his eyes that burns away the alcohol fuzzed around Colby's brain, a look of hunger that speaks of a need only Colby can fulfill. As he watches, Van crawls toward him, between Colby's raised knees, one hand on the ground at either side of Colby's waist as he moves over him. Colby's legs drop to the sand in submission and Van crawls closer, climbing atop Colby. His left hand finds a spot by Colby's head; his left knee rests alongside Colby's thigh, the weight of his body hovering over Colby's like a promise. His right hand comes up beside Colby's head, his right leg moving up into place. He leans forward, touches his lips to Colby's mouth, then rocks back and sits squarely on the bulge at Colby's groin.

Colby grunts in pleasure and writhes beneath Van. "Please."

"Touch me," Van commands.

Colby obeys, running his hands up over the thin muscles that line Van's tanned arms, over his shoulders to cradle his neck, under the silver chain that dangles from his throat, down the firm planes of his chest. Colby thumbs Van's nipples, both at the same time, eliciting a delighted hiss from the man above him. Down farther, he traces the taut muscles of Van's abdomen, fingering his navel, then finally finding the snap at waistband of his denim shorts. Without urging, Colby pops open the snap and the zipper opens beneath the weight of Van's cock as it strains the front of his crotch.

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Then Van's mouth covers Colby's. There's an urgency between them, as if this is the last night of summer vacation and they have only a few minutes to draw it out forever. Expertly Van kisses Colby, pinning him back to the sand as their bodies move against each other. Colby dips his hand into Van's open zipper and isn't the least surprised to find Van wears nothing under the shorts. A heavy dick falls into Colby's palm like steel wrapped in velvet, nestled in a bed of downy hair. The rasp of Colby's fingers along Van's skin is muffled by the crush of their bodies.

Van's attention turns to Colby's neck. He kisses down Colby's jaw to his ear, then licks behind it as Colby gasps his name. Van humps into Colby's hand, his hips moving in quick little thrusts that thrill them both. With his free hand, Colby tugs down the front of his own shorts and grabs his hard dick through the jock strap he wears. It takes some finagling, but he manages to pull the jock down enough to let his erection swing free. His balls ache where the strap on his underwear cuts across them—they pulse in time with his heart and the material feels like a hand around them, squeezing, kneading, egging him toward release.

“Yes,” he sighs as Van burrows into his neck. Tiny kisses flick over Colby's collar bone and along his throat. He thrusts against Van, eager in his need. “Yes.”

Another kiss silences him. When he rubs his cock alongside Van's, his gasp of lust is lost in Van's hot mouth. The two hump against each other with a rhythm that matches the pounding surf, Colby's hands ringed around their twin lengths, his fingers smeared with pre-cum. He plucks at the tip of his dick, giving it a little tweak, then does the same to Van's. Above him, Van shudders and rocks, his kisses sloppy as he moves faster. “God,” he breathes, and “yes,” and “uh uh uh yeah,” a litany that echoes

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through Colby's head in time with the waves against the shore.

Colby feels Van's cock shudder in his hand two seconds before his palm fills with sticky ejaculate. The orgasm triggers his own, and his lower belly warms beneath the mingled juices. For a moment Van rests above him, spent, his weight cloying as it traps Colby against the sand. "Gah," Van sighs, unable to speak. He tries to kiss Colby and settles for a half-hearted buss along the cheek. "Fuck yeah."

Rolling Van aside, Colby scoots out from under him. Hands slick, he tugs at his shirt in an effort to get it off without touching it. At least it had rucked up while they frothed—jism dribbles on Colby's stomach and pubic mound, leaving his shirt clean. Quickly he tugs down his shorts, kicking them away as he picks the jock strap out of his balls. That follows suit, and he rolls onto his belly to wiggle free of the shirt. Sand sticks to his hands and stomach but at least he's naked. A warm hand curves over one fleshy buttock as Van sidles closer to him. "God," he sighs, a bit more coherent this time, "do you have an ass on you."

With a laugh, Colby pushes himself up off the sand as he stands. "You want a piece of it?"

Van's gaze drifts up, up, *up*, over Colby's nude body to finally reach his face. "Oh, please," he whimpers. "Dude, you don't even know..."

Flexing his toes, Colby sends a little spray of sand in Van's direction. "That's the second date. If we get that far."

"We will," Van promises.

Colby grins as he heads for the waves to clean off.

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The next morning when Colby stumbles down the stairs into their kitchen, disheveled and yawning, he swears he can still feel sand grate in sensitive spots he'd rather not think of at that early hour. On the landing he stops to adjust his boxers, taking a moment to scratch his balls, when he hears his cousin make a disgusting noise. "Ugh, Colby! You're practically naked."

"Am not," he murmurs, stifling another yawn as he rubs his hands over his bare chest. True, he's not wearing *much*, but the boxers count for something.

He opens an eye and squints at Megan, who stands by the kitchen sink already dressed in her volleyball outfit, a pair of tight biker shorts and what looks like a sports bra, both black with bright teal accents. She's rubbing suntan oil liberally over her arms and a pair of wraparound sunglasses sit atop her head, holding back her hair. Wrinkling her nose, she runs her gaze over him once to let him know she's displeased, then looks away. "What time did you get in last night?" she asks. Though her voice is calm, her anger comes through in the vicious squirt of the bottle of oil she's applying. "I'm surprised you're even up at this hour."

"I got a game to play." Shuffling down the last few steps, Colby hikes up his boxers and heads for the fridge. Inside he grabs the carton of milk, shakes it to make sure it isn't empty, then swigs it back. Without a word, Megan pitches the oil at him, the bottle striking his arm as he takes a second drink. "What? It's the last of it."

"You're disgusting." She glares at her hands as she slathers her flat stomach with oil. The kitchen smells faintly of coconuts and sunshine. "You have ten minutes to get dressed and be ready to leave so I wouldn't eat anything if I were you. Can you get my back?"

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She turns and points in case he doesn't know what she's talking about.

"I got your back," Colby mutters, but he retrieves the bottle of oil from the floor and complies. Her skin is dry and warm, and she watches him over her shoulder as he works. He puts on a tight smile. She's in a mood today, he knows, partly because of his antics last night, true, but he suspects most of it is just nerves. Softly, he tells her, "Relax, Meg. The main thing today is to have fun."

For a moment he doesn't think she'll answer. Then she lets out a breath she's been holding and seems to deflate. She leans against the sink and picks at the dish towel drying on the edge. "I know, I know. It's just a game. But it'd be nice to place, wouldn't it?"

Colby's grin widens. "I could do a lot with a thousand bucks."

The top three teams in the tournament get cash prizes, the overall winner taking home \$2,000. Megan and Colby already decided they'd split whatever they won right down the middle—beach volleyball is played with teams of two, and theirs is an equal partnership. Megan's hell on the net and Colby's great with assists, always there when she needs him and she knows it. Her anxiety over the coming game play just has her on edge, is all. He squirts a little more oil into his palms and massages her shoulders, trying to loosen her up.

She shrugs him off. "You need to be getting ready. Did you have fun last night?"

Leaning back against the sink, Colby rubs the remaining oil into his own hands and up his arms. "With Van?" He recalls the heated coupling on the beach and can't stop his grin from threatening to split his face. "Hell, yeah. He was something else, wasn't he?"

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“He was cute,” Megan agrees. “I’ll give you that. Where’d you two run off to?”

“Just down the beach.” When Colby closes his eyes, he still feels Van above him and imagines he can taste their kisses on the back of his tongue.

His cousin steps up beside him and purrs into his ear, “Must’ve been good. You’re sporting wood.”

Her words are a cold blanket tossed onto his ardor, dousing it. Surprised, he staggers back, away from her, then glares as she giggles at his reaction. “Megan!” He grabs the dish towel off the sink and holds it to his crotch, hiding the front of his paper-thin boxers from her view. “Jeez, you would look.”

“Go get dressed,” she says. “You going to see him again?”

Colby shrugs, keeping the dish towel in place until she looks away. “Yeah, around. I guess.”

With an exasperated sigh, Megan shakes her head. “*Boys*. You guess?”

“I didn’t get his number or anything,” Colby admits, “but he knows you’re my cousin, so he’ll just stop by the O. Girls make things too complicated. If he wants me, he knows how to find me.”

Megan glances at the clock above the sink. “Your ten minutes are almost up. You need to get ready—”

“So turn around and stop looking at my dick.”

Megan gasps, shocked. “I’m not!”

But her gaze dips below his waist and he laughs. A thin color rises in her cheeks, pinking them, and she turns in a huff, arms crossed, mad again. Colby waits a moment to make sure she won’t turn back before he tosses the dish rag in the sink. In a pouty voice, she mutters, “I’m not looking at any *part* of you for the rest of the day.”

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“Good thing you’re on the front row then,” Colby points out.

Reaching behind her, she rests her right wrist on her lower back the way she does during the game to signal to him. There’s no mistaking her message—her middle finger stands up tall from a tight fist.

* * *

The Wildwood Beach Volleyball Tournament is an annual event held in August just off Second Street, a part of the beach far enough from the boardwalk that it doesn’t gather too many tourists. There’s an empty lot a few blocks away where the old Acme used to be, and volunteers in reflective vests direct traffic that way. Even at quarter to eight in the morning, the beach is packed—Colby cruises with one foot on the clutch, his beat-up old Beetle barely easing above five miles per hour as he coasts along in the hopes of snagging one of the coveted parking spots along the street. He already knows it’s fruitless.

Megan sighs. “Just stop the car.”

He hits the brakes, throwing both of them forward a little. Without comment, she gathers up her gym bag and pops out. Slamming the door behind her, she leans down into the window to tell him, “I’ll get us registered. Meet me back here once you’ve parked.”

“If I manage to find a place,” he mutters, goosing the gas to surge ahead a few yards before he has to slow down to a crawl again.

He ends up just following orders and double-parks in the Acme lot. The walk back isn’t bad, just three blocks, no more than the distance it takes him to walk from the apartment to the boards, but

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the crowd is hellacious. Everyone is in a state of undress—bikinis, shorts, tight tank tops, bathing suits...no one wears anything more than they have to. Kids race around bare legs, bumping indiscriminately into anyone in their way. Women with large folding chairs bully through the crowd, trying to get a good spot from which to watch the games and get some sun at the same time. Men lounge around in packs, sipping soda from cold cans or tossing Frisbees back and forth. A dog barks somewhere, though animals aren't usually allowed on the beach. Another hour or so and the vendors will be out, hawking Italian ice and frozen treats at exorbitant prices. Colby crosses the street, away from the wooden barrier that separates the beach from the road. Less foot traffic over here. With a glance at his sports watch, he picks up the pace.

Megan waits for him right where she said she would. She wears a white vest with the number 17 on it, the bottom tied up to expose her flat stomach. As Colby approaches, she thrusts a similar vest into his hands. "Put this on," she says in greeting. When he takes it, she starts flipping through what looks like a program or brochure. "Let me see when we're playing."

"Number seventeen?" Colby asks, smoothing the vest down over his mesh shirt. "I'm thinking we've got a ways to wait, no?"

The look she gives him is murderous. "The number is completely arbitrary. They printed the program up days ago so all they have listed are team numbers and match times. When you register, you get a number at random. Then you have to find where you are in the program..."

She trails off, running a finger down the list of games to see when their first match will be. Colby takes a moment to look around—this is his first tournament, and he can't deny the little seed of excitement that has begun to blossom in the pit of his

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stomach. Last year he watched from the sidelines; Megan's teammate then was her younger brother Billy, who will start college at the end of the month. He took off after graduation, his car loaded with everything he owned, and headed out on a road trip that would deposit him right on the steps of his dorm at UCLA. Colby gladly stepped in to play his position, and he'd be lying if he said he and Megan didn't make a good team. All their bickering disappeared when they stepped up to the net.

Colby doesn't see anyone he knows, but there are a *lot* of hot guys here today. He's glad he went with the skin-tight biker shorts—they cup his ass nicely and show off the bulge at his crotch. He should've donned a cock ring, now that he thinks of it. That would *really* make him stand out. He wonders if he could maybe slip into a bathroom somewhere, readjust his package, see if he can't get it to stand up a bit and get a few guys to look his way...

"Shit!" Flustered, Megan almost tears the program in an attempt to fold it.

With difficulty, Colby drags his mind back to the present. "What's wrong?"

Megan looks around wildly, the sun winking off her wraparound shades. "We're up in five minutes on number three. I don't even know where that is!"

Adrenaline jolts Colby's heart. "What? Now? We play first?"

Megan nods as she says, "Seventeen versus thirty, court three, eight o'clock. Where...?"

A little taller than his cousin, Colby can see over the crowds more than she can, and he stands on his toes to add to his height. To their right he can see a huge flag flapping in the sea breeze, the number *1* written on both sides. Pointing, he tells her, "There's the

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first court.”

She’s pointing in the opposite direction. “There’s the second. We must be farther down. Damn it! We’ll never get there in time.”

Taking her hand, Colby jumps onto the rail that edges the sand. “We’ll make it. Come on.” Without waiting for her to respond, he hurries down the wooden path, stepping quickly. “Move it, people! We have a game to play!”

Those sitting on the rail see him coming and jump out of his way. He skips over items left behind, beach bags and boogie boards, soda cans, a small child who cries as Colby brushes by. He sees the second flag Megan mentioned and squeezes her hand, tight in his. The third flag flies just ahead.

At the last moment, they jump off the rail into the hot sand. It sucks in Colby’s sandaled feet with each step, hindering his progress, but Megan skims over it as if she’s weightless. “We’re seventeen!” she shouts as she hurries up to a referee who stands at the sidelines, hands on his hips, surveying the court. “Seventeen. That’s us. We’re here.”

“About time,” the referee grumbles, but she takes Megan’s program and initials the playbook to prove they made the match. “Take your places. We’re about to start.”

Behind the net, Colby stops and leans over, hands on his knees, as he tries to catch his breath. There’s a stitch in his side that doesn’t bode well for the rest of the day.

* * *

Together, Megan and Colby make a great team. She works the front row, he the back, and she has such good command of the game that he watches her hands for signals more than he watches

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the other team. One finger means she's going for the ball; a closed fist behind her back means it's his to claim. She points out where she wants him to be during play and he obliges, covering one part of the court while she gets the other. She never backs into him, never trods on his bare feet, never fumbles a pass. If she misses the ball, he's there to bump it back into play, keeping it from hitting the sand. Each game consists of two matches, three if a tiebreaker is needed, but neither Colby nor Megan have ever had to play that long.

They win the first match easily, and by the time they score the needed 21 points to end the second match, the opposing team's players—two girls Colby knew in high school—glare at Megan and him through the net. He ignores them as he scoops his cousin into a tight embrace. “Woo!” he whoops, pumping a fist in triumph. “We did it!”

Megan laughs as a thin smattering of applause breaks out from the bleachers, which hem in the court and block it from the street. They're rickety seats only ten risers high whose scaffolding is hidden behind billowing sheets that sport the name of various advertisers for the event. Most of the logos are from beer companies, and Colby knows by the end of the tournament, most of the people gathered will be too drunk to care who wins.

“Shake,” she tells him, spinning him around in the sand.

Colby sticks out a hand without thinking, reaching under the net to shake hands with his opponents. The two girls have pulled on sunglasses now to hide their hateful eyes, and their sportsmanship is questionable—the first wrings Colby's hand so tight, he thinks his fingers will fall off, while the other scratches his wrist with sharp nails accidentally on purpose. “Good game,” he says through clenched teeth, knowing it was anything but. He

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and Megan wiped the sand with these girls. He can already *taste* the prize money.

Megan snags his arm and leads him off the court. Under her breath, she mutters, “Bitches.”

“Hey,” Colby points out, “course they’re mad. We kicked their ass.”

That gets a laugh from Megan, who shakes the sand from her Mary Jane style water shoes before slipping them on. She keeps one hand on Colby’s arm to steady herself, and in the early morning sun, her touch is blazing. He steps into his sandals as she gathers up her things—the program and her gym bag filled with lotion, towels, and a couple shirts to cover up with, if necessary. Digging into the bag, she pulls out a leather coin purse with the words *Wildwood-By-The-Sea* stamped into it, something she bought on the boards like the tourists, and hands it over to Colby. “Get me a drink, will you? Gatorade, or something sporty. I saw a booth over there.”

As she points, Colby follows her finger to a long line of people waiting to be served. “Megan,” he sighs. “Don’t you have anything to drink in that bag?”

She shoots him a withering look. “How would I keep it cold?”

Before he can answer, she starts to walk away, in the opposite direction of the drink booth. “Wait!” Colby catches her arm to stop her. “Where the hell are you going? When’s our next match?”

“I gotta go see.” She rolls her eyes and shrugs him off. “Jeez, Colby. They’re posting the scores at the main table. It’s only right over here, see? Right in the middle of the courts. So go get me a drink, and I’ll find you as soon as I know what we’re doing next.”

Colby thinks he’d like to take a look at the current rankings as well, but even as he watches her walk away, he realizes he’s a bit

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thirsty, himself. Cupping the coin purse in his hand, he heads toward the vendor booth, which sells hot dogs and soft pretzels in addition to ice cream, snow cones, and bottled drinks. He steps up to the end of the line and crosses his arms in front of his chest, bored already. There are easily forty teams playing today, and with only a handful of courts, the first round of matches may take a few hours. Then they'll pair up the remaining teams, whittling down the competition further, eliminating the losers and advancing the winners. By the end of the day, there will only be eight or ten teams left—the final eliminations will take place tomorrow, and Colby hopes they're still in the running then. If the next team they play is as bad as the last...

Suddenly darkness envelopes him as warm hands cover his eyes. A man's hands, firm and large, the fingers scented with coconut. Colby holds his breath, trying not to laugh. Who is this? One of his friends, maybe, out to see him play. The moment the guy speaks, he'll know.

But the voice that queries, "Guess who?" stymies him. It's a woman's voice, high and tittering, speaking from in front of him. Through the gaps in the hands, he sees a competition vest and what looks like the number 8. Long tanned legs, bare feet, a white puca shell strand like a tattoo around one ankle.

Uncrossing his arms, Colby raises them to touch the wrists before him. Definitely male. "I don't..."

He feels someone press up against his back—oh yes, *God* yes, it's a guy. Colby feels a hard cock thrust against his buttocks and almost creams himself. In his ear, a familiar throaty voice purrs, "Don't tell me you've forgotten already."

Colby tugs at the wrists, pulling them away as he turns. "Van!" At the brilliant smile that greets him, Colby laughs. "You are hard

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as shit, dude. How do you walk around with *that* shoved down your pants?"

Van's smile brightens as he adjusts the front of his swim trunks. His fist closes around his shaft, outlining it in fabric for a brief second before his hand falls away. "Saw you and just let it lead the way."

Behind Colby, Van's sister Vallery snorts. "You guys are perverts. Can we talk about something *other* than your dicks while I'm right here?"

"You could always go away," Colby offers.

When he turns toward her, the look on her face reminds him so much of Megan's that he has to grin. Van's arms come up around his waist, hugging him back against the hard body behind him. "I like the way you think," Van murmurs. He plants a quick kiss on Colby's ear before he lets Colby twist free.

Not here, Colby wants to say, but who really cares? Most of the people on the beach today horse around, goofing off half-naked, nothing more than a flimsy bathing suit between them and their friends. Van kneads the muscles in Colby's arms, warming them, working his way down to Colby's hands, which he takes in each of his own. Colby moves forward as the line nears the vendor booth and pulls Van along with him. If he isn't careful, he could fall for this guy, big time.

Nodding at the number on Vallery's vest, he asks, "You guys here to play?"

"Won the first match," she says brightly. "You should've seen my final spike. It was like *facial!*"

She mimes pounding a ball over the net, into the ground, and spreads her hands as if it bounces back into her face. With a glance over his shoulder, Colby catches Van's eye and the two men start

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to snicker. Vallery looks from her brother to Colby and back again. “What? It was awesome.”

Van ducks his head onto Colby’s shoulder, giving into his laughter. Vallery’s eyes narrow as she catches on. “Grow the fuck up, Vander. I’m not talking *that* kind of facial.”

Now Colby’s dying, too. He leans against Van as he laughs, savoring the hands that ease around him so intimately, the warmth of the body against his. Tonight, after the tournament, he’s *definitely* going back for seconds. And he’ll get Van’s number this time, too. The guy lives in Philly, which is just about local enough for him.

Pissed, Vallery turns her back on them and flicks her blonde ponytail over one shoulder as she raises her head high. “I’m not talking to you two anymore until you get your juvenile minds out of the gutter.” The line moves forward again and Vallery steps up to the booth’s counter, ignoring them. “Yes, I’d like to have—”

“Hey!” Colby elbows her aside playfully. “How’d you get in front of me?”

Vallery pushes him away, as ornery as his cousin. “Ladies first.”

“Age before beauty,” he mutters.

That earns him a swift kick in the shins. Her bare foot doesn’t hurt, but the indignation in her eyes is worth Van’s rich laughter and his hands on Colby’s waist again.

* * *

Megan finds them sitting on the wooden rail that edges the beach. As she approaches the vendor booth, Colby sees her and stands, waving. “Meg! Over here!” She switches direction in mid-

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step, scowling when she sees who he's with. Colby grins at her as he sits down next to Van again. "Look who I ran into."

By the look on her face, he can tell she isn't pleased to see the twins again, but Colby just laughs as he hands her a bottle of Gatorade. Where he sits, his thigh presses against Van's with an almost delicious warmth that has nothing to do with the sun overhead. Let Megan sulk. They won their first match and Van's arm surreptitiously rests on the rail immediately behind Colby's ass. The sky is cloudless, his drink cool, and the way Van looks at him makes Colby feel invincible.

Turning to Megan as she sits beside him, he asks, "When are we up next?"

"Court two at ten." She hands over her program for him to look at while she opens her drink.

The booklet's already turned to the rankings page. The tournament bracket looks like an inverted pyramid—a row of numbers at the top of the page indicate the original teams playing in the event. The next level down has boxes filled with Megan's meticulous handwriting; Colby scans the line until he finds their team number, and below that, Megan's note about the time and place of their next match. His gaze trails along, looking for Van's number. "You guys are in court four."

From Van's other side, Vallery stops slurping her drink to mutter, "That's where we played *last* time."

Colby traces the lines that extend down beneath his team number. If they win the next round, and the next, and if Van wins, too...with a laugh, Colby says, "There's a pretty good chance we might play against each other. If we both continue to advance."

Suddenly Van leans against Colby. He's removed his numbered vest, so Colby's arm tingles where Van's bare chest

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rests against it. Propping his chin on Colby's shoulder, Van blows playfully into Colby's ear, ruffling his hair, before he asks, "When? Show me."

Setting the program in his lap, Colby points out both their numbers, then draws imaginary lines down until his fingers meet. "Like what, three games from now?"

Van prods the program with his forefinger, his hand dangerously close to Colby's crotch. *If the program weren't in the way...* "Here?" he asks, smoothing down the paper. "Not the next game, but maybe two after that?"

"Yeah." Colby's voice cracks at Van's closeness and he clears his throat. In his shorts, his dick stiffens in response to Van's touch and he's glad he *didn't* wear that cock ring after all. If he stands now, the whole beach will see how hard he is for this guy beside him. Van rubs over the program gently, his hand drifting closer and closer to Colby's groin.

Without warning, Megan snatches the program away. Van places his hand flat against Colby's stomach, just the briefest of touches, before he sits back. "You two are a mess," Megan sighs. "Get a room already, will you?"

"We're just sitting here," Colby says in his defense.

"All over each other." Tucking the program into her bag, Megan shrugs out of her numbered vest, then stands to tug off her shorts. Even though she wears a bathing suit beneath them, Colby still turns away. "Don't worry, no girl parts for you to see. I'm going down to the water to cool off a bit. Watch my stuff, will you?"

She troops off, heading for the distant waves. Colby pulls her bag closer to him so no one else will take it. "Good riddance," he mutters, but when he catches Van's eye, they both grin. "Now if

only—”

From Van’s other side, Vallery shrieks, “Ow!”

Colby glances around Van to find Vallery on her feet, rubbing her hip as if something pinched her there. Glaring at her brother, she tosses her drink bottle at him—it hits him square in the chest, then falls to the sand.

“What?” he asks, stifling a laugh.

Vallery narrows her eyes but doesn’t say anything. Stripping off her vest, she balls it up and throws it into her brother’s lap, shakes her blonde ponytail, and pulls up the straps of the sports top she wears. “Fuck you,” she growls before heading after Megan.

“You didn’t have to chase her away,” Colby says. But secretly? He’s glad Van did.

Scooting back, Van raises one leg and repositions himself so he straddles the rail facing Colby. As he leans on the rail with both hands, he rocks forward and kisses Colby’s bicep through Colby’s mesh shirt. Van’s wide eyes look like sea glass, a magical non-color that makes Colby’s breath catch in his throat at the way the sunlight winks in them. “I don’t want to play against you,” Van sighs, his words ticklish and hot along Colby’s skin.

Colby laughs. “It’s just a game.”

Van kisses Colby’s arm a second time, and there’s something exaggerated and sad about his eyes when he meets Colby’s gaze. “What if I win? You’ll never want to see me again.”

Another laugh, this one surprised. “What if *I* win?” Colby asks. “You’ll avoid me like the plague.”

The hint of a smile curls Van’s lips. “Let’s make a bet.”

“What?” Colby shakes his head, giddy at Van’s nearness. “I’ll still want to see you no matter who wins. What kind of bet are you talking about?”

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“Well...”

Van scoots closer, legs widening, arms easing around Colby's neck. One leg butts up against Colby's ass at the back of the rail, the other bends up and around to rest on Colby's thighs. Van has him enveloped, trapped, and suddenly Colby doesn't know where to put his own hands. He settles for rubbing Van's knee, the one angled above his lap, running his hands over the fine light hairs along Van's thigh and calf, brushing at the hem of Van's swim trunks, dipping down lower to touch something hard and unyielding hidden beneath the material. Despite the crowds, all Colby can see is the man draped around him.

Setting his chin on Colby's shoulder, Van stares at him one long moment before he murmurs, “Whoever wins advances in the tournament.”

Colby nods, yes. “And whoever loses...?”

Van's mouth pulls into the same sexy smile Colby fell for the night before. “Whoever loses gets whatever he wants from the winner.”

Colby's still not following. “Such as what?”

Those pale eyes widen. “Whatever *pleasure* he wants.”

To punctuate Van's words, one hand drops down from Colby's arm and grabs the front of his biker shorts, giving the bulge there a healthy squeeze that sends shards of delight shooting through Colby's body. Colby grasps Van's leg as he thrusts his hips up into the hand encircling his cock. His voice is nothing more than a guttural moan. “Yes, please.”

“So it's on?” Van asks, withdrawing his hand.

“Only if you do that again.” Colby grabs for it but Van just closes his fingers over Colby's own and won't be drawn back.

With a laugh, Van promises, “Only if you lose.”

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* * *

Trouble is, Colby can't decide which he'd prefer. If he loses, he gets a chance to call the shots, and after the few hours they spent together last night, he can think of quite a few things he'd like Van to do to him in the buff. But if he wins, then he does whatever *Van* wants him to do. *That* can't be bad. As long as it involves the both of them naked, Colby doesn't foresee a downside to either outcome.

But if he loses, then he can't continue on in the tournament, and he'll have to deal with Megan's sulkiness for the rest of the day. Hell, the rest of the week, most likely, and it's hard to live with her when she's angry with him. Which she will be, he's sure—she'll think he went easy on Van no matter how well he plays against the twins.

In the end, Colby decides he wants to win, very much. He and Megan have been practicing all summer, and the prize money awaits at the end of the weekend like the fabled pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. As much as he and Van connected the night before, Colby won't let his feelings, his *lust*, get in the way of his game.

The second round is tougher than the first. Both teams won their respective opening games, so the guys Megan and Colby face off against really know their stuff. But Megan is quick on her feet and Colby's never more than a step behind—they win the first match by seven points, and that euphoria carries them midway through the second match, as well. By the time the opposition starts to catch up, the cousins are already in the lead. The final score is real tight with just one point separating them, but in the end the announcer calls out, "Seventeen takes the game!" and

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Megan almost crushes Colby in her fierce victory hug.

Because Van's game runs into a tie-breaking match, Colby doesn't get a chance to catch up with him before the third game. Megan wants a salad for lunch—"Something healthy," she says—but the two of them walk up and down the stretch of beach where the tournament is being held without finding a vendor that sells anything but junk food. Hoisting her bag over her shoulder, Megan squints across the street at a small deli nearby. "Let's head over there and see what they have."

"Meg," Colby whines. With his hands on his hips, he's busy searching the crowds for some sign of Van. It's difficult—everyone seems to have blond hair that wisps across their brow, and he's tired of the adrenaline surge he gets whenever he sees another hot guy only to realize a moment or two later it isn't the one he's looking for. He thinks if they go back to the same vendor booth where he saw Van the first time, he'll run into the guy again. "Can't we just get a hot dog?"

Apparently not. Turning on her heel, Megan stomps off toward the street and the deli nestled a little more than a block away. Because he doesn't want to lose her in this crowd—and, more importantly, because she's the only one with a little cash between the two of them—he follows behind her. Their next match isn't until one, so they have plenty of time to grab a bite to eat.

Van isn't at the deli; Colby didn't think he'd be. After they eat, Megan wants to sit in the stands at the court where they play next. Colby would rather continue his search, but it's fruitless. How he hopes to find one sexy dude out of several hundred is beyond him. With his chin in his hands, he frowns at the court before them as he sits on the bleachers, Megan at his side.

"You watching this?" she asks.

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He tries to glare at her from the corner of his eye but it isn't a very effective gesture—she's sitting back and doesn't see the look. "What do you think I'm doing?"

"Moping." Nudging him in the ribs, Megan leans forward and points at the tournament bracket in her program. "I hope you're paying attention because whoever wins this game plays us next."

Colby's interest is piqued. Without moving a muscle out of his disaffected pose, he tunes into the game before him. After a few passes, he begins to notice things that might help him in the next game. The teams are both mixed, a guy and girl on either side, but in one, the girl plays the back row. This leaves her partner open to more spikes, and he punches the ball over the net whenever he can, forcing it down to the sand and sending the other team scrambling. When he switches it up, he fakes a spike, then hits the ball hard over the head of his opponent in the front, making the guy on the back row back peddle to keep it in play. More than once, his opponent brushes the ball with his fist but doesn't manage to save it in time. As it bounds out of the court, the point goes to the big guy in front because his opponent touched the ball last.

They're good.

It's no surprise they win the game. When the final whistle sounds, Colby sits back, impressed. "Damn," he mutters.

Beside him, Megan laughs. They have fifteen minutes before the next game begins. "Shyeah. We're gonna get creamed."

"Just play it close to the net," Colby tells her. "I'll stay back so he can't throw me off guard. We have this in the bag. Even if we aren't better than they are, there ain't *nobody* who wants to win more than me."

* * *

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He's right, of course, and the quick strategy he came up with before the game starts works to their advantage. Each time their opponent spikes the ball, Megan's already squatting in front of the net, hands laced together to keep the ball off the sand. She bumps it into the air and Colby steps in, punching it over the net and back onto the opposite side of the court. Their teamwork is flawless—they win both matches mostly by surprise, because even by the final count, the opposition didn't expect anyone to counter their signature move so easily. When the game is over and they shake hands under the net, Colby's is almost crushed in a fierce grip by the guy playing the front row. "Jerk," Colby mutters, glancing back over his shoulder as he follows Megan off the court.

Another step and he runs smack into someone. For a fleeting second, he thinks it's the guy from the game—somehow he heard Colby and wants to take it up with him here and now. But when Colby turns, he feels warm lips touch his forehead in a rough kiss and strong arms drape over both shoulders, holding him in place. "Great game," Van says, resting his sun-warmed curls against Colby's temple. His eyes look as faded as the sky above, but they light up at the quick grin that flashes across his face. "You two look real good out there. It's almost a shame you're going to lose the next round."

Colby laughs. "It's you who's gonna lose. We'll wave at you from the stage tomorrow when we accept the grand prize. So it's official? We play you guys next?"

Dropping one arm, Van keeps the other around Colby's shoulders and leads him away from the court. "Val's checking it now, but we've won and you've won, so..."

"Court one!" Megan yells as she races up to the guys. She snags Colby's hand in passing but doesn't slow. "We've got three

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minutes before we're up. Come *on!*"

Colby catches Van's hand so they don't lose him along the way. "Where's Val?" he asks, trying to see back over his shoulder as the cousins drag him along. "You didn't see—"

"Probably already there," Megan hollers. She's breathless with excitement that races through the trio like a flame.

It ignites Colby's own emotions, spurring him on, until he's the one in the lead, his friends flanking him on either side as they hurry to make the next game. It's mid-afternoon and the crowds are at their thickest; sunbathers and kids from the beach and boardwalk have wandered over to see how the tournament's going. People stand in clusters, eating Italian ice or hot dogs, sipping slushy drinks, watching kites or the distant advertisement banners being towed by small airplanes off the ocean. Colby ducks and weaves his way between them, angling for the court marker that flaps up ahead in the breeze. As he barrels through, he laughs at how silly they must look, then at the thought of being late. Would the officials be able to forfeit a game if *neither* team showed up on time?

He won't get an answer to that because at the last minute Megan breaks away and dodges through the crowd to reach the court. As predicted, Vallery's already there, scuffing her bare feet into the sand by the net to smooth it down. She glares at Colby as he and Van skid to a stop at the edge of the court. "About time. Here I thought I'd have to play by myself."

Van claps Colby on the shoulder. His hand is warm against the vest Colby wears and leaves a trail of heat where he rubs down Colby's back before pulling away. "They just finished their game. Jeez, Val. Let us at least catch our breath."

Neither she nor Megan relents. Dropping her bag at Colby's

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feet, Megan nudges her cousin and points at their side of the court. “Breathe later. Now we have a game to play.”

Reluctantly, Colby stretches as he stands. Van’s hand is still on the small of his back like a lingering promise. “Good luck,” Colby says. “You’ll need it.”

Van grins. “Win or lose, I get another night with you. I call that damn lucky.”

With a shake of his head, Colby tells him, “You’re bad.”

“And you’re mine.”

The ref’s whistle sends both guys hurrying to their respective places on the court. As Colby runs up behind Megan, his cousin half-turns. “What’s that all about?”

“Nothing.” Colby’s cheeks feel sunburned, but he knows he’s blushing. Did she hear Van? *God*. He gives her a quick push toward the net. “Let’s just play this game.”

When the whistle sounds a second time, the ref tosses the ball to Colby. It’s his serve, and he nails it perfectly—the ball sails over the net with ease. This is going to be the easiest game he wins all day. How many other teams have they faced off against? And how many have they beaten? All of them. *All*—

The shrill whistle cuts through the cheers ringing in his head. In a no-nonsense voice, the ref calls out over the crowd, “Score one point, team eight.”

Megan whirls around. “Colby! Watch for my signal. You should’ve *had* that ball!”

What ball? His gaze rakes the sand in the court, then he spots the ball off to the left side, as far away from him as it could get and still be in play. “Sorry,” he mutters, hurrying to retrieve it. *Focus*, he tells himself as he scoops up the ball. *Don’t let Van get to you. He’s right, you know—whatever happens, you two hook up.*

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But if he loses, Megan will kill him. And he doesn't want to have to deal with *that*.

So focus.

* * *

The twins take the first match with little effort. Colby's feet seem rooted in the sand—he feels like he's standing on the sidelines, a gawkish teenager watching professionals play the sport. The sun glistens off sweat beading along Van's tanned arms, and his hair looks impossibly blond in the light. Whenever he sees Colby looking, he puckers his lips in a kiss, or winks as he grins, anything to distract Colby.

It works.

Colby stares whenever he can, and more than once Megan backs into him, her heel grinding down hard on his toes to wake him up out of his stupor. When they switch sides for the next match, she pinches a hunk of flesh at Colby's waist and twists, forcing him to pay attention to her. "We're a *team*," she hisses, releasing him. "If you want to watch, sit in the stands. Otherwise play *the fucking game*."

The second match goes better. The sun is at Colby's back and the sunglasses Van dons to play hide his pale eyes. Now Colby can follow the ball instead of return that sexy gaze. The score is close—eighteen to twenty-one—but those three points make all the difference. With the second match their win, the game goes into the tie-breaker.

They switch sides again. This time Colby dodges Megan's pinching fingers and ducks under the net instead of circles it. Van does the same, flashing Colby a winning smile as they pass. The

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net isn't even down yet before Colby feels a strong hand slap his ass—the touch tingles through the skin-tight shorts he wears, and because the crowd's in front of him, oblivious to the little tap, he feels Van's fingers dip between his buttocks to cop a quick feel. Goosed, Colby dances into position as he laughs. This is it, the deciding match. He's no longer playing for the money. He's playing for a chance to do whatever Van wants from him. As long as it involves the both of them naked and pressed together, Colby knows it'll be a prize worth winning.

Unfortunately Megan saw the love tap, and she glares at Colby over her shoulder. "If we lose, you better see if he'll let you sleep with him tonight because you're *not* coming home."

Colby just laughs. "Hollow threats, hon. I'm sleeping with him win *or* lose."

The whistle sets the game into play. Colby serves the ball over the net; almost immediately, Vallery jumps for it, fist curled to spike it back. Megan meets her at the net and flips the ball back into their court with a cobra—her thumb and forefinger curled together, hitting with those fingers alone. Vallery's too close and can't get under the ball, which rolls off the top of her head and down her back. Van's there, hands laced together to bump the ball back into play, but Vallery doesn't recover fast enough and the ball just falls to the sand, Van unable to hit it a second time without faulting.

As the crowd surges around them, Colby's blood rushes in triumph. And they're *back* in the game!

It's close, there's no denying it, and both teams put on a great show. But in the end, Megan's more aggressive than Vallery, driving the ball over the net each chance she gets. Colby follows her hand signals, letting her block when she knows she has the

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ball, keeping a step behind her just in case she doesn't. The match ends with a *much* larger gap between the scores this time, eight points instead of a measly three, and Megan almost knocks Colby down in her zeal at winning. "We did it!" she shouts into his ear, and Colby laughs as he swings her around in the sand. "We did it! We're back tomorrow. We can *win* this thing!"

When she disentangles herself from him, Colby sees Van on the sidelines, his numbered vest lying on the sand at his feet. Vallery's pulling on a cover-up, and it's only then Colby notices how late it's grown. The sun has set, and the breeze blowing in off the sea has stiffened, chilling heated skin. He waits for Megan to retrieve her bag, then leads her over to where the twins stand. "Hey," he calls out, offering his hand. "Great game. You two are really something."

Van's grip is sure, the strength in his hand thrilling Colby. "You're the better man," he says.

"Yeah, good play." Vallery kicks her feet in the sand, then hugs Colby quickly. She moves toward Megan, seems to think better of it, then grabs Megan into a fierce hug anyway before either can prevent it. "We'll be here rooting for you tomorrow. If you win the whole thing, I won't feel so bad losing today. You guys were awesome out there."

"Lots of practice," Colby says. He stands so close to Van, he can feel heat radiating from Van's arm and chest, but they aren't touching. Not yet. Around them the crowds have begun to disperse, and he wants to leave as well, but he can't think of what to say or do to get them moving.

Or rather, to get *Van* moving—he wants to ditch the girls. Fortunately when Megan digs into her bag, he hears his keys jingle. She pulls them out and hands them over, but he shakes his

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head. “You drive on home. I’m going to...”

He looks at Van, who gets the hint. “Val, can you catch a ride home with Megan?”

Her glare is palpable, and Colby turns away before she can direct her evil eye *his* way. From the corner of his vision, he sees Van clasp his hands together as if in prayer, and with an expression of groveling on his face, Van mouths the word, “Please?”

Vallery sighs, perturbed. To Megan, she asks, “Do you mind? I’m over on St. Louis, in the Crest. If it’s out of your way—”

“I can drop you off.” Megan jiggles Colby’s keys as she steps up to him. For one crazy moment, he thinks she’s going to give him a peck on the cheek, congratulate him again for playing so well this afternoon, but he should know better. Jabbing the key into his ribs, she growls, “Don’t stay out late. We’re not losing now.”

“Hey!” Colby brushes the key away, then steps back out of reach for good measure. “I was on *fire* today and you know it.”

Megan’s eyes narrow, relentless. “If you’re not in by midnight, I’m locking the doors.” She tangles his keys and a slow smile creeps across her face. “Without these, you’ll be sleeping on the porch.”

Turning on her heel, she starts off across the sand, Vallery hurrying to keep up with her. Colby can’t think of a retort and just stands there watching her leave. He’s still trying to come up with something witty to say when Van claps a hand on his shoulder and pulls him into a one-armed hug. “If you miss your curfew, you can sleep with *me*,” Van murmurs, his breath hot in Colby’s ear.

* * *

With his arm still draped around Colby’s shoulders, Van leads

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the way down a side street a few blocks from the beach. As they approach a new Jeep Wrangler, topless, with half-doors on the front and a fiery burnt orange custom paint job that gleams in the last of the sun's rays, Colby thanks God he didn't offer to drive. His dumpy little Bug barely fit himself most days—there's no way he and Van could cruise in it comfortably. Van's Jeep has all the ruggedness of a beach buggy mixed with the sexy appeal of a sports car, and Colby has to refrain from leaping over the half-door to slide into the passenger seat like some overeager kid. As it is, he can't help holding onto the roll bar as he climbs in, and once he's buckled into place, he grabs the canvas hand grip that hangs from the bar above him just because he thinks it's cool. "Nice ride."

In the driver's seat, Van starts the engine, then leans across the gear shaft to claim a quick kiss. Against Colby's mouth, he murmurs, "You like?"

"Whatever you have in mind for tonight," Colby tells him, "we're not getting out of this vehicle. It's *awesome*."

Van's laugh catches in the wind as they peel away from the curb. The radio blares out something hard and pounding, a rock song that sounds like sex. Once they get into sixth speed, Van's hand drifts from the gear shaft to Colby's knee. The beach and crowds roar by, and soon they're alongside the boardwalk, catching glimpses of it between the houses as they drive. The hand on Colby's knee drifts higher, over the hem of his biker shorts, and settles on a sweet spot where Van's thumb taps against the tip of Colby's dick. To be heard over the wind and the music, Colby raises his voice and asks, "So what do you have in mind?"

"Nothing kinky," Van says, but the wink he gives Colby suggests otherwise. His hand drifts to Colby's side to poke at the meaty part of Colby's hip. "Just what I wanted last night. This

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makes a second date, doesn't it?"

"What, no wining and dining?" Colby teases. Truth is, he wants the same thing Van wants. In the confines of his shorts, his balls throb, his cock aches, and each bump in the road, each rumble, each touch threatens to set him off. He tries not to dwell on it—he wants tonight to be special, and if he can just hold out a little longer, he'll get what he wants. What they *both* want. Van in him, above him, driving in so deep that Colby won't let him resurface until they're both spent.

He hopes Van has somewhere in mind he wants to go because Colby's already halfway there.

So he's more than a little surprised when Van angles away from the beach. He keeps his mouth shut, wondering...they aren't going to his place because Van didn't ask where it was, and they can't be going to Van's, either, because Vallery will be there. Then where...?

He gets his answer when they pull into the parking lot of a McDonald's. Before he can protest, his stomach growls appreciatively and Colby has to admit, yeah, he's maybe a little hungry. Pulling up to the drive-thru menu, Van cuts the radio and sits back so Colby can take a look. "I'm a cheap date," Van admits. His hand is back on Colby's thigh, higher than before, and Colby's cockhead tingles beneath the touch. "I promise I'll make it up to you. Hungry?"

"God." Colby orders three cheeseburgers, famished after playing volleyball all day in the sun. Van gets the same thing, then hands the bag to Colby before taking off again. The hot grease smells heavenly, but as it seeps through the paper, Colby sets the bag on the floor between his legs. "Where do you want to eat?"

Van flashes him a quick grin. "I know a place." The hand on

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his knee gives him a promising squeeze. “Gorgeous view, away from all the tourists. *Alone*, if you catch my drift.”

Colby does. Suddenly the hunger in his stomach is secondary to the lust in his veins.

They ride around for a little while—it seems Van isn’t really sure where they could go. Colby opens the bag of burgers and they split the order, Van driving with one hand on the steering wheel as he eats. When the burgers and fries are gone, Colby wipes his greasy fingers on the numbered vest he still wears. Dusk has settled, deepening the blue sky to an almost indigo shade. Near the boardwalk the streetlights begin to flicker on but down more residential streets, trees drape sidewalks and house fronts in shadow. At some point Colby tugs off the vest and tosses it into the seat behind him, careful to aim for the floorboards so it doesn’t get caught in the wind. When Van’s hand moves back to his leg, he knows he has to do something to get the ball rolling. As much as he wants to be with Van, Megan’s right—he can’t stay out all night. He has a tournament to win in the morning.

At the next stop light, he unbuckles his seat belt. Van glances over when a warning light flashes on his dashboard. “What’s up?”

With an enigmatic grin, Colby climbs over the gear shaft and between the front seats. The light changes, and when Van takes off, Colby’s tossed against the back seat of the Jeep. He meets Van’s gaze in the rearview mirror—for one brief second, those pale gray eyes flash in surprise, then Van sees him sprawled out, legs open invitingly, arms draped along the back of the seat, and his eyes warm. Colby eases one foot between the front seats to prod at the gear shaft and Van catches his toes with his free hand.

An old sandy blanket covers the back seat. Pulling his foot back, Colby tugs the blanket free and repositions it over his lap. In

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one corner of the seat rest a pair of sunglasses, a bikini top, and a half-empty bottle of coconut-scented suntan oil. Colby knocks these items to the floor and settles into a comfortable position in the middle of the back seat. He watches the rearview mirror, but Van's concentrating on the road, only occasionally glancing at Colby. An intent look furrows his brow—hopefully he has someplace in mind, because Colby wants him in the back seat as soon as possible. If he thought they could get away with it, he'd suggest Van just park on the side of the road somewhere. It's getting dark out, and all the tourists spent their evenings on the boardwalk. Who'd see?

Beneath the blanket, Colby strips off his biker shorts. As the tight material pulls away, his skin feels like it can breathe and his whole body relaxes. Music pounds from the dashboard and from speakers set in the roll bar above. Colby's surrounded by the beat that throbs in time with the ache in his crotch. Covered by the blanket, he massages his half-erect cock and fondles his balls, stiffening his dick. Over the sound of the radio, he calls out, "Some time tonight."

Van laughs, a ribbon of brightness that curls around Colby before the wind whips it away. "I know a spot," he says. He half-turns to look at Colby over his shoulder. "What are you doing back there?"

With a flick of Colby's foot, his biker shorts smack Van in the face. "Come on back and see."

Another laugh as he brushes away the shorts and the Jeep jumps ahead as if goosed.

By the time he finally stops, Colby's hands are slick with the suntan oil and the scent of coconuts laces the air. They're on an empty stretch of beach south of the boardwalk, out where

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developers have bought up the land. In a few years, condos will dot the landscape here but at the moment, there's nothing but chiseled black rock poking up through dark sand. The waves roar beneath a strong breeze, and every few moments the sounds off the boardwalk blow down around them. Here it's dark, night already fallen, the stars not yet awakened, the moon hovering somewhere at the edge of the world out of sight. The only light comes from the small bulb set in the roll bar above; it washes everything inside the Jeep with a faded glow. Van cuts off the Jeep and stretches in his seat, then unbuckles his seat belt and turns to give Colby an arched look. Holding up the shorts, he asks, "Lose something?"

In response, Colby tosses aside the blanket. His cock glistens wetly, his balls and thighs and hands oiled, the tip of his dick a deep plum crowned with white flecks of pre-cum. Sliding down a little, he places his feet on the backs of the seats in front of him, right foot on the passenger seat and left foot behind Van. Colby bends his knees, spreading his legs wide, offering Van a glimpse at the tight darkness between. One finger dips below his balls to rim around his trembling hole—as he eases into himself, he lets his eyes close and a soft moan escapes his lips.

He needs no further prompting. Van almost trips in his haste, standing and shucking off his shorts in one fluid motion before clambering between the seats to land in Colby's lap. With a hand on either side of Colby's hips, Van presses him back to the seat, mouth hot against Colby's lips, tongue eager as it delves between them. "Yes," Colby moans, grasping at Van's hard length now alongside his own. He's been wanting this all damn day. "Please."

Squirting the rest of the oil into his palms, Colby encircles Van's cock with both hands and kneads it fully erect. When Van starts to hump against him, Colby guides him in—the flared head

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of his dick pushes at Colby for one tense moment before it slips in. Raising his hips up off the seat, Colby meets Van thrust for thrust. His mind is a blur of sex and lust and coconuts, his senses reeling from the oil and the man above him, his feet leveraged flat on the seats before him. He grips Van's arms, massaging the length of corded muscle as he pushes up to rub his erection along Van's hard, flat abdomen. Together they move in an ancient rhythm as harsh, as pounding, as eternal as the surf that beats the shore.

At the last possible moment, Van pulls out and rubs his cock against Colby's. The friction sets him off, his orgasm triggering Colby's own as he fucks into Van's hand. "Yes," Colby gasps, "yes, yes."

Kissing the words from his mouth, Van promises, "You win again tomorrow and I'll give you a repeat performance."

Colby grins, his lips curving against Van's. Those words are more incentive than all Megan's pep talks combined. He knows he'll win, both the prize money *and* this guy.

Victory never tasted so sweet.

J. M. SNYDER

An author of gay erotic/romantic fiction, J. M. Snyder began self-publishing gay erotic fiction in 2002. Since then, Snyder has released several books in trade paperback format and has begun exploring the world of e-publishing, working with Amber Quill Press and other e-publishers. Snyder's highly erotic short gay fiction has been published online at *Ruthie's Club*, *Tit-Elation*, *Sticky Pen*, and Amazon Shorts, as well as in anthologies by Aspen Mountain Press and Cleis Press. A full bibliography, as well as free fiction, book excerpts, purchasing information, and exclusive contests, can be found at:

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* * *

**Don't miss *Playing The Field: Play On*
by J. M. Snyder,
available at AmberAllure.com!**

A junior at Patten University, Sean Mason plays a left winger position on the men's intramural soccer team. In the three years he's been playing the pitch, he's never been interested in any of his fellow teammates...until Cordero Jefferies joins the team.

This is Cordero's rookie year with the team, but he catches Sean's eye the first day of practice. Sean wastes no time letting this fly brother know just how sprung he is. The feeling's mutual, and when the two hook up after practice, there's no denying the spark between them.

Soccer is the only thing the two guys have in common. They share no classes, no mutual friends, and don't see each other outside of practice. Unfortunately, Sean is easily distracted by Cordero out on the field. Can he get his mind back on the game before the coach throws him off the team?

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