



FREYA'S BOWER PRESENTS

Inherently Sexual:

The Runaway

JAIME SAMMS

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by

Jaime Samms



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Culver City, CA

The Inherently Sexual Series:  
The Runaway

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### Chapter One Miles' return

Wind dashed Miles' hair across his face and raked a fine layer of grit through his already dusty locks. Radio static drowned out the music but for a faint thumping rhythm that kept his thumb tapping sporadically against the steering wheel. Outside the truck window a parade of variegated fields rolled by, their endless rhythm broken up by the rounded silhouettes of silos or dotted with bored-looking cattle.

In the ten years he'd been gone, this interminable stretch of highway still rambled into nowhere, and his home town, now less than sixty miles away, still didn't rate inclusion on the road signs. He turned off the main artery onto a smaller patch-work highway. Within a few miles down this road, not even radio waves could reach him. Static drowned out the last vestiges of music, and he stabbed the power button in irritation. The sound fizzled into silence. Just ahead, he'd find the turn-off to the smallest town on earth. Dirt roads with washboard surfaces that made his teeth rattle soon replaced even the poor, battered pavement.

Gravel clanged up under the fenders. Ditches, deep under the tangle of long grass, fell away to either side of the road, and powder-blue flowers of chicory waved at him from their long stems lined up along the soft shoulders. Every turn and dip on this road lived in his memory. With the way his hands and feet played the wheel and the gas without his having to think too hard about it, he might have driven it just yesterday. Fence posts and mailboxes flashed by. Soon he'd pass the farm where he'd spent so much of his childhood. He should have grown up there, but when his father fell into the bottle, his grandfather passed the land and business to Miles' uncle Allen instead. He pressed the gas pedal a little closer to the floor boards.

The drive came into view and almost whizzed past in a blur that suddenly became a tangle of legs and tail and hooves. He swerved, jerking the wheel to the right. The front tires skidded sideways and off the narrow mouth of the drive. He'd missed what he could only assume had been a horse, but managed to plough into a mailbox with enough force to snap the post and drive his small truck up onto the stump where it hung, front wheels spinning, motor roaring. The now-loose mailbox skidded across his hood and crashed against the windshield. For a minute, he stared through the crack-riddled glass at the bright blue letters painted across gleaming stainless steel.

A few seconds passed with ringing in his ears underscored by the erratic jittering from his heart. It took time to sort out what had happened, to recognize the ragged sound of his breathing and the grinding hum of noise coming from

under the hood of his devastated vehicle. He reached over and twisted the key, silencing the tortured sound. Setting both hands on the wheel, he hunched forward, leaning his forehead against the steering wheel and feeling the uncomfortable pull of thick scar tissue across his shoulder blades. He endured the discomfort a moment before settling back against the seat. They still hurt, and he was still alive.

The door protested with a loud creak as he opened it, but he pushed his way out and sank deeply into the muck and rotted grass in the bottom of the channel. The stench that plumed up around him caught in his throat. He gagged and braced himself against the truck until his shaking ceased. Across the road, the horse he'd avoided made a soft sound and tore up a mouthful of grass.

Miles glared at the animal. "Miserable beast."

The horse watched Miles drag himself up out of the ditch. One glance at the damage from the higher vantage told Miles he wouldn't get the truck back on the road. From across the stretch of gravel, the horse continued to munch.

"Come on," Miles said to it at last. It perked its ears forward, a good sign, and wandered toward him. "My cell's dead. You'll get me a phone call and, hopefully, a tow."

He stopped in the middle of the road and eyed the horse placidly grinding the long grass hanging from its lips. He had to admit it was a beautiful animal. Uncle Allen knew how to pick them. This stud would be a money maker despite his poor training. After a few minutes, the animal plodded up onto the road, approached him, and stretched out its nose to nuzzle at his shirt pockets.

"In your dreams, dumb-ass." He reached a hand slowly forward, and the horse suffered his light touch on its velvety muzzle. It gave him a soft nicker, and he moved his hand, sliding it down the high, arched neck.

"You are a beautiful creature, I'll give you that." The horse tossed its head. "I'm betting Hell on wheels, though. You need a firmer hand and fewer treats."

The horse nuzzled his pocket again, and Miles couldn't help a soft, if still shaky, laugh. Leaving the animal on the road, he scrambled back down to the truck for his duffle and cell phone and to retrieve the mailbox from the hood. Back up on the gravel, the horse nudged him, and they moved away from the dead vehicle side by side along the laneway to the farm. He tried not to remember the flight that had taken him away from here, away from his childhood ten years ago, or to think about the reason he had for returning now.

## Chapter Two

### Reunion

Miles steeled himself. He'd left this farm with not just his damaged back, but his heart and his life in tatters too. He knew his uncle wouldn't welcome his return, but Miles didn't really care what he thought. He just wanted to do what needed doing and get out.

He hadn't meant to come here at all, but had intended to head straight for the little mongrel house on the edge of town where he'd grown up. Unlike the neat grounds of the farm, weeds grew into the walk there, cedar shakes shed their hairy fur onto the patchy grass, and his father had fallen apart and finally died.

He couldn't help but notice how the same big oaks, only larger, thicker lined the drive, but rose bushes still softened their regimented line, and fluffy clouds of tiny white flowers puffed out over the pink gravel. Beneath their feet, feathery green plants smelled of pineapple and softened the footsteps of Miles and the horse as they walked over them toward the barn. One huge, ancient white pine towered over the two-story brick farmhouse. Its branches scraped the roof and the windows on the east wall.

Memories of climbing that tree to knock on a certain window momentarily slowed his steps but he forced them away. A decade of silence and more bitter anger than he could stomach had stretched the intervening years too thin. He looked away from the dark squares and patted the horse.

"Long time ago," he mumbled.

The horse snorted. The high-pitched but soothing whine of grasshoppers filled the quiet afternoon. Sun drenched the yard and brought out the scent of dust, hay and horse. Beside him, the animal clopped along, and, for a few minutes, he let himself imagine he'd never left. Would it have worked if he'd stayed? There was no way of knowing now, but the idea banished the sounds of grinding metal and shattering glass from his mind. He followed the horse off the main drive along a narrow but smooth path leading past the big pine and around the back of the house.

"You find that horse, David, and I expect your things packed by evening. This is the last time you let him out, you hear me? I'm done. I can't afford your mistakes!"

It took Miles a minute to place the voice. He'd expected to find his Uncle Allen still terrorizing the place, but this voice carried none of his harsh, baritone rumble. This light, slightly east-coast-accented voice belonged to Allen's stepson, Dillon. White-hot electrical flashes of emotion shot through Miles, welding his feet to the ground. The horse stopped, too, and whickered softly.

The sound of footsteps preceded a young man around the corner of the house. Miles didn't recognize him and assumed he must be David. The horse ambled over and snuffled at his dark hair.

"Storm." The kid ran a hand down the horse's neck and pressed his face into the long mane. "Stupid animal," Miles heard him mutter.

"You get that animal stalled." Dillon stalked into view, his dark features sharp and scowling. "And who are you?" He stopped short. "Oh...Miles?"

Dillon had grown into the lanky limbs Miles remembered. His chest and shoulders had filled out, and brown hair, straight and shining, hung down around his shoulders, evidence of his mother's native heritage. A thick belt only accentuated his narrow hips, and Miles found he couldn't quite keep himself from staring. He'd spent more than a little bit of the long, lonely trip back wondering what he'd find here. It shocked him to realize that just the sight of Dillon changed everything. Suddenly, the memories of knocking on Dillon's window crowded out all the reasons he'd had for leaving and for staying away so long.

"Dillon."

A slight, stunned pause hung on the air before Dillon spoke. "You came back. Why?" He raised a hand and pointed. "Why are you carrying my mailbox?"

"I...hit it. Had to swerve." Miles held out the box, and Dillon took it. "The horse." Miles closed his eyes, took a breath to compose himself. "I need to use your phone. Your horse ran me off the road."

"Are you hurt?" A sharp edge of concern in Dillon's voice made Miles finally meet his eye. He'd taken a step closer, and Miles noticed lines around his mouth, between his brows, but his hat cast too much shadow for him to read anything in his eyes.

"No. I'm fine." He resisted asking why Dillon would care. "Where's Uncle Allen?"

"I wouldn't know. He's been gone almost as long as you have and he didn't come back for the funeral either." Something hard lined his words; it sounded almost accusatory, and he aimed the accusation, not at a despised step-father and uncle, but at Miles.

"I heard he was sick. I came when I could." Miles winced at his defensive tone, but rushed on anyway. "Bad enough I walked out on a perfectly good job to come at all. But then it wouldn't be the first time I walked away from something important because of him, would it?" Dillon said nothing, only glowered at him from beneath the brim of his hat. "I had animals to care for, Dillon. One mare past her term, and an orphaned foal. I had things to do. Commitments."

"None of which included your own father? Other people's animals were more important?"

Miles glared through sunlight suddenly too bright. "He's as important to me as I ever was to him." Let Dillon think what he wanted. Miles had been working for good people, at a decent wage. He'd thought he'd finally found a place to reside, and still, this farm tore him away from it.

Dillon settled back into his own sullen defensiveness. "You could have let someone know you got the news."

"Who would have cared?"

Dillon's eyes narrowed, and his lips parted slightly, as though he might speak. Instead, he turned away. Stiff strides carried him across the yard and left little puffs of dust in his wake.

"Hey." Miles pursued him across the open expanse of the yard. "He never put his drinking on hold when I needed him, why should I have put my life on hold to bury him? And why do you care?"

Dillon opened the gate to the paddock, and Miles marched through behind him, nearly getting clipped by the closing gate. They walked toward the barn

entrance, Dillon still silent.

“Dillon!”

Dillon snapped around, one sharp finger stabbing hard on Miles’ chest. “You should have been here. His only son, his *only* family! And you let him die alone.”

“How much did he leave me to struggle through alone when he was alive? Why should I care how he died?” Scars tightened on Miles’ back. Regret coiled in his stomach. Dillon’s eyes took on hard, angry light reminding Miles of all the times he’d managed to smooth those edges away in the past.

“Hey!” The shout from the barn interrupted their argument. “Come back here!”

Miles looked up from Dillon’s dark scowl to see the big gray stallion bearing down on him again. He managed to get out of the way in time. Dillon, with his back to the barn door, didn’t. The horse ploughed into him, knocking him over, one sharp hoof smashing down on his upturned foot with an audible crack. A back hoof thudded against Dillon’s side as he fell and hit the ground hard. The horse barrelled past Miles and through the gate before he could stop it.

“Dillon!” Miles dropped to his side, heart racing.

Dillon groaned in the dust, his face pale, and his eyes squeezed shut.

“Not again,” Miles whispered.



## Chapter Three

### Change of Plan

Another day flashed through his mind. Once before, he'd watched Dillon moaning in the dust of this paddock. Then, a horse too big and wild for Dillon to handle had tossed him across the yard like a stuffed doll. He'd flown, landed hard across the top of the fence, and ended up on the ground. A broken pelvis had kept him down. That day Miles had left, running from his vindictive uncle and the one place he had ever wanted to stay.

"Dillon?"

A string of curses drifted up to him. Carefully, he touched Dillon's shoulder. "Find my horse." The first coherent words Miles caught had to do with the damn horse. Dillon struggled to a sitting position. "Where's the bloody horse?"

"Who cares about the horse!" Miles peered into his face, trying to ascertain how badly Dillon was hurt. That he could sit and talk boded well, but Miles knew men who had walked away from similar accidents to die hours later from internal damage that no one suspected.

Dillon held an arm around his middle, and Miles attempted to peel up his shirt to see what damage the horse had done. Behind him, feet scuffed in the dirt, accompanied by the hitch of David's panicked breathing.

"Leave it." Dillon batted his hand away.

"Let him look, Dillon." The boy's wavering voice came from over Miles' shoulder.

"Find the horse."

"Don't move, you idiot." Miles glanced over his shoulder. "You David?"

There was a rustle of movement, but no reply, and Miles sighed. "Go find—"

"Not him, you!" Dillon pushed Miles' hands away again, but the contact lasted longer than his irritation dictated. "He can't handle him." Dillon glared up at the kid. "You didn't fix the gate."

"I was about to. I would have...."

"You should have, but you decided to let him out and spend the morning fussing over the foals instead."

David stared at his boots, and Dillon just shook his head. "Idiot."

"It's not my fault he can't ignore an open gate!" David shouted.

"Your fault the gate was open." Dillon tried to get up. The movement made him hiss out more curses between clenched teeth.

"Take it easy."

Dillon glared at him. "Go find my horse." But he didn't try to get up again, and even under his dark skin his face looked a little gray.

The boy shuffled closer, hands formed into tight fists around the brush he must have been grooming the horse with.

"Go get the truck," Miles instructed, realizing he didn't know where they kept the keys or parked the vehicle.

Dillon grimaced, but reached for Miles' hand. "Help me up."

"Just wait." Miles twisted around to find the kid standing, staring, his face white. "Go. He needs to get to emergency."

David nodded, almost violently, and turned, fleeing back into the barn.

"Dillon, please. Don't try to get up yet."

"Don't tell me what to do." But Dillon remained where he sat; he leaned slightly on Miles to keep himself upright.

Miles pulled a few stray hairs away from Dillon's face. He peeled them out of the sweat beading on his upper lip and forehead and settled Dillon so that his weight rested against him a little more evenly.

After letting out a careful breath, Dillon settled his back against Miles' chest and looked up at him. "Seems we've been here before."

Miles almost looked over his shoulder, but Allen wouldn't be there. No riding crop would come down across his back. He tensed anyway, and the old scars tightened.

Dillon actually squeezed his fingers. "He's long gone. He can't hurt us now."

"I didn't know he'd left," Miles said. He barely managed a whisper, knowing his ignorance made a poor excuse for a ten-year silence. He realized now he regretted not only his father's death, but also every minute of the long absence that he had no idea how to explain.

"You only had to ask. Did you think either one of us would ever let him lay a finger on you again?"

"I didn't know." Miles laid his cheek against the back of Dillon's head. "I didn't know what to think."

"You only had to ask," Dillon said again. He sounded weary, hurt. Miles almost preferred his anger. He'd learned how to defend himself against that.

David arrived in an ancient pick-up, rumbling from around the house and skidding to a stop in a spray of gravel. Miles waved the dust down and shifted their bodies.

"Let's get you up." Gently, he supported Dillon's effort to get his good foot under him. Together, they stood, and Miles helped him hop the few steps to the truck. Getting him up into the passenger seat took some effort and a lot of sweating and groaning on Dillon's part, but he made it. David climbed up beside him.

"You take it easy," Miles admonished. "No point in driving stupidly and getting you both killed."

David nodded. "I will." He turned the key, and the starter emitted an obnoxious grinding sound. David flushed.

Miles stalked around the front of the truck to yank open the driver's side door. "Get out and find the damn horse. I'll take him."

"No." Dillon caught Miles' gaze. "He can't handle the animal in a calm mood, never mind spooked." Miles frowned, unsure if Dillon meant the boy's mood or the horse's. "Please. Miles, that horse keeps this place alive."

Miles sighed and closed the door but gave David a look. "You be *careful*. Bring him back in one piece, yeah?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you." Dillon rested his head against the back window of the truck and smiled slightly. He didn't try to pretend he wasn't in pain.

Miles could only watch David drive off. The old truck rumbled and rattled over the gravel, but David's panic had abated upon seeing Dillon on his feet. The

injuries, while probably painful, appeared less severe than Miles had first feared.

Miles watched the dust settle after the truck rounded the corner. Moments later, cricket song rose again, wind whispered through the pine boughs, and, in the distance, a horse whinnied. Sunshine bounced off the dusty barn yard. His eyes watered in its glare, but it heated his face and warmed the earth under his boots. Soon the horses would meander up from the south pasture to the gate of the shadier west paddock. There, they would be closer to the barn for their evening feeding.

It all came back to him: the routines of a lifetime ago performed so many times he didn't need to think about it. This had never been his home, but no other ranch or farm he'd worked over the past ten years held the memories he still harboured of this place.

In the very spot where he stood, his Uncle Allen had taken the price of a lamed horse out of his hide and left him a lifetime of scars to remember the day by. At the time, Miles hadn't cared much about the horse or the riding crop leaving bloody welts on his skin. He'd cared about Dillon, moaning in the dust beside him, a broken pelvis twisting his face into a mask of sweaty pain. No amount of abuse would have beaten the helpless fear or the feelings that engendered it out of him, no matter what Allen might have hoped.

Miles shut his eyes against the memories. None of it mattered now. For the first time in ten years, he questioned his reasons for leaving and for staying away; however, he found he didn't buy them any more.

"This was not what I planned."

Picking up the mailbox and his duffle, he set them on the back porch of the house and followed the horse's path through a small copse of trees at the bottom of the yard.

## Chapter Four

### Memory Lane

He found the horse exactly where he expected, placidly cropping grass in a small clearing at the edge of the creek that ran behind the house. He returned to the barn for a halter and lead and then followed the creek to within a few paces of the horse.

The horse ignored him until Miles made it clear he meant to do more than just watch him graze. Storm watched his approach, wary, though not nervous, even moving a few steps in his direction. The horse stopped just over an arm's length from him and dropped his head so his nose almost touched the ground.

"Come here." Miles pointed to the ground in front of him. The horse took one hesitant step.

"That's right. I'm pissed. Now." Reaching slowly, Miles touched the animal's neck. He twined his fingers through the dark mane. Storm tossed his head but made no real attempt to actually free himself. "I don't care what you're used to. So far as I'm concerned, you earn the right to not wear this."

He slipped the halter over the horse's head, getting a look full of indignation for his trouble. "Don't even bother." He buckled the halter into place with a few deft movements and snapped on the lead. "I'm the boss here and neither attitude nor puppy eyes work on me." A tiny jerk on the lead told him how much the horse would resist his attempts to go back to the barn.

Storm pulled his head up high, taking up all the slack in the line Miles would give him. Miles didn't move, but waited. Storm took a step back. Miles shortened the lead, pulling the animal's head down again. Another back step brought his head even lower. The horse wasn't stupid. He stopped his slow reverse dance.

"That's right." Miles patted his forehead and spoke conversationally. "My balls are bigger than yours. Not to mention my brain. Now come with me." He took a few steps, paused to feel the line go slack, and continued walking. Just once, Storm stopped abruptly and gave the lead a sharp, hard jerk. Miles yanked back, bringing Storm's head even with his own.

"Nice try."

They proceeded to the paddock without further incident, but Miles didn't trust the horse for a second. A few flicks of his wrist looped the lead around the top rail of the fence near the water trough where he secured it. He dropped a small pile of hay on the ground and accepted the snub that met his pat on the animal's shoulder.

"You'll stay there until I'm done fixing that gate," said Miles. Storm shuffled around to the limit of his lead and presented his hind quarters. "Fair enough."

A quick examination showed tears where the horse had torn the latch from the soft wood of the post.

"I suppose you did this?"

The horse said nothing.

Miles approached him again to examine his chest and front legs with care, running his hands in long, firm strokes across his coat. Worry drew his brow down into a tight squint that made his head ache, but finally, he let out a sigh.

“You’re lucky. That post will have to be replaced soon. Right now, I have to find some tools. Knowing Dillon, that won’t be hard.” With a final pat for the horse, he headed into the barn.

He passed down the long corridor between stalls. The familiar melon-green paint brought back memories. This barn had always been his haven—safe from his father’s drunken ramblings, his teenage fear of being found out for a queer. Even his uncle had forgotten his differences, or at least had let them pass without remark. Here, the horses responded to him, learned at his hand, gentled under his touch. Training horses was the one thing he had always been really good at. For a while, that skill had kept his uncle satisfied, and he and Dillon had been safe here together.

He chuckled now at their silly, awkward courting, removing their shirts to work in spring air that chilled their skin even in the barn. A few furtive glances at Dillon’s dark-skinned shoulders or chest, just sweaty enough for the straw dust to stick, made him ache until he could only pretend to work. Whole days, then weeks, had passed while they kept at it, pretending not to watch each other.

It hadn’t all been bad. For the first time in years, he recalled the good times more easily. He passed into another room, much smaller, where racks of tools lined the walls and rows of shelves held cans of paint and old tack. He ran a hand over the dusty leather of the big chair tucked into the corner. It held other, sweeter memories; ones made once they had stopped pretending.

Miles had been the one to break their silence, cajoling, sweet-talking, and gentling Dillon until he acknowledged his feelings and let Miles in. How many times in the ensuing years had Miles wished he’d never said a word? Had he kept silent, Dillon wouldn’t have been so nervous, too nervous to admit his horse wasn’t trained properly. Had Miles kept his own feelings and desires to himself, Allen would have never raised a hand against them. He never would have felt compelled to leave. If he’d just kept his damn feelings to himself, none of it would have happened.

“Long time ago,” he muttered sadly.

A long time and a lot of resentment had barred him from viewing those days clearly. He’d talked himself into believing Uncle Allen had destroyed it all, that it hadn’t lasted through the years, the distance, and the silence. Of course, he didn’t know that it had prevailed, but he could admit, at least to himself, that he hoped it had and that his feelings hadn’t changed.

He shook himself. All this brooding wasn’t fixing the gate. Gathering the tools and supplies he needed, he made his way back out into the high afternoon sunshine and set to work removing the latch, plugging up the old holes and reinforcing the weak post. He chose longer screws to hold the latch in place this time. Once he’d fastened it on, he swung the gate closed and listened to the satisfying clank of the latch hitting home. A tug on the heavy door, and the repair held. Some things he *could* fix.

On the other side of the fence, the big gray horse nickered at him.

“I know.” He shuffled back inside the fence and released the horse from the lead. “Long time ago. I suppose you think I’m pathetic, brooding over something I couldn’t control then and can’t do anything about now.” The horse let him rub a hand down the speckled line of his nose. “But I can’t help it, can I? He was my

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first. He'll always be that at least."

It took the next half hour or so to clean up and find a rope long enough to fashion into a double loop he could fit over the gate and the fence post for added insurance against the equine escape artist. Just outside the barn, he settled on a warm Storm and worked the rope. He tightened the last twist of wire to the sound of the truck's old gears complaining as it approached down the long drive.

## Chapter Five

### Walking Wounded

The truck rolled into the barnyard as Miles settled the new rope's loop in place. David pulled the vehicle to a much more sedate stop, turned off the engine, and jumped out.

"We're home, sir."

David opened the door, but Dillon slumped, as when they'd left, with his head against the back window.

"David, can you get any closer to the door?" Dillon handed David keys and a set of crutches. "I can't handle these right now."

"I can move the truck?" David glanced at Miles, uncertain in the face of Dillon's apathy. Dillon didn't answer the question or look at either of them.

"Just go." Miles pointed to the house and shrugged, climbing into the truck in David's place.

He reached for the key in the ignition, but Dillon moved, finally, laying a hand over his to keep him from starting the engine. He didn't turn his head and closed his eyes again only after Miles' fingers relaxed on the keys.

"So?" Miles studied his face. Even around his closed eyes Miles noted a fine network of lines, etched too deeply to be new.

Dillon tipped his head around and fixed Miles with a weary glare. "Did you find my horse?"

"And mended the fence. Who trained that animal?"

"I did." Dillon's gaze fell, and pain, deeper than physical, passed over his face. "At least I'm the only one who got hurt this time."

Miles looked to the house, where David searched for the right key to unlock the door. He hoped the kid would take his time. "What did you find out?"

"Cracked ribs, and he busted up my foot pretty good. I've had worse. So've you," he added, his voice a low, husky whisper.

Wind moaned through the needles of the pine tree, stronger now than it had hours ago. Sunlight glimmered orange through the tops of the trees, dazzling Miles' eyes. For a few minutes, he let silence fill the cab.

"It wasn't your fault," Miles said at last.

"Damn fool horse can't abide an open gate. That's training, and that's my fault. Same as that other day when the brute animal threw me. I should have told someone he wasn't taking to the bit. Should have let you help. None of it would have happened. Allen wouldn't have—"

Miles flushed. "That's not what I meant. And I blamed Allen for what Allen did, not you. Never you."

"Then why'd you leave?" Dillon looked back at him, his dark eyes glittering in the setting rays of the sun. "Why didn't you ever come back?"

Miles reached for Dillon's hand, but his fingers closed on the empty air left by Dillon's retreat.

"Who would have protected us?" Miles asked. "Allen never cared about the horse. Or you. He cared about us, and he would have done anything to keep us apart once he knew that we'd—" Miles waved a hand and blushed, but hurried on.

"You know that. You're the one who told me that right from the beginning. You warned me what he would do. I should have listened and—"

"And what?" Miles couldn't mistake the anguish in Dillon's voice and eyes now. "Not tried? Not talked me into loving you? The best thing I ever did was love you." He turned away again, sinking into the gray upholstery, resting an elbow on the door and his forehead in his hand, eyes closed. He looked completely defeated. "And you left."

"I-I had to. I couldn't stay. There was no one. You were hurt. My father—" Miles made a sound of disgust. "By leaving, Allen didn't have a target."

"You had to protect yourself." Dillon examined the palm of his hand, rubbed at a callus. "I get it."

"No, you don't. I had to protect you. I didn't know any other way. People like Allen...you don't reason with them. You don't let them know it hurts, and unless you're big enough and strong enough, you don't fight back either." Miles moved a little bit closer, tried to get a better look at Dillon's face, but the other man refused to raise his head. "If I had stayed, my father might have done something. Eventually. He might have been able to protect me, but then what? Allen beat me up pretty bad, true." Miles shifted his shoulder and felt the cotton of his shirt glide over the puckered scars. "But it was one time. One beating. What would he have done to you, helpless in his house where no one could help?"

"I thought you hated me, you know; thought you blamed me and left because you hated me. Your dad tried to tell me I was wrong."

Miles settled a little closer to Dillon, but didn't dare reach for him again. He rested his head against the back window and watched the orange sky fade between the tree branches. "I left because I loved you. I didn't know what else to do."

All the anger had leached away from Dillon's next words. His voice barely carried over the evening song of the frogs drifting in the open windows.

"I watched him beat my mother down every day, in little ways. He didn't have to throw her around very often to keep her in line. He only had to look at me the right way, and she'd do whatever he wanted." He looked up at Miles, and it took every ounce of Miles' will to meet his eyes. "He was good at manipulating everyone, I guess. Everyone but your father. Your dad did protect me."

"He did?" Anger flattened his words, and Miles clamped his mouth shut because Dillon didn't sound angry. Miles didn't want to argue. He wanted to know.

"He did."

Now Dillon reached for Miles' hand, and Miles watched their fingers interlace without really feeling it through the smouldering resentment that mentioning his father always caused him.

"He kept telling me to wait. That you'd be back, but I think after a few years, even he didn't really believe it any more."

Miles pulled free. "I'm glad he was there for you."

"He was. He ran Allen off. He looked after me and my mom. He kept the place going when we couldn't." At his pause, Miles glanced over to find Dillon watching him. "He stayed sober, just in case, because he didn't want the last memory you had of him to be one of a drunk."



“And it is anyway because I never came back.”

“He died with so many regrets over you, Miles. What good does it do if you live with those same regrets? Sure, he let the horse out, but he did mend a lot of fences in the end.”

Miles smiled sadly. After a day too full of shocks, exhaustion drained away every other emotion. “And what does the horse do when he finds his way home and can’t get back in through all those fences?” He turned to Dillon, not really expecting an answer.

“Do you really want in?”

Maybe Dillon meant the question to be lightly sarcastic. Maybe he wanted to hide whatever crept into his voice anyway and made it a little too soft, a tiny bit too uncertain. Whatever caught in his throat and made the last words tight and tiny snagged in Miles’ heart too.

He nodded, but couldn’t speak until he’d cleared his throat. Regardless, his answer was only a rough approximation of the word.

“Yes.”

A smile spread across Dillon’s face that discharged a thrilled shock through Miles, turned his gut over, and made his hands shake. It filled out the hollows in Dillon’s cheeks and the hollow places in Miles. It held everything that mattered.

Dillon leaned slightly toward Miles until his injured ribs stopped him and reached up to touch his face. The very tips of his calloused fingers dusted across Miles’ cheek bone, and his hand snuck around to the back of Miles’ neck to pull him close.

“Welcome home.”

Miles accepted the embrace, knowing in his heart, no matter how hard he’d tried to find a new one, *this* was his home. All his memories, his heart, all his love lived here.

“I’ve only ever managed to tame one thing my entire life,” Dillon whispered.

Miles smiled.

“But that’s okay,” said Dillon. “I knew you’d come home to me.”

## Author Bio:

Jaime Samms has been writing for much longer than she can remember. With a few short story publications under her belt, she's now working on her first novel. She lives in Northern Ontario with her husband, teaching her two kids and serving three members of feline royalty. You can find fiction and movie reviews as well as a few free reads on her website The Fictional World of Jaime Samms at <http://jaime-samms.logophilos.net/>

Inherently Sexual Series: The Runaway  
Jaime Samms

Excerpt from  
*What Flavor Are You?*  
by  
D.N. Lyons

A Freya's Bower.com M/M Mini

## What Flavor Are You?

*“—And in other news, Avalon’s High Court has ruled—”*

*Click.*

*“—praise her, praise the Goddess for this wonderful day—”*

*Click. Click. Click-click-click.*

*“—Gooooooooood morning, Camelot! It’s just at the top of the eighth hour today, and it’s a balmy 87 degrees in the shade. And speaking of shade, you’d better find some before you burn to a crisp!”*

*“That’s right, Ric Ray! There’s not a cloud in the sky. We can’t hope for rain today, on this lovely June 12th in the middle of our beautiful Avalon! Sorry, Camelot Construction, the road tar’s not going to harden today! So slap on the sunscreen, ladies and gentlewizards; it’s going to be a scorcher!”*

### *Midday, Camelot Beach*

An ice pop...oh, what wondrous things one could do with an ice pop.

Especially a peach-vanilla ice pop fresh from the cooler, eaten by one very, *very* sexy Planetary Wizard.

*“Whoopee, it’s a good hot one! 103 degrees! I’ve already got a burn on the back of my neck. How about you, AvaChopper?”*

*“Yessir, Ric Ray, I’ve got one too! The traffic is slower than hot tar. Not to poke fun at our own Camelot Construction, but boy, it’s really thick out there! A five-Norinberg pileup has us stuck like a dragon in mud!”*

The ice pop twirled, spun and sank down between a pair of full lips slicked with perfect green-blue lipstick, lipstick that never mussed, no matter how many kisses those lips had. Tense, Mercury watched the ice pop bob in, out, in, out. In response, his cock twitched in his bikini shorts.

“Pluto,” he chided, “don’t eat all of the ice pops.”

“Do you want one?” Pluto’s delicate, long-fingered hand held up an unwrapped strawberry-banana ice pop. He licked slowly up the length of the first treat.

“Yes!” Mercury’s cock jerked again, and he groaned. “Will you give me the ice pop?”

*“And speaking of tar, Ric Ray, we’ve got tar tracks in front of the High Courthouse, and those councilmen don’t look happy! A couple of novices and their dragons have tracked that mess all over the sidewalk! I’d hate to be caught with tar on my boots!”*

The beauty in the pink-striped lounge chair laughed and tossed his straight, white hair back. He lowered his sunglasses and wagged the second ice pop back and forth in front of Mercury. “You’ve been at work nearly nonstop for weeks, Mercury, and you haven’t attended nearly enough to me.”

He rotated his hips in time with the wagging treat and licked an errant drop of peach-vanilla from the corner of his mouth. Twittering laughter, he sucked his ice pop down, finishing it off.

Mercury’s gaze lowered along the pale length of Pluto’s body. So sleek, he was like an otter or a beautiful snake...yes, a snake. Pluto was a crafty one.

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