

SAM DORSEY
AND HIS

SIXTEEN CANDLES

A NOVEL BY
PERIE WOLFORD

“SAM DORSEY AND HIS SIXTEEN CANDLES” by PERIE WOLFORD

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“SAM DORSEY AND GAY POPCORN” Series: Book 1

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INTRODUCTION

You're reading SAM DORSEY AND HIS SIXTEEN CANDLES, book 1 in the SAM DORSEY AND GAY POPCORN series. The series channel popular movies and TV shows, so expect a lot of references to classic movies of the 80es and 90es. But don't worry this is not a fan fiction! The stories are 100% original and all the references are made only as a tribute.

This book, SAM DORSEY AND HIS SIXTEEN CANDLES, obviously channels the classic 1984 Sixteen Candles film, directed by John Hughes. It's an awesome movie and it deserves to have another spin—this time with gay characters!

Enjoy!

CHAPTER 1

The year is 1985. The month is April. The day is Monday.

And also, it is my birthday.

Thankfully, I'm not awake just yet. The bright, obnoxiously cheerful morning light is coming through my window, but I'm still there in my bed snoozing away, peaceful and happy; not yet aware that my least favorite day of the year has settled into existence all around me.

I fell asleep watching *Sixteen Candles* on VHS last night and, as always, it captured my heart. Now I'm blissfully dreaming about Jake...

Only, it's not Jake from the movie. It's Jake from my school, Jake Timbers, and just like his fictional namesake, Jake is a jock, the permanent and unrivaled king of Arcadia High. He has an expensive and totally drool-worthy car, a gigantic horde of friends and followers who worship him, and a majorly sexy girlfriend.

I'm not a fan of hers.

Anyway, Jake is jogging across the school's Football Stadium, which coincidentally has his name plastered on it due to his father's "charitable donation" a couple years back. I suspect it was more about appearances than charity, but it provides me a nice viewing angle, so I'm cool with it either way.

Jake is the quarterback, an overrated position in my opinion, but he's definitely good at it—I'd even heard rumors about him being scouted by universities, practically unheard of considering he's only a sophomore. He's not as bulky as the defensive players on the team, but he's still very muscular, lithe and quick, with perfectly toned throwing arms. During the spring, before the weather gets too hot, he often comes out here to jog and warm up after school. Most of these days I am lurking nearby, doing some warming up of my own if you catch my drift.

Luckily he doesn't know about that.

Sometimes I wish he did though. It's hard work keeping my feelings to myself all the time. Not owning up to them just makes me feel like I'm telling the entire world one long and continuous lie, ya know? But that lie is necessary; for more reasons than one.

So yeah...no confessions from me, just admiration from afar.

In this particular dream Jake is wearing those standard tiny red gym shorts; the ones that are incredibly aerodynamic and leave very little to the imagination. I don't know who the hell invented them and made them standard issue, but that person definitely has my gratitude. He's also wearing a *RunAround* T-shirt that is becoming increasingly wet as his workout intensifies.

And soon enough, almost like clockwork, he sheds the shirt and begins to cool his heated body in the morning breeze.

I look on, as I often do (in my dreams and in real life), with multiple forms of envy.

Jake is only 16, like I am. But unlike me, he already has the body of a grown man. I guess he has sports to thank for that, or his parents' good genes, or both. In any case, those muscles he has on his chest are fantastic. I can't keep myself from staring at them.

Unfortunately, he notices me noticing.

He is headed my way now and my heart is working overtime. Relax, Sam, relax!

He approaches me.

Suddenly I am frozen. I'm like a statue. A statue with a blitz of meaningless mind babble: *What's wrong with me? God, I'm sweating. Is it noticeable? I think I'm paralyzed. What do I do?!*

He smiles at me deviously. Then, unbelievably, he takes my hand and puts it onto his chest!

"What are you doing?" I ask, my voice octaves higher than it should be. I can feel the warmth of his skin under my fingertips. His heart is beating steadily beneath them.

No. This *cannot* be happening.

"I wanted to feel you on my skin," he says, confident, not at all shy. He's not angry or ashamed, just smoldering.

"Don't you like it?" he stares up at me with twinkling blue eyes. The kind you—well *I*—can't help but get lost in.

"Yeah," I breathe out stupidly.

His eyes are locked on mine, a sultry smile playing smoothly across his handsome face.

"Touch me..." he says finally, trailing off in a way that makes my imagination run wild.

"I already am touching you," I manage to choke out, not willing to acknowledge the sexy notes in his voice, but still hoping they ring true.

"No," he whispers with a crooked smile. "Touch me there..."

He takes my hand and lowers it right down his torso, my fingertips barely brushing against slick washboard abs until...Oh Lord! That is too much.

No... No... Ahhhh!

“Sam! Get up! You’ll be late for school!”

And just like that reality comes crashing down around me like an eighteen-wheeler.

“Coming Mom!” I shout, trying to shake the memory of skin against skin.

Tentatively, I reach down into my shorts and yep, there’s all the evidence right there—a lot of it too. Ya know, I totally get that a wet dream is perfectly normal and everything, but that doesn’t make it any less awkward, especially factoring in the *subject* of said wet dream. Sighing and feeling completely less than stellar, I close my eyes, partly ashamed of my fantasy and overall infatuation with Jake Timbers and equally ashamed of my shame. Like, why does everything have to be so weird and messed up and complicated? Why can’t I just feel what I feel and be done with it?

It takes me a couple of minutes to brace myself and get up from the bed. For one thing, there’s an unfortunate amount of sticky goo in my pants that I have to go take care of. And also, I’m not looking forward to today at all. A happy birthday? Not likely.

I reach down into the drawer of my desk and take out a hidden stack of photos. No, it’s not porn! I don’t keep my porn in the drawers. Even I’m not *that* lame. It’s my own personal collection of ghosts from birthdays past. I keep them here as a reminder of all those truly gag-worthy moments; lest I forget and try to actually enjoy my birthday.

My birthdays have never been happy. Exhibit A: Here is a photo of me when I turned one. I’m such a cute little blue-eyed baby you say? Wrong! The next thing you know that cute baby-boy is gonna fall face-down into his cheerfully-colored birthday cake. Exhibit B: a photo of me turning five. I look so radiant and happy on my new bike you say? Wrong again! Don’t be fooled. There I am a couple hours later with a cast on my left arm. Exhibit C: here is the one where I turned seven with a cast on both my arm *and* my leg. I don’t even remember how that happened; that’s how used to these experiences I am. But what really takes the cake (pun intended) is the day I turned twelve. My house totally went up in flames, but alas, there’s no picture for that, just one very sad news-clipping.

Most times it doesn’t really bother me. Over the years I’ve just slowly come to the conclusion that this particular day of the year is cursed for me; like my very own personal Friday the 13th. Usually I can just hunker down and make it through the worst of it. But now I am turning sixteen, a relatively “important” number, and I just can’t shake the feeling that something is about to go horribly, wretchedly wrong.

Dressed now, casually as usual in my Run DMC T-shirt and jeans, I make my way downstairs, following the smell of the freshly-cooked pancakes. Ron and Julia, my younger siblings,

are perched at the table and shoveling food into their mouths. Dad has already left for work, thank God. Not that I don't like my old man or anything. It's just that there's one less person at the table to wish me happy birthday. Which is definitely a good thing, believe me. My evil birthday gremlins can smell well-wishes from a mile away.

"Well, look who finally decided to show up," Ron says, glancing up from his plate. He's twelve now and totally in need of a major chill pill. He doesn't have a respectful bone in his body.

"Don't talk to him like that, you dipstick," Julia says, defending me in her own weirdly inappropriate way. "It's his birthday!"

"Oh yeah? And what he was doing upstairs so long, giving himself a birthday present?" Ron snaps.

"Shut your mouth you dweeb-o-rama!" she counters and smacks his forehead with her spoon.

"Make me!" Ron lifts up his spoon eagerly, ready to retaliate.

"I *will*, believe me," Julia replies, deadly calm.

"Come on, I'm ready for it!"

"That's enough! Ron, you be nice!" my mother finally snaps at him, effectively shutting down the argument. Must be some super-secret Mom power or something.

"Okay, okay, keep your wig on," Ron says, getting up to place his plate in the sink. "It *is* his birthday. I better keep myself away. I wouldn't want to get my hair set on fire or anything."

I cringe. Eleven; I'd almost forgotten about that one since it didn't directly happen to me. That year my birthday candles had effectively turned a six year old Ron into a human torch. Needless to say, there are no longer any candles on my birthday cakes, and now there's a fire extinguisher in our house. Two actually.

I sit down at the table and wait for the bombs to start dropping. Julia is not much of a threat. She's not gonna wish me a happy birthday since she knows good and well that I don't like it, but my mom doesn't believe in the curse. My muscles tense up in preparation.

It's already starting. I watch in horror as she abandons her pan on the stove, and approaches me, planting her standard "birthday kiss" on my forehead. The next thing you know the words are gonna leave her mouth... *happy*...

I brace myself, but suddenly the phone starts ringing, cutting her off midsentence. Thank the sweet lord!

She goes to pick it up, her mane of feathered blonde hair trailing several inches behind her. "Hello?" she answers.

It's Uncle Jack calling, I'm sure. Their entire family of seven is gonna be moving into one of the houses on our street today. They've been talking about it forever, but I never actually thought they would go through with it. The thought of having so many relatives in close proximity is infinitely nauseating to me, but I guess there's really not much I can do about it. I'm still gonna be coerced into celebrating with everyone tonight—even my grandparents are coming.

And of course they're all too damn loving and thoughtful to completely forget my birthday even exists.

Immediately I start stuffing my face with pancakes in hopes that I'll be able to avoid any sort of conversation with my uncle. You see, Uncle Jack is a man of very few words, most of those words being rather unpleasant.

Case in point:

"Sam, honey, Uncle Jack is asking if you could help him move the furniture in this afternoon," my mom tells me still holding the phone to her ear.

I sigh dramatically, of course he is. It's not like he has five kids of his own to do it or anything.

I nod sullenly and she relays the information to Uncle Jack. I catch Julia's eye from across the table and she gives me a sympathetic smile that does manage to make me feel a *little* better.

Chewing fast, I swallow my last bite of pancake and jump up from the table. I manage to pat my sister's head affectionately and give my mother a quick kiss on the cheek in one fluid motion and then make a beeline for the door.

"Honey?" she shouts after me, but I'm already outside.

"I'll be late for the bus," I shout as the door closes.

As soon as I'm in the clear I indulge myself in a small victory smile.

Mission accomplished! She didn't say it. Now I have to make sure nobody else does either.

For some reason most of the students at my high school seem to magically acquire cars and licenses the moment they turn the big one six. Sadly though, I am not one of them. Because why actually try to look cool when there's public transportation that just shows up conveniently at the corner every morning, just a-waitin' to take you to the most fun-ducational place on the planet?

Ugh. Eye roll.

Anyway, I look out the window as we drive down the suburban street, mostly staying on the lookout for potential birthday catastrophes. But as far as I can see, the world looks sun-shiny and marvelous.

Satisfied, that the bus isn't gonna hit a rogue scrunchie and then burst into flames, I turn my thoughts inward. This week is shaping up to be pretty eventful. Today is my birthday. Tomorrow it's the school science fair. Wednesday kicks off a whole day of football practices before a very important post-season charity game—and of course, that means I'm booked as a full-time spectator. Thursday is Joanne McAlister's party at Jake's house, to which I'm sort of invited. Not that I'd want to go (Joanne being Jake's girlfriend and all), but I think my friend Melissa is gonna force me. Then again, Jake is probably gonna be there. I mean, it's *his* house. And finally, topping it all off is our annual Spring Fling on Friday.

So yeah, things are pretty crazy right now.

I don't like it at all. I prefer stability and control, especially this time of year. I just think that whenever a lot of stuff is happening at the same time, you tend to lose perspective and get carried away with the motion. You miss all the important details, the ones that always come back and bite you in the ass. Or at least I do.

The bus stops and I get up from my seat.

Almost immediately I connect with a solid wall of human flesh and completely wipe out.

My books scatter and I flounder, trying to quietly round them up without making a spectacle of myself, which of course doesn't happen—everyone thinks it's hysterical.

I look up and see Mitch Blake. So it was *him* who stumbled against me. He is reaching down to help me up, but I scramble to my feet and push him away. I know he probably didn't mean for that to happen, but I snap at him anyway, "What the hell, Mitch!"

"It was an accident, sorry," he says. He *is* sorry. I can see it in his eyes. He's surprised by the strength of my reaction. He doesn't know that it's not him that I am angry with. It's the whole birthday thing. I know how it works. This incident is just the catalyst; the one crappy event that will end up ballooning out of control and make my day a living hell and I'm not at all excited to see where my day goes from here.

Mitch sheepishly collects all of my books and I work on calming myself down. He obviously didn't want to pick a fight with me or anything, so I shouldn't pick one either. I guess it is just my general reaction towards the straight guys. I jump into defense mode instantaneously. It's better to be safe than sorry. Or, in my case, better safe than bleeding in a ditch somewhere. People can be such pricks.

I look back up at him. He is not a small guy, Mitch, and a football player too. I shouldn't have snapped at him like that. He could break me in half like a twig if he wanted to.

But he doesn't.

"You kinda just walked right into me," he explains. "It's not really my fault."

He's right. I don't want to admit it, but he's right. I just spotted Jake's cherry red Porsche 944 as it drove past our bus and I was too busy looking at it to notice Mitch. I guess I'm getting a little too obsessed with Jake these days.

Or am I? I mean, I've had a crush on him forever. And it's not just a physical attraction. There's something about him that suggests a sensitive soul and delicate nature. I'm not making it up, I swear! I've been watching the guy for a while now. And I don't know...all those sweet sentiments just scream gay to me. I suppose that is why I am attracted to guys who have those qualities. It takes one to know one.

So basically, Jake has it all. The only thing I wish he *didn't* have is a girlfriend. And no, I don't feel bad about calling her a thing.

"Yeah, sorry man," I say, backpedalling to cover up my vast overreaction. "It was an accident." It's hard for me to start admitting my fault here after I already snapped at him, but I'm trying to sound friendlier now.

"Yeah," he responds with an equally friendly tone, "That's kinda what I said." He smiles and hands me my books, all animosity replaced by gentle teasing.

"Thanks," I tell him as we finally leave the bus. I'm still pretty embarrassed, but decide not to dwell on it too much. It could've been so much worse.

Entering campus, I scan my surroundings, just as I did on the bus, hoping to avoid more embarrassing screw-ups. At first nothing seems out of ordinary, but after closer scrutiny I pick up on the fact that the majority of the student body seems happy and downright chipper even though it's a Monday. What the heck? Nobody likes Mondays!

Mitch swings his backpack so that it rests on both shoulders instead of the one he previously had it slung over. "See you around," he says without sparing me another glance.

I watch him walk away. He'd be pretty cute if he wasn't so... so... I don't know. He doesn't dress all that well. Well, he is a straight boy and they rarely dress well. Also, he has that punk thing going on. And I don't really like punk rock music. But I think he's into that lighter "pop-punk" which is actually not terrible. But he does wear tight "drainpipe" jeans and occasionally a leather jacket which is adorned with different band logos and some scary-looking pins and buttons. Also, he has very long and messy hair, which I despise. I don't think guys with long hair are all that attractive.

On the other hand, he is sweet, and that adds on about fifty points in the cute department. But either way, he is straight and it doesn't matter anyway because the only person I like is Jake.

Jake is the only thing that makes me hurry to school every morning. He is the reason why that soul-sucking building made of yellow faced bricks doesn't even look all that bad anymore.

How could I even entertain thoughts of anyone else?

The hallway is crowded, or overcrowded I guess I should say. The students are buzzing about, stopping to chat in large clique-ish chunks that create major roadblocks for the rest of us all across the way. I make my way to Melissa's locker, using my elbows to part the sea of teenagers. Thank God she is already there.

"Hey," I say, smiling, comforted by her familiar presence.

"Hey," she responds with a smirk.

My smile dissolves. "Don't you dare say it," I warn her.

"Are you sure?" she asks. "I kinda feel compelled."

"Don't!" I say as she reaches in and grabs some books from her locker. "I already practically tasted the floor of the school bus this morning. I don't want a repeat performance."

She makes a face. "I'm sure it was an accident and that it had nothing to do with your *birthday*," she looks at me meaningfully.

"Don't say that word either," I say, giving her one of my very best glares. "And it *was* an accident. I'm not saying it wasn't. I'm saying if it wasn't for my... *you know what*... there wouldn't have been an accident to begin with."

She shakes her head. "It's all in your head, Sam. You are making a bigger deal of it than it actually is."

"It's not in my head," I hiss, ready to defend myself, but then I notice that Jake Timbers is looking at me and all other thoughts cease to exist. He is standing on the other side of the hall, surrounded by jocks and his personal assortment of lackeys. Our eyes meet for a split second—just the briefest of moments—and then he turns away like it never happened, a calm, confident smile plastered on his face. But *I* know it happened.

Thank God Melissa is taking her time fishing around in her locker. She doesn't even notice my drool session. And also I'm pretty sure I'm blushing. Jake was looking at me! I feel like doing a happy dance. I mean Jake Timbers is the best gift I could possibly wish for on my birthday. He's the only gift that I really even want.

Melissa finishes collecting her books and shuts her locker with a distinctive slam that takes me out of my wonderfully treacherous birthday thoughts.

"Come on, we're gonna be late for the class," she says and I follow her, mentally chastising myself for even thinking about the B-word. I need to be more careful.

Melissa and I take our usual seats side by side in the back of our history class, amid all the angst-y couples trying to get as far away from the teacher's prying eyes as possible. Some of our less observant peers might lump us right on into that category as well, but we're just friends. Melissa's cool with that. She doesn't know that I'm gay though.

Well, I *presume* she doesn't. We never actually talked about it—I mean, the words were never said, but I've got this gut feeling that she knows about it anyway. I guess I *do* make it pretty obvious sometimes. But anyway, she treats me just like a girlfriend, not in a lesbian way but in a best-friend kind of way. And I guess I am technically one of her "girlfriends."

I don't think girls talk to straight guys about sex much. And me and Melissa, we do. She also frequently asks my opinion on boys that she likes, and unlike me, she has a lot of them.

Unexpectedly, Mitch saunters in a few moments before the bell and takes the seat directly behind me. I think I'm okay with that, just a little surprised is all. But I guess I shouldn't be. Mitch has never been mean to me, unlike the other guys on the football team—not counting Jake of course, who is never really mean to anybody unless they mess with him first—and if this morning was any indication, he might actually be someone I could genuinely get along with.

But it soon becomes very clear that Mitch is gonna be listening to his Walkman the entire period and I'm not too jazzed about that. I'm not at all into the kind of music that he likes, well other than the Descendants. I sigh loudly and place my head in my hands. Well, it *is* my birthday. I kinda expected shitty things like this to be happening. Again, I guess it could be worse.

I look back at him and there he goes putting his headphones on and hitting the play button. I brace myself for a totally awful ear assault when suddenly I hear:

Happy, happy birthday in a hot bath

To those nice nice nights.

I remember always always I got such a fright.

Seeing them in my dark cupboard with my great big cake.

If they were me

If they were me

And I was you

and I was you

If they were me

and I was you

Would you have liked a present too?

Yes, it's that one song from the movie, Happy Birthday by the Altered Images. Normally I would have loved that tune, me being a fan of the movie and all. But not today! I didn't even know Mitch listened to that kind of music. My palms are sweating. Oh God, this is gonna be bad. I can feel it. It's gonna be really, really bad!

Why is he listening to it anyway? Is it on purpose? He couldn't possibly know it was my birthday. And even if he did, he wouldn't be that cruel to me, would he? Is this some kind of revenge for me yelling at him on the bus this morning? No, I'm being silly. He wouldn't have time to prepare that song even if he did want to get back at me. It is probably just another unlucky coincidence, the second one today involving Mitch. Something really weird is happening here.

Melissa nudges my shoulder, distracting me yet again. I glance up at the teacher just as a precaution, but as usual, Mr. Jacobs is busy blabbering away to himself up at the front of the class. The dude's getting too old for this job—he clearly can't see or hear much of anything anymore. Almost every student is engaged in some sort of personal conversation at this point.

"Are you coming to the party this Thursday?" she asks. I haven't really decided yet.

"I haven't really decided yet," I say, echoing my thoughts.

"You better decide," she says, a little annoyed with me. "I don't want to go by myself."

"Don't go then."

"Don't go then," she mimics me. "I *want* to go, just not alone."

"Fine," I say just to get her off my back. Plus Jake is gonna be there and I want to have an extra chance to see him. We don't have any classes together and the only time I really get to see him is at football practice (or in my dreams of course). Seeing him in another kind of environment would be nice. It's just that I don't want to see Joanne very much.

Yes, I *am* jealous, but it's not just that. She really is a total bitch.

I seriously don't get why Jake is going out with her. Yes, she is beautiful and rich and her well-to-do parents "approve" of their relationship. But is it all it takes to win him over? I don't want to believe that. I mean, he's not a dumb jock—in fact, I'm pretty sure he made the honor roll last semester. Surely he has to have seen what a truly vile person she is at *some* point. It's not like she's trying that hard to hide it.

"Hey, Sam?" Mitch whispers and taps my shoulder. I immediately put the brakes on my inner monologue and turn around.

"Can I borrow your pen?" he asks. I can see a torn piece of paper in his hand. Apparently he wants to write a note to somebody. But he doesn't have a pen or a pencil. I mean he wouldn't be much of a punk if he was carrying around school supplies I suppose.

"Sure," I say, handing him one of my spare pens. "You can keep it."

“Thanks,” he says, softly. He is looking at me in a weird way right now. I don’t know what it is. I can’t put my finger on it. There’s something unusual in his eyes, something I haven’t seen before. It’s kinda creeping me out.

“You’re welcome,” I mumble and turn away.

So, where was I? Yes, I was thinking about Jake...

Time for a brief lesson in public high school architecture kiddos. So I already told you that our school has this old center building where we have most of our classes, or at least I meant to—I’m not all that great at focusing, okay? Anyway, the gigantic stadium-sized blob of a building which doubles as our cafeteria is situated just to the left of that. It used to be attached to the main school building a couple years ago, but at some point in the late seventies some rich dudes with nothing better to invest in decided to pay to have them separated.

So basically, now there’s this gap between the two wings. It is small and awkwardly situated so that nothing else fits there. Naturally, that’s where all the “cool kids” hang out.

Well at least it used to be.

Then everybody found out about it and who wouldn’t want to be considered cool, right? So now, at any given moment, it’s practically flooded with a million mindless drones desperate to climb the social ladder.

Needless to say, I am one of them.

Melissa and I have managed to stake claims on our own special spot inside the gap, a small, barely perceptible niche in the wall where we can both sit comfortably and remain hidden from the majority of prying eyes. It also happens to be a good spot for me to indulge in my favorite pastime; watching Jake.

He is hanging out with some kids from the football team as usual and also the Ice Princess Joanne. She’s wrapped her possessive claws so tightly around him I’m surprised he hasn’t turned blue from the lack of oxygen to his handsome little face.

“She’s such a bitch, isn’t she?” Melissa says, noting my gaze and accurately guessing my feelings, as usual. “I can’t believe people even like her. She’s just blatantly vile literally *all* the time. I mean, she has her looks and everything, if you’re into bimbettes, but there’s nothing pretty on the inside.”

“Yeah,” I say shortly. I couldn’t have put it better myself. The way Melissa hates Joanne you’d think she was either jealous or in love with her, but it really just stems from her need to constantly speak her mind. Melissa has no tolerance for silly, shallow people who do nothing but play games, particularly bottle-blondes named Joanne.

Suddenly the hairs on the back of my neck rise to attention and I feel that prickly sensation of being watched. I momentarily tune out Melissa's prattle about specific peers and their supposed level of bitchiness and turn my gaze back to Jake. Our eyes meet momentarily and I immediately whip my head back around in embarrassment. Dear God! Twice in the same day? It must be some sick birthday joke. Conflicting emotions flood my brain. Do I dare look at Jake again and expose myself? Yes... No? Ugh. This is so complicated!

Casually, I cast my gaze in the opposite direction, deciding to play hard to get on the off chance Jake really *is* burning a hole into the back of my skull with his rad pair of baby blues.

But my bubble immediately bursts once I see that it's not Jake, but Mitch who is staring intently in my direction. No, scratch that. He is staring at *Melissa*.

Well, that's understandable. Melissa is pretty hot. If I wasn't gay I'd be all over her—I think. *So that's what's going on with him*, I think, happily putting two and two together. Mitch likes Melissa! That explains why he was sitting behind me in class today, and that note he was writing was probably for her.

Good for him! I shout mentally. At least the boy has better taste in chicks than he does in music. But then I think better of the whole notion and let out a dejected sigh. He doesn't have a chance with Melissa. Poor sap! Melissa wouldn't even let him get close enough to make an impression. Mitch is a pretty decent guy, but unfortunately, Melissa doesn't do well with decent. She's usually attracted to douchebags.

If only Mitch could lose the long hair and get himself a pair of jeans that didn't look like they'd been brutally murdered last October...that still wouldn't help him win Melissa over, but it would probably help him find a nice girl who would appreciate him.

"Sam?" Melissa practically shouts in my ear.

"What?" I ask, guiltily jerking back to attention.

"Are you listening?"

"Yes," I say, less convincingly than I had hoped.

Melissa rolls her eyes, but mercifully lets it slide. "I'm borrowing my dad's car this Thursday. Do you want me to pick you up?" she asks.

"Yeah, sure," I say. "It's not like my parents are gonna cave and let me get my license anytime soon."

She snorts, but then immediately returns to her annoyingly blunt self. "You aren't giving your parents enough credit."

"And how is that?" I say with an eye roll of my own.

“They love you and they care about you,” she says in her smug I-know-that-I’m-right-voice.

“Well, they don’t love me enough to get me a car,” I mumble under my breath, but I can’t really contradict her nonetheless.

“By the way,” she continues with ease. “I have a present for you.” I give her a warning glare. Presents work the same way as the happy birthday line. The cooler the gift the more it backfires.

“I’m not gonna give it to you *today*,” she corrects herself. “I couldn’t, even if I wanted to. It kinda has to get here first. But it’s very cool. You’ll love it.”

“Okay, I’m sure I will,” I say, brightening. “Just not today.”

After class I’m lurking around the outskirts of the practice field as usual, reflecting upon my day. After lunch everything was practically textbook. I mean, nothing out of the ordinary at all. Crazy right? But I’m not letting my guard down just yet. I have way too many birthday scars to make that mistake.

Abruptly a bus-sized human emerges on my right.

“Give me that, you asshole!” one of the football players demands of me as he snatches one of the towels from my stack.

I internally glare at him, taking pleasure in the fact that these standard-issue towels have probably been collecting dust and god knows what else in the school’s supply closet for at least a decade now.

As you may have guessed, I am not athletically inclined. That being said, the only way I can stalk Jake Timbers at practice is if I volunteer as towel boy.

“Thanks!” car-boy says sarcastically and throws his sweaty towel at my face.

Okay, okay, calm down, I tell myself. It’s worth it.

He’s worth it.

With a longing sigh I return my gaze to Jake. The team is only warming up today, so he is not wearing his uniform, which is yellow and white with *TIMBERS* written on the back in red block letters just above his number, 12. Twelve is his lucky number. Don’t ask me how I know that, it may present some legal issues.

Anywho, I love him in his uniform, but I love him in his tiny red shorts even more. He looks just like he did in my dream this morning; absolutely scrumptious, but this time my pants will remain dry; I assure you.

“This game is very important for the school, I hope you understand that,” I overhear Ms. Anderson, our school’s principal, say to coach Millwood as they move in closer to observe the team. She is really taking this charity game far too seriously. Especially considering we already won the state championship this year.

“Don’t you worry, Principal Anderson, everything’s gonna be as expected,” coach reassures her.

“I certainly hope so,” she says firmly, leaving the phrase *for your sake* unspoken, but still painfully clear. She is a total hardass, that woman. She’s never been married and she lives alone with her cats (lord only knows how many). She’s got these totally ugly bags under her eyes that make-up, for all of its glory, still can’t seem to hide, and the abundance of wrinkles around them is the result of her reading tons of administrative papers, I’m guessing.

The two of them don’t even acknowledge my existence, even though they are standing about two feet away. I’m not too offended by it. They’re both even bigger wannabes than I am; both hoping to cash in on the team’s success.

Mrs. Edelson, our principal’s assistant, gives me a sympathetic smile though. She is currently our “water-girl” since I am the only volunteer and I’m busy with the towels.

Now, you may be wondering why they can’t just set the towels and water on a table or something. I don’t damn well know the answer to that one, but I’m hoping the thought never occurs to them!

Ignoring everything else, I find Jake among the players and start following him with my eyes. There is so much grace in his movements, the way each one is so smooth and fluid, seamlessly blending right on into the next one. And yet, he never once drops his unquestionable air of masculinity. It really is quite astounding. I’m practically one thousand percent sure that I am the only person on the face of the earth who would ever dare suspect him of being gay.

“Johns! Watch your left arm,” coach Millwood shouts, startling me and several of the players.

“Walovski! Just get out of my sight! That was terrible!” he shouts again.

The coach is obviously laying it on thick so that Anderson will think he’s got everything under control. You see, coach Millwood is a little more into the bottle than the game these days, not that anyone would ever say anything. He’s a pretty cool dude, drinking aside. But yeah, he’s rightfully concerned about job security.

Smirking, I tune back into the game. I watch as someone throws a football to Jake and he catches it easily. As a quarterback, his throwing arm is the real prize, but like I said, he has the total package. He throws it back at whoever threw it at him and repeats the process several times until somebody throws the ball just out of his reach. The ball flies right over his head and falls down on the floor. It rolls in my direction, stopping just a couple feet away from where I stand.

Ridiculously, my initial thoughts are something along the lines of: *Oh! Well, hello little football, pleasure to meet you!*

I stand stalk-still, staring at the ball with wide eyes because, for all my talk about the damn thing, I'm not usually the one to touch it. I expect Jake to come over and pick it up, but he doesn't. He is just standing there looking at me expectantly.

I think I'm about to wet my pants after all. Jake wants me to throw the ball back to him. My heart is practically running a marathon. What do I do?! Should I throw it? I don't even know *how* to throw it! I glance back up at Jake who's beginning to look a tad bit impatient. Shit! I have to do *something*.

So I abandon a good portion of my self-respect, throw the towels down on the bench beside me and grab the ball. I feel it in my hands. It feels nice actually, a little heavier than I expected, emblazoned with dozens of tiny little goosebumps all over its surface.

I suck in a breath, blink slowly and then throw the ball as hard as I can. To my amazement, it flies straight into Jake's hands. Jake smiles at me and mouths *thanks*. I smile back. We are looking into each other's eyes now and the chemistry between us is undeniable. It feels awesome. I wish this moment could last forever...

"Hey, Sam! Catch!" I hear someone shout at me from out of nowhere.

I turn my head to see who it is only to find yet another football is flying in my direction. This time I don't even have to think about it. I just instinctively reach up and pluck the ball out of midair absorbing the impact with my chest. I'm not as bad at this as I thought.

I see that Mitch is the one who hurled it my way. He is looking at me excited, expecting me to throw it back. As glad as I am to be a part of practice now, I'm desperate to hang onto that moment I just had with Jake, but when I turn back to him he is already throwing the ball back and forth with another guy.

I throw the ball back at Mitch as hard as I can. I can't help it. I've gone into bitch mode.

"I don't want to play, Mitch!" I shout angrily.

He is clearly taken aback by my reaction, but still not deterred.

"Come on, warm up a little. It'd be good for you," he says and throws the ball back to me.

I catch it and throw it back even harder. Now I'm seeing red.

"I *said* I don't want to play." The words are pretty much dripping in acid.

"Oh, really?" he shouts, a little angry now too. Why is *he* getting angry? And then he throws the ball back at me, hard this time, real hard.

I catch it.

I don't know if you're aware of this, but catching a heavy, fast-moving projectile at a close distance hurts like a bitch.

Livid, I collect all of my energy and throw it back at him as hard as a can. He catches it and I can see by his expression that it was equally unpleasant.

He, of course, retaliates by throwing it back, and I, preferring to keep all of my internal organs intact, immediately dodge left. Unfortunately, this sends the ball flying straight towards Mrs. Edelson, water girl extraordinaire. Lucky for her, the ball finds it in its cold inflated heart to avoid caving in her pretty little face. Not so lucky for *us*, it does manage to knock the tray of water right out of her hands so that it thoroughly soaks Principal Anderson, who judging by her reaction is closely related to the wicked witch of the west.

Soaking wet, she gives both me and Mitch a piercing look with her enraged raccoon eyes.

"My office, now!" she yells.

And that, my friends, is how you get yourself a week of detention.

I knew I couldn't possibly get through a birthday unscathed.

I'm in the team's locker room now, collecting the towels left scattered all over the floor after everybody else is long gone. I'm sure they'd be a lot more careful about where they left their towels if they knew I was constantly watching them, but hey, it's worth it.

They don't know I like guys, *obviously*. Even if they catch me looking at them it won't be the first thing on their mind. It's kinda like being a kid in a candy store, a really really fat kid on a diet, but still. If only I could touch those sweet candies and not just look at them, not to mention everything else you can do with candy...

Jake hasn't made an appearance yet. The last time I saw him, he was walking into the coach's office. The poor guy was probably in the middle of one of Coach's lame cookie-cutter speeches about how important winning is for the self-esteem of impressionable youths such as himself. As if the star quarterback with potential scholarships on the line doesn't already know all about winning.

I'm tempted to go looking for him, but I don't want to risk running into Ms. Anderson again, or worse, Mitch.

Mitch has practically been stalking me all day, and I know it has something, or everything if I'm being honest, to do with Melissa. He obviously thinks he can use me to get to her. I don't think I can help in that department, and now I don't even want to. He probably doesn't realize it, but he is being a major pain in the ass.

It doesn't help that his presence seems to bring bad luck.

I finish collecting all the towels and begin hauling them toward the industrial-sized hamper on the other side of the locker room. Damn! They're *heavy*. My knees are buckling and I'm pretty sure that I'm gonna collapse beneath a giant sack of athletic sweat, and not in a sexy way.

Someone approaches me from behind.

"Need help with that?" asks a low male voice.

I turn around slowly, not sure who to expect. It's Josh Wells, one of the jocks. Pretty face, big chocolate-y brown doe eyes, dark, curvy eyelashes, and a lean muscular build—which I am particularly familiar with if you catch my drift.

I have to swallow a few times before answering. "No, thanks," I say. "I'm cool."

I continue dragging the bag across the floor. I'm sure that it's painfully obvious that I do, in fact, need help, but I'd never admit that. Especially around someone like him.

Josh watches on in amusement for a few minutes before taking the sack from my hands and tossing it into the hamper with ease.

He turns back to me and says, "There you go."

"Oh, thanks," I mutter, straining to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

"I'm going to hit the showers," he says, peeling off his sweaty T-shirt. I gulp nervously. He doesn't seem to mind me looking.

"Okay," I mutter again, voice proud and steady despite the erratic fluttering in my chest.

"You look like you could use some refreshing as well," he says, looking down at me.

I do the same.

It is pretty hot in here and I am sweatier than I'd like. I guess I *could* take a shower, but I never like to shower at school. I mean, the view would be great, I'm sure, but being naked and exposed before all of those jocks is kinda terrifying seeing as I don't exactly have great control over one particular part of my body.

"No," I start saying. "I think I'm gonna wait 'til I get home."

"Suit yourself," he says and takes off his shorts. Dear God! He is not wearing any underwear. He stands completely naked in front of me and, again, he doesn't seem to mind me looking.

He grabs a towel and goes into the shower room. My eyes follow greedily. I think I'm gonna take that shower after all.

I am so nervous that my legs are shaking. I'm in a shower stall, naked and Josh is in the shower stall opposite me, naked too. This is my first time being naked with another guy in the room, well, unless you count that time when I was twelve and me and my friend Frankie were putting our swimming shorts on in my bedroom. That was a lot less thrilling than this.

It was also a lot less terrifying.

I am practically aching to turn around and look at him, damn all repercussions. Even the *thought* of looking at him is arousing. I feel completely exposed though. I face the wall. The possibility of watching him shower is taunting me, consuming every rational thought. I wage an intense inner battle for a few more minutes, but then I come to the conclusion that I'm not likely to get another chance like this one anytime soon.

I turn around and, not daring to look at his body, I look at his face instead. Our eyes meet... I think I'm gonna faint now...

But I don't faint. I watch in stunned silence as Josh winks at me instead.

Oh sweet Jesus!

I turn away at once. That is just too much to handle right now. I can't even begin to process what is happening. But I gotta look again. I just have to.

I turn around and see him from the back now. I watch as he puts his head under the stream of water for a moment and then starts soaping himself. The sight of his wet body under the stream of hot water is just delightful. *Too* delightful.

I turn away again. I don't want Josh to see my boner. Or do I? No, I don't! I mean, it sounds good in theory, and this could be a good plot for an erotic dream, but this is neither. I can't predict what kind of reaction I would get. I mean, it's just us here. It's not like there's a girl around. This is just too much for one day. I have to take a break. But there he is, standing right there, a couple feet away from me, naked. Do I dare look at him again?

The thrill I get from this is not something I'm used to. I mean, I have a couple of porn magazines back at home, but those pictures are not alive. It's not the same as looking at a real boy standing so close that I could theoretically reach out and touch him if I dared.

I look again. I stare at his body this time. He is drying his hair, so I have a few moments to openly gawk. And he has quite a bit to gawk at. His body is just perfect. It looks almost as if it was carved with a chisel. But that is not even the main point of attraction. His tool is right there on display; and it's hard.

This is a scene straight from the erotic stories book I managed to find in a public library. I mean, if it *was* a scene from an erotic stories book I would turn around and start touching myself and let him watch. And he would watch me touch myself and he would like it. And then he would start touching himself as well, stroking his big tool. And I would watch. And then he would come

over into my stall and... And touch me... And... And... I start breathing hard now and my face becomes distorted as I climax.

I try to hide my sudden orgasm, but my body twitches a little and I can't do anything about it. I don't know if Josh saw me. I don't even dare look at him right now. I didn't even touch myself. I am soooooo embarrassed, mortified even.

I put my head under the water, desperately wishing that this was a dream that I could soon wake up from.

About five minutes later I turn off the water, steel myself, and turn around. Josh is already gone. I don't know if he saw any of that, but I just wanna crawl into a cave and die.

I get dressed with trembling fingers, imaging the hell that will befall me if my secret gets out.

When I enter the designated classroom for detentions, room 409, the first person I see is Mitch. I am so upset at this point that I don't even say anything to him. I just sit down and cover my face with my arms.

"Aren't you taking this a little too hard? It's just detention," Mitch says.

"It's not that," I say without looking at him. "It's something else."

Mitch already apologized to me after Ms. Anderson scolded us in her office. I know none of this is his fault, just an awful string of coincidences, that's all, but I have to blame *someone* or else I'll go crazy.

"What is it then?" he asks.

"I don't think you want to know, Mitch," I say into my armpit. I don't really want to talk right now. I'd much rather just die.

"Well," he says gently. "I have an hour and a half to kill. And it's not like there's anything else to do."

I look up and scan the classroom, which I now realize is completely empty apart from the two of us. I'm pretty sure there's supposed to be a teacher here, but I guess we did get stuck with detention a little late in the game. As gross as it is to think about, teachers do have lives outside of school. At least I *think* they do.

"Do you really want to know?" I ask, wondering if straight guys often complain about their problems to other straight guys. I don't think they do, but I wouldn't know.

"Sure. Spit it out."

I chew on my lower lip for a moment while I figure out where to start.

“Mostly my problem with today is that it’s my birthday.”

“It is?” he asks, a smile lighting up his face. “Well, then happy—

“Don’t say that out loud!” I screech.

“What? What did I say?” he looks around urgently as if he expects some authority figure to pop up out of nowhere and admonish him.

“It’s not you,” I explain. “This is exactly why I’m upset. It’s this thing about my birthdays...”

“What’s wrong with your birthdays?” he asks. I look at his face, trying to size him up. From what I can gather, he seems genuinely interested, so I tell him. I tell him about the cake, the broken bones, the house fires. Everything.

He keeps nodding and intently listening the entire time. I don’t think anyone ever took my story so seriously. My family doesn’t believe in it. And Melissa likes to talk but doesn’t really like to listen. I find Mitch’s calm reaction very refreshing.

“Do you think I’m crazy?” I ask when I’m finished. He thinks about it for a moment and then smiles.

“No, I don’t think you’re crazy. Well, maybe just a little bit,” he smiles conspiratorially so that I know he’s joking. “Maybe it’s like a curse? A birthday curse?”

“Is that a thing?”

“It might be,” he says. “There are a lot of people who believe in them, in curses I mean.”

“Do you?”

“I think so.”

“Who cursed me then?”

“I don’t know.” He says solemnly. “Maybe nobody did. Maybe you were born with it.”

“Seems like it,” I sigh. “What do I do to lift the curse?”

“You’re just full of questions aren’t you?” he smiles as if he just made the funniest joke ever and then grows serious once again. “I dunno. But there’s gotta be something.”

“I know. I gotta take three feathers from a street pigeon, two ounces of pig’s blood, and a dash of unicorn tears,” I say smiling.

“Yeah, and don’t forget about the rabbit’s feet...and a caldron. You’re gonna need something to mix that in.”

We both laugh.

“Or maybe you’re like Sleeping Beauty and your curse can be lifted with a kiss?”

“Yeah, right,” I answer, trying to smile. Little does he know, much like sleeping beauty I’m waiting for my prince.

Shrugging off my momentary awkwardness, I continue bombarding him with theories as to how to break my curse. We talk more about curses and zombies and vampires and the *Creepshow* movie from a few years ago that we both loved, among other things. Then one thing leads to another and he’s using the plastic skeleton model to impersonate the undead and I’m running around the classroom trying to escape my gory death until he catches me and “eats my eyeballs.”

“Gahhrr... I am a creature from a planet Gahhh and I am going to eat your facial features,” he growls.

“No, please creature from the planet Gahhh, don’t eat my facial features!” I shriek in my best damsel in distress voice.

“I can’t stop myself, Arrr... Your eyes were delicious and now I have to eat your nose too.”

“No... No!” I scream.

I try to escape again, but he hunts me down and eats my nose as well, causing both of us to collapse into hysterical fits of laughter.

Then, tired and out of breath, we sit down and talk some more. We also share an orange that appears out of the depths of Mitch’s backpack. So *that’s* what his backpack for. He never has any notebooks or pens or anything, just cassette tapes and questionably obtained fruit.

He says he likes citrus fruits. So do I.

I’m pretty much marveling at how well the two of us get along. An hour and a half of detention passes by in what feels like ten minutes.

“You know, I don’t think I like my birthdays either,” Mitch says as we get back on the subject of my birthday curse.

“Why?” I ask, curious. He seems to have pretty much everything he could possibly ask for, well except for Melissa.

“I never get anything I really want,” he explains. “I mean, my parents give me a lot of cool stuff...”

“Like a car,” I supply.

“Yeah, that, but that’s not really important. It’s not a car that I want.”

I nod and say, "I think I know what you want."

He looks up at me, surprised. "You do?"

"Yeah, I mean I noticed the way you look at..."

And before I can say *Melissa*, Ms. Anderson walks in. She gives us both dirty looks and also a stern lecture on how young boys should be behaving at school. She used the word "hooligans" no less than five times.

"Okay then. I will be expecting to see the two of you back here tomorrow," she finishes. "Dismissed!"

She exits the room immediately as if she has a ton of important work to do, which she probably does.

Now it's just me and Mitch again.

I watch him get up and put his backpack on. I don't really want to go home, not today. I wasn't there to help Uncle Jack move the furniture and I'm sure I'm gonna hear all about it. But most of all, I just don't want to be celebrating my birthday. Today has been traumatizing enough. I'd much rather spend some more time with Mitch.

"Hey," he says. I look up at him. "See you tomorrow?"

"Yeah," I say. "We don't really have a choice."

"I don't mind this detention thing. It was kinda fun talking to you and stuff."

"It was," I agree, awkwardly. "I mean I feel the same way."

He seems hesitant to leave too, and also a little bit nervous. Maybe it's this Melissa thing? I'm just about to offer him my help with that, but he interrupts me saying, "Bye then. See you tomorrow."

"Bye," I say watching him rush out almost as fast as Ms. Anderson.

I turn around and reach for my jacket which I left on the desk behind me and catch a glimpse of a note lying on my desk. I glance back at the door. Mitch is already gone.

It's probably a note that he wants me to give to Melissa but he couldn't work up the courage to ask me. He seems oddly worked up over something so simple. Well, I guess I would have been worked up too if I asked someone to give a declaration of love to Jake.

I take the note, vowing to give it to Melissa first thing tomorrow morning. Although I'm pretty sure what she's gonna say about it. But hey, you know what they say. No harm, no foul.

I enter my house through the back door, hoping to slip in unnoticed.

“Where have you been?” my mother asks, immediately bursting my bubble.

“Detention,” I admit.

“Detention?” she asks, surprised. I’m her “easy child” AKA, not usually one to get in trouble.

“It’s the birthday thing.” I sigh.

“Well, I’m sorry about that, honey. But I’m afraid there’s more bad news.” That is when I start noticing the loud voices coming from the living room. Apparently all of the guests are here and ready to celebrate.

“What happened?”

My mother shifts uncomfortably. “Well, when Uncle Jack and your father were trying to move the furniture in, Uncle Jack threw out his back,” she starts, eyes wide with excitement. As a suburban housewife she doesn’t really get out all that much. “We even had to take him to the hospital.”

“Well, that’s bad,” I say, sensing that there is worse news to come.

“The sofa that they dropped after Uncle Jack threw out his back; it made a hole in their living room floor. It turns out that the house is infested with termites.”

“Uh huh,” I say and gesture for her to continue.

“Well, they couldn’t move into the house that has holes in the floor. So we invited them to stay over at our house for the next couple of days.”

“Mom!” I protest immediately. They have five kids, for God’s sake! Couldn’t she see the amount of noise and destruction that would ensue?

“It’s already decided and we are not going to argue about it. The termite problem is gonna be solved tomorrow. The contractor says that it’s gonna take two days tops.”

“Two days?” I whine.

“It’s just two days, Sam. I think we can handle that. Also, your grandparents are not gonna be able to make it today. And taking into account that the Ericsons are not exactly cheerful after what happened, we decided to reschedule your birthday celebration for tomorrow.”

“What?” I practically shout.

“Honey, Uncle Jack just got back from the hospital. You can’t expect him to get straight to celebrating your birthday. And to tell you the truth, he is a little upset that you didn’t show up this afternoon to help him out.”

“It wasn’t my fault,” I protest.

“And your grandparents aren’t here. You wouldn’t want to be celebrating your birthday without them, would you?”

“I don’t wanna celebrate it at all!”

My mom gives me a seething look that says exactly what she thinks of that idea. “I’m sorry, honey. We’re just gonna have to reschedule it.”

I can’t believe this. I thought I was done with today, but I guess I was wrong. It looks like my birthday curse is going to carry on into tomorrow. Shit!

“Okay,” I say unwillingly. “Is there somebody in my room?”

“Yes, three of the Ericsons kids are gonna be sleeping in your room tonight.” Double shit!

“I don’t want to sleep with them,” I retort.

“Well then, the laundry room is all yours.”

Thankfully, the laundry room is spacious enough for me to settle into comfortably, and it has an old couch that I can sleep on. I lie down on said couch, cover myself with the blanket my mom brought in, and stare up at the ceiling. This room was not part of the original structure of the house. It’s basically like an oversized shed with a giant skylight in the middle of its slanted roof. Looking up at the stars through the skylight makes me feel slightly better about this whole ordeal. But only slightly.

With a large sigh, the sigh of the century almost, I sink into the cushions, close my eyes and let the soft whirring of the washing machine coax me into sleep.

The first thing I see is an image of Jake. We’re at the gym and he’s throwing a football to me. I catch it, much more confidently than I would’ve in real life, and throw it back. He catches it with a giant smile. I smile too. We continue throwing the ball back and forth, falling into a comfortable routine.

Then I throw him a pass he can’t catch. It hits him in the face instead.

Startled, I shoot up out of bed and try to rid myself of that awful mental image. Stupid dream. Dreams are supposed to show me happy, sexy-time with Jake, not me making a total fool out of myself.

I do just fine at that in real life.

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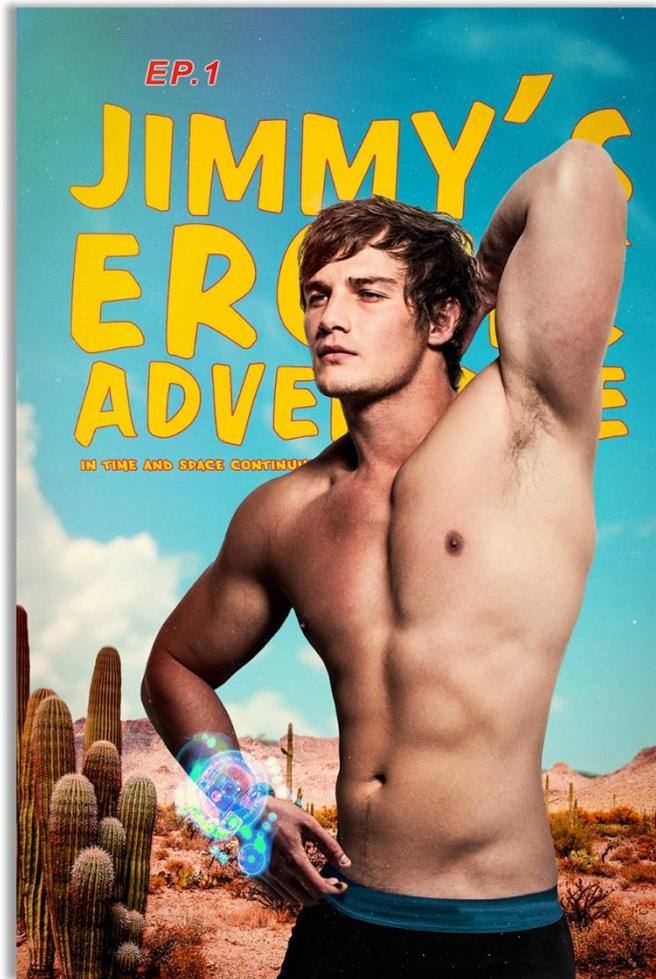
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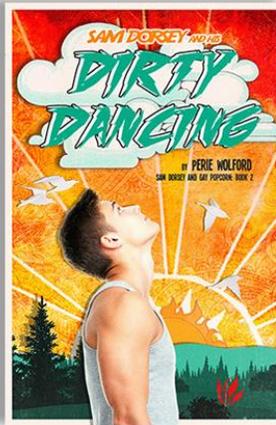
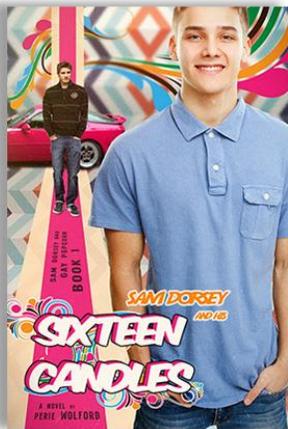
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