



**Sample Pages From**

**I SWEAR TO YOU**  
**by Sloan Parker**

Genre: Gay Contemporary Erotic Romance (M/M)

Length: Novella, 36,000+ words

**This book contains adult material and sexual situations not suitable for reading by minors. Please keep your electronic books safe from underage readers.**

## Prologue

Grady turned his pickup truck onto the narrow dirt driveway and glanced over at his roommate in the passenger seat. The side of Mateo's dark head was plastered against the window, his eyes closed, lips parted in sleep.

"This sucks," Grady whispered under his breath. He so didn't want to wake him.

It had been one hell of a shitty day, and Mateo deserved at least another hour or two of the ignorant bliss that came with sleep.

Grady sighed and tapped Mateo's thigh with the side of his fist. "We're here."

Mateo flinched awake, banging his elbow on the armrest as he bolted upright. That had to feel damn near perfect after what he'd gone through a little over an hour ago.

"Sorry, man."

Mateo blinked and shook his head as if to say it was fine.

He had drifted off halfway through the drive to Crystal Spring Lake, which was situated in the middle of forestland and farm country, fifty-five miles from their university in West Clinton, Ohio.

It had been pushing midnight by the time they'd left their dorm room, tossing some clothes and shit into their bags, heading out without telling any of their frat brothers or hockey teammates where they were going.

Or why.

As the truck came to a stop, Mateo nodded toward the north end of the property. "The guesthouse?"

“You know it.”

It was odd that he'd asked. They always stayed in the one-room, pale-blue house that sat off to the side of the main cottage.

Maybe what he'd witnessed earlier had him feeling even more out of sorts than Grady had expected.

And why not? No matter what a guy felt about the girl he was seeing, when he caught her in bed with another guy, it fucking stung.

Mateo wrenched open the passenger door and got out.

Grady followed suit. Despite how warm it had been that day for early May, it was frigid at the lake at this time of night. Good thing he'd had the sense to grab their coats on their way out an hour earlier. Mateo hadn't been thinking too clearly when he'd stormed into their dorm room after catching his girl with a freshman from their hockey team, the guy's dick buried inside her.

Mateo paused in front of the truck like he was too exhausted to move another inch. He stared at the guesthouse, then out over the moonlit water.

The lake was just a speck on any map, and the nearest neighbor was a quarter mile away through the dense forest. Only a dozen houses sat around the perimeter of the lake. The two that Grady's family had owned all his life weren't anything elaborate, but it felt good to be away from school, to inhale the clear, crisp air, and stand in the piercing quiet.

With the moon barely a sliver of light in the sky, it was like they'd stepped into another world.

Maybe Mateo felt the same. He inhaled deeply like he was able to really breathe for the first time since they'd left the city, and then he walked to the shoreline and continued to stare out at the dark, still water.

Grady grabbed their bags and the case of beer and set everything on the porch of the guesthouse, then headed down to the shore. They stood almost shoulder to

shoulder in the sand, though Mateo was a touch taller. They had the same dark hair, but in contrast to Mateo's darker skin, Grady's paler complexion always freckled easily in the sun.

The cool breeze picked up, blew across the surface of the lake, and smacked into them. Mateo closed his eyes and lifted his face into the wind. With his hair swept back off his forehead, he looked like he did whenever he peeled off his helmet after a game, his black hair sweaty and slicked back.

His voice was low when he finally spoke. "Grady?"

"Yeah."

He waved that off like he'd changed his mind on what he'd been about to bring up. "Let's take the boat out."

"Sure. Let me go grab the key from the house."

"No." He shook his head again. "We fire up the motor this late, and the neighbors across the way will be bitching your dad out." With a tilt of his head, he gestured to the back of the property. "The canoe."

Grady looked toward the shed that sat behind the main house where the canoe and oars were stored. He shrugged. "Okay." It didn't matter that they'd probably come close to freezing their asses off out on the water. If this was what Mateo needed, Grady would do it. He'd row through a blizzard for Mateo.

They'd been coming out to the lake since they'd met in the first grade. All through school they'd spent their weekends there, hiking through the woods looking for tree frogs, and doing cannonballs off the dock to see who could make the biggest splash. In high school they'd progressed to taking either the canoe or the motorboat out on the lake and talking about which girls they wanted to fuck. They'd even moved to the guesthouse during the first three summers in college, both of them working part-time at the honky-tonk joint about a mile away. Grady knew Mateo had nowhere else to go. Asking his aunt and uncle if he could stay with them wasn't an option.

*"They're just gonna say no."*

He'd lived with them since he was three months old, but the minute he'd left for college, they'd practically forgotten he'd existed.

Fuck 'em.

Grady had made a point of telling Mateo he didn't need them. He had Grady's family. Hell, Grady's parents had done more for Mateo during one season of hockey—buying his gear and driving him to practice—than his aunt and uncle had ever bothered to do.

Without another word, they headed for the shed. It wasn't long before they had the canoe launched and were rowing away from the cottage, Grady seated in the bow and Mateo behind him in the stern. In the center of the lake, they stopped and let the canoe drift on the nearly still water.

There were no sounds of traffic, no guys bitching at each other, no blaring video games. Just the sporadic hoot of an owl in the distance.

Grady swung around to sit facing the back of the canoe. Mateo hadn't taken his eyes off the water.

"Fuck her," Grady said as he pulled out two beers. "Who needs her?"

Mateo nodded but said nothing.

Grady twisted open one of the beers and handed it to him, then opened his own. He guzzled it down, not knowing what to say or do.

He never felt this uncomfortable around Mateo. Then again, they didn't spend their days talking about this kind of thing.

Not that shit didn't ever get serious. Sometimes late at night in their dorm room, after a party, when they were both drunk, they'd talk about stuff they had never talked about with anyone else, that they'd only admit because they were alone, drunk, whispering in the dark. It was then that Mateo would admit how scared he was he'd fuck up in school and ruin his one chance to make something of himself, to prove to his

aunt and uncle they were wrong about him. And maybe to prove to himself he could do it.

Grady hadn't known what to say to that. He had tried to tell Mateo his aunt and uncle didn't know crap about him, but he'd never gotten through.

Or maybe he had. Maybe Mateo needed those words from Grady, and that was why he'd brought it up in the first place.

And now, sitting in the canoe, Grady was yet again at a loss for what to say, for what Mateo needed him to say. So he drank his beer and waited.

Eventually Mateo looked away from the water and stared down the mouth of his beer bottle. "I just finished reading this book about the psychology of introverts."

"Yeah?"

That wasn't a surprise. Mateo was always reading like he was on a deadline. Yet it wasn't just what was assigned for his classes. He devoured books the way the guys at the frat house inhaled pizza.

He also kept to himself a lot. He rarely said more than two consecutive sentences to anyone—except Grady.

It was that quiet, mysterious thing he had going on that girls found irresistible, thinking they could be the ones to get him to open up. He didn't even need the two sentences to get most girls in bed with him. He'd just flash them those serious dark eyes, and they were all over him.

Of course, it also could've been the story of how he'd gotten to Ohio from Mexico that did the girls in. Most people on campus had heard the rumor that Mateo was the famous "miracle baby." At three months old he'd been smuggled into the US with his parents, hidden under a false floor in a van, only to end up in a car crash ten miles north of the border. He was found lying unharmed amid the twisted metal, crammed between the bodies of his dead parents.

That story always had the girls batting their pity-filled eyes at him.

*Morons.* They never bothered to see who Mateo really was.

Maybe Grady would always know him better than any woman.

When Mateo said nothing more about the book he'd read, Grady didn't push him on it. When he wanted to talk, he'd talk.

The silence stretched on for so long Grady practically jumped in his seat when Mateo finally spoke again.

"It said introverts usually prefer a small number of close friends over lots of casual ones." There was something very damaged and hurt and vulnerable about the way he sounded right then. Even in the low light of the moon, the look on his face matched the sound of his voice. "Most of their relationships can get pretty intense." He drank a long swallow of beer. Then another until the bottle was empty. He tossed it over his shoulder into the boat. "Who needs her?"

"Exactly." It wasn't like he'd been seeing her that long anyway. Grady handed him another beer.

Mateo didn't say anything else for a while, just stared off into the dark, impenetrable water once again. When that beer was almost gone, he said, "You know that thing we've been doing after your history class?"

*Shit.*

With that one question, he was violating their unspoken agreement not to talk about it—about what they did every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday when Grady got back to their dorm room.

So far those afternoons had been the best sexual experience of Grady's life, and all he did was spend those few minutes touching only himself.

With forced nonchalance he said, "Yeah."

"Was I cheating on her?"

"No fucking way! We were just beating off at the same time. It's not like we were doing it to each other. We weren't even on the same side of the damn room."

Mateo nodded, downed another long swallow.

Of course, it hadn't just been beating off, and they both knew it. The way they'd watched each other, focused on the other man's dick as he worked it over. They had matched their rhythms so it was exactly like they were doing it to each other. And neither one would look away until the other's pulse of cum shot out as he came.

For Grady it had all driven his arousal higher, made him come harder than anything else.

To his relief, they didn't say anything more on the subject. They kept on twisting open beers until they were both drunk, cursing at the fish who sporadically breached the surface of the water, laughing at how every rustle of brush and crack of a twig from the acres of wooded land surrounding the lake had them jumping out of their seats.

They finished off the last of the beers a few hours later, and then Mateo passed out on his side on the canoe floor. Too tired and drunk himself, Grady ungracefully ducked under the thwart that stretched across the canoe's middle and squeezed in beside him. Sometime in the night Grady's arm became a pillow, protecting Mateo's head from that hard, wet floor.

When they awoke, the lake was covered in fog, the sunrise a brilliant orange burning through the mist. The sorrowful call of a mourning dove was punctuating the quiet stillness.

Without a word they got up and arranged themselves on the seats.

As if they had to summon the energy to move, they sat there holding on to the oars, facing each other, both staring off into the separating fog, watching a pair of swans take flight and breeze across the surface of the water.

"Thanks," Mateo said in a low whisper.

"No problem."

He nodded, then looked Grady's way.

Grady added, "I always got your back."



\* \* \* \*

Two hours later Grady was balancing a bag of groceries on his hip as he opened the door to the guest cottage. He got one step in and froze.

Mateo was lying naked on the lone bed—where Grady usually slept—one hand tucked behind his head, the other gripping his cock.

Just the way Grady had watched him jerk off so many times in their dorm room, watched that slick hand running along the length of his shaft, listened to his breathing pick up speed, the groans he'd let out right before he came.

Mateo didn't scramble to cover himself, and Grady didn't look away. He stepped farther inside and swung the door closed behind him. He dropped the grocery bag on the kitchen table as he passed by and went to the couch—where Mateo usually slept.

Mateo hadn't taken his eyes off Grady, and he hadn't let go of his dick.

Neither of them said a word as Grady sat on the couch and reached to undo his jeans. Mateo started stroking again, and Grady slipped a hand inside his underwear, frantically trying to catch up. It wasn't going to take long. Not with the way Mateo was watching his hand move underneath the fabric.

Then Mateo turned away. He reached for his bag that was sitting on the nightstand. He tossed Grady a bottle of lubricant—the girlie shit with some sort of imitation cherry flavoring. Grady squirted a glob on his palm and fished out his cock. He worked it over, quickly getting it to a state of desperation. He hadn't gone at it with such vigor in a long while.

Of course, he had never gone this long without sex. The last serious thing he'd had going with a girl had ended six months earlier, and since then he hadn't felt inclined to hook up with anyone.

Not when he had something this good.

Was he really saying that jerking off was better than sliding his dick into a wet, hot pussy?

Right now? *Hell yeah.*

They sat there fixated on each other, the sound of their slick strokes filling the room.

Mateo moaned, threw his head back on the pillow. He dropped his free hand to the sheet beside him and gripped it in his fist. "Grady!" Cum spurted out of him and landed on his abs, his hips slamming up again and again with his release.

That had Grady working himself faster.

"Your turn," Mateo said around a sigh, gaze locked on the steady tugging action of Grady's hand.

That did it. Grady groaned and came, his body quivering, and through it all he never looked away from Mateo – who was still watching him in return.

In all the times they'd been doing this, Mateo had never said his name. He'd never said anything.

Grady was still wringing the cum from his cock when Mateo swung his legs off the side of the bed, facing the opposite wall. He stood and slipped on his jeans, his broad shoulders and biceps flexing.

How had he so casually gotten up and gotten dressed like that? While Grady was still gasping for breath?

Only then did Grady realize how he'd been watching Mateo's every move, taking in the sight of him – his naked body, his strong frame and hard muscles – in a way that scared the shit out of him.

He wanted him.

He wanted to touch his dick, have Mateo touch him in return.

He wanted to grab that ass he'd just been staring at.

He wanted Mateo to...

To fuck him.

“Shit!” Grady dropped his head to the couch behind him, trying not to panic, trying to figure out when things with his best friend had changed that much, and what the hell he was going to say to him.

Fuck that. He wasn’t saying anything.

Because this was crazy. He was straight. Snatch-eating, pussy-fucking, tit-licking *straight*.

So they’d done some jerking off together? Big deal.

He was *not*—

He couldn’t even think the word.

There was just something about Mateo, something about watching him pleasure himself that got Grady hot and bothered. It fed a primal instinct in him that no amount of fucking girls had done for him.

Jerking off together was bound to mix thoughts of Mateo and sex together in his mind. He was just horny and stressed about finals coming up and feeling weird about no longer living with Mateo in a few weeks.

That was it. That was all it was.

He sensed Mateo’s presence before he felt his touch. Mateo placed a hand on each of Grady’s knees and knelt on the floor before him.

The look on his face was a new one. Fear?

“I can’t lose you, our friendship... That would be...” He shook his head. “Impossible.”

*What the hell?*

“You’re not gonna lose me.”

Mateo’s expression grew more pronounced—more unsure than Grady had ever seen him. He always had a confidence about him that went well with his quiet, stoic persona. Most people took all that to mean he was a tough guy who never let himself

feel anything. When really, he had felt things so deeply he'd learned to keep himself at bay from almost everyone and everything to avoid the pain.

Grady knew what Mateo was saying. Grady was his family. So were his siblings and his parents, his aunts and uncles, his cousins. They were the only real family Mateo had ever known.

But Mateo was overthinking this.

"You're not gonna lose me," Grady repeated.

Mateo reached up and grabbed him by the back of the neck. He licked his lips and watched Grady's. He leaned in. Grady could feel Mateo's warm breath graze the surface of his lips, like a caress.

Was he going to—

No. He wouldn't. Would he?

Then Mateo stopped. He pulled back.

Without another moment's hesitation, he stood and went across the room to the kitchen area. He rinsed his hands in the sink. Then, with fierce concentration, he started unloading the groceries, checking out each item like he had to read the entire ingredient list before he could put it away.

"What—" Grady started, then stopped, not sure what the hell he was going to say, or what he wanted to say.

Mateo looked his way, one dark eyebrow raised. "Something wrong?"

Grady swallowed but couldn't find his voice.

When he didn't say more, Mateo asked, "What?"

Shaking his head, Grady croaked out, "Nothing." He grabbed the tissues from the end table, cleaned up, and got off the couch. He swiped one of the new boxes of cereal off the kitchen table and went for a bowl in the cupboard. He didn't pour the cereal, though. He tried to keep his back to Mateo, but he couldn't even do that. He was so flabbergasted he just turned around and stood there with his arms folded across his

chest, staring at Mateo's profile while Mateo kept casually removing items from the bag one at a time.

Grady wanted to grab hold of the package of chocolate-chip cookies and fling it out the damn window.

Mateo set the cookies down and went on with the unloading. Finally he reached the end of the groceries but kept his focus on the last item—a can of flaming red-hot barbecue chips.

That was when it hit Grady.

"You're freaked out."

"No!" Mateo slammed the can of chips onto the table, smashing the package of cookies in the process. "I'm not."

"You are." Grady seized him by the arm and spun him around. "Teo, it doesn't have to mean anything. So we like jerking off together? It doesn't mean we're— It doesn't mean anything."

Mateo snorted out a bitter laugh and shook his head. "It means everything."

What the hell was he implying by that? Grady couldn't bring himself to ask.

Mateo's entire body seemed to relax; his expression softened like he'd made his mind up about something and was completely comfortable with the decision. "What if I want something more than what we've been doing?" His gaze narrowed in on Grady again. "What if I think you do too?"

Suddenly Grady couldn't swallow. Breathing normally was also getting pretty tricky.

Because he did want it.

God, how he wanted it.

Did that mean—

"Yeah," Mateo said. "And that's why I'm freaked."

“What—” Grady was finding it difficult to focus. He wasn’t sure what Mateo was trying to say. The thought of this ending—of not getting the last few weeks of school doing what they’d been doing together—was more than a little disappointing. He just knew he’d have said or done almost anything to get him to stop talking, to get him back on the bed with his cock out again.

Mateo crossed the small space separating them and stopped before him. He had that nervous, almost scared look in his eyes again.

Grady spoke first. “It doesn’t mean dick, okay?”

Mateo laughed at that.

Yeah, poor choice of words. He tried again. “And no matter what, we’re good. Nothing changes that. Got it?”

Mateo met his stare. He must’ve seen something in Grady’s expression as well, something that told him Grady wanted this the same way he did, that Grady would give just about anything to repeat what they’d done a moment ago.

Continued in *I SWEAR TO YOU* by Sloan Parker  
Original Release Date: April 29, 2014

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