



*The random three words used in this scenario: **Package, Joy, Band**. I hope you enjoy another holiday spent with Sean and Gavin. I wish you many, many moments of love and joy in the coming years. Happy holidays to you and yours. –Sloan Parker*

It Says Love by Sloan Parker

(featuring Sean and Gavin from SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN)

Length: 2,500 words

Dearest Sean,

I want you to have the items in this box. My mother gave them to me when I was first married. I hope you can make them a part of your yearly holiday with Gavin.

All my love,

Grandma

I stared at the handwritten note for another moment. Then I tore open the wrapped **package** that she'd given me with the letter and recognized the box inside right off. Carefully, I removed the lid and peeled back the layer of tissue paper.

The round, blue ornaments sparkled in the glow of the twinkling lights on the Christmas tree beside me. I had been in such a hurry earlier to get the tree up and

decorated so I could surprise Gavin, I had almost forgotten about the package from my grandma.

Thank God I'd remembered before I decked out the tree in the cheap plastic Rudolph ornaments I'd purchased at the dollar store.

These were so much better.

The glass ornaments my grandma had put on her tree every year of my childhood had white glittery lettering that stood out against the brilliant blue and spelled the words *peace* and *joy* and *love*.

Only, over the years several of the ornaments had broken, and now there was only one with the word *love*.

I retrieved it from the box. I knew right where that one should go. Near the top of the tree, facing both the kitchen and the living room so Gavin would be able to see it every day.

He had no idea I was spending my morning off dousing our little apartment in holiday cheer, and I couldn't wait for him to see everything. Growing up he had never had much of a home, let alone one with a tree and presents and cookies left out for Santa.

I reached up on my tiptoes and hung the ornament's hook over a branch, then stepped back to take a look. Perfect.

Until the ornament slipped, then went tumbling down the side of the tree, hitting branch after branch. I lunged forward and just barely caught it with the tips of my fingers, saving it from smacking into the tile floor.

Apparently I should've put the tree up in the carpeted living room, but the dining room was my favorite space in the apartment. It had a sliding glass patio door that offered an unobstructed view of the snow-tipped evergreen trees behind our apartment building. Having dinner there every night, it felt like we were on a vacation somewhere, just the two of us, surrounded by miles and miles of sparkling white forest.

A new song started playing from across the kitchen where I'd set my iPod – a gift from my grandparents for my last birthday. I couldn't help myself. I smiled and sang along with the rendition of "Let It Snow" from a favorite **band** of Gavin's.

I heard his keys jangling in the hallway, then the apartment door opening behind me. I tried again to hang the ornament as I waited for him to see what I'd been working on.

One of his arms slipped around my waist. He reached up over my shoulder with his other hand and helped me settle the ornament into place. It stayed that time.

He pressed a kiss to my temple. "It looks great in here."

I held onto the arm he had across my waist.

In addition to the tree, I'd also put up garland and twinkling lights over the archway leading to the living room. "Is it too much?" I asked.

"No way. I like the blue." He gestured toward the ornament. "What's it say?"

Gavin couldn't read much, but sometimes he was able to figure out words he'd seen repeated over and over like the text on traffic signs. It made me sad that he didn't know that word on the ornament. And that after all this time since we'd gotten to Ohio, he still hadn't let me help him learn to read. He'd said I was too busy with work and school, and that teaching him shit he should've learned a long time ago could wait. That we had our whole lives together to do stuff like that.

I liked that last part.

"It says *love*," I told him.

He held me tighter and kissed the side of my head again. "Your hair's getting longer."

I laughed and leaned back into him. "You wanna trim it for me?"

He let out a snort of amusement. "Don't you want someone with talent to do it?"

I reached behind him and gripped the back of his thigh. "I like your talents just fine."

Whenever he cut my hair, it always reminded me of that night in a hotel room a year ago, the night we'd first made love.

I turned, slipped my hands around the back of his neck, and kissed him. He held me in return and tugged me closer, kissed me harder. I didn't want the moment to end.

But no amount of holiday decorations or tender embraces could erase what I'd learned earlier that day.

I pulled back, kept my hands on the warm skin at the back of his neck, and studied his face. "I talked to Grandpa today."

"Yeah?" He let go of me and went to the kitchen counter. He picked up one of the ornaments from the box and examined it.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He looked my way, concern evident in those green eyes. "About?"

"About what you've been doing every morning when you get off work."

Gavin worked the night shift, and I was on days, so until earlier that morning, I'd had no idea that for the past several months he'd been coming home three hours late.

He didn't move, didn't speak, just glared at me. He was angry.

At me?

He looked away again and carefully returned the ornament. He kept staring into the box. "He shouldn't have said anything."

"Grandpa didn't mean to tell me. We were talking about my plans to work less so I could take another class at the college next semester, and he mentioned that I should sign up for the mornings when you're gone."

He nodded again but said nothing.

"Gavin, what have you been doing?"

His uneasy expression relaxed; relief flooded his eyes. "He didn't tell you?"

"He said it was your secret to tell."

Gavin stared out the glass door into the backyard. I hadn't seen that shame on his face since a year ago when he'd gotten back from spending a week with the last man who'd paid him for sex.

He said, "I needed his help with something."

"Whose?"

"Your grandpa's."

"Oh." I'd had no idea what to expect, but it wasn't that. Gavin didn't ask people for help. Ever. "Help with what? Something you couldn't ask me for?"

"Not *couldn't*."

"You didn't want to ask me?"

"I—" He stopped, gave up watching outside, and picked up another ornament like he had to study each one before we could put them on the tree.

Getting him to talk was never easy. I hated pushing him. It was usually best if I let him find the words on his own, but I couldn't stand not knowing.

"What?" I asked when he didn't say more.

He frowned; his forehead scrunched up. Then he spoke quietly and slowly. Like he knew I wouldn't like what came next. "I didn't want you to be disappointed." He continued again with even more hesitation. "Didn't want you to get your hopes up."

I went to him and tried to force him to face me, but he wouldn't budge. "I didn't know what hope was before I met you."

He kept his gaze trained on the box of ornaments for a long moment, then nodded like it had been the same for him. I wasn't expecting his next move, but I wasn't startled by it either. He spun to face me with urgency unlike his usual movements, like he had to do this now or he'd regret it later. He reached behind him and tugged out an envelope from his back pocket. He handed it to me. It was folded in half and crinkled at one corner, but all I could focus on was my name written on the front.

“I was waiting for Christmas morning, but you and your grandpa sort of blew that plan.” He threw me a half smile. There was nervousness in that smile and in those eyes watching me.

Inside the envelope was a single sheet of paper. I unfolded it and read what had been painstakingly printed in small lettering – handwriting I’d never seen before, like that of a young child learning to write.

Sean,

I wanted to say thank-you, but somehow those words don’t come close to what I need to say to you, and they will never be enough for how much I owe you for being in my life, for loving me.

You believed in me when no one else did. You saw past every shitty thing everyone said I was, everything they said I’d ever be. You saw something special that I’m still not sure I can live up to, but I’m going to try.

Starting with school.

Your grandpa has been helping me study for my high school diploma. He’s taught me to read and write, which I guess is pretty stupid of me to tell you now that you’re reading this. He’s helping me write this letter. I still have trouble getting my thoughts down on paper, but I’m working on it. I’m working on a lot of things.

But not loving you. I don’t have to work at that. That’s been the easiest thing I’ve ever done.

You keep asking me what I want for Christmas. There’s nothing I need or want. I already have everything. I have you.

Gavin

“I…” I swallowed around the lump in my throat and reread the last line before his name.

“Are you gonna cry?” he asked in an amused tone.

"Maybe."

"Your grandpa did."

I laughed. "He's been a big sap ever since I came home."

"Your grandma too." Gavin bit his bottom lip and shrugged. "It's kinda nice."

"Yeah." I refolded the letter, returned it to the envelope, and set it on the counter beside the box of ornaments. "I wanted to be the one to help you."

"I know. I needed to do this on my own, so I knew I was doing it for me."

I understood that and was about to tell him so when he said more.

"I was afraid I was doing it to prove to myself I was good enough, which didn't seem like the right reason."

"Good enough for what?"

He looked surprised by that. "For you."

I reached for him and held his face in my hands. "Gavin, don't you get it?"

He shook his head, searching my eyes. "I don't think I ever will."

Of course I had told him why before, told him how much he meant to me, how much having him with me every day we had lived on the streets was a salvation.

Maybe at this time of year, he'd always need the reminder.

I kissed him. "Everything you are...*everything*...that's what I admire and respect about you. I was lost, and your strength and compassion saved me."

He scoffed and rolled his eyes. "I wasn't searching for a compliment."

"I know." I reached for his hands. "That doesn't mean you don't deserve one." I backed up, pulling him toward the doorway that led to the living room. "You know what else you deserve?" I threw him a coy smile.

He stopped us under the archway. He stood there, staring at me for another long moment, like maybe he was letting the words I'd said really sink in for the first time.

Then he came at me and kissed me. Passionately. Hungrily. His hands landed on my ass, and he lifted me up. I wrapped my legs around him and held on, accepting another long kiss. His tongue met mine, and he plastered me against one wall of the arched doorway, the garland with the string of lights shimmering above us.

His mouth eagerly returned to mine again and again as he shifted ever so slightly forward and back, caressing my body with his without giving up any other contact.

“Gavin...” I threw my head back and arched into the touch of groin to groin, desperately wanting him inside me in a way that still surprised me after all this time of living together.

He gripped my ass tighter, bent his head, and nipped the skin at the base of my neck, and then he sucked on that one spot. He had to be leaving a mark.

“Oh God. Don’t stop.” I clutched at him, wishing we were naked, wishing his mouth could be on my lips right then too, on my cock, on my ass, on every inch of my body at the same time.

He swiped a soft kiss over my skin where he’d just been teasing with his tongue and teeth.

Another gentle brush of his lips, and all at once he stilled us, leaning into me. He wrapped his arms around me tighter, burying his face in my neck. “That Christmas when I met you... You were the best gift I could’ve ever asked for.”

First the letter and now...

It wasn’t often he said things like that, but when he did, it hit me square in the chest and made me love him all the more.

His lips met mine again, and he carried me to the living room. He laid me on the couch, threw off his clothes, and then he followed me down, pressing openmouthed kisses along my skin as he stripped away my clothes too.

We kissed and caressed, lingered over every touch until he shifted us so he was lying behind me, both of us facing the tree in the dining room. That lone blue bulb and the word *love* in white letters sparkled in the glow of the tree's lights.

Love.

How had I gotten so damn lucky?

He turned my head to the side and kissed me again, his lips hovering over mine as he pressed inside me, moving in slow, deep thrusts that took my breath away. He had his hand wrapped around my erection and was pulling me along with him into a moment of pure pleasure I'd never known with any other man.

Several long, exhilarating moments later, when we were both spent, lying still, his lips caressing the skin between my shoulder and neck, he held on to me and whispered, "Merry Christmas, Sean."

This short fiction features Sean and Gavin from [SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN](#).

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About the Author: Award-winning author Sloan Parker writes passionate, dramatic stories about two men (or more) falling in love. Sloan enjoys writing in the fictional world because in fiction you can be anything, do anything – even fall in love for the first time over and over again. You can learn more about Sloan and her writing at www.sloanparker.com.