

WHAT YOU DO TO ME
(A *Breathe* Epilogue)

Sloan Parker

Dedication

To Jay and Lincoln's fans. This one's for you.

What You Do to Me

(A *Breathe* Epilogue)

Jay glanced up from the open book lying on the kitchen table before him and checked the time on the clock above the stove. Two a.m. He really needed to get some sleep. Tomorrow was set to be a busy day.

Just one more section, and then he'd put the book away.

The next exam for his History of World War II class was in a week, and he didn't want to ruin his A average. If he could keep it up for the rest of the term, he might be able to get more financial assistance next time around. As it stood now, he and Lincoln were working their asses off to pay for his tuition, their rent, and their lingering hospital bills.

Not that Jay wanted it any other way.

They were building a new life for themselves. Together.

He returned to his reading. The next section was titled *D-day: Letters Home*. The first page included a photocopy of a handwritten letter by a young paratrooper from the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. The letter to his fiancée was dated June 5, 1944, the day before the Invasion of Normandy.

He told her nothing of the war, where he was located, or for what he was most likely preparing. Instead he wrote about what he wanted their future together to be like. He described buying a home in the rural farmlands of Wisconsin, spending their nights together on a porch swing watching the sun set over the sea of rolling hay fields, dancing under a blanket of stars, growing old together.

Alongside the letter was a colorized portrait of the man in his paratrooper uniform. He had a full head of red hair, trimmed short, a wide smile, and one crooked front tooth. He looked innocent and barely sixteen.

Below the letter was a notation that read *Private Arthur Roberts died on June 6, 1944 during Operation Neptune at the Invasion of Normandy. He was killed in midair during the paratroopers' descent into France, having never seen Wisconsin or his fiancée again.*

Sadness for the young man who hadn't had a chance to live the life he'd hoped for overcame Jay. He set the book down and removed his glasses, the sadness turning to relief at how very lucky he was in his own life. Not many people got the kind of second chance he'd been given.

He went to the kitchen sink and filled a glass with water. The ancient pipes behind the walls rattled. He switched off the faucet before the clanking woke Lincoln. Their new place was in serious need of work—even more than Jay's old house.

He sipped the water as his thoughts returned to the young paratrooper and the unfulfilled promise of those nights with his fiancée, the Wisconsin house and farm and fields and...

A porch swing.

Jay stared out the window above the sink into the darkness behind the house. That was what he'd suggest for the place once they'd taken care of the basics. A swing overlooking the fenced-in backyard where they could sit alone under the night sky. He'd point out the stars and share what he knew of the Iroquois legends related to the origins of the constellations and see if Lincoln knew the same ones.

God, Jay had never been this romantic in his life. Maybe with the passing of time came a sentimentality that the kid he'd been a few years ago could never comprehend, or maybe it was something else. Maybe whatever time he'd get to spend with Lincoln would always be special—because they'd been so close to not having any more time at all.

An arm came around his waist, and a hand settled over his stomach. A warm, solid body pressed against his back.

“You smell good.” Lincoln’s voice was low, and the heated air from his breath blew across Jay’s neck, sending a shiver throughout Jay’s body. He’d never get tired of this man’s touch.

Jay tilted his head back. “You feel good.”

Lincoln let out a little hum in response and kissed the side of Jay’s neck. “You’re studying too hard. Come to bed.”

Jay leaned into Lincoln’s bare chest, grateful he hadn’t slipped on his own shirt before heading into the kitchen to read because he’d also never tire of feeling the press of their bare bodies. He reached around behind him and held Lincoln in return—even more grateful Lincoln hadn’t put on anything more than a pair of briefs. If only Jay weren’t wearing the jeans.

“Did the light wake you?”

Lincoln brushed his lips over Jay’s neck again and ran a hand up his arm. “No, the cold bed beside me did.” He paused his touch at the tattoo on Jay’s upper arm—the outline of the feather and the two wolves running side by side within. He ran the pad of his thumb over the tattoo, gave a stroke to one wolf, then the other, and caressed Jay’s neck with his lips at the same time. Ever since Jay had shown Lincoln the tattoo that symbolized the future he wanted for them, Lincoln had been obsessed with touching and kissing and licking Jay’s skin over that tattoo.

Those sure, strong hands had Jay forgetting about his coursework. He let his weight settle against Lincoln more. He reached up with his other hand and held the back of Lincoln’s neck. “I love it here.” He could stand there at that chipped and stained kitchen sink all night, so long as Linc had a hold of him.

Lincoln laughed—that deep rumble in his chest that he only let out when Jay amused him. “You really need to get your head out of those books. Have you even looked at this place? It’s definitely gonna need work.”

They were renting from an elderly man Lincoln had worked with years ago. The man, who had a gay son living in California, had made a point of telling them he had no problems renting to the two of them. In fact, he'd given them a break on the rent provided they did the repairs themselves, and even offered to let them buy the place as soon as they had the down payment saved up. Which sounded just about perfect to Jay, even with nearly all the kitchen cabinets missing hardware, the living room carpet worn to the stained padding in several places, and the water heater that barely kept the water warm enough for a tepid shower.

None of that mattered, not really. They hadn't been there long, but it already felt like home. Even with the boxes still stacked in the corner of the kitchen, and more boxes with his books along the back wall of the living room.

A new start. For both of them.

"We'll get it fixed up." Jay turned his head and captured Lincoln's mouth in a kiss. Such a simple touch that still surprised Jay, shocking him with its power and the passion sparking between them. Or maybe he shouldn't have been surprised. The physical moments had always been intense for them, from that very first moment in the alley behind Sonny's Tavern.

When they parted, Jay said, "I like that we're paying for the house together, you know?" That was one of the reasons he'd insisted they sell his old house and use the extra cash for some of the hospital bills, not to put toward their rent or a down payment. He wanted this new place, no matter what it looked like, to belong to the two of them.

"Yeah." Lincoln kissed Jay's neck again. "As soon as we get a little cash saved up, we'll work on the repairs."

Jay dropped his hand from Lincoln's head. "We should take the bike back."

Lincoln let go of him in a rush and stepped away. "No way."

Jay kept his back to him. "And I shouldn't be switching to part-time at work."

That didn't even get a response. Jay faced him. Lincoln had his arms folded across his chest, his face held in a tight grimace of frustration.

"Don't." Jay reached up and ran his fingers over Lincoln's furrowed brow.

"Don't what?" Lincoln gripped Jay's hand and kept a hold of him as he dropped their linked hands to his side. "This is not up for discussion. You cannot take all those classes you signed up for next semester, study, and go to work full-time."

"Lots of people do it."

"You're not. You've already put off school long enough. I'm working, and I'll take care of the bills." He eased his grip on Jay's hand and smirked. "We'll have enough money for this place, food, and lube. What more does a man need?"

Jay laughed. "You're right." He leaned into Lincoln. "I've got everything I need."

The next kiss was slow and sweet and full of the promises Jay wanted to share. Yet there was something else he had to say. "You don't always have to be the one to take care of everyone." He kissed Lincoln again. First on the lips, then down along his neck to the sensitive spot between neck and shoulder that always drove Lincoln mad. "You gotta let people take care of you sometimes, Linc."

Lincoln held him by the back of the head and tilted his own head to the side, which encouraged Jay's explorations as Lincoln said, "You took care of me pretty damn good last night."

Jay grinned against Lincoln's skin. "It was a good one?"

"You have no idea. It's like you've been sucking cock all your life."

"Just yours."

Lincoln let out a low rumble. He always liked being reminded that Jay had never been with another man. He gripped Jay by the hips, then swung him around and crowded him against the refrigerator. He planted another deep kiss on his lips, this one more about lust and passion.

Jay wrapped a leg around him and gave himself over to the moment, falling into the sweet sensation of those lips on his, their tongues connecting over and over again, the taut muscles under his fingertips.

Eventually, reluctantly, Jay forced himself to pull back. "When I said you need to let people take care of you, I wasn't talking about sex."

"I know." Lincoln ran a hand down Jay's bare chest, tenderly tracing the scar left behind after the surgery to remove the bullet.

"It's ugly, isn't it?"

"Nah. It's beautiful. Reminds me you're still here." He met Jay's stare with those focused, dark eyes. "A lot of people don't get second chances."

Good to know they were on the same page about that.

Even after Jay's confession that he couldn't bear to lose Lincoln, after packing up his stuff and moving in with him, Jay had worried Lincoln would always have lingering doubts about their pasts – about them. That he would always feel guilty about being too happy.

Jay leaned in, and they kissed again, each caressing and loving with every touch. They had come too close to losing this.

"So..." Jay walked Lincoln backward toward the kitchen table. "We've christened every room in the house but this one." He cleared his books off the table, lowered his jeans and underwear. Lincoln watched him undress and then followed suit with his briefs. Jay lay back across the table's surface, pulling Lincoln with him, and Lincoln slowly lowered his body over Jay's.

They kissed and rubbed and stroked each other in all the right places until they were both begging for more without words.

Lincoln stood, laughing as he unwrapped Jay's limbs from around him. "Gotta get the lube."

Jay pointed over his head to the top box on the pile in the corner. "That box has the shit from my nightstand."

Lincoln went for the box. He returned to the table with the lube. "I vote we either never unpack or we always keep a stash of lube in here."

"It's the kitchen. Where would we put lube?"

"We'll make room in the silverware drawer."

Jay laughed at that. Then he sobered as he watched Lincoln readying himself, slicking the length of his hard shaft.

Staring down at Jay, Lincoln breathed deep and shook his head.

"What?"

"Nothing. Just..." He leaned over Jay and pressed into him as he spoke his next words. "God, what you do to me."

Jay was utterly lost to a reply or thoughts or anything but the intensity passing between them that had very little to do with sex.

Lincoln rocked slowly, angling Jay just right. A few more sweet slides of their bodies coming together and Lincoln pulled out. He gripped Jay by the back of the neck and encouraged him up.

"Ride me." He turned them, taking Jay's place on the table.

Jay nodded and knelt on the surface, straddling him. Lincoln gripped his hips as Jay lowered himself onto Lincoln's cock.

The table creaked and rocked with their combined weight. It sounded like it was about to collapse. They both stilled. Then laughed.

"Shit," Jay said. "We're gonna fall."

Lincoln shook his head. "It'll hold."

"We can't..." Jay lifted up and sank down on Lincoln's cock again, picking up speed each time his body swallowed the thick shaft. "We can't break the table. We'll have nowhere to eat."

“We’ll eat in bed.” Lincoln surged up into Jay, grunting with each slam of their bodies. The table teetered and squeaked beneath them again. The metal tips of the legs scraped along the linoleum floor.

“Sex on the table and” –Jay kept moving, his thighs flexing as he rode Lincoln— “food in bed? Isn’t that a little opposite of how it should be?”

Lincoln’s next words were punctuated by low grunts. “Everything...about us...is opposite of how it should be.”

No.

Jay stopped. He reached down and laid a hand over Lincoln’s chest, over his heart, loving the power and strength of the firm body beneath him. “Don’t.”

“It’s okay.” Lincoln gripped Jay’s hand and held it in place. “I won’t forget, but I don’t want to live in the past anymore.”

Jay surged forward and kissed him. Letting his body and heart take over, he started moving again, and Lincoln thrust up to meet him. It wasn’t long before Lincoln jerked his hips faster and faster. He arched off the table, and a long groan escaped his lips as he came.

They stilled, and the table settled underneath them. Until Lincoln tugged Jay down to him with an urgency that would’ve had anyone believing he hadn’t come yet. He held him close and whispered, “Love you,” against the skin of Jay’s neck as he stroked his cock.

A shudder worked its way through Jay. A few more strokes mixed in with a repeat of those whispered words, and he came over Lincoln’s hand. His release landed on his chest, then Lincoln’s. He collapsed forward, and they lay pressed together, the table swaying underneath them with each deep breath.

Lincoln shifted Jay around until he lay beside him, Jay’s head on Lincoln’s chest, Lincoln petting the wolf tattoo again.

“I’m proud of you, Jay.”

“For what? My finely honed acrobatic skills that kept us on this table?”

Lincoln laughed. His breath blew through Jay’s hair. “Yeah, that. And everything else. Going to school, going to therapy with your parents, forgiving your brother. All of it.” He wrapped his arms tighter around Jay. “There’s not many men in the world like you.”

Jay scoffed. *Him?* He sat up and searched Lincoln’s face. Didn’t he get it?

“Right back at you.”

* * * *

Lincoln pressed the Up button for the garage door, and the sun’s rays poured into the dark garage. Two Harleys sat side by side, one in great shape with flames and an eagle painted across the tank.

The other was the bike they’d just bought for Jay. Older than Lincoln’s and in need of some serious bodywork, but at least it ran decently. They’d get it into shape. Like they’d done with the first one.

Lincoln removed the tarp that covered the stacks of boxes along the far side of the garage. He could at least get some of this stuff unpacked before Jay finished in the shower.

Jay needed to spend his free time studying, not lugging shit out of boxes, especially if he was going to stay up half the night reading his schoolbooks. Lincoln’s thoughts turned to the night before – and the kitchen-table-christening sex. He couldn’t seem to care that every leg on the crappy kitchen table was now loose. He’d tighten them tonight when they got home. And just maybe he’d see if Jay wanted to test out the table again and make sure he had the legs secured well enough.

He laughed to himself and set to work unpacking Jay’s tools from the boxes. He almost missed the hand on his ass. He didn’t miss the words whispered in his ear, though.

“You gotta stop coming out here if you expect us to get anywhere on time.”

Lincoln glanced over his shoulder at Jay. His hair was still damp from the shower. Who knew the scent of cheap-ass soap and aftershave lotion from the local discount store could smell so damn good? Or maybe it was the way those scents mixed with the man underneath that was so tempting.

Lincoln asked, "You got a thing for garages?"

"I got a thing for sex with you on a bike, and we haven't broken mine in yet."

Forget the table. They'd christen the garage and Jay's bike next. Lincoln moved in to kiss him.

Jay took a step back. "Don't you dare start something. We've gotta get going or we'll be late."

"Me? You really going to put an idea like that in a guy's head and not follow through?"

Jay smirked, a playfulness in his expression unlike any he'd worn yet. Then the look grew into something more. Lincoln wasn't sure what. More serious, maybe. Determined. Confident. "I'll follow through. As soon as we get home."

They'd both learned a lot about living in the moment. Lincoln gave a nod of understanding. Some things they got without having to offer more. From day one they'd understood each other's pain and need in a way few others had.

Contentment lingered on Jay's face as he grabbed his helmet from the workbench, got on his bike, and took off through the open garage door into the sunlight. Lincoln started his bike and followed. He loved this—Jay looking free, at peace as they rode through the streets of Edgefield.

A few blocks later they pulled up to a two-story house. There was a realty sign marked with a SOLD banner out front and a car in the driveway that Lincoln didn't recognize. The car was parked behind the moving truck he and Jay had loaded up the day before. Nancy and the kids hadn't accumulated much since the fire—the apartment they'd been renting had been furnished—but they did have a few boxes with new clothes and toys and kitchen crap.

“Jay!” Jessica ran at Jay and threw her arms around his legs as soon as he got off the bike.

“Hey.” Lincoln swung off his bike. “Did you forget about me already?”

She ran to him and jumped into his arms. “Uncle Lincoln, you’re funny. You don’t forget family.”

“Good point.”

Adam exited the cab of the truck, lugging a cat carrier through the open door. Davy crawled out after him. He had Sparky on a leash, and they all headed to where Jay and Lincoln had parked their bikes off to the side at the end of the driveway. The furniture delivery truck would be there in an hour with the new sofa and dining room set Nancy had picked out the week before.

A man stepped out of the house with Nancy. He handed over the keys, hesitated, then shook her hand, holding on a little longer than necessary. Together they crossed the lawn to gather up the realty sign, and then he and Nancy continued slowly side by side, chatting as they made their way toward his car. He loaded the sign into the trunk. Then he paused again and spoke more to Nancy, both of them smiling and nodding, the guy’s gaze lingering on Nancy’s face.

He was definitely interested in more than helping her get settled in her new home. Lincoln exchanged a look with Jay. He was thinking the same thing.

Eventually the real estate agent got into his car and began backing out. When he neared the end of the driveway where everyone else stood, he stopped the car. “Enjoy the new home, kids.” He waved and pulled out onto the street.

Lincoln smirked at Nancy as she approached. “He was nice.”

She nodded. “He is. And really patient. We must’ve looked at more than thirty houses all across the county.”

Davy groaned. “And then you bought the first one we looked at here in town.”

Adam bopped his brother on the top of the head. "Leave Mom alone about it." He gave Davy a playful push toward the truck, then said, "He's a nice guy, Mom. If you want to see him again, I think you should. You know...without the lame excuse of looking at houses."

"Adam!"

He rolled his eyes and headed for the truck, calling back, "Like it wasn't obvious."

Lincoln tried to fend off the laughter. He couldn't hold back the relief washing over him, though. More than anything, he wanted Nancy to be safe and happy and...loved. She deserved someone who'd treat her and the kids with respect.

He dropped a kiss on Nancy's forehead, then headed with Jay for the back of the truck to start unloading. Jessica skipped after them. The boys had the back door open, and everyone began sliding boxes to the end of the truck bed.

"Stop!" Nancy called out as she came around the side of the truck. She went to Jay. "I really hope you don't mind." Louder to everyone else, she added, "The first thing in the house is the angel."

"What angel, Mommy?" Jessica asked.

Nancy retrieved a box from the back of the truck and pulled out a large figurine that was over a foot tall. A woman in a green dress with long red hair. She handed it to Jessica. "You can carry it, sweetie, and why don't you keep her in your room so she can look after you."

Jessica wrapped both arms around the angel, the figurine nearly too tall for her to carry. "But she's so pretty. Don't you want to see her all the time?"

"We don't need to see her every day to know she's looking after us." Nancy looked to Jay. "All of us."

Jay nodded, a pleased smile on his lips, the expression one of appreciation, not sadness or grief. "It's perfect."

Lincoln wound an arm around him and pressed his lips to Jay's temple. "She's a part of all of us now." As much as he wanted Jay to move on, to build a new life, he'd never let him think he couldn't remember her, love her.

Leaning into him, Jay offered appreciation that Lincoln got without words. Again that understanding that defied logic – and maybe sanity – passed between them.

Or maybe it was the sanest connection either of them could've found.

Jessica sped off toward the house, the angel in her arms. The boys followed with Sparky and the cat. Nancy hesitated for a moment. Then in a flurry, as if she had to act before she changed her mind, she lunged for Jay and wrapped her arms around his neck. She whispered her next words, but Lincoln heard her clearly.

"Thank you for everything, but mostly, thank you for helping him find his way."

Jay held her in return and met Lincoln's gaze. "He did the same for me."

She stepped back, wiping tears from her eyes. She looked to one, then the other and sighed. No matter what his little sis had been through in life, she believed in love and happy endings. She watched them for another moment, then grabbed a box from the truck and went inside the house.

"Your sister is pretty great."

Lincoln stared after her at the open front door of the house. "She is."

"Runs in the family." Jay stepped in front of him, blocking Lincoln's view until Jay was all he could see. "I think..."

"What?" Lincoln searched Jay's face, for once believing he was exactly what Jay needed in his life. He knew that now with a certainty he hadn't been sure he could ever feel before this moment. He wouldn't let him down. "You can always talk about Katie, whenever you need to."

"Thanks for that, but this isn't about her." Jay reached for him, running his thumb along Lincoln's jaw. "My future is you. And I think I might just be the luckiest guy around. I've been loved by two of the most beautiful people. Inside and out."

Lincoln scoffed. "You talk too much." He paused, grew serious. "You're the one who's beautiful. The best of all of us." And without a doubt he knew she'd agree with him.

Jay stepped closer. He looked toward the street and then back to Lincoln, gesturing between them. "There's not many people who'll understand this."

"Who cares?" Lincoln let out a long breath. He felt more at ease than he had in months, not wanting to be anywhere else in the world. They'd had this discussion before, but maybe they both needed a reminder from time to time. "I think if I owe her anything—if she'd want anything from me—it's for me to love you with everything I am. Fuck what people think."

That had Jay laughing, a huge grin on his face.

Lincoln drew him into an embrace, holding on, letting the certainty wash over him again. He wasn't worried about who saw them or what anyone thought of the two of them together.

Despite all his mistakes, he'd been given a gift, and he planned on being worthy of it for the rest of his life.

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About the Author

Award-winning author Sloan Parker writes passionate, dramatic stories about two men (or more) falling in love. She 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. Sloan lives in Ohio with her partner and their neurotic cats. Her greatest moments in life are spent with her family, her friends, and her characters.

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