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Boxer Falls: Episode Twelve

By Kate Sherwood

Zach wondered whether it would be possible to stay on Ecstasy permanently. With the drug coursing through his system, he was at peace, with himself and everyone else. He was invulnerable to emotional pain, not because he wasn't sensitive, but because he was sensitive enough to understand everyone on the planet and care about *feelings* as

much as his own. He was cosmic, metaphysical, omniscient, and omnipotent. And horny. When he was on E, he was really, really horny.

He leaned back against the headboard and ran his fingers over his chest, lost in reminiscence. Adam's headboard. Adam's bed. Zach had no idea why Adam had responded as willingly as he had to Zach's aggression; maybe it had just been too long since the poor, picky bastard had gotten laid. But respond he had, with enthusiasm that had been-- fervent? Was that the right word? Zach had felt like he was a god, being worshipped at the same time as he was being claimed, and it had been fucking hot. Who knew Adam had it in him?

He swung his legs over the side of the bed. He'd shed his jeans before collapsing and he looked around for them now. He was distracted by the shirt balled up in the corner of the room. Adam's shirt. He'd used it to mop them both up, Zack remembered. *Jesus* it had been hot. Handjobs, nothing kinky, just Zack pushing Adam against the wall, both of them biting and straining and struggling to get closer to the other. Unzipped pants, lined up cocks, shared grip, and Zach coming harder than he could ever remember. Ecstasy was fucking awesome. Zach thought about the little baggie of pills. He wasn't going to be a dealer, he was going to be public servant. An evangelist for Ecstasy, the one true god. And acid. But that would just be a sideline, he figured.

He heard his cell phone go off, and followed the sound to his jeans. He dug into the pocket and saw the familiar number on the phone. It was tempting to ignore it, but he was feeling good enough to handle a little nagging. “Hi,” he said cheerfully. “What’s up?”

“Zach, where *are you?*” Grady sounded frantic.

“What? I’m at Adam’s.” His fathers tried to keep him on a tight leash, but not usually *this* tight. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s Phil,” Grady choked out. “I got home, and there was a message.”

“What kind of message?” Zach tucked the phone between his ear and his shoulder and pulled his jeans on. Whatever this was, it sounded serious.

“From the highway patrol. There was an accident. A bad accident.”

“How bad?” Zach demanded. He stormed into the bathroom and grabbed his shirt, then looked around frantically for his shoes.

“They couldn’t say. There was…” Grady sounded like he was on the edge. “At least one person died. Maybe more. But everything sounds really confused. They said the cars were upside down, and people’s phones and wallets had all fallen out and mixed together, and…” He continued in a whisper. “They don’t know, Zach. They aren’t sure which one is Phil.”

“You’re going over there? You’re going to sort this all out?”

“I’m on my way out the door.”

“I’ll meet you downstairs. We’ll go together.”

“Okay,” Grady agreed softly. “Hurry.” And then he hung up.

Zach jammed his feet into his shoes and headed down the stairs at a run. He didn't see Adam in the doorway at the bottom of the stairs, watching him bolt. And he didn't even think about the bag of Ecstasy he'd left sitting on Adam's bathroom counter.

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The hospital was terrifying. *Everything* was terrifying. The man felt like he'd been dropped into an alternate universe, one where he didn't understand who he was or who anyone else was or why anything was happening. People were kind, at least. Concerned doctors and nurses, and then the neurologist who seemed more excited than concerned, waving a handful of images at the other doctors as if he'd found something amazing. It was too much, and the man just wanted to close his eyes and make it all go away.

Then the door to his room burst open and two men rushed in, one about the man's age, one much younger. Maybe more boy than man.

"Phil!" the older man cried, and the desperate relief in his voice was overwhelming. He rushed toward the bed, and the man in the bed shrank back and raised a hand. The man skidded to a halt. "Phil?" His face was like a video on fast forward,

emotional scenes flying across it too quickly to track or understand. Confusion, fear, alarm--guilt?

“Just give me some space, please,” the man said. He just needed some time to adjust to everything.

The neurologist arrived then, and that was a relief, because he spoke to the older visitor and kept him busy. The younger visitor approached the bed, but he was cautious, and the man appreciated that.

“They said you don’t know who you are,” the young man said. “And I guess you don’t know who we are?”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be. It’s not your fault.” The boy pulled a chair over and sat beside the bed. “I’m Zach. He’s Grady. We’re your family.”

“My family.” The man tried to put it together. He’d seen his reflection a few times in the past hours, so he had a rough idea what he looked like. He knew how old he was. “You’re my... son?”

“Yeah. Zach Boxer. You’re Phil Boxer.” The kid jerked his chin in the direction of the older man. “He’s Grady Boxer.”

“My brother?” the man guessed.

Zach looked startled. “Uh, no...” he began, but the doctor and the older man finished their quiet conference and turned toward the bed.

“It’s a fascinating case, Mr. Boxer,” the neurologist said. He was a stereotypical egghead, all intellectual excitement and no social graces. The man in the bed had no idea why he could recognize the personality type so easily, but couldn’t manage to remember his own name. “We’re still running tests. We’re going to be running a *lot* of tests. But it really seems as if the accident caused trauma to the *exact* area of your brain where the tumor was growing. We couldn’t access it surgically; it was buried deep under healthy tissue that would have been damaged irreparably by the surgery. But preliminary results indicate that the blood flow was blocked to *just* the right part of the brain, for *just* the

right amount of time to do significant damage to the tumor! As I said, we'll need a lot more tests, and we'll need to give it some time to let the swelling subside. But I was just telling your husband, the early indications are *very* exciting.”

There was a moment of quiet when the doctor stopped speaking, and then the man in the bed and the boy beside him spoke simultaneously.

“Tumor?” the boy said.

“Husband?” the man in the bed asked. He closed his eyes again. Things needed to start making sense. Fast.

“Mr. Cotten? Oswald? Are you with us, Mr. Cotten?” The nurse’s voice was fucking annoying, and Oz was pretty sure that if he opened his eyes, her face would be just as harsh, so he kept them shut. He didn’t want to deal with her, didn’t want to deal with anything. But her thumb was on his lid, pulling it up, and then she shone a blinding flash of agony into his skull and he batted at her arm as he jerked away. “Okay, Mr. Cotten, I know, it hurts. But it’s part of the exam.”

“Get a doctor in here,” Oz ordered. “If a *doctor* wants to examine me, he can.”



“Well, then, I’m in luck, Mr. Cotten, because I *am* a doctor.” She sounded as if she couldn’t decide whether to be amused or disgusted. “It’s 2012, and you still think all doctors are men?”

He opened one eye, cautiously, and peered at her. She was wearing scrubs and a white coat. Damn. “What do you want?” he grumbled.

“I want to ensure that you’re recovering well, Mr. Cotten.”

“What about the others?” he asked. “The others who were in the accident. Yoshi?”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Cotten, I don’t know. You’re in the recovery area—I know it doesn’t feel like it, but you weren’t hurt too badly. The others... well, I’m not sure about all of them, but I know that at least two were taken directly to surgery. One other is in recovery down the hall.”

“Is the one down the hall Japanese?”

“I haven’t seen him, Mr. Cotten. Now, if you’ll just cooperate, we can make sure that things are going smoothly with you...”

The door opened, then, and a familiar face poked inside. “Mr. Cotten,” Vic said, and his voice was more formal than usual. A warning. “Doctor. We need to speak to Mr. Cotten as soon as possible. The state police are investigating this incident, and they’re looking for statements.”

There was a message in Vic’s eyes, but Oz couldn’t read it. Obviously, the state police being involved wasn’t good; Vic couldn’t do much to cover things up if there was another law enforcement body taking charge. But, it really felt like there was something more to it. Something Vic wanted Oz to know.

Unfortunately, the doctor didn’t seem impressed. “I’ll be a while longer.” She frowned at Oz. “It would go faster if you were a little more cooperative.”

“Yeah, fine,” he muttered. He let her poke and prod at him, but his mind was elsewhere. What was going on outside the door of the room, and would Vic be able to get him up to speed before the state police came in? But, surprisingly, that wasn’t the biggest

concern on Oz's mind. He was thinking about Yoshi. The man was out of control, but he'd done it all for Oz. Had Yoshi paid the ultimate price for his loyalty?

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Adam needed to get ready. Breakfast rush was always grueling, even when he was well rested. On this day, with only a few hours of sleep after cleaning up from the night shift, then coming up to find Zach waiting for him--yeah , he hadn't gotten much sleep, but it had been worth it.

He sat up in bed, and struggled to think about work, about what he needed to do, but it was no use. His focus was totally blown.

The night before had been perfect. *Zach* had been perfect. Finally, it had seemed like Zach had wanted Adam just as completely, just as desperately as Adam wanted him. They hadn't made it to the bed, hadn't even gotten most of their clothes off, and it had still been perfect. Not so perfect that Adam didn't want to do it again, and do it better this time: fewer clothes, more actual dick-in-ass action, and, hopefully, more post-coital bliss.

Adam had hoped for a little of that the night before. He'd snuggled up to Zack for a while, then gone downstairs to make sure the servers had locked up properly and to get something to eat. But he'd been planning on going back. *Dreaming* of going back, really. When Zach had charged past him out the door, it had been bewildering, but Adam was trying to find a good reason for it. There *must* have been a good reason. And maybe that same good reason would explain why Zach hadn't answered his phone when Adam had tried it.

He pulled himself out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom. Eyes still half-closed, he peed, then turned the shower on. He was already late, but he was tempted to jerk off; he could think about Zach's strong hands, his smooth skin, his hot, hard cock, and this time, it wouldn't all be coming from Adam's imagination.

He was trying not to act like a kid with a crush, but it was pretty much impossible. He let himself go, just for a while. He imagined how he'd be working in the kitchen, later, and Zach would come in. He'd slip back to the kitchen, like he always did, and he'd play coy at first, sneaking a slice of red pepper or a bit of cheese, acting like everything was normal, but he'd have that sweet, sexy smirk on his face.

Adam would play along, trying to ignore the way that everything had changed, trying to pretend they were still just Adam and Zach, best friends *without* benefits. Then

Zach would ease a little closer, just enough to make it clear that he was looking for something, and Adam would step closer too, and then... Adam couldn't decide which one of them would break first, but then he remembered the way Zach had rushed at him the night before, the desperate passion of his body, and it was clear. Zach would make the first move, slower in the morning than he'd be the night before, just coming in slow and inevitable, as if he'd finally realized that their entire lives had been dragging them toward this moment.

Yeah, Adam was *definitely* going to have to find time to jerk off. He checked the temperature of the shower water and pulled his boxers off. He tossed them toward the hamper and his gaze caught something unfamiliar on the counter. A little baggie, filled with pills. Adam took a step closer, and then stopped. He didn't want to look, didn't want to know. But, he already did know, he realized. He closed the rest of the distance, picked up the baggie, and felt the arousal that had been building in his stomach turn into a tight, heavy ball.

It hadn't been about Adam. Not at all. Adam had wanted Zach, but Zach had just wanted *somebody*. Some body. He'd been high, he'd been horny, and Adam had been the closest willing person. God, *so willing*.

Adam's skin crawled, and he could feel the mortification burning his face. He'd made a fool of himself. And Zach had been part of it.

The previous night, too, Adam realized. He'd thought it had been building, thought Zach had been starting to realize... oh, God. Zach didn't want Adam. He never had, and he never would. Adam needed to get over this before he ruined whatever friendship they had left, and before he totally destroyed whatever shreds of self-respect he was still clinging to.

His whole body was shaking as he walked naked into the kitchen and pulled the card down from the top of the fridge. The restaurant in the city. It had sounded good. Great, even. It was an opportunity, not so much for Adam to further his career, but to reclaim his life. He picked up his phone and dialed the number. It was too early, of course, but the machine picked up and Adam tried to keep his voice level as he said, "This is Adam Parish, calling for Mr. Forsyth. I know I'm probably too late, but things have changed here, and if that job is still open, or if you have any other openings, I'd be really interested. I'll call back later to check in. Thanks."

He hung up the call and tried to feel good about it. He couldn't quite manage it, but at least he'd *done* something. He hadn't just sat around like a pathetic loser, waiting for his friend to get high enough to touch him.

He headed back to the bathroom and stepped into the shower, then turned the water on hotter, and hotter. He wanted to be clean. He wanted to forget.

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■ Has Phil really been cured of his tumor? Will he ever get his memory back? If he doesn't, what does that mean for him and Grady?

■ Who's alive, and who's dead? And what was Vic trying to tell Oz?

■ Will Adam leave town for good? Will Zach miss him if he goes?

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## **TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!**

### **Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...**

Author Bio: Kate started writing at about the same time she got back on a horse after a twenty-year break. She'd like to think she's far too young for it to be a mid-life crisis, but apparently she was ready for a few changes!

Kate's writing focuses on characters and relationships, people trying to find out how much of themselves they need to keep, and how much they can afford to give away. She tries to find that careful balance between drama and humor - She wants readers to have an intense experience and feel drawn into the book, but she also wants them to enjoy the time they spend reading.

Kate started writing in m/m Romance, but has branched out into m/f as well. She doesn't plan to give up her m/m stories, but as a feminist, she wondered why she was having trouble writing strong female characters falling in love, and decided to see what she could do. Her first m/f novel is coming out this spring, but she's also got a full line up of m/m stories coming out soon.

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