

Between These Walls

John Herrick

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This heartbreaking but ultimately inspiring love story reveals the power of love as a way to overcome fear of acceptance.

Hunter Carlisle seems to have it all—a bright future in sales, a beautiful girlfriend, and a strong Christian faith. But one long-kept secret threatens to topple it all: Hunter is gay. It was a video posted online by a young high-school student on the verge of committing suicide that moved John Herrick to write *Between These Walls*. The teen, having endured all the bullying and harassment that he could handle, and unable to speak his message aloud, had written it on sheets of paper that he held out to readers as he wept, hoping that someone, somewhere, would read it and care. Herrick was heartbroken; he couldn't forget what he had seen. He set aside work on his third novel and instead began writing *Between These Walls*, a story of secrets, self-discovery, and the triumph of the human spirit.

Twenty-six-year-old Hunter has kept his secret attraction to other men well hidden. In high school, he was a well-liked jock who dated girls. Athletic and handsome, he appears to be an average heterosexual guy, an image that even his girlfriend, Kara, accepts. Due to a sales slump that threatens to jeopardize his career, Hunter experiences severe stress-related back pain and reluctantly makes an appointment with massage therapist Gabe Hellman. The two become friends, but Hunter soon suspects that Gabe shares his secret, and their mutual attraction turns Hunter's already precarious life upside-down.

When Hunter's secret is revealed in the most devastating way imaginable, he realizes that he can no longer hide, and Herrick's handling of Hunter's coming out and the reactions of his parents, friends, family, and church are true to life and heartfelt. Also carefully taken into account are the elements that cause suffering for so many LGBT people: bullies, condemning pastors and preachers who use fear to dominate their congregations, and a society lacking in understanding and compassion.

Herrick has done his research well and tackles each of the questions, doubts, and fears someone struggling with their sexual identity would have to face, including whether or not it's possible to be both Christian and gay; he does so in a way that evokes compassion and empathy. The result is a moving story of love's power to cast out fear.

KRISTINE MORRIS (Summer 2015)

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