



Equals

Brigham Vaughn

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Too busy to date while he worked to put himself through school, Russell Bishop's dedication finally pays off; he has a great job with Vantage Marketing. Stephen Parker, CFO of the marketing firm, has resigned himself to a life without a partner. For six months, they wanted each other but it isn't until Russ slips on spilled coffee, and Stephen rushes to his rescue that they discover their attraction is mutual. However, the twenty year age gap between them proves difficult when they begin dating. Fiercely independent, Russ isn't sure he's ready for long-term commitment. Scarred from a previous relationship, Stephen is afraid history is repeating itself. Is there any way for them to meet in the middle and become equals?

As if he'd heard Stephen's thoughts, Russ straightened and turned his head before hopping in a half circle to face him, smiling widely. "Hey. Didn't hear you come in."

Stephen realized he still hovered in the doorway and he stepped forward and let it shut behind him. "Hi. How was your day?"

Russ leaned back against the counter, all of his weight on his uninjured foot. "Once I got over being pissed at you, not bad."

Stephen gave him a wry smile. "I am sorry; I didn't mean to come off heavy-handed." He set the bags in his hands on the counter and walked closer to Russ. "I was worried about you."

Russ laid a hand on Stephen's chest, fingers curling around his tie. "I'm a big boy; I can take care of myself."

Stephen nodded, stepping closer so his feet were between Russ' but careful not to bump the injured ankle. "I am sure you can," Stephen said calmly. "But I feel at least somewhat responsible for your accident."

"I don't blame you for it."

"I know you don't." For a few heartbeats, they looked at each other until Russ tugged at the tie. Stephen didn't lean in, but it didn't take a genius to decipher his intention. He looked up at Stephen and spoke quietly. "It feels strange to be wearing your clothes and sleeping in your bed when we haven't so much as kissed."

Stephen's voice was husky. "Was that a hint?"

"No." Russ wet his lips. "But this is a demand: I want you to kiss me."

"I can do that."

Equals Details

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From Reader Review Equals for online ebook

Jewel says

3.5 Stars

Equals was certainly a departure of the action and sci-fi that has been a staple in my reading diet, as of late. Not much really happens in the story, itself; it's a very relationship driven book. The event that brings our two MC's together felt a bit contrived, but that's a minor complaint and it did serve its purpose in making sure that Russ and Stephen were thrown together for several days, cementing their attraction to one another.

Russ and Stephen have obstacles to overcome before their relationship will really work. The twenty year age difference is really only part of what they need to overcome. Their communication skills outside the bedroom really need work. Russ is a very stubborn young man, feeling like he has to do everything on his own. He does not like feeling like he can't do everything himself. He resents that Stephen wants to take care of him, even a little bit. AND Stephen, whose last experience with a much younger man left him feeling like he'd failed at life.

Both Russ and Stephen work to overcome their fears and issues, but not before they almost lose sight of what they really want -- each other.

Wax says

I really wanted to like this more. It hit all my buttons with an age gap office romance. Unfortunately it then becomes bogged down by relationship angst. I understand the need for that to some degree. Certainly it'd be way too convenient if they didn't have any issues and just had a HEA after a meet cute. However, Stephen (the older MC) becomes insecure in his looks and age. And Russ (the younger MC) wants financial independence even potentially to his own detriment. This plot issue gets drawn out almost to the end of the book, so it started to get annoying to me. For those who really like a character/relationship driven book, this may be for you.

Jaycee Edward says

When Brigham Vaughn asked if I would be willing to beta read *Equals*, I jumped at the chance. I have read a few of her short stories and I adore her writing style. It's clean and precise and a joy to read. This book is no different. I marveled more than once how smoothly the story flows and how easily Brigham describes simple little things in a very meaningful way. Here is one example:

“Stephen had carried both of their suit jackets over his arm, so as not wrinkle them, and when he carefully laid them on the tan leather backseat of his Mercedes, Russ felt a funny lurch in his stomach he couldn't quite identify.”

Nice twist on the “I saw my toothbrush next to his..” analogy that has been done a thousand times too many, huh? I loved the visual I had of Stephen being so careful and Russ seeing their jackets lying together and having it trigger something inside him.

I personally love May/December romances because my husband is quite a bit older than I am. It's not always an easy dynamic, either in real life or on the written page. I have truly only read one other book (Years by Lavyrle Spencer, a M/F story) that did it well - without the older man coming off as a father figure, which totally turns me off. I've never read a M/M story with more than a ten-year age difference. There are twenty-some years between Russ and Stephen and Brigham not only pulled it off, she nailed it.

It's not love at first sight, but the chemistry between Russ and Stephen is instant and believable. When Russ is injured in a fall caused by Stephen's spilled coffee, Russ's annoyance and Stephen's guilt and eagerness to help in every way possible is completely realistic. Russ really has no choice but to accept Stephen's offers of assistance and before long, things begin to sizzle. Because of Russ's injuries they are kept from acting on their attraction physically. This forced abstinence is as sexually charged for the reader as it is for Stephen and Russ. One scene in particular, that begins with a race in the rooftop pool, threatened to melt my Kindle into a shiny, black, plastic puddle.

The angst whore in me was also well satisfied. Without any spoilers, there were a couple of parts that just made my heart hurt, but Russ and Stephen are both smart men and they got things worked out to my satisfaction.

I appreciated that Ms. Vaughn showed how annoying "outside opinions" of a May/December relationship can be. The exception to this is Russ's roommate, Monty, who has a special knack for saying totally inappropriate things, but I give him a pass because he cracked me up every time he appeared.

I thoroughly enjoyed this story from beginning to end. My only complaint was I wanted more – much more – of Russ and Stephen. Imagine my giant smile when I saw the cover sporting the words "book one".

Tina says

I love a good written age gap romance (I hate the term May-December). Seriously, how can a man in his forties live in December of his life???

Anyway, Equals was an enjoyable, entertaining read, a great book packed full of emotional moments.

Russell and Stephen are a lovely couple and being 20 years apart they have to deal with some unpleasant stuff.... and most of all with their own stubbornness. :)

The story was really well written and I can't wait to read Partners, the sequel. Recommended!

Sandra says

A rather good character study of two men, who despite their 20 year age difference and disparate socio-economic status, begin a relationship after meeting at their work.

I had a really difficult time liking Russ, the younger of the two. Though their upbringing was somewhat similar, both in rather poor conditions, there were some differences in their male role models, but Russ was very hung up on being equal to Stephen, the older man, and made some very poor choices because of that.

I could appreciate that he didn't want to be a gold-digger, or using Stephen for his money, but his refusal to let Stephen help him in any way, even if it meant his own safety, was rather off-putting and caused a bunch of issues in their relationship. Pride comes before the fall, as the saying goes, though I suppose Russ' behavior could possibly be explained by his immaturity and failure to see the big picture.

I felt that Stephen bent over backwards to accommodate Russ' hangups, though I wished that he'd come clean sooner about Jeremy and the pain he had experienced from that relationship. He was extremely patient with Russ, denying himself time and again to make sure the younger man didn't feel controlled or put upon, but failed to explain himself in a way that Russ could understand which also led to issues in their relationship.

There were some moments where the two had honest discussions about things that bothered them in the relationship, and the plot progression allowed Russ and Stephen both to grow and change.

There was a side character (Russ' room mate) who had some great insights despite coming across as a bum for most of the time. Monty was an unknowing catalyst for Russ to pull his head out of his ass.

The author created a nicely crafted story line, with lots of UST and well done steamy scenes that didn't overwhelm or distract from the plot. The writing was descriptive and well-suited for this story.

Nicely done! My first read of 2015.

Ann says

3.5 Stars rounded up for the sexytimes.

It was nice to read a story about just the relationship for a change. No shifter, assassins, mysteries or murders to be found. Just a story about two lonely men who get together because they need and want each other. Stephen was more warm and loving than Russ seemed to be. Not that it didn't seem that Russ was in love with Stephen, he definitely was. He was stubborn though and the parts of him that drove me (and Stephen) nuts were actually part of what made the story more realistic and believable. The miscommunication wasn't over the top, but it was there and the issues fit with what a relationship between two ambitious men with 20 years between them would face.

Favorite scene: the first time they get together without actually getting "together". Wowskis.

Elyxyz says

Una storia piacevole, con una buona trama, che affronta due temi generalmente poco usati: una consistente differenza d'età e di disparità economica come ostacoli.

Se Russ e Stephen vogliono darsi una possibilità di essere felici insieme, devono scendere a compromessi su tutto, ma non è affatto semplice cambiare opinioni radicate, stili di vita, superare paure e accantonare pazientemente i propri bisogni e desideri per rispettare quelli del partner.

Benché siano due buone caratterizzazioni, devo dire che mi sono trovata molto più in linea coi pensieri di

Stephen e ho ammirato la sua pazienza nel sopportare alcuni 'capricci' di Russ.
Beh, la fatica lo ha ripagato e questo primo libro mi è piaciuto. Ora sono curiosa di leggere i prossimi!

Helena Stone says

I received my copy from the author and rated it 4.5 stars.

About two and a half months ago I read 'The French Toast Emergencies' by Brigham Vaughn and fell not only for the story and the characters in it, but also for the author and her writing style. Less than a month later 'Sunburns and Sunsets' secured this author's place on my 'must read' list. So when I discovered she had a new book coming out I was rather excited.

And my excitement was more than justified. Once again this author has brought me captivating characters in a well timed and smoothly written story. Stephen and Russ seemed to jump off the page and into my head the moment I was introduced to them. I enjoyed getting to know them better as the story went on even if I wanted to knock their heads together on several occasions. I guess my violent tendencies prove how invested I got in their developing relationship and the issues they were facing.

The relationship between these two men and the difficulties they face as a result of the twenty year age gap felt natural. While there was quite a bit of conflict between them, none of it seemed contrived. In fact, most if not all of the issues between Stephen and Russ were a result of both of them being typical men. Their failure to communicate with each other, combined with Russ's pride and Stephen's insecurities, was as frustrating as it was recognisable and kept me firmly glued to the story.

This story was well paced. Everything is built up gradually, giving the reader a chance to get to know the characters without feeling overwhelmed by information. The fact that it was the similarities between Russ and Stephen causing most of their problems made this story fascinating. I liked that the age difference was really addressed in this book. The characters are aware of it and, eventually, discuss and tackle it. While the issues between Russ and Stephen were there from the start they didn't really cause problems until they were together for a little while, which made them all the more painful when they did surface.

This book is hot and I don't necessarily mean the sex scenes, although I'm not complaining about those. The sexual tension between Russ and Stephen during the two weeks they more or less abstain from acting on their attraction, and the way it grew, was scorching. I found myself getting frustrated for and with them. Which of course only made the release, when it did come, all the more powerful both for the characters and the reader.

I'm delighted there will be a sequel to this book. I've gotten quite invested in these two men and their relationship and look forward to the opportunity to see how they grow together in the not too distant future.

Anke says

[the money issue was too drawn out. Especially regarding the tires. At one point Russ himself said: 'I should have taken you up on your offer to do it a few weeks ago' and then, when Stephen actually did it - he throws a tantrum and left. Sorry, didn't work for me. (hide spoiler)]

Debra says

The 20 year age gap between Russ and Stephen is the least of their problems. The attraction between the two is unquestionable. It is when they get down to the day-to-day of building a relationship and living together that trouble starts. Both men have past issues that shape their ways. Stephen looking to protect and help Russ if he can, even while he understands Russ's determination to make it on his own. Russ is almost unflinching in his desire to become his own man without relying on anything from any one. A little touch of angst and inability to communicate move the story along nicely on the way to HFN and a second book coming soon. This was my first book by Brigham Vaughn and I enjoyed her writing very much. I'm looking forward to the next part of the story.

Federica Lemme says

Sono incappata in questa serie l'anno scorso, avevo notato che aveva ottimi giudizi e, nonostante questo non sia un mio criterio di scelta, ero rimasta incuriosita dalla trama.

Leggerlo in inglese mi era piaciuto, ma sono stata molto contenta di potermelo finalmente gustare in italiano. Lo stile dell'autrice mi piace molto, la storia è piacevole e scorre fluida. Russ e Stephen sono colleghi, si sono notati ma non hanno mai tentato un approccio, poi uno stupido incidente finalmente li fa letteralmente scontrare.

Mi piace il fatto che ci sia una differenza di età fra i due protagonisti, e l'autrice riesce benissimo a rendere i due punti di vista. L'immaturo, per certi versi Russ, e il più pratico Stephen, che dovranno accettare dei compromessi per poter far funzionare il loro rapporto.

Contrasti e fraintendimenti danno movimento alla storia. Si arriva alla fine del libro e si vuole di più.

Speriamo di non dover aspettare molto.

Raccomando caldamente questo libro e tutta la serie in generale.

Anita Bianchi says

<http://bianchianita1971.blogspot.it/2...>

I compromessi del titolo sono quelli che Russ deve accettare per poter stare con il suo uomo: un uomo di vent'anni più vecchio e molto facoltoso. Ma sono anche i compromessi con cui deve venire a patti un uomo come Stephen, dominante ed abituato a far valere le sue ragioni, per non "prevaricare" il suo giovane amante. Ho trovato particolarmente riuscito l'equilibrio con il quale l'autrice gestisce questi due uomini: è riuscita a non cadere nel tranello di trasformare il giovane Russ in un ragazzino petulante e il maturo Stephen in un riccone viziato ed insensibile. La storia è ben bilanciata tra sentimenti, drammi e scene hot, e la scrittura scorre liscia come l'olio fino ad un finale che mi ha pienamente soddisfatta ma che ci fa anche intravedere possibilità future per i due.

Vivian says

All about the relationship.

Two guys trying to make it work with all their various issues. No drama llamas, just straight up everyday issues that divide people when they don't talk. While I liked the exploration of how we all approach problems from our own experiences, it was a bit heavy handed at times in the telling me. Great guys who almost lose because of fear--fear of the past replaying again.

Marc | Rainbow Gold Reviews says

Cover: I really love the cover. In a way, it highlights the initial inequality between the two main protagonists. At the top we see Stephen, all powerful in his expensive suit and with his posture and that power looks attractive and seductive. The Skyscrapers in the background underline this effect. He is the one at the top of the cover, strong and mighty. Russ is at the bottom and in shadows. He is the one with the most doubts, the one who is not only more fragile, because of his injury but obsessed with their outwards appearance of inequality. I think this cover by the author herself, does a beautiful job at getting to the core of the story.

Title: Equals. The equality or perceived equality between the two main characters is at the heart of the book and thus I think it is a very fitting title. Though I could live without the tag line on the cover ...

Story: When I read Brigham Vaughn's 'The French Toast Emergencies', one of the characters was older than he was portrayed on the pages of the short story in my mind. I couldn't help but imagine him not as a young man trying to discover himself, but as a mature and experienced man in his prime. When I said so in my review, the author told me that she was working on a May/ December story and I was excited that I would get to read it when it was finished. I don't lust after older guys, actually age doesn't play much of a role to me, though I rather look at guys my own age as potential mates, but the guy I fell in love with and have been with for more than 3 years is 9.5 years older than me. I find the dynamic between someone who is already well settled into his life, without need for games and a much younger guy who still needs to find and accept his place quite fascinating!

Brigham Vaughn is very good at creating moments outside the normal rhythm of life, where characters are in a kind of bubble that allows their relationship to progress faster than normal. Whether a snowstorm, camping trip or in this case an injury that thrusts the two characters together, it is fascinating to see the characters interact in the safety of this alternate reality away from their everyday life. In this case, I thought it was an added bonus that the injury made sex be off-the-table and the guys got to know each other intimately in their little bubble, before sex could muddy the waters. There is a lot of sexual tension and sizzling chemistry and even as readers will wish for that ankle injury to finally heal up to get to the hot stuff, the delayed gratification is well worth it.

Stephen and Russ fit well together, in a very real way that any Disney princess with her cardboard prince can only dream about. They are characters that are easy to relate to and I loved the honesty between them and the way they both tried to balance their lives, trying to become 'equals'. Of course they are human, they make mistakes, keep back things that need to be talked about, overreact, let their pride get the best of them, ... but it doesn't feel forced just to create tension between them. There are reasons why they act the way they do and not just one, but the author allows for many reasons that could add to the reactions of real, complex characters and I had a much easier time understanding the actions.

There is some nice angst set against sweet and sexy moments. The real moments like using a condom after both say they are negative or showering before sex actually made the story feel more authentic, instead of taking away from the sexiness. Sure, it's a fantasy, but I like my fantasies to feel real; that way they can

touch me even more on an emotional level, without losing any of their physical effect.

While the story ends at a very nice place in the relationship, an equilibrium point, I am very glad that the author is planning two sequels to the story. I think we need more real guys, struggling with real issues in a believable way.

You won't regret reading this story! Strongly recommended

namericanwordcat says

I enjoyed this book. It was great to watch the heroes work through the conflicts of an office romance and an age difference as well as their own backstories.

However, the focus was too narrow for me, not that the book is character driven I love that, but that these men are so isolated in their connections to others.

And then it turns out this book is really a serial stretched out over several books so I don't get the full HEA. Sigh.

Good writing though.
