

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

# WHAT FAMILY IS FOR

T.T. Kove

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## WHAT FAMILY IS FOR

By T.T. Kove

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

### What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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# WHAT FAMILY IS FOR

By T.T. Kove

## Photo Description

Two men holding hands.

## Story Letter

The picture shows Tim and Connor as they are standing outside an airport somewhere in Nebraska, waiting for Connor's family to pick them up and drive them to Connor's family home.

*Dear Author,*

*We live in New York City where Connor and I met four years ago. My parents still reside in the same Brooklyn brownstone where I grew up and we often go there to help out with gardening or repairs on the house since my Mom and Dad are getting older and can't cope like they used to. Connor loves my family. I know the feeling is mutual; my parents love him as their own son.*

*Somhow we've never come around to meeting his family. I know very little about them. According to Connor, the small town in Nebraska where he grew up is the ugliest town east of Hooker County, and when I suggested we should go see them on our next vacation, he was very persistent saying there were absolutely no reasons for us to go there.*

*I asked him if he didn't miss his folks. If maybe his parents would like to meet me, the guy their son married one month after it was declared legal in New York. But he just laughed.*

*"I'm proud of you baby, never doubt that, but you have no idea what my family's like. You don't want to go there if you don't have to. There's Cousin Albert who thinks the microwave was invented by the Russians to spy on him, and Aunt May who hasn't left her house for twenty years, and angry Uncle Donald who says he will kick any democrat in the balls, and Uncle Stephen who considers Nebraska made the biggest mistake ever when the state repealed all sodomy laws in 1977, and he's not hesitating to tell anyone who cares to listen. And they all live in the same town, total population 287 people, it's like a bee's nest. I got out of there as soon as I turned eighteen, and you won't miss them either. Trust me."*

*I had a hard time believing parents weren't important.*

*“But what about your parents?”*

*“They’re not so bad. They claim to have accepted I’m gay, but they won’t ever understand why I choose to live with you, or any man for that matter. Tim, please, let’s forget about them. I’d prefer to live my life here and now, with you.”*

*And there was the end of the discussion. We did fine with letting my family be his, too. Everybody needs a family of some kind.*

*But one Saturday morning in March when I was lounging on the couch, Connor rushed into our living room, stopped and stared at me.*

*“What’s the matter?” I asked and put down the book I was reading.*

*“My brother called.” He looked clearly distressed.*

*“You have a brother?” I asked surprised. Four years and he never told me?*

*“Yeah,” he said. “Tim, you and I are going to Nebraska. Dad died last night.”*

*Connor almost fell down on the couch, landing heavily beside me; I had never seen him this frustrated, he was always so cool and...*

*“Shit!” he cried out. “Why the hell couldn’t they have told me he was ill?”*

*I was in shock.*

*Dear Author—I grew up in New York in a loving accepting home, I have no idea what to expect when we arrive in Nebraska. I’ve known Connor for four years, still I might get to see a whole new side of him and I’m not sure if it scares me or not. And something must have happened with his brother that is so bad he won’t even talk about him.*

*The only thing I do know is that I stand by Connor no matter what. That’s what family is for, right?*

*Sincerely,*

*Amelia*

## **Story Info**

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** death of family member, established couples, family drama, homophobia, hurt/comfort, sweet/no sex

**Word Count:** 7,295

# WHAT FAMILY IS FOR

By **T.T. Kove**

I was lounging on the couch when Connor came rushing into our living room. He stopped just inside the door and proceeded to stare at me.

“What’s the matter?” I put the book I’d been reading down on my chest, open so I wouldn’t lose the page I was on.

“My brother called.” He was clearly distressed.

“You have a brother?” That came as a complete surprise to me. We’d been together for four years, and this was the first I’d ever heard about a brother.

“Yeah.” He ran his hands through his coarse brown hair. “Tim, you and I are going to Nebraska. Dad died last night.” He came over to the couch and nearly fell down next to me. I had never seen him so devastated. Connor was always the calm one. “Shit!” He pulled on his hair. “Why the hell couldn’t they have told me he was ill?”

I didn’t know what to say. I was still shocked about the fact that he had a brother.

Connor and I met over four years ago, right here in New York City where we still lived.

My parents lived in the same Brooklyn brownstone where I grew up. We often went to visit them, and to help out with gardening and repairs on the house since both Mom and Dad were getting older and couldn’t cope with everything like they used to.

Connor loved my family.

The feeling was mutual. My parents loved him too, just like he was their own son. Or son-in-law, but that was basically the same.

We never got around to meeting Connor’s family though. I knew very little about them, since he wasn’t sharing much. According to Connor, the small town in Nebraska where he grew up was the ugliest town east of Hooker County.

When I suggested we should go see them on our next holiday, he was persistent that there weren’t any reasons whatsoever for us to go there.

I asked him if he missed his folks, because I knew I would've if I hadn't seen my own in four years. Maybe his parents would like to meet me? I was the guy their son had married, after all, just one month after same-sex marriage was declared legal in New York.

He laughed it off. "I'm proud of you, baby, never doubt that, but you have no idea what my family's like. You don't want to go there if you don't have to." He sighed heavily. "There's Cousin Albert who thinks the microwave was invented by the Russians to spy on him, and Aunt May who hasn't left her house for twenty years, and angry Uncle Donald who says he will kick any democrat in the balls, and Uncle Stephen who considers Nebraska made the biggest mistake ever when the state repealed all sodomy laws in 1977. He doesn't hesitate to tell anyone who cares to listen, either." He kept making movements with his hands as he spoke, a testament to just how upset he was. I'd never heard him speak so much about his family before. "And they all live in the same town, with a total population of 287 people. It's like a bee's nest. I got out of there as soon as I turned eighteen, and you won't miss them either. Trust me."

I had a hard time believing parents weren't important. Mine were the most important people in my life, after all. "But what about your parents?"

"They're not so bad. They claim to have accepted I'm gay, but they won't ever understand why I choose to live with you, or any man for that matter. Tim, please, let's forget about them. I'd prefer to live my life here and now, with you."

It was the end of the discussion. I wanted to know more about his family, and it was upsetting that he shut it down, but at the same time it was flattering to hear he preferred his life exactly as it was. With me. My family was his family, and we did fine with that. Everybody needed a family of some kind, after all.

\*\*\*\*

Now here we were. Standing outside an airport somewhere in Nebraska, waiting for Connor's family to pick us up and drive us to his family's home.

Connor's hand brushed mine. "I've been debating the whole trip whether to tell you we shouldn't be affectionate with each other while we're here. But you know what, babe? We're married. I'm not going to pretend we're not, just to please them. I'm going to treat you exactly like I do when we're at home, or with your parents, and they can deal with it. I'm not going back into any kind of closet for them."



I squeezed his fingers. “Are you sure? What if this alienates them even more?”

I still hadn't gotten him to tell me more about his brother. He clammed up every time I tried to bring it up. He stayed silent on anything family related.

“They can deal.”

I saw a truck heading our way and I felt Connor tense up next to me. I watched him out of the corner of my eye.

Having known him for four years, I was pretty confident I knew him quite well. But being here, I might see a whole new side to him. I wasn't sure if it scared me or not. There was a reason he hadn't been back there in four years, after all.

Not to mention that something must've happened with his brother that was so bad he wouldn't even talk to me about it. Me, who knew everything about him—except for his life back here in this small town. It was frustrating—and truthfully also hurtful that he wouldn't open up to me about it.

I knew one thing though, and that was that I would stand by Connor no matter what. Because that's what family was for.

The truck stopped at the sidewalk, and I felt Connor tense up further. He grabbed our stuff, and all but threw it in the back.

I blinked, surprised at his violent reaction.

“Get in, Tim.” Connor held the door open for me and motioned for me to slide into the front seat before him.

A man, maybe a couple years older than Connor and I, sat stoically at the wheel. His head didn't turn towards us. The only reaction I could see was his hands gripping the wheel tighter.

“Joseph.” Connor sat down next to me and slammed the door shut.

“Connor.”

That was it. Their names. All the greeting they did. It was terse, and I really couldn't feel the love between them. I knew who this had to be though—this could only be the brother.

It was like I didn't even exist though. I was definitely hurt by the lack of greeting, but judging from the greeting between the two of them, they'd only done it grudgingly. Maybe I should be happy I didn't receive such a terse greeting as well.

The atmosphere in the truck was tense all the way from the airport to Connor's family home.

Connor's brother kept his eyes on the road at all times. His lips were pressed tight together. Connor was staring out the window, all broody. And I was sitting in-between them, wondering what the hell to say to relieve the tension. It was uneasy, to say the least. I was afraid to move in case it would slice up the tension and something would erupt.

I couldn't come up with anything, and the whole ride had been spent in silence until we pulled up in front of a nice-looking house with a wrap-around garden that seemed to be well tended.

"Mom's with the funeral director. She should be home soon. She made up your old room for you." I didn't know if he sounded angry or upset. Maybe a bit of both. But with that said, Connor's brother got out of the truck and headed inside without a single glance back.

Connor got out as well without a word.

"So that was your brother."

I jumped down from the truck after Connor. I watched as he reached back for our bags and took mine once he held it out to me.

"Yeah. That's Joseph."

"He was... rude." I couldn't find another word to describe him. He hadn't even greeted me. It'd been like I was invisible.

"He's still angry with me." Connor put his hand on the small of my back and gently pushed me towards the stairs up to the house.

"For what?"

"For being me."

Connor led me quickly up the stairs and into what could only be his room. I turned in a slow circle to take it in. It was sparsely furnished, only with a bed, a desk, and a bookcase.

"I see they've redecorated." Connor chuckled, but it wasn't a happy kind of chuckle. More bitter than anything. He pointed to the walls. "I used to have posters up there, of half-naked guys.

"I bet that wasn't popular."

“Not at all. I used to have posters of girls, before I came out, just for cover, you know. But once I did come out, I covered these walls with posters of half-naked, fit guys. My parents didn’t like to come in here after that.” He dropped his bag on the bed. “This bed is made for one. If she thinks I’m going to sleep away from my husband, she’s sorely mistaken.”

I scratched awkwardly at the back of my neck.

He’d had an argument with his mom the day after he’d told me we were going to Nebraska. Apparently I hadn’t been very welcome, but he’d refused to go without me. I couldn’t help but wonder if there even was a room made up for me or if I was supposed to find some other form of sleeping arrangement.

“Let’s go downstairs. I need something to eat.”

I followed Connor out of the room and back down.

We walked into a big, brightly lit kitchen, only to find it occupied by a young woman. I almost walked right into Connor when he stopped dead in his tracks.

“Jess?”

The woman turned with a big smile on her young face. “Connor!” She came out from behind the counter, and my eyes instantly fell to the pregnant belly jutting out.

Connor saw it too, because he took a step back when she reached out to hug him. “What’re you doing here, Jess?” He had an expression on his face I couldn’t decipher.

She gave up trying to hug him and instead crossed her arms. “I’m helping your mom out. This isn’t easy for her.”

Connor was still staring at her belly. He wasn’t saying anything, and it didn’t seem like she was going to be volunteering information either.

“Hi. I’m Tim.” I stepped in front of Connor and held my hand out to her.

She regarded me with deep, brown eyes for several moments but eventually shook my hand. “I’m Jessica. Nice to meet you, Tim. So, you’re the guy who stole Connor’s heart?”

I liked her. I think. She didn’t seem hostile or anything, at least. “I guess I am.”

“He’s my husband,” Connor said from behind me, putting a heavy hand on my shoulder. “And I expect him to be treated as such.”

Her lips pinched as her eyes found Connor again. "I made my peace with you a long time ago, Connor. But I can't make promises for anyone else."

Peace with? Peace with what?

When Connor didn't say anything, she turned back to the counter. "I've made sandwiches. Feel free to take what you want." She motioned towards a heaping plate.

"Thanks, Jess." He said it grudgingly.

She leaned against the counter while we both took a sandwich.

"These are real tasty." It wasn't a lie either; they really did taste good. I got a smile in return for it.

"So..." Her focus rested on Connor. "Aren't you going to ask?"

"Ask what?"

Her eyes widened a bit in irritation. She motioned to her belly. "Aren't you at least a little bit curious who knocked me up?"

"Well, since you're here, apparently to help my mom, I'm guessing Joseph did. And I've got nothing to say to that." He shook his head as if he was disappointed.

"Connor—" The front door opened and closed and footsteps could be heard coming towards the kitchen.

I knew it was Connor's mom the moment I laid eyes on her. They had the same eyes, a mix of gray, blue, and green, and the same course, brown hair, though hers had a bit of silver in it now.

"Connor." She was terse.

"Mom." He eyed her, then turned to me. "This is Tim. You remember I told you about him? My *husband*?"

"Yes, hello." Her nod was just as terse as her voice. "May I speak with you? Alone?" She turned and walked out, and after throwing me a glance, Connor followed.

I was left in the kitchen with Jessica.

"So how do you know Connor?" I asked, hoping to avoid another tense and awkward silence.

"He's my ex-boyfriend."

My whole body froze for a second, and my eyes again went to her belly. Connor's ex-girlfriend, and now she was apparently with his brother? Why hadn't Connor mentioned that to me? Why did *she* mention it? Did it even matter that they'd been together? Maybe it did to her... I couldn't help but think that maybe she was trying to have Connor through his brother?

"Don't worry. We never did anything," she said. "It was an innocent teenage romance. I realized once he came out that I was used as his cover. But it's okay." She shrugged, like it wasn't a big deal. Maybe it wasn't now, but I was pretty sure it had been. Why else would she have said she'd made her peace with him earlier?

"How long were you together?" I wasn't sure I wanted to know.

I'd never thought of myself as jealous, but then I'd never found myself face-to-face with Connor's ex before either.

"For most of high school. Until he came out."

Silence descended. I tried not to look at her. I didn't want to seem like I was staring.

"Look, Tim. It was Tim, right?"

"Yeah." Short and easy name, not too hard to remember.

"All of this." She motioned around the room, but I had a feeling it wasn't the room itself she was referring to. "It's not as bad as it seems. I mean, Connor had some bad experiences once he came out, but who doesn't?"

I hadn't.

"We really aren't so bad, any of us. Grace is grieving, so is Joseph. But they're not bad people. They're just a little... they don't understand."

"Don't understand what?"

"How he could stay away for four years. Grace is okay with the whole gay thing, even if she can't quite comprehend the fact that he married another man."

One thing was missing from that sentence, and it bothered me. "His brother's not okay with it?"

Her lips pursed again. I took that as a no.

"His extended family's a bit crazy. Has he told you about them?"

I nodded. The paranoid uncle, the aunt who didn't leave her home... Yeah. "They seem like a weird bunch." Maybe that word wasn't the best to use, but it was all I could come up with.

She chuckled. "They are. But then don't we all have something weird about us?"

I'd made up my mind. I liked Jessica. She seemed like a decent person, and she had humor. If anyone else didn't welcome me around here, at least she seemed to be okay with me. I guess it was better than nobody.

\*\*\*\*

Dinner was tense.

Joseph was still flat out ignoring me, and Connor seemed to be ignoring his brother. Grace kept her head bowed through most of dinner; she didn't say a single word. Jessica tried to keep a conversation going, but no one seemed inclined to speak with her.

I was relieved when Connor and I escaped up to his bedroom.

"Mom admitted to wanting us to have separate bedrooms." Connor grabbed both of our bags. "But I set her straight. So we've got the guest room now."

"Oh." I followed him across the hall, into a room that was even more sparsely furnished. There was only a double bed and a nightstand on each side, as well as a closet.

He sat down on the bed and glanced up at me. "Do you regret it?"

"Regret what?" I went over to stand in-between his thighs. I looped my arms around his neck and leaned down to press a kiss to the top of his head.

"Coming here with me? They haven't exactly been very welcoming." He wrapped his arms tightly around my waist.

"They've never met me before."

"Your family welcomed me with open arms the first time I met them," he pointed out. "Why can't my family be normal?"

"I don't think my family's normal, babe. I've been extremely lucky with my parents. Your family is maybe a bit more normal, when it comes to reactions. Someone's always going to take issue when there's two gay men around. Not everyone's going to be supportive."

"They could try to be a little bit nicer. You're not fucking invisible. You're a big part of my life."

I hugged his shoulders. "Maybe they'll realize that these few days we're here."

"I doubt it. You know what Mom said when I asked why they hadn't told me Dad was ill?"

"No." I looked into his eyes.

"She said she didn't think I wanted to know. That I'd left them and never bothered to come back."

"That's..." Jesus. That was cruel. He'd been Connor's *dad*, of course he'd deserved to know the man had been ill.

"Yeah." He sighed. "I think Dad's the one who was the most okay with me. It's weird, really, but Mom seems to be a lot more hostile towards me now than she'd been when Dad was still alive."

"Why is it weird? Wasn't she like this before you left for college?"

"Not quite so bad. Usually it's the father that minds having a gay son the most, but I think it's opposite for me. Dad didn't like it, but he accepted it as long as he didn't have to get it shoved in his face. Like all the posters in my room. That's why he never went into it anymore."

"Maybe it's just because she's grieving. He did just die." I didn't like the thought of Connor not being accepted by his family. Maybe it seemed so far-fetched to me because I'd always been accepted.

"I wish I could've seen him one last time. Or at least talked to him." Connor's voice grew thick. He was fighting his emotions. "I should've come back here. For Dad."

"None of them told you anything. Not even your dad. So you couldn't have known." I put my free hand on Connor's chest, caressing him. He was wearing a T-shirt to bed and the fabric bunched under my hand.

"At least you're here to say a final good-bye to him," I whispered. "At least you get that." They could've chosen not to tell him about his dad's death too. After seeing what I had, and hearing what he'd just said, I wouldn't have put it past them.

"Yeah." He reached over to me and pulled me in close. His strong arms wrapped around me again. "At least I get that. And I've got you here with me, too."

"I'll always be with you, whatever happens."

"I love you so much, Tim. Don't ever doubt that."

I smiled against his chest. "I don't. I don't doubt it for a second."

I never had.

"No matter what, babe, you mean everything to me. You're my family." He kissed me.

I straddled his lap and sat down, enjoying the way his tongue teased me. I loved kissing Connor, had since our very first kiss four years ago. He was an excellent kisser—always had been. I had to wonder though where he'd learned it, considering he'd only ever been with one person in this town, and that person was a girl.

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The funeral was the next day, and it seemed the whole town's population of 287 were gathered in the church.

Connor kept his hand on the small of my back, almost like he was afraid of losing me if he didn't have his hands on me at all times. I found it quite endearing. Everyone else didn't, if I were to judge by the long glances we got from each and every direction.

"This row is for family only," Joseph snapped once we reached the front of the church.

My stomach clenched tight.

Connor's jaw clenched dangerously. "Fine." He took my hand and dragged me with him further back.

"Babe." I sat down gingerly next to him on the hard bench. "I don't mind sitting here. You should be with your family." I knew I was his family too now, considering we were married, but he should be up there close to his dad.

"You're my family, Tim." His eyes were sincere when he looked at me.

Butterflies erupted in my stomach. They always did when he gave me that look. That was the look I'd fallen for in the first place. It was the one he'd had on his face when he'd asked me out.

I wanted to lean in and kiss him, but I restrained myself. Kissing another man inside a church wouldn't be viewed well, I could imagine. I wasn't religious, but I bet most of the people in the church were. Not to mention his family.

I could tell he was agitated, no matter how fine he tried to seem about the situation. His hands were clenched; his jaw was tight. He was upset and he had



a right to be. This was his dad—apparently the only person who'd accepted him for who he was.

I reached over to hold his hand. He gripped on tight.

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Connor had to wipe away a few tears when the coffin was lowered into the ground. I stood by his side the whole time, not sure what I could do to make him feel better. Not much. He'd just lost his dad, and I couldn't imagine what that must be like, even if he hadn't seen him in the past four years.

It was emotional for the rest of his family too. His mom was crying through the whole thing, while his brother kept an arm locked tightly around Jess' shoulders. It seemed she was his rock—even if he wasn't reduced to tears.

The family gathered back at the house after the service was done. Those who weren't family were giving their condolences to those who were.

I didn't feel part of anything, so I went to the bathroom just to get some time alone to myself.

I didn't regret coming with Connor, not at all. But I understood why he didn't want to come back here. It wasn't like the welcome, his or mine, had been anything to brag about.

I ventured back out to the crowded house. Connor wasn't where I'd left him, so I walked through all the rooms looking for him, until I spotted him out back.

It wasn't until I was out on the porch that I noticed he was facing off with Joseph.

"What's your deal, huh?" Connor said, arms hanging by his sides, but his hands were clenched into fists.

"You're my problem," Joseph spat. "You bring that man here and expect to sit with us up front in church? No fucking way am I ever going to let that happen. He's not family."

"He's my *husband*. He's more my family than you are."

Joseph spat on the ground again. I took a step back, debating whether to go back inside or not. This was their fight, but Joseph was posing as a danger. Maybe even a little bit unstable, with his blatant homophobia. It was very unsettling. I bet it must feel even worse for Connor, who was his brother.

“Yeah, I imagine he is. You can go play faggots together.”

Connor's knuckles were turning white. I knew from experience that Connor had an exceptionally good hold of his temper—but I was pretty sure he was about to snap.

I bit my lower lip, worried about what would happen when Connor did snap.

“What are you going to do, Joseph? Are you going to beat me up again? Like you did last time? You going to make me go to the ER to get my arm set again?”

My blood ran cold. That's what had happened between them? His brother had broken his *arm*? What the hell kind of person did that to his own brother? It was maddening to hear. Not to mention upsetting, for Connor, who'd had something so horrible done to him by someone he cared about.

“You're not wanted here.” Joseph's eyes were practically black with rage.

It didn't seem like Joseph's anger was going away. He had broken Connor's arm before, which meant he could very well do it again. I didn't want Connor to experience such a thing, not for a second time.

“Dad would've wanted me here.”

“Dad.” Joseph snorted. “You always were his favorite. Even when he found out you were queer, you could do no wrong. But Mom and I, we aren't having any of it. You can take your *husband* and flit off back home. Leave us alone. I've got a kid on the way, with a great girl, and I don't want you around to ruin it.”

“What? You're afraid I'm going to take Jess away from you? *Again?*”

The last word broke the tension. Joseph flew on Connor, and they both crashed to the ground. I started in shock for a moment as they both swung at each other, unable to move. I'd never seen Connor like that before. He'd never lost his temper with anyone. He'd never once hit anyone. And now here he was, hitting his own brother.

“You fucking faggot! She's my girl and she's not getting anywhere near you ever again!”

“She was my girl first, you fucking loser!”

My mouth dropped open. They were fighting about *Jess*? My husband was fighting with his brother about a woman. Brilliant.

“Connor!” I hurried down from the porch to reach where they were rolling around in the grass. “Connor, come on!” I grabbed his arms and pulled him off his brother, but Joseph wasn’t about to let me remove Connor from the fight. He dove after him, hit him around the waist, and then we all fell to the ground.

I rolled away from flying fists so I wouldn’t get one in the face. It wasn’t my fight, so I didn’t want to sport the war wounds from it.

They weren’t even yelling at each other anymore. They were intent on beating each other’s faces in. I tried to grab a hold of Connor again, to drag him away, but I was pushed away.

“Connor!”

He ignored me, too intent on Joseph. Joseph didn’t even react to my voice. To him, I was still invisible.

Where was the brotherly love? Had they always been like this, or was it because of homophobia and jealousy it had developed this way?

“Connor, come on!” I got a grip on his shoulders and managed to push him back, away from Joseph. “Calm down. Come on. Don’t do this. Not now.” His dad had just been put in the ground. I didn’t want him hurt and I didn’t want him to think back to a fight with his brother on this day.

Connor pushed himself up on his feet, glared down at Joseph, who was also pushing himself up. Without a word, he turned and strode back inside.

I glanced once at Joseph, at the angry grimace. He wasn’t worth my time. I hurried after Connor.

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“Is that what happened between you before?”

I put the damp cloth to Connor’s lip, trying to be rid of the blood. His lips were split, and he had a graze on both his cheeks. He looked worse than Joseph, who’d only seemed to be bleeding from his nose before I left him out on the lawn.

“Fighting?”

“Yeah. About Jess?”

“Well, yeah. Her and me being gay. He really doesn’t like me being gay. Especially not as I dated her first.”

“Huh.” I pressed the cloth harder, and he flinched. “Sorry. I just didn’t expect that.”

“What?”

“That you’d fought over a girl. You never once mentioned having a brother to me and that’s because you fought over a *girl*?” I’d expected some big reveal. Instead, I was just baffled. Connor didn’t even *like* women.

“Joseph hated the fact that I was with her. He always wanted her. And when he found out I was gay, he took great pleasure in sharing it with everyone.”

My eyebrows rose. “Your brother outed you?”

“Yeah.” He covered my hand with his and guided the cloth over his lip. “Out of pure spite. We’ve never been close. He hated me for having the girl he liked, he hated me for being Dad’s favorite, he hated me for doing better in school than him—Honestly, I could go on all night.”

“He’s your brother.” I couldn’t imagine. But then I was an only child.

“That doesn’t matter. He outed me, Dad still liked me, Jess was still my friend. Seemed he got his clutches in her in the end though.”

“She seemed like a decent girl. Surely there must be something good about your brother?”

“I don’t know, babe.” He heaved a sigh. “Love makes you blind. Isn’t that a saying?”

“I guess.” I shrugged. “Am I blind to your faults?”

The unharmed corner of his mouth hitched up into a wry grin. “Maybe we’re blind to each other’s.”

“Maybe we are.” I kissed that particular corner of his mouth.

“Anyway, I want to change our flights. I want to go back home tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” I was caught by surprise. “You sure about that? We’ve only been here a full day.”

“And it’s been more than enough.”

I went to the sink to rinse out the cloth. “I go wherever you go, Connor. If you want to go home, that’s where we’ll go.”

“Dad was the best thing about this place. He’s gone, so... there’s really no need to stay any longer.”

I could understand. He hadn’t exactly been welcomed with open arms.

“There’s one thing I want to do before we leave though. I want to go visit Dad’s grave, just you and me.”

“Of course.” I’d go with him to the end of the world if he asked. All he had to do was just that—ask.

\*\*\*\*

The dirt was piled high on the grave, and it was covered in ribbons and flowers. A white cross at the front told us whose grave it was.

Connor was crouched in front of it, arms dangling from his knees, and eyes somber as he took in the simple cross.

He didn’t say anything, he just sat in complete silence. I stood behind him, hands in my pockets, and tried my best to be quiet. To give him this time with his dad. It was the last he’d have in a good while.

He’d managed to change our flight tickets. It’d been more expensive, but he’d said he didn’t care how expensive it was, as long as we could go home. I kind of agreed with him, because it wasn’t like I enjoyed being treated like I was invisible. Or being glowered at like I was an abomination.

I wanted to go back home just as much as he did, back to the peace and quiet, where we could be ourselves. I wanted to go back to my parents, who loved us both and weren’t afraid to show it.

Connor straightened eventually and his strong arms wrapped around me. I took my hands out of my pockets and embraced him, too. We stood there for a good while, hugging each other, without saying a word. I was both a comfort to him and his strength. I’d be whatever as long as he’d be fine eventually.

“Let’s go back. Get some sleep before we leave tomorrow morning.”

I nodded, and he kept an arm around my shoulders as we started walking back toward his childhood home.

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“You’re leaving?”

His mother appeared behind us as we lugged our bags out into the driveway. We’d ordered a taxi to pick us up, because another drive in complete, tense silence wasn’t something either of us wanted to experience again.

“Yes, Mom.” Connor turned to her. She stood at the top of the stairs.

She nodded. “All right, then.”

“That’s it?”

I knew Connor hadn’t expected anything, but I could tell he was hurt all the same.

“What do you want me to say? It’s for the best.” In body she looked fragile, a thin old lady, but her expression and her eyes were cold. “After yesterday’s debacle, leaving is a good decision.”

I burned to speak up, to tell her yesterday hadn’t been only Connor’s fault, but I wasn’t sure if he’d appreciate me speaking my mind to her or not. So I kept my mouth shut.

“Yeah, Mom. I guess it is for the best.”

The taxi pulled up behind us, and Connor swirled around to go put our bags in the trunk.

“Connor!” Jess came hurrying out of the house. She descended the stairs and came towards us as fast as her small, pregnant body would allow it.

Connor allowed her to hug him this time. He even hugged her back lightly.

“I’m glad you came back. I’m glad I got to see you again.” She pulled back to look into his eyes. “I’m sorry about Joseph. He just can’t seem to get over...” She trailed off, but she didn’t need to list the reasons he couldn’t get over. There were only three of them—Connor being gay, getting with his girl before him, and Connor being his dad’s favorite—but those three were more than enough. “But I’m happy to see you, know that. As for me, you’re always welcome back.”

“Thanks, Jess. It was nice to see you again, too.” He didn’t put much emotion into it, but I knew he was being truthful. He was still hurt about his mother’s cold words.

“It was nice to meet you too, Tim.” Jess turned to me with a smile. “I hope we’ll meet again someday.”

I nodded with a smile. “I hope so too.”

She hugged Connor one last time, then we got into the taxi. The taxi drove away once Connor slammed the door shut, and Connor’s eyes rested on me as we drove away instead of glancing back home.

“Do you regret it?” I asked. “Leaving now?”

“No.” He shook his head for emphasis. “I don’t regret it at all. I’m looking forward to getting back home, where we belong. We don’t belong here. *I* don’t

belong here.” He reached over to tangle his fingers with mine. “My mom’s always been frigid, but she was a bit warmer when Dad was alive. I guess now he’s not, she’s got nothing left.” He gazed out the window. “I hope I won’t ever experience losing you.”

I couldn’t answer that. We didn’t know what would happen in the future. All I knew was that for now, I wasn’t going anywhere, and neither was he. We were married, we belonged together, we were *family*.

\*\*\*\*

My parents met us at the airport. I’d texted them that we were coming home, and now here they were.

“I didn’t know you were coming to pick us up!” Connor embraced first my mom, then my dad, with a big smile on his face.

“That’s what family’s for, Connor dear.” Mom smiled widely back at him and patted his cheek.

I went in to be hugged as well, then I wrapped an arm around Connor’s waist. His sad mood from the taxi drive and the flight seemed to have vanished the moment he’d spotted my parents.

I was glad.

Because this was family. People who loved you unconditionally—and who showed up at the airport to pick you up without so much as being prompted to it, just because they loved you so much.

*That’s what family’s for, indeed.*

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*T.T. writes m/m romance, all-male ménages, lesbians, and even a few m/f short stories in already established series. She writes books that are only intended for adults; her stories usually have explicit sexual content, so if you're not 18 years of age, you probably shouldn't be reading them.*

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