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**GEEKING OUT
ON 11C**

L. L. BUCKNOR

4838, LONGITUDE: 55
1-800-887-8888
1-800-887-8888
311-472-7700

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

GEEKING OUT ON 11C

By **L.L. Bucknor**

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.

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GEEKING OUT ON 11C

By L.L. Bucknor

Photo Description

A guy with golden skin, washboard abs and a scruffy, sexy grin is staring off into space. He looks like he's thinking about something hot as he lifts up his sleeveless shirt.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Mateo is the most gorgeous man I've ever seen. He lives in my building, but I didn't think he would ever notice me. I'm shy, I'm a geek and I'm probably too old for him. The other day he passed me in the hall and winked at me. Of course I completely clammed up, blushed and rushed by him. I can't even say hi to the man without being completely flustered. But I can't get him out of my mind.

Requests: Contemporary, age difference, opposites attract, some humor and smexin' would be nice, HFN or HEA.

Sincerely,

Valerie C

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: age gap, opposites attract, smaller top, geeks, men with pets, blue collar

Word Count: 14,887

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone that I pestered about Edgar. Many thanks to the MMR Team!

GEEKING OUT ON 11C

By **L.L. Bucknor**

“Sounds like someone’s home, huh?”

Pausing for a moment to listen, Ed heard loud laughter coming from the hallway outside his apartment door. It was nearly four o’clock in the morning. Whoever was out there—Ed had a sure bet on who—did not care about the time. Ed shook his head briefly and went back to enter his cheat code for the computer game.

“I bet you an extra shake of fish flakes it’s our neighbor from across the hall.” Ed looked at his goldfish, Atari, and sighed. He was talking to his goldfish and playing Sims 2, instead of tumbling home, like the loud group outside his co-op door. He definitely was not going to tell the party to keep it down. He didn’t like confrontation. Also, he didn’t have the balls to say anything to anyone... especially *him*. Him being Ed’s hunky neighbor. Almost a year after the walking deity moved in the unit across the hall, Ed had yet to learn Mr. Hotness’ name.

He did not want to be a creepy stalker at his age. Not that thirty-four was decrepit or he should look into retirement housing. Edgar Horace Brown—named after both of his grandfathers—did not inspire men, especially those like his younger neighbor, to lust after men like him. Besides the geriatric moniker, Ed was too shy, too set in his ways to even talk to him. He sighed at his character on the computer screen. Okay, maybe a little stalker-ish—he made a character on the computer game that looked like his neighbor. And maybe he gave him a love interest that sort of looked like Ed. Creepy? A little. Pathetic? Atari told him that from the start. Ed wanted a little bit of fantasy, since he was pretty sure Mr. Live-Tumblr was straight.

The noise from the hallway sounded like more than one person, so out of curiosity, Ed got up from his computer desk to look through his peephole. He saw the object of his boners talking to another man. And the other guy seemed to fawn all over his neighbor. Couldn’t blame him, he would do the same if he were in his shoes. His tall, scruffy neighbor with golden skin, dark, spiky hair and eight-pack abs. Ed recalled the memorable summer of his neighbor shirtless, with a basketball under his arm, in the building hallway. The man’s

chest was sculpted like a living statue. *Quit fantasizing.* He listened in on their conversation as he watched. Didn't hurt to be a little nosy.

"So Mateo... I've been thinking." *His name is Mateo?* Ed silently did imaginary backflips in his mind. His neighbor had a sexy name to match his appearance. Guess he could change Eleven Cee, named after his neighbor's apartment number, to Mateo in the Sims game, now that Ed knew that was his name. *Not creepy at all.* Ed peered closer and listened.

Mateo smiled. Ed could see the gleam off those shiny, shiny white teeth.

"Don't gimme that look." The guy standing next to Mateo leaned closer to Mateo, as did Ed, behind his door.

"Trev, you know I'm usually busy." Mateo murmured something that Ed couldn't quite hear.

"We haven't hooked up in ages." Ed watched Trev lean closer, with his front on Mateo's side. "Why is that?"

He's gay? Ed looked down at his crotch; apparently it was very excited for tonight's date with Sir Right Hand. Ed stopped paying attention to the conversation briefly, just to think of the possibilities that would never happen in this lifetime.

Mateo pushed away while shaking his head. He murmured something to Trev, who frowned. Ed tried to listen to whatever the two were saying, but could barely hear, as their voices got lower still. It was either put his ear against the door to listen, or peep through his peephole. He'd rather watch. Trev tried to kiss Mateo, but Mateo pushed him away and muttered something.

Trev made an exaggerated pout and walked away, in the direction of their elevator.

Mateo, while groping his pants' pocket, glanced to Ed's door. Ed jumped back and stubbed his toe on his doorstep. Of course, it made a loud bang. At this time of night, any noise over a whisper sounded like a bomb going off. He grasped his foot and tried to jump up and down quietly. *Please don't let him have heard me.* He was too tempted to not peep once more. He tiptoed to his front door and looked to where his neighbor had stood, but Mateo had already gone inside his apartment. Ed backed away with a smile on his face. The injury was worth it for what he learned tonight. He shook his head at himself and checked to see if he had done any permanent damage to his foot.

Even if a zombie apocalypse started tomorrow and he and Mateo were the last two human beings on Earth, Ed knew he'd never stand a chance. He was

too old and too nerdy—certainly not compatible with someone who looked like a walking wet dream. Mateo looked well under thirty, well-toned and tall, whereas Edgar, at five eight (but who's counting?) never met a gym he liked. He had a soft waist to maintain, thank you very much, and his perfect night was doing just what he'd been doing tonight: checking on his couples and families on Sims 2, and talking to Atari. To add to his shyness factor, Ed had a tendency to blurt out odd things at weird times when he was nervous. Edgar didn't think he was so unattractive that he should wear a bag over his head when in public. He managed to snag a few hookups in his lifetime, but no one he'd ever been with could pass for a *GQ* model. They were normal, like him—geeky gamers, whose description of a hot night would be having an all-night Super Mario Bros tournament.

It'd been quite a while since Edgar's last hookup—two years ago, with an old college acquaintance. Some days he wanted to have someone to sleep next to. He had needs. He even tried Grindr a year back and then chickened out. His older sister Melanie sent links to online dating sites from time to time, which Ed never tried. He talked himself into it and then talked himself right out of it again. His social life wasn't exactly buzzing, but he wasn't complaining. He worked at home as a web designer, which was perfect for his homebody lifestyle. When he tired of staring at his four walls, he visited the local library, or traveled into the city for museums, expos or shows. He was more resigned to how his life currently was: porn and fantasies of hot men... Okay, one hot man seemed to be the main star.

Ed looked to his apartment door again, turned away and bumped his injured toe into a wall corner. "Fuck!" He jumped and held his toe once again.

Edgar was late for his meeting with Melanie. They were going over web design plans for her bakery, and she thought it was better to meet at her shop to get Edgar out of the house. Truthfully, he would have rather met at his place, but Melanie had cupcakes and he could never deny baked goods. He slung his messenger bag over his shoulder as he opened his front door, and turned around to search for his apartment key to lock up. He had fifty million key chains and was struggling to find the right key when he heard a throat clear behind him.

Please don't let it be Mateo. He dropped his key ring, nervous just thinking about his name. He bent down to pick up the keys and looked behind his feet while on the floor. *Fuck, he's standing behind me.* Ed snatched his keys, quickly locked the door and looked at his feet. He knew it was odd but he couldn't help it.

“Nice to meet you.”

Ed nodded to his feet. He turned away from his door, looked briefly to the side of his left shoulder and panicked. It *was* his neighbor, Mateo, wearing just basketball shorts and bedhead. Mateo, up close and personal, could wreak havoc on anyone with a pulse. Ed wished he could get a string of coherent words together or say something witty, but the words were stuck in his throat. He stared a little over Mateo's shoulder and blushed. Damn, he couldn't help it.

Mateo held out a hand for Edgar to shake. Ed stared and silently berated himself for not responding like a normal person.

“I'm sorry if me and my friend were noisy late last night,” Mateo said. He continued to hold his hand out. “Actually, early this morning.”

Ed nodded his head and looked to the ground, willing himself to respond. *Say something. Anything. Please. Tongue... work!*

“We've never had a chance to meet with my weird hours. I'm Mateo.” His neighbor smiled and put his hand to his side. “I'm in 11C.” Ed stared at Mateo's shiny, shiny teeth. *What to say?* Ed blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

“Chillier in the hallway than I expected.” He mentally kicked himself and rushed toward the stairway, too chickenshit to wait for the elevator and further embarrass himself for the day. He didn't look back to see Mateo's face.

Two days had passed since Ed's remarkably chilly hallway incident. Thankfully, or not so thankfully, he had not seen his neighbor in that time—he could only imagine what other “winning” repartee he'd have bumbled out loud. Ed brushed back his curly hair from his forehead and looked through his peephole. It appeared that the coast was clear. He listened for a few seconds and confirmed all quiet on the hallway front. He wanted to run to his floor's garbage chute, get rid of his trash and scurry back to his apartment without encountering anyone.

He grabbed his trash bag, unlocked his door and turned right, toward the little room. But before he could grab the handle, the door swung open. Ed held his breath and let it go when he saw it was his elderly neighbor, Mrs. Gladstone. She was a sweet lady who was a little hard of hearing and loved to discuss her cats with anyone and everyone who'd listen. She had chosen her next victim and blocked Ed's way to get into the room.

“Oh, Ned! You gave me such a fright!”

During the eight years he lived in the building, Ed had corrected her many times, but his neighbor kept calling him Ned. Or Fred. Even Jed once. He gave up trying to correct her at this point.

“Hello, Mrs. Gladstone! How are you?” He raised his voice. He tried grabbing the door, hoping his neighbor might get the hint, but she didn't budge. *Great.*

She nodded and smiled. Ed felt unsure when he noticed a gleam in her eyes. “Such a dependable young man you are. How many years have we been neighbors, hon?”

“Eight years, ma'am.” Ed sighed and tightened his hold on his bag. He attempted to walk around Mrs. Gladstone, trying to inch his way through the blocked entrance, hoping she would get the hint. She didn't.

“So polite. Ned, you know my friends from the senior center in town? They have a few available young women in their families. I could bring you to our next family social to meet them, if you'd like. You're so quiet and reserved. Better than what passes for acceptable suitors these days. You have a steady income and good manners. You'd give someone a solid, steady life.”

Ed would rather meet the available men, but he let Mrs. Gladstone go on and make her assumptions about him. She started to go on about her friend Esther's granddaughter who was divorced and lonely. She emphasized the lonely with an eyebrow wiggle and took a deep breath.

“Wow,” Ed had to cut into the spiel before she got her second wind, “thank you for the compliments, Mrs. Gladstone. But you see, I—”

“Speak up a little, hon.” She tilted her head closer toward Edgar.

“Is that Mrs. G. I hear?” someone boomed from behind the door. Ed hadn't heard the elevator chime. Didn't matter, as he was blocked between Mrs. Gladstone and... Mateo. *Just great.* Mrs. Gladstone finally moved from blocking the doorway to giggle and preen at his neighbor.

“Hello, Mateo darling.” Ed couldn't believe she called Mateo the correct name. He guessed a handsome face could do that. Mateo moved closer to the duo—fully clothed this time. Ed was grateful for small miracles. All he needed was to pop a boner in front of Mateo or, God forbid, Mrs. Gladstone. “I am trying to talk Ned into joining me at my senior center's family social. Get him

to socialize a little. Not that you'd need to come, Mateo dear. With your face, I'm sure you leave trails of broken hearts by the dozen."

Fuck it. Ed didn't have to stand around to hear this. He let go of the door and turned toward his apartment, trash still in hand. He'd throw it out later. Mateo looked him in the eye and Ed felt his stomach tighten, a ball full of nerves and lust. He began to look down to the floor and tried to move aside, but Mrs. Gladstone touched his shoulder. "Oh, Ned, your trash, hon! Don't forget to throw it out."

Ed blushed at the attention and moved around the old woman while she gabbed to Mateo. Ed got rid of his garbage bag and slowly closed the chute. The bag got stuck, and he played with it until it went down. He heard Mrs. Gladstone wish Mateo a "good evening" and figured waiting a minute or two would give Mateo enough time to get back to his apartment.

Ed entered the hallway and stopped walking when he saw Mateo still standing by the door. He didn't know what to say, but he was beaten to the punch.

"You're right," Mateo told him.

What? Ed tilted his head and looked at Mateo's shoulder. It beat having to look the other man in his brown eyes.

"It *is* chilly in the hallway," Mateo said.

Ed nodded and started toward the safe zone of his apartment. Mateo walked beside him down the hallway. "Ned, is it?" Ed got to his door, his hand almost on his doorknob. *Just wish him a good day like a normal person.*

"No. It's Edgar. Ed." *Look at that. You are almost having a conversation.* Now he just needed to get control of his racing heart.

"Oh. Well it's nice to finally meet you. I haven't seen you at the co-op association meetings."

Ed hummed affirmatively and briefly looked toward his crush, still in shock that he, Edgar the geek, was talking to Mateo, the star of some *very* erotic fantasies. Well, sort of, if muttered sentences that were five words or less counted.

"Not that I have time to go there every other month with my weird hours," Mateo continued. "I bartend at my family's bar and grill. Maybe you've heard of Tino's?" He leaned against the wall across from Ed, not budging, just

looking comfortable in his own skin. Ed was a little—fine, a lot—jealous of the ease.

Ed's throat was getting drier and his tongue felt like it was stuck to the roof of his mouth. His plan to avoid Mateo for weeks was a bust. He figured it would have given him enough time to study witty repartee. Not going to happen now, since each time he interacted with Mateo, Ed further proved how socially inept he was. He nodded in response to Mateo's question and gulped loudly, staying focused on Mateo's chin scruff while Mateo continued to talk.

"We are forever busy at work. I'm filling in tonight, so I rushed home to try to sleep for an hour or three before running back in." Mateo didn't hesitate to keep their one-sided conversation going. Edgar assumed his hot, friendly neighbor was just trying to learn about the person living across the hall from him. Nothing more.

"It was nice to finally get to chat, E. Catch you around, man."

E? Edgar frowned at the one-letter nickname. He was unsure how he felt about it. E sounded like a secret agent or someone younger. He was still contemplating the reasons why he didn't think E was acceptable as a name choice as Mateo's door closed shut.

Ed replayed the last sentence in his head. Mateo made it seem as if the two would see more of each other or, God forbid, interact... socially. It would have been his finest dream of dreams come true but for the fact he couldn't speak around him.

He shook his head and walked inside his apartment. He was getting ahead of himself. It wasn't like the two were going to become friends.

Nearly two weeks passed without what Edgar dubbed *Mateo incidents*. He was happy about this. He didn't want to embarrass himself further. Life was back to what he was used to. The first day after Mateo spoke to him, Ed was afraid Mateo would seek him out to talk about neighbor things. But he never saw him. Most late nights, Ed was playing his vintage Super Nintendo system. He was going through a Ms. Pac-Man phase and would hear Mateo's door closing in the wee hours of the morning.

Edgar imagined Mateo was probably meeting tons of hot guys who would have no problems talking. They probably flirted with no issue, which ultimately led to sex and Mateo would top. Though in Ed's sex fantasies, the two of them

would switch and leave no body part unexplored. Edgar stopped thinking that route to smutty encounters. He needed to empty his garbage and didn't want to pop a boner until he returned. He was lazier during his Pac-Man one-man tournaments. He slept late and let the trash pile up. The smell was getting pretty toxic and he couldn't avoid taking it out any longer.

"Another eventful night at *Casa de Atari*." Ed smirked at his goldfish.

After eating, he showered and changed into a very comfy pair of white boxers and a T-shirt. The boxers were old and threadbare, but he couldn't throw out his favorite pair of underwear. It was late in the evening, when there normally wasn't a lot of foot traffic in Edgar's corner of the hallway. He put on old rubber flip-flops to start his mission. As he opened his front door, a loud *crack* of thunder boomed and echoed in the empty hallway. Edgar made sure to flip his door lock so as to not lock himself out, and made his way to the trash room. He slid on the wet marble floor in front of the elevators, his sandals providing no grip. Moving slowly, he inched his way to the garbage room with no accidents.

His return trip was a different story. Edgar managed to finish in the trash room and walked back to the wet floor in front of the elevators. Unfortunately, someone was coming off and was in the process of closing their soaked umbrella, not seeing Ed. Their collision was unavoidable, as was Ed's slippery entanglement with the other person and their inevitable meeting with the floor.

Ed huffed out and did a quick mental check for anything hurting. *No pain yet. Just cold and soggy.* Ed rolled from on top of the person he collided with, apologizing profusely, while the other man did the same. Just his luck, it was Mateo. Edgar tried to offer a hand to Mateo while he also attempted to stand on his own independently, since gracefulness was on a yearlong vacation around the world at this point.

He clutched Mateo's arm, since his poor choice of shoes were not helping. Mateo made it to his two feet first, and caught Ed's arm, before Ed fell again. Ed tried to pick up Mateo's umbrella, but Mateo wordlessly shook his head, held Ed's shoulder and bent to retrieve it. Ed wished he was any place but here. His face reddened as he felt his cold, wet underwear stuck to his skin.

"I am very sorry," Ed croaked for what was probably the fiftieth time. He looked up into Mateo's face quickly to see how pissed Mateo might be.

Mateo just grinned and shook his head. "It's my fault. I didn't look where I was going. Are you okay?" Mateo let go of Ed's shoulder but stood close by as

Edgar tried to situate himself. Mateo looked Edgar up and down, stopping below Edgar's shirt for some reason. Edgar frowned as he looked in that direction. He didn't think anything was interesting and, *oh my God*, his frigging underwear were practically transparent due to the rainwater. His dick was on display. Ed looked up and spluttered. Mateo looked him in his eyes, smiling but not looking apologetic for being caught.

Edgar put his hands in front of his fly and tried to move away. "Very sorry. I'm wet. I mean, you made me wet." Nope, not *any* better. Now, he sounded like a pervert. "You didn't make me *wet*."

"I kinda did," Mateo pointed out. Thankfully, he didn't look down to Ed's boxers again, well, not that Edgar could see, while chastising himself for leaving his apartment in his underwear in the first place. *Why was Mateo home so early? Fuck. Fuck! Fuck!* He needed to get out of there before his cock rose and drew more attention.

"I need to go. Sorry once more." Edgar turned toward his door, praying to hit dry floor so he could run.

"Let's call it a no-fault accident, E." Mateo started to walk beside him.

Edgar barely paid attention to him as he ran through his klutzy blooper reel of the last minute or two in his head. Walking in front of Mateo, he made it to his apartment without further incident. He looked over his shoulder while opening his door, "Good night," he called out in Mateo's general direction and scurried inside to a faint, "G'night."

He went over the last thing Mateo said to him. *E*? He still wasn't too sure how he felt about it. But instead of pondering about the one-letter nickname, Edgar thought about maybe hiding out in his apartment for at least the next year and the feasibility of this plan.

He just accidentally flashed his neighbor. *Holy shit*.

Ed's yearlong plan of remaining inside his apartment didn't happen. He had to leave to buy fish food the day after *Wet Dick-gate*, as Ed embarrassingly dubbed "the incident". Edgar left in the morning and didn't run into Mateo upon return. Maybe he was blowing it out of proportion. The spot of blush-worthy excitement was probably nothing to Mateo. Edgar tried to brush it off as small potatoes as he went about his business for the rest of the week. His days went back into normal routine. He made sure to complete his short checklist

when throwing out his trash: 1) fully clothed and 2) in the morning. There were no Mateo sightings, so it was gravy. He might have made sure to play more Sims 2 for the last couple of days and possibly listened out to hear his neighbor getting in from work in the early morning, so Edgar could sort of schedule ways to avoid him. And it was working.

A week and a day later, fate had other plans in store for Edgar. Returning from a visit to his sister's bakery that afternoon, Ed spied Mateo talking to their neighbor from 11G in the hallway. He kept his eyes trained on his key ring in his palm and walked around the two in conversation. However, he couldn't help but look at Mateo, and in doing so, caught Mateo looking at him. Edgar quickly looked down again, but not before catching Mateo's wink.

"How's it going, E?"

Again with this E.

"Not raining," he murmured and rushed to his door. Edgar was proud he actually spoke words, but pissed that he chose to remind Mateo about the last time he saw him.

Mateo laughed. "Good one, E. See ya later, man!" He resumed his conversation.

Edgar went inside and dropped his laptop bag at the door. *Were they friendly neighbors now?* He was so underprepared.

He tried to put it out of his mind because he would only obsess about the minor interactions he and Mateo had had since they became neighbors. He showered, changed into sweats and had leftovers for dinner; basically, a typical night. He switched it up by starting his Super Nintendo. He was in a Super Mario Bros. mood. He'd just sat on Yoshi, Luigi's dinosaur, when someone knocked on his front door.

Edgar paused his game and checked the time. 10:49 p.m. He wasn't expecting anyone, but he stood up to check anyway. It was most likely one of his neighbors' visitors who got mixed up with apartment numbers. He looked through his peephole and rubbed his eyes. He must be hallucinating.

"Hello?" Mateo called out, looking straight at Edgar's peephole.

Edgar backed away from the door in disbelief. He quickly came back to reality after bumping his hand into the door, realizing he'd made his presence known. He didn't think Mateo actually meant he'd see him later, as in today, as in now.

“E?”

Too late to pretend he wasn't home. Edgar opened the door halfway and stared. Mateo looked great, as usual, and smelled even better. “Er, yes?”

“Not wet, I see.”

“What?”

“Because it's not raining.”

“Dry. I'm dry. Yes.” Edgar clicked his teeth loudly. *Real smooth.*

Mateo stopped grinning widely. “I hope you weren't hurt from our accident. I haven't really seen you since, I think.” He scratched his head and moved closer.

Edgar was still trying to wrap his head around the fact that he was speaking to *him*. He figured Mateo was just doing his neighborly duty in finding out if he was okay. Totally nice, and another attribute that added to why Mateo was a great human being.

“I'm fine. Dry and fine. Thank you for your concern. I hope you were okay as well.” Edgar gave himself a mental high five for remembering to return the gesture, and pushed away from the door frame. “Have a nice ni—”

Mateo cut him off. “No injuries on my end. Anyway, the reason why I stopped over before work was because I wanted to let you know about our bar's Singles Night. I'm not sure where you usually hang out, but we have two-for-one drinks eleven to one on Thursday nights. Ladies free from eleven until closing.”

Edgar raised his eyebrows. Mateo thought he had a social life? “Er, thank—” Ed squinted his eyes “—you?”

“No problem, E. I've been meaning to invite you and your friends to our weekly event. Couples are good to attend too, in case you want to bring your honey.” Like Edgar was dating anyone. “I think you're the only apartment I haven't asked. Mrs. Gladstone thought I was joking when I invited her. She just touched my cheek and chuckled.”

“Probably the highlight of her day.”

Mateo tilted his head and grinned. “I wouldn't underestimate her. She's a charmer. Hey, what game are you playing? That is a game I'm hearing, right? Unless that's some kind of new genre of music I've never heard.”

Edgar turned in the direction of his television and stared like it was a new invention. The entire moment was surreal. "Super Mario Bros: All-Stars." *How could he not know this classic?*

"I've heard of it. My older brother and sister used to play that, I think." Mateo grinned and tried to peek over Edgar's shoulder. "I gotta ask the next time I see them if they remember the game." Just letting Edgar know he was ancient in comparison—a reminder that he and Mateo had nothing in common.

"Do you mind if I take a look? I don't usually play video games, but maybe it's something I should check out."

Edgar wondered why Mateo wanted to even come inside, but figured he was just being friendly, like inviting Mrs. Gladstone to his bar. *He's a businessman. Of course he has to promote for new customers.*

"Uh, sure." Ed walked toward the television, past Atari's tank. He didn't look behind him to see if Mateo followed. Mateo exclaimed loudly how cool it was that he had a goldfish and chattered about not having time to take care of a pet. He walked away from the tank and came to look at the large flat screen television.

"What kind of game system is that, E?"

"Super Nintendo. It's Ed, by the way." No one had ever called him by that nickname, not that he considered a singular letter a true nickname. It made him sound cooler than what he was. And tonight's choice of activity should prove this to his neighbor.

"How awesome is it that you play this?" Mateo looked down at the controllers and sighed. "I wish I had time now to play with you." Ed couldn't help but mentally smirk at that. "Not that I'm an expert or anything, E." Apparently Mateo had ignored Edgar's name correction. "I'm off Sunday night. My brother owes me for covering for him. You've got to show me the ropes. I think he'll be jealous that I get to play." Mateo walked away, moving to the front door, yet still facing Edgar. "What time works for you? Unless you have plans?"

What the hell was happening? "Er, no?"

"Great. So I'll catch you and goldfish—"

"Atari."

"Excuse me?"

“My goldfish’s name is Atari.”

“Cool. You must be a hardcore gamer.”

“I had two.”

“Ataris?”

“No, goldfish. Atari and Sega.”

“Get out.” Mateo leaned against Edgar’s door.

“Honest. Atari ate Sega.”

Mateo chuckled. “Dude, Atari sounds like a badass. Remind me to stay on his good side.” Mateo winked and stepped out of the door. “See you later, E.”

“Edgar or Ed is fine.”

“So ten-ish Sunday night. I should be back by then. Have a good night, E.” Mateo waved and closed the door. Once again ignored. *The story of his life.*

Edgar switched the locks. *Seems I have a new acquaintance with a selective hearing problem?* He didn’t understand if this was Mateo being really polite or interested in learning a new video game. Hopefully, it was a passing fad. Once Mateo saw how boring Edgar really was, he would go back to the friendly-in-passing type of neighbor.

This was only going to get Edgar’s hopes up for a friendship. The disappointment wouldn’t be as bad if he understood why Mateo was interacting with him on a more frequent basis.

Edgar didn’t want to consider Sunday night anything more than it was. In fact, since Thursday night, he’d rationalized it as him offering his tutorial skills to a novice. Nothing more. He fixed his brown-framed glasses on his nose—seasonal allergies made wearing his contacts uncomfortable—and was trying to walk at a normal pace, when he heard his apartment buzzer ring.

He’d wanked off earlier in the afternoon in hopes of preventing any surprise erections during Mateo’s visit. Edgar’s crush had done nothing but get stronger with the increased interactions. He knew he could play it cool when Mateo was here, though, because of his new ability to form more coherent sentences when conversing with his sexy neighbor. The guy made this talking business seem easy.

Edgar opened the door and breathed out slowly. Mateo looked fine. He'd lick him from head to toe, not missing anything in between. He wore fitted jeans, a henley shirt that outlined the picture-perfect torso, and a smile. A very bright smile.

"Do you brighten your teeth?"

"Hello, and how are you?" Mateo didn't seem fazed by the word vomit.

"Your teeth are very white, like a toothpaste commercial."

The body part in question continued to gleam as Mateo rubbed his chin slowly. "Thanks?"

Edgar moved back to let Mateo in. "I have a tendency to say things as they come to mind."

A brief shrug was all that Edgar received as a reply, as Mateo made his way over to the goldfish. "Atari, how's it hanging?"

Edgar stared, as Mateo made himself comfortable inside his home. He might have not cleaned up as much as he wanted. He wasn't try to impress anyone, but he had set up a few snacks and soda cans on an end table by his couch.

"Er, I didn't know how long you planned to stay, so ignore the snacks if you just wanted to play for a couple of minutes." He watched the other man put a tortilla chip in his mouth and sit down. *Guess he's not planning to leave anytime soon.*

"Totally set up for a night of fun. Thanks for the eats, E." More crunching from the couch.

Edgar moved to sit at the other end of the couch. "About the shortening of my name—"

"Do you hate it?"

"No. But I'm—"

"You look like an E." Mateo left his explanation at that and picked up the controller from the coffee table in front of them. "I meant to tell you, I spoke with my brother about your Mario Bros. game. He was fucking jealous. Then he laughed at me because he knows how horrible of a scorer I am when it comes to video games. I'm bad when playing for fun and worse in competitions. But eager to learn."

Edgar frowned. He knew tutoring was on the menu for the night, but the way Mateo described his skills, Ed would have a long night and not get to the levels he wanted to finish in time. And if Mateo knew how bad he was, why invite himself at all?

“By the look of your face, you’re not too keen. Regret accepting my pushy invite?”

Yes. But looking at you more than makes up for it. “No,” he finally answered. *Real smooth.*

Mateo stared at Ed, looking at his face for what felt like an eternity, causing Ed to sweat heavier than normal. “I think you’re lying.” Mateo laughed and grabbed another chip. “Think about it, you can sit superior and smug when you watch my person die or make a mistake for the fifty-millionth time.”

Ed would have done that anyway, while he mentally sucked on Mateo’s neck.

“The appeal is there. C’mon, E. Put me out of my misery, so I can give you misery instead, with my non-gamer skills.”

Ed turned to his controller and chose the Mario avatar on-screen. After he finished, Mateo copied him. This was familiar turf for Ed. He finished his level. Now it was Mateo’s turn, and he hadn’t been exaggerating. He barely made it past the first area before he died.

“Not like that,” Ed said. “You need to jump.”

“Can you show me?” Mateo held his controller in front of Ed’s face. Edgar reached for Mateo’s controller to pause the game. He explained what each button did and repeated any instructions if Mateo didn’t seem to get it. “Thanks,” Mateo said.

Ed restarted level one, coaching Mateo through it, and he made it out of the first area but struggled when he got to the next. Edgar moved closer without realizing and put his hand over Mateo’s to guide his actions in the game. He forgot himself, sitting closer until their thighs touched. Ed’s nipple brushed against Mateo’s forearm while he was helping him to finish. Once the castle flag was drawn down to signify his completion, Ed peered over and caught Mateo looking at him rather than the screen. Edgar moved away back to his cushion, aware he probably made Mateo uncomfortable.

“So basically, it’s like that.” Edgar quickly grabbed a bottle of water and started to drink. He wasn’t really thirsty, but it gave him something to do with his hands.

“It’s your turn, right?” Mateo reminded as he ate another chip.

Edgar closed his water bottle and grabbed his controller. He played and looked at only the screen.

“So, I know I kind of asked last minute on Thursday, but do you think you could make Tino’s any night this week? It’s usually packed Thursday to Sunday. Though it’s been busier during the week as well. Live DJ, if you’re a dancer.”

“I’m not.” Edgar continued to focus on the screen, Mario almost falling off a cliff with his hesitation.

“That’s fine.” Mateo was not deterred. “There’re tons of ladies every night.”

Did Mateo really think Ed danced? Or went bar hopping? Or looked for ladies? “Mateo. I appreciate the invitation. But I’m not a fan of the bar scene. Or looking for ladies. No offense.”

“None taken.” Mateo was quiet throughout the rest of Edgar’s turn. Mateo started his turn just as quietly. The silence from the chatterbox made Ed feel slightly uneasy.

Edgar started to worry. *Maybe Mateo thinks I will jump him?* He would love to, but he didn’t want to make anyone uncomfortable... intentionally. He opened his mouth to apologize, but couldn’t bear to look at Mateo.

“It’s safe to assume you’re gay, then,” Mateo murmured and continued playing.

“Yes,” Ed replied gruffly. He picked up his water bottle and played with the bottle cap. Why did it feel like coming out all over again? He’d been out since junior high. The same geeky, shy preteen who figured out he preferred his popular male classmates over girls, grew up to be a shy, geeky man who still hadn’t learned to stop crushing on men out of his league.

“Not a secret, is it?”

Ed looked to Mateo briefly. Mateo paid him no attention. Ed looked away before he got caught staring. “No.”

Mateo’s Luigi avatar died. He had to restart again but paused to look at Ed. “That’s cool. Me neither.”

Ed started to feel the intensity of the moment. Or maybe it was all in his head. *Stop overthinking.* “I know.”

Mateo tilted his head. "Oh really?"

"I sort of heard you with a friend in the hallway. It's not a big deal."

"My bad."

"It is more than fine. You're at that age, you know."

"At that age? How old do you think I am?"

Ed really put his foot in it. "Twenty-one?"

"Try twenty-four. I don't know what you saw with my friend, but I can assure you, I work pretty hard. I don't just bartend. I own Tino's... well, partly. It's split between my bro, sis and me."

Ed didn't think there was big difference between twenty-one and twenty-four. However, owning and running what he knew to be a successful business was commendable. He figured this was the reasoning behind Mateo's invitation.

"Besides, you're not exactly ready to join AARP. How old are you?"

"Thirty-four." Ed put his bottle down before he ended up spilling his beverage all over himself. *Soggy underwear is not hot unless from cum.*

"You haven't hit your prime yet, E. I'm sure if you walked into Tino's any weekend night, you'd be swarmed with numbers."

"Sure." *Getting a dating pep talk from a twenty-something. Great.* "You should jump right now or you're going to get hit by the swinging platform and die. That's what happened the last time." He didn't want to think about the probability of nothing ever happening to him like that. Better to talk about the video game.

"Sorry." Mateo followed Ed's instructions while biting his lip and moving his controller along with his Luigi avatar. Ed side-eyed him and smirked to himself. *Fucking adorable.* Mateo finally finished.

Ed started to play, anxious as to what else Mateo would discuss. Mateo was the baby of the family and it seemed he liked to get his way. He was certainly pushy enough. Ed was able to halfway listen as he got into his game. Mateo occupied himself with chips and dip, watching Ed's Mario character move.

"I usually work on Thursdays. So when you decide to visit, just let me know. I have a hookup with the bartender."

"I thought I explained why I can't—"

“—won't—”

“—am not interested—”

“You're turning down my invite?”

“I thought I established this earlier.”

“It'll be fun.” Mateo's kind of fun—not for Ed. He imagined being too shy to speak in a crowded room, staring at the beautiful people making their selection for the night and being overlooked. Not Ed's first or hundredth choice for fun.

“Describe a fun night, Mateo. If you could choose a fun activity.”

“For myself? Or for us?”

Like his wishes would finally be answered. “Obviously for yourself.”

“Hanging out with my closest friends. Good convo, good food, good music. And getting laid at the end of the night.” Getting laid was always a highlight, especially getting laid *well*, in Ed's opinion. And by Mateo? Even better.

“See, this is where you and I differ. My perfect night is playing a video game all night and beating all levels. Or reading a great book. Or watching the History Channel. A true nerd to the core.” Ed hoped Mateo would finally see he was a lost cause.

Mateo only shrugged. “Differences makes life more enjoyable, don't you think? Besides, the more I hang out with you and learn from your ninja gamer wisdom, I can probably join you for an all-night session. Maybe beat you, too.”

Ed kept a straight face and looked Mateo in the eye. “I doubt that.” *Seriously.*

“Me too. So should I expect you this Thursday? I have an in with the bouncer.”

Ed shook his head, but couldn't hold back a smile at Mateo's persistence. He figured Mateo was trying to either drum up new business, or help Ed get some action from drunk singles. By the end of the night, he was sure Mateo would understand he was a lost cause. Then Ed could go back to normalcy: sort of stalking Mateo from afar and having him star in his sex dreams.

What Ed thought would be a one-time curiosity of his social, fuck-hot neighbor turned into a weekly video game tournament. Mateo tried to play

video games with Ed on at least one of his days off, and at first Ed tried to keep Mateo at the level of acquaintance—brief nods of hello and discussions of weather in passing. But Mateo ignored his attempts. Several weeks passed, seasons changed, and now it was early October: six months since Mateo's first time playing Super Mario Bros. with him.

In all that time, Mateo didn't get any better playing video games, which both men knew. What Ed didn't expect was that he gained a friend—actually, two—Mateo and Mateo's older brother, Martino. Martino and Ed were in the same age range and shared more in common. Mateo brought Martino over to Ed's apartment one night in August to show off Ed and his *Mortal Kombat* game. They were both geeky homebodies who enjoyed a great book over popular television shows. Ed would have crushed on Mateo's brother if the man wasn't straight and happily married. At least Ed knew how much hotter Mateo would be in fifteen years.

Ed also learned Mateo was an all-around great guy. More than a handsome face, his neighbor was a great family and business man. Mateo inherited Tino's, the family bar and grill, with his brother and sister. The younger man put a lot of himself into making the business last for his nieces and nephews, although Mateo did have a bit of a temper when serious issues were involved, such as having to fire an employee who drank on the job. He also maintained his social butterfly status—partly because of the job and partly because he genuinely enjoyed people. Even so, he managed to fit a day each week to hang out at Ed's apartment. Ed also visited 11C once, but he didn't stay, since Mateo expected friends over and Ed didn't want to be in the way. After all, he was the just short, nerdy guy who got flustered when put into a social situation and eye-fucked Mateo when he was sure the other man wasn't looking in his direction. It might not go over so well.

Mateo didn't stop inviting Edgar to Tino's. At least once a week he would work it into their conversations—conversations Ed found easier to participate in when he had the drool-worthy man on a one-to-one basis. Unfortunately, Ed's lust didn't simmer. It exploded. And even worse, he actually liked Mateo as a person. He had met Martino, learned Mateo's quirks and laughed at his job stories. It was different now that he knew him.

Edgar watched from the sidelines of Mateo's life. And Ed was horny. He decided tonight to accept Mateo and Martino's—Mateo enlisted his brother as well—invitation to visit the bar. Did Ed think he was going to go home with a barfly? No. Ed was reaching the end of his horny rope, lusting for Mateo in

secret and only having his hand to satisfy him. It was different having his crush in front of him on a weekly basis, accepting Ed's nerdy ways and encouraging him to get out on the dating scene.

Ed was close to desperate at this point, and tired of coming up with different ways to hide his boner from Mateo whenever he came over. He even considered trying Grindr again. But before he embarrassed himself, he figured some practice wouldn't hurt. He held conversations with Mateo for long periods of time without inserting his foot in his mouth... mostly. Old habits are hard to break. It should be sort of easy with someone who he shared interests with. He and Mateo did have a weird affinity for fish jokes. Martino didn't get their odd humor.

Martino and a couple of members of Martino's bowling league would be at the bar tonight. Martino had a few possible customers looking to start or update their business websites. If the night was a bust, at least Ed would leave with possible business prospects. Two birds with one stone.

Ed looked in the mirror one last time. His brownish-auburn shaggy hair was tamed. There were no glasses covering his hazel eyes for the night—contacts on, of course. He wore a white *Tron* vintage T-shirt over jeans. Ed's version of dressing up: wearing a black blazer over his shirt and adding a folded handkerchief in his breast pocket.

Ed took a cab over instead of driving, since he planned on drinking. He tipped the driver and looked the building over. *Not so scary, Ed, you can do this.* He walked through the front door with sweaty palms and looked around. A DJ played dance music—not anything Edgar could name, but it was tolerable. From across the dance floor, he spotted Martino sitting by the bar and made a beeline. He didn't look left or right and blurted out a "Hey!" as he stood in front of his neighbor's brother. Ed had tunnel vision upon seeing Martino, and completely forgot Mateo worked tonight. Mateo noticed Ed first.

"Are my eyes deceiving me? E, what are you doing here?"

Ed looked behind Martino and noticed his friend in his usual bartender gear, a black "Tino's" T-shirt and jeans. Ed also noticed Mateo's clothes could have been painted on. If this were months earlier, he would probably have walked into a wall. Now he could function normally, at about ninety-nine percent—he was only human. He didn't miss a beat to answer. "Haven't you invited me a hundred times?"

"Let's make it a hundred and one," Mateo smiled from behind the bar.

"I'm sure it was more. Atari is the only one who kept record."

"And he'll never talk." Both of them laughed at their running joke about Ed's fish being his apartment record keeper.

"You guys and your lame goldfish jokes." Martino shook his head.

Mateo ignored his brother and stared at Edgar, taking in Ed's attire. "I can't believe you're here. You look great."

Ed nodded in embarrassed appreciation, his face warmed from Mateo's perusal. "Thanks."

"Seriously, why are you here?"

"Don't you have drinks to sling, little bro? I'm trying to hook him up."

Ed watched Mateo's eyes widen, then his eyebrows furrowed. Before Mateo could open his mouth, he was called away to the other side of the bar by a patron. Mateo made his way over there but kept an eye on Ed.

Ed sat down next to Martino.

"Ed. You finally made it. Jack, the accountant I was telling you about? He's here. Lisa, the dry-cleaning business owner, she had to call it a night. Jack just went to the bathroom. You took his seat, actually."

"Should I move?" Ed wondered about proper bar etiquette and if he'd flunked already.

"No, it's cool. I'm not staying much longer anyway. I figured I would introduce you two if you came. Or have a beer or two if you didn't. Either way, it's a win-win."

"I should have brought my laptop." How would he make the proper presentation without it? "Do you think I have enough time to go home and get it?" A woman sidled up to the space next to Ed, waving her arm for the bartender's attention. Mateo finished with his customer and made his way back toward her.

"Nah. It's not like you need to show a PowerPoint presentation at this time of night. I already talked you up to Jack, so this should be a piece of cake."

"Martino! Is this the guy?" A tall, skinny African American man held a hand on Martino's shoulder and smiled at Ed. A bottle of Corona with a wedge of lime appeared in front of him. He looked up to see Mateo wink in his direction and assist the woman next to him. The woman, of course, flirted while

giving Mateo her order. Mateo showed off his shiny teeth, reeling the woman in. *Good luck, lady.*

“I guess I’m the guy?” Ed finished weirdly. Martino introduced Jack to Ed. Both men shook hands awkwardly. Ed let Martino lead with small talk, since Jack was Martino’s friend. Ed listened to them discuss the night’s bowling game. He took a sip from his bottle.

Mateo came back and leaned down in front of him, beckoning Ed to come closer. He spoke softly in Ed’s ear. “Your drink’s on me.”

Ed leaned away and looked Mateo in his eyes. “Thanks.”

“So, Ed, Martino tells me you’re a computer whiz, mega-genius.”

Ed took a huge gulp and almost choked. Mateo reached over to pat Ed’s back a couple of times. Ed put his beer down and held out a hand for Mateo to desist.

“I wouldn’t,” he cleared his throat, “say all of that.”

Mateo watched on for a moment, but had another patron to take care of. He walked away with an expression of concern.

Hmm? Food for thought. Ed was unsure why Mateo was worrying. *Maybe he thinks I need help?* Ed missed a question from Jack. He turned back to face the man standing next to him. *Great first impression, Ed.* He tried to focus on Jack and Martino’s questions, but he kept noticing whenever he looked away that Mateo’s eyes were on him. Ed finished his beer and placed the empty bottle on the bar. Another open Corona appeared not a second later. Ed glanced up. The second bartender behind the bar grinned at him.

“From the boss.” She pointed to where Mateo stood. “He says on the house.” She turned away and flicked her mane of black, glossy hair over her shoulder.

Ed made eye contact with Mateo, who winked at him, and attempted to return to the conversation. Again he missed a question. Mateo and his beers kept distracting him.

“I’ll leave you two to hash out the details then.” Martino rose, shook their hands and wished them a good night.

Jack took the vacated seat and smiled. “If you have any more offers to make, Ed, you can save them. I’m definitely hiring you. Martino vouched for you, and your ideas mesh with mine. What are you drinking? Corona? Next two are on me.”

“That’s okay. I appreciate the offer.”

“It’s not fun to drink alone. That’s why bars were created, man.” Jack patted Ed on the back and signaled for Mateo to come over.

“Hey, Jack. What can I get you?”

“Four Coronas—two for me and two for my new friend here.” Mateo walked away to fill the order. Jack eyed Ed’s *Tron* T-shirt.

“Great shirt, man. Did you see the remake?”

“I bought the Blu-ray.” Mateo returned and placed the bottles in front of them. Ed nodded in thanks and faced Jack. “Haven’t watched it yet because I don’t want to ruin the memory. I feel like a backstabber for even buying it.”

Jack drank from a bottle and nodded. “The original definitely is a classic. I have both versions on Blu-ray. You should join us in the bowling league. We usually meet up Tuesday or Thursday nights. Maybe we could have a *Tron* marathon afterward?”

Mateo jumped into their conversation. “Jack, there’s a lady trying to get your attention, over by the DJ booth.” Ed looked to where Mateo pointed, to see a lady gesturing for Jack to come over.

“Oh, it’s a friend of mine. Be right back, Ed.” Jack finished his first bottle and took the second with him.

Mateo folded his arms. Ed appreciated the stretch across the biceps. His cock appreciated it even more. “You didn’t tell me you were dating,” Mateo said. “Jack’s okay, I guess.”

Wait. What the hell was he talking about? “Excuse me?”

“You said Martino was hooking you up—”

His eyes bulged in disbelief. “And your mind went to dating? Me? Mateo—”

Mateo moved closer to Ed’s face. “One, Jack’s gay. Two, he’s making his signature move on you. Three, there’s nothing wrong with you. You’re good-looking, smart, funny, a great catch. Why wouldn’t he want you?”

“He is?” Not that Ed could ever tell when someone hit on him. “I doubt it. He just bought the beers because I’m going to work with him.”

“Work?”

“Yes, work.”

“When does it start? Later tonight at his place?”

Ed hadn't seen this side of Mateo. He appreciated Mateo looking out for him as a friend. But there was no need for worry. “Look—”

A bunch of guys called Mateo over. “Shit. I'll be right back, E. Don't leave yet.”

Somebody went past jumping to conclusions and moved there. Ed finished his Corona. He started his third. He watched Mateo talking loudly to the men, who seemed to be friends. Ed noticed the guy from many months before, Trevor, was part of the group. He watched Trevor grip Mateo's arm and fawn over him.

Ed continued drinking. He turned to see Jack dancing with his friend and shrugged. Somehow he finished that bottle and the next without realizing it. As he sat there, he planned to notify Mateo about... something. Another Corona popped up from the female bartender and Ed did his duty to the good deed. He drank.

He finished that bottle too. And people-watched. Time passed by. *This going out business isn't so bad. Especially if magical Corona bottles are involved.* Ed chuckled out loud and caught himself. Maybe he should stop drinking the magical bottles before he embarrassed himself further. *Good plan.* Another good plan was to find the restroom. Ed's bladder liked that plan a lot. He stood up straight and turned his head from side to side to make sure everything was in working order.

Not even drunk, E, good on you. Damn it, Mateo has me calling myself E. This was going on the list of things he needed to talk to Mateo about. Ed tried to remember what else was on that list while on his restroom mission. He didn't figure it out until he returned. He went to an empty seat in the corner of the bar, where the nice lady bartender gave Ed another beer and a bowl of nuts. Ed liked the beer fairy and planned to give her the biggest tip ever.

Ed ate his nuts—they tasted so good—and sipped his beer. He wanted to walk out of there on his own. He'd lost Jack and Mateo. But he was fine because he had his nuts. He laughed loudly at himself. A bottle of water appeared in front of him. *Was there a water fairy too?*

Mateo scowled and crossed his arms. “I thought you'd left.”

Ed scowled back but didn't know why he was being scowled at in the first place. “Nope. Just me and the beer fairy.”

“Beer fairy? You must mean Angela, the bartender.”

Ed shrugged and continued to munch on the nuts.

“D’you know how many you’ve had? Did you drive here?”

“Nope on both counts.”

“Stay here. I’ll bring you home.” Mateo added more nuts to the bowl in front of him.

“You’re beautiful,” Ed muttered and grabbed a handful. Mateo paused and murmured something that sounded like, “You too,” but Ed had a bowl of nuts with his name on it. *Have they ever tasted so good?* Ed had to make another restroom trip. When he was done, he noticed his bowl of nuts was gone but the water was still there. *A travesty.* Ed glared at the injustice and jumped when he felt a tap on his back.

“Hey, man, I was looking all over for you.” Jack looked sweaty. *It must have been from looking all over for me. Right.*

“You wanna join me? There’s a twenty-four hour diner that makes the best pancakes at two in the morning.” Jack moved closer to stand directly in front of Ed. Pancakes did sound great.

“E, you ready?”

Ed turned a little too quickly and the floor moved just a bit. He stumbled but remained upright. Mateo and Jack reached out a hand to help but Ed shook his head.

“E, huh? How about those pancakes, E?”

“He actually prefers Edgar or Ed.”

Ed told him that all the time and now Mateo remembered. Mateo did not smile. Mateo always smiled. Ed noticed. *Something is wrong.*

“E, you’re hungry?”

“Negative, Ghost Rider. I’m full of nuts.”

Mateo laughed. “You’re going to be so embarrassed later. Sorry, Jack, you heard the man. He’s full. We’re heading home now. Catch you later.”

Jack nodded. “All right. Maybe next time.”

Ed focused on walking out of the bar. Mateo walked behind and directed him to the car. Ed sat in the passenger seat and buckled himself in. Mateo

slammed into the driver's seat, turned on the radio and drove. Ed watched Mateo, who kept his eye on the road for the entire ride. No words were exchanged, but Ed couldn't help feel some sort of tension floating between them, or control the lecherous thoughts invading. He was hard and tipsy. He couldn't add another worry, since those two predicaments reigned supreme.

Luckily, they arrived at their co-op building garage. Mateo parked the car silently and shut off the ignition. Ed grabbed the door release to get out, but Mateo turned to look at him. Ed stared, waiting for Mateo to speak. It looked like he really wanted to say something. He watched Mateo open his mouth and close it again.

"Yes?" he prompted.

Mateo shook his head and held his door handle. "Forget it."

Ed got out and walked around as Mateo locked the car doors. They walked to the elevator, and before he could press the button, Mateo grabbed his arm. He looked down to where he was being held, surprised at the contact—even more surprised that Mateo did not let go.

Ed was led away from the elevator, down into a darkened corner, away from the cameras and any other neighbors' prying eyes. The above light flickered lightly as Mateo leaned against the brick wall. Ed stood in front of him, his arm still in a vise-like grip.

"Did you want to hook up with Jack?" Mateo asked.

"Yes." Edgar didn't understand what the problem was. He just got a new client. And Jack liked pancakes. *Mateo doesn't like pancakes?*

"I'm not apologizing for ruining your night, E."

Fuck is he yapping about? "You didn't ruin my night."

"I'm not following."

"Good. Me neither." Ed tried to walk away, but Mateo held on and moved in closer.

"You had my brother set you up with Jack is what I'm talking about, E."

"Yes."

"For a date."

"Negative." *Where was this guy getting his information?*

“So why would you meet with him? I’ve asked you to come to the bar nearly every fucking week.”

Ed paid attention to the first question. “You want me to make you a website?”

“What?” Mateo finally let go and ran his hands through his hair. Ed wished he could have done the same. He already missed Mateo’s hand on his arm.

“Since we’re neighbors and friends, free of charge.”

“Website?”

Ed watched Mateo look down at the ground. He didn’t understand why they were standing in the basement garage when they could have been upstairs.

“You met with Jack for business?”

Hello! “Yep.”

“And not for a date?”

“Is there a special answer you want me to say? Because I don’t know it.”

Ed was startled by Mateo’s lips brushing against his. He had an out-of-body experience feeling those soft lips on his. Mateo didn’t push him for more, just kept his mouth on Ed’s.

“Now, do you get it, E? Do you understand?”

Ed only just heard Mateo over the fireworks that exploded in his head. He grabbed the taller man’s forearms and put his tongue inside the hot mouth he’d dreamt about for over a year. If this was his one chance, he was going to make it count. He ignored the feeling of regret in his stomach. He had his dream man to kiss.

Mateo’s mouth opened and Ed’s tongue was there. He moved one hand to hold the back of Mateo’s head, tilting to change the angle. Mateo growled—a sound Ed had dreamed of, and now he was hearing it for real. He wanted more and everything in between. He pulled back for air and looked into lust-filled eyes. Mateo’s brown eyes were laser-focused on Ed. His cock went full mast.

Ed took a deep breath and pulled Mateo closer, nibbling on his bottom lip. Mateo wrapped both arms around Ed’s body, rubbing his back and bringing them even closer. Ed felt Mateo’s clothed erection press against his own and gave in to the urge to grind against him. Mateo moaned while they sucked on each other’s tongues. That shit drove him wild. Ed pushed Mateo against the

wall, leaned in to rub against his cock, not sure what was on the menu. Whatever they did, he wanted to rock Mateo's world.

He didn't expect Mateo to switch them around, making Edgar lean against the garage wall. Mateo pressed into him, moving his mouth across Ed's cheek. He whispered into Ed's ear, "E." Ed opened his eyes and watched as Mateo unbuckled his belt. Ed felt he should reciprocate the gesture. *Okay, mutual hand jobs with Mateo in the basement garage, for the win.* Ed grinned as he unfastened Mateo's fly. His cock got harder as he heard Mateo's zipper go down. Mateo pushed Ed's pants and boxer briefs out of the way, looking into his eyes all the while. Ed didn't break the stare as he fumbled with Mateo's pants. He tried to move his hand into the open space, but Mateo shook his head.

Ed raised an eyebrow. Mateo pulled away, spat in his own hand and palmed his own cock. *No fair, I want to see it. Or least touch him.* Ed tried to reach for Mateo's dick again. He could see the head peeking out of Mateo's underwear waistband. *Damn, I'd like to taste that.* Again, Mateo shook his head wordlessly. Ed wondered if he thought out loud and had his lips kissed roughly once more. Then he felt Mateo's mouth descend to the side of his neck.

Ed turned his head to give Mateo more access. He wanted to get some part of his body on Mateo's cock, be it his mouth, hand, cheek... ass. *I ain't too proud to beg.* Ed tried to lower himself so Mateo would get the hint. Mateo placed a hand in the middle of his chest to hold him in place. Mateo squatted in front of Ed's dick. Thoughts were swiftly vacating the big head and rushing down to the little head.

Ed watched Mateo's face and its proximity to his penis. He watched him mouth the word, "Nice," and couldn't stop his grin. Ed's uncircumcised dick was more thick than long. Mateo tapped Ed's chest twice. He got the message; he needed to stay put. He leaned heavily against the brick wall and watched Mateo's hand move from his chest. Mateo placed his free hand on Ed's erect cock and gave it a firm stroke. Ed curled his toes and bit his lip to silence himself, before he woke the entire building. *Quiet, must remember to be quiet.* It was just... Mateo from 11C fondling his penis in a semi-private area. *Wet. Suck. Warm. Yes.* Correction, Mateo from 11C mouthing his penis in a semi-private area.

Mateo held Ed's shaft and licked the veined underside.

"Fuck," Ed murmured. Mateo looked up into Ed's eyes, held his gaze and opened his mouth on the tip. He sucked tentatively at first, gripping his lips

around the head. Ed groaned as Mateo flicked his tongue across the tip and sucked his way down his shaft. He saw Mateo's other hand in his pants. *He's jerking off.* Mateo pulled out his cock and balls but didn't push his underwear further, his erection in his hand. Ed only glimpsed at the cock; the flickering light caught the pre-cum at the tip. Mateo moved his tongue, licking the side from tip to base and back up again.

"Fuck," Ed whispered and closed his eyes. He felt Mateo move his flattened tongue across the hardened shaft. Mateo started fondling Ed's balls as he slurped his shaft. Ed moved his hands down to his crotch and grabbed Mateo's head with both hands. Trying to keep his eyes open to watch, Ed saw Mateo work his mouth back to the tip. He watched Mateo flick his tongue under his foreskin and around his cock head—one of the most erotic things he'd experienced in a long time.

Mateo moved his mouth to Ed's fuzzy balls, sucking on each one, then tonguing his sac. Ed gripped Mateo's hair and pulled, watching the man return his mouth back to his shaft. Mateo increased his efforts, making Ed lift his lower back off the wall and hump deeper into that suckling mouth. Mateo sped up, bobbing his head in time with his hand on the shaft.

"Yes," Ed grunted. His balls tightened. Mateo kept up the motion, and Ed knew he was going to come.

"Mateo," he tried to warn. He tried to pull Mateo's head back but Mateo pushed Ed's dick further into his mouth. Ed thrust deeper inside. Between Mateo's sucking and playing with Ed's balls, Ed couldn't hold back.

"Sorry," he groaned as he came into the hot mouth. Mateo swallowed, which caused Ed to jerk his hips and tighten his grip in Mateo's hair. He tried to catch his breath as he watched Mateo jerk off in between his open legs. Mateo moaned and slurped, still sucking Ed's cock. Ed watched Mateo shoot his semen on the ground. His hand moved rapidly, squeezing a few loads out of an impressive cock. Ed was a little jealous.

He continued to breathe heavily from his cataclysmic orgasm. He looked around the area and down again. Mateo breathed just as heavily as he looked up into Ed's face. As the high started to wear off, Ed began to worry. Should he thank Mateo? Apologize? He understood this was not the start of a relationship. He wanted it to be. But he was sure that tomorrow, once Mateo realized what he'd done, he'd regret his actions. *I'm just a friend. A video game buddy. Not your lover. Don't get your hopes up.*

Ed bent down to pull his boxer briefs and pants up, and tucked his sensitive, semi-erect cock into his pants while internally berating himself. He still held onto a sliver of hope that maybe Mateo would want to do this again. He expected to see a blissed-out Mateo, kneeling before him. Instead, Mateo wore a frown and a trickle of drool and sperm on his chin. Ed focused on Mateo's glistening chin. He wanted to lick Mateo so bad. *Get it together, loser.*

Ed figured he should pay attention to the immediate need of wet chin. He pulled out his handkerchief, negative thoughts swirling in his head. He didn't want to ask Mateo what was wrong. He had a feeling it was regret. Or that this was a one-time affair, and he didn't want to hear Mateo say the words. He went into shutdown mode and threw the piece of cloth in the direction of Mateo's face. He thought Mateo would catch the cloth but it landed on his chin. *Shit! Escape, dumbass!*

He wriggled away with a gruff, "Thank you," and watched Mateo lose his balance.

"I... good night." *Fucking smooth.* Ed ran away toward the stairway on the other side of the elevator. He heard Mateo hoarsely call his name as the door slammed behind him. Edgar ran up eleven flights of stairs. His heart knocked the bottom of his throat, he ran so hard. By the time he collapsed on the eleventh floor exit door, he was drenched in sweat, his buzz long gone. He struggled to breathe and rushed to his apartment.

He heard the elevator door arrive on his floor and dodged inside his apartment to avoid Mateo. He knew it would be too awkward. He gasped for air as he looked through his peephole and took the coward's way out. He watched Mateo walk toward the door and stare. Mateo grumbled something and turned away to his own apartment.

I really fucked this up.

"I... good night. Bet he's glad to be rid of me," Edgar thought out loud. It hurt all the same.

Ed barely slept all night.

He replayed his foolish actions, reviewing the highlight—the epic blow job—and lowlight—basically everything after his brain was sucked out his dick.

He wanted more, as foolish as it may be. He knew Mateo just wanted to have fun, and now he would have to go back to watching from afar. He just

took the first step. But he didn't like the way he left things. The guilt was killing him.

He called Mateo in the afternoon and got his voicemail. He didn't leave a message and definitely wasn't going next door. Instead he stayed in bed all day and tried to distract himself with a book. However, he didn't get very far because he kept thinking about dialing Mateo's number again. He looked at the clock. 10:05 p.m. *He's probably on his way to work. I'll call him later.*

Of course, later turned into tomorrow, since Ed finally fell asleep. The day turned into missing Mateo all over again because the times Ed remembered to try to call were inopportune. Maybe he subconsciously chose to contact Mateo when he knew the man couldn't pick up.

This head in the sand game lasted for over a week. Mateo never called, or showed up for their usual video game night. *A telling sign, if anything.* Edgar felt wretched. *That night's replay weighed him down.*

The next evening, Edgar played with his Mateo avatar on his computer. It'd been a while since he'd played the game. He heard someone in front of his door and couldn't stop the touch of hope he felt in his gut.

No one knocked at his door. *This is bullshit. I should just get the inevitable over with.* He paused his game and grabbed his keys before doubt could enter his mind.

He crossed the hall and knocked on Mateo's door. He breathed out when the door opened. Mateo stared blankly. Ed took him in from top to bottom. *Still gorgeous, even when he's pissed.* Ed stared back, not knowing what to say for a while.

Mateo continued staring ahead and prepared to close his door.

"Wait!" Ed put his hand on the door before Mateo closed it in his face.

"I'm busy, Ed."

He called me Ed? "I'm sorry."

"Okay." Mateo tried to close the door again.

"Could I possibly talk to you inside, please?"

Mateo opened the door wider and walked toward the living room. Ed moved inside and locked the door behind him.

Ed stood in front of Mateo, a coffee table separating them. "The game was Zelda this week. We missed you."

Mateo stared. "I was busy. I still am."

Really? "Doing what?"

"Ed—" He rolled his eyes, "You apologized. I'm busy. You should go."

I'm messing this up again. Edgar looked around and noticed a blue goldfish swimming in a bowl on an end table. "You bought a fish?"

"Yes."

"I thought you didn't—I mean." Ed looked to the ground to get a moment and let the words settle down in his head. "I like you. Not because you have a fish. Though your fish is nice. I liked you before the fish. In fact, I liked you before you noticed me. And I noticed you from the day you moved in. A lot. I mean. Lusted over you for many a night," he confessed.

"You have a funny way of showing it—throwing a handkerchief in my face, like a whore."

"You had my cum on your face. I thought you'd want to clean up. So I left because it was weird. I'm weird."

Mateo put his hands in his pockets and shook his head. "You're logical, E. I actually get your fucking logic. But it still was a dick move."

"You called me 'E' again." *Progress?*

Mateo lowered his eyebrows. "I thought you didn't like it."

"It's grown on me." Ed moved closer to Mateo and looked into his eyes. "I miss you."

"I live across from you, E. You know where I work. You could have easily found me."

Ed shook his head. "It's easier for you."

Mateo looked confused. "What's easier for me?"

"You try living your entire life being me, then live across the hall from someone like you and see what you come up with." *Must I spell it out for him?*

"Someone like me? Clarify."

"You could have anyone from eighteen to one hundred lining up to be with you. You look like... you. A walking gay Tumblr gif come to life. I look like, well me. Short and geeky. Men like you who probably have fans around the world don't look at men like me—guys who hold the wall and hide in corners. Guys who are comfortable there. You're *Details* magazine. I'm *PC Gamer*."

Mateo squinted his eyes. "I'm guessing *PC Gamer* is a magazine?"

Ed pointed at him. "You just proved my point."

"E, I don't give a shit about your perceptions. I fucking like you. I have for months. I sucked your dick in the garage. Maybe I wasn't clear enough, so let me make it crystal. I get that you can be clueless at times, which I adore, by the way. But you need to look in the mirror. There's nothing wrong with you. I'm willing to start reading *PC Gamer*." Mateo touched Ed's face. "I'm a fan of you, quirks and all."

This guy. "You should look at men closer to your age."

"Did you?"

Ed paused. He tried to think of another reason why he couldn't be with Mateo. "That's not the point."

"Let me cut into your excuse brigade with an important question."

"There're not excuses. If you just—"

"Right, right. You're older and prefer to stay at home. I'm younger and like a good party. I studied the CliffsNotes. I truly couldn't give a shit about the differences. I've been with guys who liked to party and have a good time. I'm looking for substance. Now, listen to the question. Do you want me?"

"Of course I do," Ed admitted gruffly.

Mateo smiled. "I still want you. I wanted to be a friend in the beginning. But once I got to know you, I was attracted to you as a person. Plus, I think you're hot. Thought you should know." He held onto Ed's hand. Ed smiled back.

"I'm truly sorry for not talking to you sooner. I never meant to treat you like a whore."

"You could in the future. I really like role-playing. A lot." He grinned his Mateo grin—a grin that turned Ed on. Of course, his cock hardened.

Mateo lowered his head, resting his forehead against Ed's. "My schedule just became clear. How's yours looking, E?"

"I could fit you in."

Mateo grabbed Ed's cock and rubbed him through his sweatpants. "Really? Wonderful. Because I want to fit you in my bedroom. Right now."

Edgar surged forward and pressed his mouth against Mateo's. Mateo grabbed his waist and pushed him toward the bedroom. Both men grappled with removing their shirts, throwing them haphazardly on the bedroom carpet.

Once the clothing was out of the way, Ed drew Mateo's mouth back to his and pulled at Mateo's hair.

"I like hair-pulling too," Mateo murmured against Ed's lips while rubbing his back.

"Make a list. I'll research it properly."

Mateo pushed Ed backward onto the bed and pulled his pants down. He was free-balling. Ed liked this hard. He started to fondle himself, thinking lecherous thoughts. Mateo bent down to remove his pants from his feet. He was smooth... all over. *He waxed? Yes!*

Finally, he saw Mateo in all his glory. And in full daylight, with no crevice unseen. He looked at the package first, of course, since he only had a shadowed memory. His mouth watered at the long, circumcised cock, making plans on where to begin his exploration. He could finally touch this man in the flesh.

"Come here," Ed beckoned, while putting his hand under his waistband and into his drawers. Ed placed his other hand on his lightly furred chest, tweaking his nipple.

"That's hot," Mateo growled as he kneeled above him. He licked the unoccupied nipple below him and teased the raised flesh. Ed pushed his chest closer to Mateo's mouth. "This is hotter though," Mateo spoke against his skin and freed Ed's erection. Ed watched Mateo lick a strip down his belly, bypassing his cock to continue down his right thigh. He tried to kick off his pants but only dislodged Mateo off his leg. Mateo removed Ed's pants for him and licked his lips as he stared at Ed handling his cock.

Ed shook his head. "Uh-uh. It's my turn to taste."

"I'd rather ride, E." Mateo placed his hand over Ed's to help him stroke.

"You want to bottom?" He assumed he'd be ass-up. The taller men he'd been with always wanted him to bottom.

"I'd love to have you fuck me. Been dreaming of it since I sucked you off."

Ed forgot to stroke and stared. His porn dream come true. Mateo continued to play with his shaft, fingering his slit. "Get a condom." Mateo teased him by kissing and sucking the tip. Ed squeezed his nipple harder. His dick responded enthusiastically. "Please."

Mateo let go with a loud pop and crawled over Ed toward a side drawer to his left. His cock dangled close enough to Ed's mouth for him to suck. Ed couldn't resist groping and sucking the deliciously bulbous head.

"E, babe. Wait."

Ed swirled his tongue around the leaking head, getting off on the taste. Mateo started to thrust and stopped his search. "Fuck. E." Ed moved his other hand on Mateo's firm ass. *Maybe I could rim him now?* He wanted to. "Jesus, E," Mateo groaned. "Fuck me first."

Ed reluctantly let go with his mouth. He kept his hand on his ass, though, squeezing a cheek. Mateo fumbled with getting the condom and lube. Once he found them, he crawled back over Ed, who licked his dick as he passed by.

"Later." Mateo pressed his lips against Edgar's, licking into his mouth. Edgar squeezed Mateo's ass with both hands, ghosting his fingertips along his crack. Both of them thrust against each other while they kissed. Mateo lifted his head to breathe. "Sit up."

Edgar complied, propping himself against some pillows and watching Mateo open the condom packet. He slicked the condom smoothly over Edgar's extremely hard cock. *I hope I last long enough.* Mateo flipped the bottle top and squirted lube over the thickened penis.

Mateo rubbed Ed's sheathed cock a couple of times, then pressed his lubed finger into his ass to lubricate himself. Edgar watched Mateo straddle and hover over his erection, holding it steady for Mateo to sit down on, which he did slowly. When Mateo bottomed out, Ed moved his hands to his hold his waist and waited for Mateo to give him the okay to thrust. Mateo wrapped his longer legs around Ed's back, hooked his hands around Ed's neck and lifted his hips slowly to Ed's tip. Then pushed himself down. *Fuck yes!* Mateo's ass felt fucking great gripping his dick.

Mateo laughed out loud. "You're crossing your eyes, E."

If Mateo had enough thought to pay attention, Ed was not doing his job. While guiding Mateo's hips, he thrust upward as Mateo moved down. Mateo grunted and closed his eyes. *Yes!* Ed tried to pace his thrusts just right. Mateo increased his rhythm, but Ed wanted this man crooning. He moved a hand up Mateo's back, grasped his shoulder, pulled out and twisted Mateo onto his back.

"E?"

Edgar moved back between his opened legs and ordered Mateo to hold his legs. Ed lined his cock up at Mateo's entrance and pushed in. Mateo groaned deeper.

"Good?" Ed pulled his hips back and made a shorter thrust inward.

"E," Mateo grunted even lower and tightened his grip on his thighs. *That's the spot, then.*

Ed started powering his hips into Mateo, maintaining the angle, and stroking Mateo's leaking cock. Both ground and pushed themselves faster. Ed leaned over, stroked Mateo's cock with his hand and licked his neck.

Mateo moaned. Edgar slammed inside, tightening his firm hold on the steadily leaking dick. He continued thrusting. Mateo's cock throbbed and he shot across his chest. Ed thrust harder a few more times and came inside of him. Once Ed stopped moving, Mateo dropped his legs. Ed released Mateo's cock and licked the cum off his palm.

Mateo shuddered. "I have plans for you later. Many in the future."

Ed held his gaze, lowered his mouth to lick the globs off his chest and winked. Mateo pulled Ed in for a sloppy kiss, both men thrusting their tongues deeply. Ed lay on top of him, basking in the afterglow. Mateo hugged him tightly. Ed was super-content, the sweat cooling on their bodies. Of course, Mateo had to have the last word.

"Just so you know this means we're exclusive, E."

"Okay." Ed pulled out and removed the used condom. He tied it and threw it in the waste bin at the side of the bed. Ed walked to the en suite bathroom and returned with a wet washcloth to clean them.

"As in together." He pulled Ed back onto his chest.

"All right." Ed was tired. He hoped Mateo wanted to take a nap because he planned to, right now.

"Boyfriends."

Ed smiled. "I believe I agreed to the terms." *This guy and his selective hearing.*

"And the goldfish needs a name. I figured Atari was lonely. It was going to be a surprise last week, but a certain someone—"

"Pong."

“What?”

“Pong for your goldfish.”

“It’s more our goldfish. Pong the goldfish. It works.”

“I thought Xbox would be a bit much.”

Mateo bit Ed’s lip and laughed. Ed, however, kissed him fully, properly and deeply.

The End

Author Bio

L.L. Bucknor loves to read... a lot, drink caffeine (coffee and tea the best, yum) and has been known to do some things for chocolate (there might or might not be a case pending—j/k, maybe). She writes sometimes too. She used to write slash fan fiction for the masses many years ago. She figured it's time to get back into the game. A staunch believer in happy endings and the various paths one can take to get there, she does.

Contact & Media Info

Did you like what you read? Want more? Less? Just want to give a shout? She's not a fan of Facebook—she has a page but barely goes on it, but she has Twitter (@BooksForShe). To best reach her, email her at the email address below.

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