



What
are you waiting for?



Ava Moon

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

By Ava Moon

Introduction

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

What Is Love is an Open Road?

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 is an Open Road*.

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.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

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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Photo Description

Sitting down and leaning forward, with his arms resting on his legs, a man has his fingers entwined. His veins are bulging out on his arm and hand that are facing the camera, traveling up his tanned skin. On each inner forearm is a tattoo, some sort of cross with wings. He is wearing a common, large-faced, navy-blue watch on his left wrist. Only his midsection is captured on film

Story Letter

Dear Author,

The first thing I noticed about him were his beautiful, veiny forearms and hands (a particular fetish of mine). I couldn't tear my gaze away and was afraid he would catch me staring at him. I certainly didn't want to come across as an old creep. Of course, as my luck would have it, he turned and looked at me with curiosity, so I panicked and blurted out, "That's a nice watch!" He didn't reply and I could feel the heat rise to my cheeks. It was unnerving, to say the least. As I gathered my things and stood to leave, I heard him ask with a hint of humor in his voice, "Have we met before?"

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Natālija

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: men with pets, age gap, blushing, out and proud, blue collar, inheritance, gardening

Word Count: 51,068

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WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

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Chapter One

Teddy

Teddy dropped his bag onto the floor and collapsed upon the couch in the small two-bedroom cottage he'd inherited from his great-aunt. He ran his hand through his short brown hair and sighed. He'd traveled across the country to the small town of Northville to take up residency. It was a big change for him. He'd been living a comfortable life back home, but nothing exciting ever happened to him. He was born and raised in the city, along with his sister, Grace, and his best friend, Paulie. They'd been friends since middle school. He admired his sister, but like Paulie, she was his polar opposite. Teddy tended to end up in what he would consider embarrassing situations, making him blush. When he wasn't working, he was at home. He didn't have much of a social life outside of Grace and Paulie, who were busy with their own lives.

He'd met his great-aunt Helen, over five years ago, due to a DNA test he had taken through a website that tracked your ancestors.

The big family secret.

Her parents had disowned her after she hadn't lived up to their expectations. He could see Grace in his aunt. They had similar personalities, and you could see the family resemblance. When Helen refused an arranged marriage to help further her family's reputation, her parents were furious. But what got her disowned was when she announced her best friend was in fact her lover and partner, and they planned on living together. The two of them moved to Northville, where they'd lived the remainder of their lives.

Helen had been happy to connect with one of her relatives, even before she found out about Teddy. She was glad that his parents had accepted him, even if they weren't around anymore. Despite the hardships Helen faced when she was younger, she loved her life. Even after her life-long love passed away, she continued on with her life, checking things off her bucket list. Teddy was shocked by some of the things she did, because of her age, but she laughed telling him, "Age is only a number, Teddy. You are only as old as you feel!"

He leaned back on the sofa as he replayed one of their last conversations in his mind.

"Teddy, love, you have to learn to live life. Bring the excitement to you. Get yourself out there and live it to its fullest," Helen told Teddy over the phone.

“I am comfortable with my life. I know what to expect.”

“I didn’t hear happy or love. Comfortable isn’t how you should describe living. Don’t let fear or shyness rule your life. You’re almost forty. You’re never going to find your *forever man*, sitting at home alone.”

“What if I don’t find a guy? I’m afraid of rejection. Plus, I always realize they are hitting on me way after the fact.” He let out a heavy sigh.

Helen paused before answering, “I am sure there is a guy out there who is just right for you. Who will love you and make you happy. A guy who won’t let you be oblivious. Who will make it obvious he is interested in you.”

“But, I am almost forty... what if I’ve already missed my chance?” Teddy whispered.

“Oh, Teddy, love will come. You’re a handsome, kind hearted, loving, loyal man.”

Teddy loved his aunt Helen. He found it so easy to confide in her, and listen to her advice and wisdom. Helen passed in her sleep at the ripe old age of ninety-seven. He was surprised when he heard from her lawyer. Not only had she left her cottage to him, she’d given everything to him, except some money that she’d donated to the town to finish the pathways and landscaping at the park. Which was pocket change to her. Apparently, she and Ethel had played the stock market at all the right times, and had amassed a fortune. All of a sudden, he was sitting on a fortune. He had enough money to never work again, if he chose not to, pay for both his niece’s and nephew’s college, and still have plenty left over. Paulie and Grace took him out one night, and it was through their persistence that he finally agreed to take the leap and leave the box he’d built around himself.

“Teddy, what are you waiting for? Didn’t Helen always tell you to live your life? This is your chance. Step out of your comfort zone. You can always come back to visit us and vice versa,” Grace encouraged.

“Grace is right. Just because we won’t be within driving distance, doesn’t mean you’d lose us, Teddy,” Paulie piped in. “This could be your chance! Anyway, if you hate it, you could always come back. But you won’t know unless you try it.”

“Yeah, what if your perfect man is living there and has been waiting for you all this time...” Grace’s shoulder bumped her younger brother.

Teddy moved after he'd completed his two-week notice at his job. He needed to do this, not for Helen, Paulie, or Grace. He needed to do it for himself. His loved ones were right, it was about time to make a change, and start *living* his life. He was using Paulie and Grace as a crutch. But if they weren't around, he'd have to strike out on his own.

It had been a few weeks since Teddy moved into his late aunt's cottage. People came by to welcome him, bringing him goodies, and give him their condolences. He'd spread his aunt's ashes over the lakes, as per her wishes. But besides that, he kept to himself. He'd only been out a few times, going to the local (and only) café, Daisy's Delights, to grab a bite to eat, and to the grocery store. The rest of the time, he spent fixing up the cottage to his liking.

He stood in the front entrance taking a moment to appreciate the changes he'd done to his home so far. It was a nice, open floor plan, two-bedroom cottage with windows that took up almost the entire front side of the house, allowing the space to be bathed in natural sunlight, a feature he'd always loved. The rest of the house, however, he had to redo because his aunt's cluttered 1970s-style clashed with his minimalist modern sensibility. He'd been lucky. When he'd pulled up the ugly orange shag carpet, he was shocked and pleased to see a beautiful hardwood floor underneath. A little bit of polishing, and the floor looked brand new, restored to its original dark-oak color. To the right was the living room, which held his favorite new purchase, a large, buttery-soft, black leather couch. He had his favorite seventy-inch plasma TV that he had brought with him, hanging on the far wall where he could enjoy watching his favorite shows as he relaxed on his comfortable new couch. He'd left the dining room, on the left, sparse, with only a four-chaired table decorating it, leaving the much-needed space to move around. He very much enjoyed the island that was already part of the kitchen. He spent most mornings eating his breakfast there. From there a hallway led to rooms he was still updating, a guest bedroom, a guest bath, and the master suite.

He Skyped with his family and Paulie whenever he could. It took him a while to sort through all of Helen's possessions. He threw some items away, like some worn clothes, and used pots and pans. He sent a few items back home for Grace and her family, and some for Paulie and his family.

Things had settled down for Teddy, but he was falling back into his regular routine—staying at home. His sister addressed it during one of their Skype sessions.

“Teddy, it’s been weeks. You aren’t going to meet new people, if you don’t get out of your house and socialize. It’s more than eating some food at a corner table in a café, avoiding everyone,” his sister pestered him.

“I’ve been busy…” He avoided eye contact as he let the excuse flutter out of his mouth.

“Teddy, we live on the other side of the country. You need to stop being a hermit. Go out, meet the locals. Say hi. Interact with people, Teddy.”

“You know how shy I am with new people. I was sure my heart was going to explode from my chest when I made myself stop and eat at the café for the first time.” Teddy’s anxiety rose just thinking about it.

“Teddy, I’m not asking you to go streaking down Main Street naked, or ask a guy out. Just go out and be friendly. You know you get yourself worked up over the tiniest details. I don’t know why. Everything will be okay. Remember your first day at work when you had started your first job…”

His sister’s comment triggered a memory.

He’d been so nervous about his first day at his new job. He wasn’t paying attention and didn’t realize the door to the main entrance said “Push” and not “Pull.” So he banged right into the door, causing everyone inside to stop and look up at him. He’d felt his face blossom into a rosy color. Then it got worse. He turned to run away, and crashed right into his (he found out later) new boss, causing his new boss to spill his hot coffee all down the front of his shirt. Needless to say, Teddy was mortified. Luckily, his boss took one look at Teddy’s face and laughed, telling him it wasn’t the first time that had happened. He’d liked that boss.

“Teddy! I have a wonderful idea!” Grace proclaimed, snapping him back into the present. She continued to ramble on as Teddy realized there was no getting out if it. Once his sister had an idea, there was no going back, and anyway, maybe this was the push he needed. It sounded like it could be a fun way to start to fit into his new home.

Daisy owned the local café, Daisy’s Delights. She was a bubbly, robust, nice lady, about ten to fifteen years older than Teddy. She knew everyone and everyone knew her. Her personality helped give her café a comfortable atmosphere. He was able to elude her the first few times he’d eaten there, but she finally captured him before he had a chance to run away. It wasn’t his fault.

He had his earplugs in, tapping his foot and jamming out to his iPod when she cornered him, in his little booth in the back corner. He shouldn't have been surprised she knew about him. Helen had talked about him often, and showed off pictures of him. Daisy insisted she better see him at her café often, if not she was going to track him down. He believed her.

A few days after his conversation with his sister, he did his first selfie at the café. Daisy made some badass gourmet, grilled cheese sandwiches. They had asparagus on them with three different types of cheese, and were served with a savory tomato soup. He was holding the sandwich in one hand, a few customers in the background, and he made a funny face before he took a picture with his phone, capturing his very first selfie, with Daisy in the background.

“Teddy, are you making fun of my food!” Daisy declared, as she stood behind her counter.

“No, Ms. Daisy. It's the best food I've ever tasted.” Teddy's face mimicked the red shirt he was wearing. “It is something my sister wants me to do.”

Daisy wiped her hands on a towel, walked over to the blushing man, and sat down at his table.

She smiled. “So, what's she got you doing?”

“Well, I avoid people.” Teddy felt guilty. “You know that. Grace, my sister, insisted I needed to interact with people. So, I have to take pictures with people I meet around town. I was hoping to just capture people in the background... but I don't think that will satisfy her.”

Daisy clapped her hands in delight. “Oh, what a wonderful idea... ohh... take a picture with me!” She was already grabbing for his phone.

“I got it.” He laughed. They leaned in towards each other, stuck out their tongues, and crossed their eyes, before taking the photo. Although he hadn't known Daisy long, she reminded him a little bit of a mix between Paulie's easygoing personality and his sister's no-nonsense, but caring, personality.

Afterwards, she hurried back to her other customers. She had employees, but she liked to work the front line. Plus, she was very people friendly and loved talking.

Once Daisy got the word out, some of the other locals started to approach him, asking to take photos with him. He sent them to his sister as proof that he was socializing with people in his new town. Mostly everyone he met gave him

a warm welcome, and were more than happy to take pictures with him. A few people gave him a weird look and avoided him, but that didn't burst his bubble. If they weren't going to be nice, he'd rather they just left him alone.

Teddy started to have fun getting selfies, and meeting people who lived in his small town. He ran into other locals as he was doing his normal errands, taking the time to take selfies with them. He met a lot of people: Mary from the grocery store, Bruce who delivered the newspapers, Chris the butcher, and many more.

A sunny Wednesday, a few weeks later, Teddy was startled by a stranger tapping him on the shoulder. He turned to the middle-aged, dark-haired, brown-eyed man who was smiling at him. Heat flowed to his face, as he realized he'd been caught dancing in public. "Hi." Teddy greeted the other man, as he pulled out his earplugs to his iPod that he'd been caught listening to.

"Hi. I'm Mike." He offered Teddy his hand. "I own the beef cows that Chris, the butcher, uses."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Teddy... I don't own any cows." Teddy wasn't always great at first impressions.

Mike broke out in a hearty laugh. "No, I don't suppose you have room at your cottage. I'm sure everyone told you, but I'm sorry to hear about your aunt. She was the life of this town."

"Yeah, she was a lively, outgoing person. I'm so happy I was able to meet her." Teddy smiled at the memory of his late great-aunt.

"Well, I was heading back out to my farm, but saw you and wanted to introduce myself."

"Well, thanks. It was nice meeting you. Um... would you mind if we took a picture?" Teddy hesitated.

"Oh, yeah, Daisy told me about that. Sure, why not?"

Afterwards, he waved good-bye and headed to his truck. He recognized Mike around town more often, after that, and stopped to chat with him.

One day, he saw a younger man, with dark hair and bright eyes. Teddy was so distracted by staring at him; he walked right into the mailbox on the sidewalk. He didn't even look to see if the younger handsome man noticed. He could feel blood rush to his cheeks as he hightailed it away. He made sure to take a picture of himself with the gym in the background, which was also

coincidentally located across from the café. It was one of the reasons he loved Daisy's Delights. It didn't hurt to have a good view while he ate. His face heated up just thinking about all those men working out, their hand and arm veins popping out. Wowser. He needed to stop thinking about that before he sported a boner in public. Talk about an embarrassing situation to add to his list. He continued onwards, towards home, unaware of anyone else around him while looking at his pictures, and laughing at some of them.

Chapter Two

Marcus

“You seen the new guy yet?” Marcus inquired as he moved one of the plants over to the cart. They both had the day off from their usual job at Marcus’ Uncle Jeff’s lawn and landscaping business, and were helping at the greenhouse. The greenhouse was owned and operated by Marcus’ parents, but he enjoyed working with his uncle more.

“You mean, Teddy. Yeah, I took a picture with him not too long ago. I met him over by the butcher’s shop.” Nate smiled knowingly. He knew his best friend would be asking about the older man, sooner than later.

“Damn, you’re lucky. I’ll get my chance, I’m sure.” Marcus had noticed the older handsome man a few days ago, when he was out and about. He had heard about him from Nate, but hadn’t seen him until then. Marcus could picture the man he saw earlier. Teddy was around Marcus’ height of five foot eight, with shaggy brown hair, green eyes, and of average build. Marcus thought Teddy was very attractive. He was going to introduce himself the other day, but Mike had shown up and beat him to it. Marcus knew, given time, he’d have another chance to talk to the good-looking man.

“Yeah, he’s nice on the eyes.” His best friend nodded.

“Boys!” Marcus’ father interrupted as he came into the greenhouse. “Finish up that last load and you two can head off afterwards.” He looked like his son, given twenty years. Built, with black hair and vibrant blue eyes. The only difference was Marcus kept a tan, from working outdoors all the time.

Afterwards, Nate and Marcus headed off, deciding to grab some food from Daisy’s, and then go over to Marcus’ place, to watch the newest action flick. He lived in a small, one-bedroom apartment over his parents’ garage.

Nate went home after the movie, and Marcus settled down in front of his computer for the remainder of the evening. Marcus enjoyed working outdoors, and his natural tan showed it. Working out at the gym was okay, but he’d rather get his exercise outside, under the sun, with his hands in the dirt.

Helen had left some money to help finish up the final touches on their local park. The town employed his uncle to do the landscaping. They were going to put in a little gazebo with a garden, near one of the lakes (there were three of

them), where people could sit around and enjoy the view. There was already a little dock that the kids could walk out on, and throw out offerings to the ducks and fish that lived there. He was really looking forward to it being all done. They were also going to help install a fenced-in area for the dogs to play off leash.

After the greenhouse was opened in the spring, Marcus started helping his uncle Jeff with his landscaping business. They had a deadline for the park. His uncle prided himself in his work, and meeting those deadlines on or before the date the town gave them. Especially with the park project. He was giddy with excitement that he and his crew would take part in the largest project in Northville. He was determined to make the park the most breathtaking, beautiful, peaceful place that any local would be proud to call their own.

Along with Marcus, they had about ten guys working with them for this particular project, including Nate. They even had a few volunteers. Unlike Marcus, a lot of younger folk wanted to get out of Northville and move on, into the bigger cities after graduation. So, community service looked wonderful on their résumés. Not Marcus, he took some online courses to get a few certifications, and a two-year degree (his parents insisted on it), in business.

He noticed Teddy sitting on a bench overlooking one of the lakes one day while he was working in the park. A book was lying on his lap, as he was gazing out over the water, presumably at the ducks. He was a huge distraction for Marcus. Nate got fed up not having Marcus' undivided attention, and walked off in a huff. Marcus never could pinpoint why Nate got that way sometimes. But he was too busy ogling Teddy to care at the time. Marcus noticed Teddy didn't look overly muscled, like some men at the gym. He did notice his flat stomach, and sexy hipbones, along with a happy trail, when Teddy's shirt lifted up as he stood up and stretched. Something that Marcus was thoroughly enjoying.

Leaving his book behind, Teddy walked over to the lake and tried to skip a stone. He only succeeded at dropping the stone and splashing water onto his pants, making it look like he had peed himself. Marcus watched as the blush went from his cheeks the whole way down to his neck as Teddy ran back to the bench, placing the book over his lap, attempting to look innocent. Marcus laughed softly under his breath. If he wasn't working, he would have walked over and introduced himself at that very moment.

Jeff startled him as he knelt down to his nephew's level.

"What did he do?" Jeff tilted his head towards the lake.

“Uh?” Marcus answered innocently.

“Helen’s nephew. The one you’ve been staring at for the past fifteen minutes while ignoring your work?” Jeff teased.

“His name is Teddy.”

“Yeah, I remember now. I heard that he got some sort of inheritance. He’s just a few years younger than me. It must be nice to not have to work all the time.” Jeff nodded towards Teddy.

“You’d still work, you workaholic,” Marcus teased, making Jeff chuckle and nod in agreement.

Jeff stood back up. “But seriously, don’t let him distract you from your work. I’m not paying you to stand around to stare at your eye candy. We’ve got a deadline to meet.”

Marcus had always been attracted to older men. His ex was six years older than him. Not that it lasted long. He’d gone to surprise him on their six-month anniversary, and walked in on him on the couch, naked, humping the next-door neighbor like a jackrabbit. Marcus *might* have punched them both. He *might* have told them to go to hell. He *might* have totally trashed him on social media. But he refused to let one bad relationship keep him from finding another one—someone who would love him with all their being.

With everyone’s help, they were able to finish up the park by the deadline. Marcus personally liked the little garden with the gazebo the best. They used some of the larger trees as shade over part of it. It was near the picnic area, but far enough away that the people who sat in the little garden could feel like they were in their own little world. It gave off a very tranquil feeling.

His other favorite section in the park was the dog area. Several of the locals owned dogs, including his family. He thought it was fun to bring his family’s dog down to walk around the lakes, and let her swim out, as long as she was on her leash. A fenced-off area allowed the dogs to run freely and play amongst themselves while their owners could sit around and watch them. He was sure it would be a hit. Marcus didn’t have a dog of his own, but his family had a golden retriever named Rosy. Rosy was a wonderful dog, and loved to go swimming, and play with the other dogs. If you asked her, she was his dog, anyway. They would be seen together often.

Marcus finally had a day off, and decided to pay Daisy a visit. She was the mother hen of the whole town, though she was only in her fifties and had no

children of her own. Daisy always insisted she had no time for kids; she was busy with her café and keeping an eye out for everyone. She was the person everyone tended to migrate towards when they had questions about anything, or needed to vent. She had an uncanny ability to retain details. It was an amazing ability, but it also was fantastic for her job. She'd merely ask if you wanted the usual and if you said yes, she'd hustle away. No need to write things down or ask what your "usual" was, she knew it. His favorite was the chicken nuggets with French fries, and a side of honey. He loved to mix the honey with ketchup, and use that as his dipping sauce. As he was waiting for his food, he decided to broach the subject of Teddy with Daisy.

"So, what do you want to ask me?" She leaned on the counter in front of him, with a sparkle in her eyes.

"How did you know I wanted to ask you something?" Marcus looked over his shoulder as if the answer was there.

"Marcus. I've known you since you were a babe. I know you. You have that curious look on your face, so fess up." She smiled at the younger man.

"Well..." he started off, "it's about Teddy... what do you know about him?" He looked around again, making sure the man in question wasn't there.

"Don't worry, he isn't here yet," Daisy replied as if she could read his mind. "Probably will be here in a little bit for lunch, though. He usually comes every Tuesday and Thursday."

Marcus sighed in relief. Not that he was embarrassed for asking about Teddy, he just didn't want to get caught red-handed by the man while asking about him.

"So, my Teddy has caught your interest." Daisy brought Marcus back to the conversation.

"*Your* Teddy?" he inquired, dashing his hopes a little.

"Not really mine. That man attempted to avoid me when he first began coming here, like I'd allow him to do that. Since I started talking to him, he's really come out of his shell."

Marcus laughed. There was no hiding from Daisy.

"Well, he comes here twice a week for lunch." She tapped her finger on her chin. "You know he inherited Helen's cottage after she passed. He was always someone special to her. Even though she'd only known about him for a few years, he took up a space in her big, loving heart. If she'd ever had a son, he

would be like Teddy. You've seen him around town, taking pictures of himself with locals?" Marcus nodded. "Well, that was his sister's idea. A way for him to get out and meet new people and socialize instead of boarding himself up at home all the time. He's become good friends with Mike since he's moved here."

"I'm assuming there's a reason for taking pictures with the locals?" Marcus leaned in towards her.

She got called away for a moment. When she returned, she tapped her fingers on the counter. "Now where was I?" she paused before she began again. "He would've never come out and taken the time to meet new people. He needed a push, a reason, to get him started. Now that he knows some of us, he's more inclined to socialize with people. He's polite, but only holds conversations with a select few. You just have to push your way in. A few people, especially the girls, try to get his attention but he usually just blushes, comes up with an excuse, and leaves. Poor girls, I try telling them they don't have a chance. Teddy is gay. Has been since he started noticing other boys in middle school."

"How do you know that?" Now Daisy really had his attention. Finally, she was answering the real question he wanted to ask her.

"Oh, Helen told me a while ago, after she found out about him. We used to talk about her nephew all the time. He confided so much with her. Though, I can see why. She was an easy person to talk to, and would listen to you. I'll miss her, but she lived a full life, that one. Anyway, he might have mentioned it in passing. I asked if he left anyone behind, when he moved out here, and he laughed at me. Thinks of himself as undateable." She put air quotes in the air. "'No one wants to date me long-term. Let alone find a man who wants to settle down with me.' He's told me about some horrible dates he's been on. You should ask him sometime."

"Has he not looked at himself in the mirror? That man is hot. I've been trying to meet him, but haven't had good timing or luck on my side," Marcus voiced.

"I know. He's a handsome young man. Told him too. Also told him that what he said about being undateable was a load of crap. He just needed to meet someone who could laugh with him. And I think you'll get to see him today if you stick around."

They chitchatted some more about Teddy; then Marcus told Daisy about his job, and how the park looked fantastic now that they were done with the

landscaping. He hoped everyone would take the time to go enjoy it. She said she was thinking of making up picnic baskets for people to buy to take out to the park and enjoy the nice weather. Marcus thought that was a wonderful idea. After he got his food, she told him to go sit on the patio out front. As he was going outside, he noticed Teddy coming in, with his head down, reading something on his phone.

He was enjoying the view of the gym across the street when he first noticed Teddy sitting outside with his food. Daisy's outdoor patio was small, with a few metal tables and chairs. Teddy was sitting only one table away from him. He glanced back inside, and saw Daisy behind her counter, waving in between the two of them. That Daisy. If she thought she could play matchmaker, she would. He didn't want to be rude and approach Teddy as he was eating though, so he just leaned forward and waited.

As he waited, an old classmate from school approached him, and talked about her new boyfriend she'd met during her last semester at college. She planned on moving to the city after graduation, but was spending her time off at home with her family before the big move. Finally, she said her good-byes and went on her way. When he looked back over towards Teddy, he caught Teddy staring at him. Marcus knew Teddy was aware he'd been caught staring, because Teddy's cheeks turned pink in embarrassment.

"Hi." Marcus gave his award-winning smile, making Teddy turn even redder. "I know you, right?" Marcus had a glint of humor in his eyes as he watched Teddy scramble around for his stuff.

"Nice watch!" Teddy blurted out as he stood, preparing to run away.

"Thanks... your name is Teddy, right? Helen's nephew?" Marcus continued.

"Yes!" Teddy was no longer making eye contact with Marcus, as he shoved his wallet into his pocket, and busied himself as he collected his trash.

"So, how do you like it here?" Marcus started, but Teddy had already begun to walk away quickly.

Teddy looked at his invisible watch. "Sorry, look at the time... I better get going. See you around," he said as he scampered off in the direction of his home.

"Oh, I am sure you will," Marcus whispered aloud.

Chapter Three

Teddy

It was Friday night and Teddy was doing his usual thing. Sitting at home by himself with his laptop turned on and the TV playing in the background. He was so embarrassed to have been caught staring at the younger man at the café earlier that week. He'd seen him around town, working with the landscaping crew at the park, and a couple of times at the gym. He found Marcus very attractive, but the things that really caught his attention were Marcus' arms and hands. They were so sexy, with those veins popping out. Gorgeous. Marcus' veins were big and visible. Also, he wasn't too veiny, just enough to make it sexy. Teddy really wanted to run his fingers over them. He first noticed he had a thing for veins back in high school. He attempted to look up pictures online.

He shouldn't be allowed to Google images. Awkward.

He found out two things very quickly. First, there are a lot of porn sites dedicated to veiny penises. Those sites were "veins gone wild." Sure, he liked dick, but that was overload and frankly a huge turnoff. Which led to his second conclusion, there is such a thing as "too veiny." It seemed to him, that it was especially true for some bodybuilders who prided themselves on working out. Their bodies littered with an overabundance of veins, along with too much muscle. Someone needed to tell them it wasn't sexy. Just like there is such a thing as too much muscle, in his opinion. He seemed to gravitate towards toned men and athletes. Naturally, it was nice if they had arms with a few visible veins. Like that young man from the café. Daisy had quickly and happily told Teddy his name was Marcus.

Well, the real reason he'd been blushing that day was because, at first, he thought Marcus had caught him taking a picture of Marcus' arms. If he had looked over a few seconds earlier, Teddy would have been caught red-handed with his camera on his phone. It occurred to him later that day that Marcus hadn't noticed him taking the picture. The younger man just seemed to be trying to be friendly, but Teddy botched that up. Turning red, making some lame excuse, and running off. He didn't even own a watch. So now, here it was Friday. He was looking at his collection of pictures that consisted of arm and hand veins. Most of the pictures were ones he'd found online; in fact, that was the only time he had taken a picture of an actual person because of their veins.

He just liked to admire them, and if by chance Marcus showed up in his dreams later on, so be it.

A couple days later, he ran into Marcus at the grocery store.

“Hi!” Marcus bounded up next to Teddy, startling him.

Teddy glanced around to see who he was talking to, but no, it was just the two of them. “Hi,” he responded hesitantly.

“I’m Marcus.” The young man held out his hand.

“I know.” He gingerly shook Marcus’ hand.

Marcus rolled back onto his heels then leveled out again, smiling at him.

Teddy didn’t know what to do with the awkward silence.

“How are you today?” Marcus leaned over the display of oranges Teddy was currently looking over.

“Good. Just doing some shopping. You?” Teddy was still confused.

“It’s my day off. So, I’m here shopping myself.” Marcus zeroed his bright blue, sparkling eyes in on Teddy.

“That’s nice. Well, I better head off. Got things to do.” Teddy grabbed a couple of oranges and threw them in the plastic bag he was holding.

“Oh...” Marcus frowned. “Okay.” He sounded disappointed.

“Maybe I’ll see you around?” Teddy offered.

The younger man’s eyes twinkled. “Definitely.”

Teddy hustled away, and when he took a chance and looked over his shoulder, he caught Marcus ogling his backside. The younger man just smirked and winked at him, causing Teddy’s cheeks to heat up as he continued walking away. He was happy he’d chosen his nicely fitted jeans that day.

The rest of the week, he’d noticed Marcus working around town or hanging with his friends, one of them in particular, and often. He wondered if they were a couple. They seemed to always be laughing and joking around. His friend had blond hair with dark-colored eyes, and he had the same body frame as Marcus, but Teddy didn’t find him nearly as eye-catching as Marcus. A few times when Marcus would see him, Marcus would break out into a huge smile, and he’d wave to Teddy. Marcus’ blond-haired friend would give him a ticked-off, jealous glare. Yeah, maybe they were a couple.

Teddy really enjoyed the park. It was beautiful and tranquil. When he wasn't enjoying his comfortable couch in his quiet home, he often found himself at the park. His routine would involve walking on the newly graveled paths around the lakes, and sitting in the little garden with the gazebo, while watching the kids feed the ducks and fish. Other times he would watch the dogs play in the fenced-off area, wishing he had one of his own. Which led to him standing in the middle of a room with a little mutt running around him. He decided it was time to get a companion. Now that he owned his own place, he could easily fence in some of the backyard and get himself a dog. He'd always wanted to get one of his own but never allowed himself when he lived in his apartment, back in the big city where he used to live. He just hadn't felt it would've been fair to the dog, with his work hours and nowhere fun to go and play.

He'd been thinking of getting a bigger dog. Perhaps a lab or golden retriever, but none of them seemed to capture his heart. The volunteer suggested the smaller dog. It was everything he wasn't looking for in a dog. As the bundle of red and white came careening towards him, he noticed that it couldn't have weighed more than twelve pounds.

"How old?" he questioned.

"About six months old," the volunteer replied.

As he knelt down, he found himself smiling when the little bundle of joy threw her front paws up onto his knee. He was amazed by how happy she was, considering she lived in a shelter. His heart sang out as the puppy yipped at him, wiggling her small bottom, her tail flapping back and forth. Teddy dropped to the ground, spreading his legs apart, his goofy grin still on his face. His spirits seem to lift being in her presence, making his heart feel light. She flopped onto her back, demanding tummy rubs from him. As he was petting her, he was starting to picture her in his life. Playing with her in the living room as he watched TV, or her cuddling with him on the couch. He could envision himself laughing as she barked at the ducks on the lake, soaking them when she tried to jump in after them. He ran his finger up her white blaze, and ruffled her almost erect reddish ears. Teddy was amazed by how soft and silky her fur felt to the touch.

"What type of dog is she?" He glanced up at the volunteer who was smiling knowingly at him. She knew she'd done well pairing the two of them together.

"Our best guess is a corgi/papillon mix." She smiled.

He turned his look back down to the puppy. She wasn't what he was looking for at all. Younger, smaller, not trained, but she was also everything he wanted. She loved him already and she had just met him. The pup didn't give one backwards glance at the volunteer the moment she bounded into the room. He was wavering on the idea when she looked up and stared into his eyes. They were full of trust, sparkling with joy, and then her mouth hung open, her tongue lolling out to the side. It looked like she was smiling right back at him. It was a done deal.

“Okay. I'll take her.” He struggled to stand back up.

“You just need to fill out the questionnaire and she's all yours.” He picked her up and followed the woman out to the front. The questionnaire consisted of many questions. Have you owned a dog before? How much do you think you'll spend on them in one year? Do you have a fenced-in yard? (He marked yes... he planned on throwing one up when he got home). Are there any other pets at your home, if so what and how many? Are there any children in your household? He took his time and filled out each question to the best of his ability. Soon, he gathered all her papers (she had all her shots, and was already spayed) and paid for her. He very generously gave them a few extra hundred dollars. It was the least he could do, since they were the reason he had a smile on his face, and was giddy with cheer. The pup squirmed in his arms, and cried when he put her in the backseat of the car. First stop, the pet store.

They stopped at the pet shop. Teddy was pretty happy that she seemed to have been socialized well, since he knew socialization was important for puppies. He definitely didn't want to get her home and find out she had social anxiety. He was already imagining her playing with all the other dogs at the dog park. He refused to purchase any “cute” outfits for her. She was a dog, not a *mini person*. Though, he did splurge on her dog bed—it was probably big enough for a Great Dane—but she “insisted” that it was the one for her, by plopping down on it, and chewing on a toy she'd stolen from the bottom shelf of one of the displays. He spent a good hour wandering around picking up things for her, and allowing her to say “hi” to everyone. He wanted to encourage her to be friendly.

Their next stop was the local hardware store in town. Mike was there browsing. He and Mike had become friends, and had met up for drinks a couple of times. Mike was an easygoing, friendly man around Teddy's age, who was married. But Teddy hadn't had the pleasure of meeting her yet.

“Hey, Teddy.” Mike weaved his way over. “Oh, who is this?” He rubbed the puppy's head.

“I haven’t named her yet. Just got her from the shelter. I’m here to buy stuff to put up a fence for her. Nothing fancy.” Teddy shifted the little bundle of cuteness to his other arm.

“Oh, I’d be happy to give you a hand. I fix fencing at the farm all the time,” Mike offered.

“That would be fantastic. Do you need to be home anytime soon?”

“Nah, the wife is at home, doing a spring cleaning. Her folks are coming to visit, and she kicks me out while she is getting the house ready for them. Doesn’t think I am thorough enough when it comes to cleaning. I cook dinner most of the time for her instead. It’s only fair.”

After calling his wife, Kate, he helped Teddy gather the supplies, and then they headed over to Teddy’s place. It was a fun afternoon, working alongside Mike as they put the fence in. Teddy had to admit to himself, the fence didn’t look half-bad with Mike’s input.

“Thanks for the help, Mike.” Teddy was pleased to hang out with Mike. He got bored often not having any human company to spend time with.

“Oh, no problem. It’s nice to get away from the farm every now and then. We’ll have to get together sometime. Maybe Speedy, that’s my Border Collie, and your new pup can play together.”

“Yay, sounds like a plan.”

Teddy saw Mike off, and settled in for the night with his new addition to his family.

Teddy didn’t realize how much a puppy would get into and chew. His favorite blanket. No more. Mags, the name he finally came up for her, was also an avid underwear and sock stealer. She loved to tear holes into them. So, he ended up spending a lot more of his time “puppy-proofing” his home. On a good note, she loved the kennel he bought her to sleep in. The few times he did go out, she didn’t put a fuss when he put her up in her kennel (as long as he remembered her KONG with frozen peanut butter treat in it). Despite her rubber—filled with good stuff—KONG, she would still find other items to chew on, such as remote controls, pens, et cetera. The worst were electrical cords. He’d had to replace his Kindle charger twice. But he learned his lesson. Duct tape everything out of reach, or just make sure it was put up. He knew it was just a phase, and it wasn’t her fault. The best thing to do was catch her in the act, telling her “no” by making a high-pitched sound.

On another note, house training her was a breeze. Teddy made sure she was on a routine, which really helped cut down on accidents. She still had them though. She was a tiny puppy, with a small bladder. So, if he didn't pay attention when she gave him the "I-gotta-go-RIGHT-NOW" sign, he'd end up on his hands and knees cleaning up a mess. Despite all these issues, he loved her dearly. Her favorite pastime was to lie beside him or on his lap while he watched TV at night and slather him with kisses.

It was Mags' first day at the park. He'd called Mike, but he was busy with some "cow" stuff, as he put it, and couldn't make it out this time. She wasn't very good on the leash, constantly tugging at the end, which was attached to her harness. Mags sniffed at everything, splashed at the water's edge, and barked at the ducks when they took off from the water. It was another fantastic day, with the sun shining and a warm breeze. After their walk around the lake, he took Mags to the dog park to (hopefully) run off the rest of her puppy energy. He was so caught up with watching her (he was afraid how the bigger dogs would treat her) he didn't notice Marcus. He hadn't spoken more than a few words with him.

"Hi, Teddy! What a coincidence to see you here." Marcus plopped down on the bench next to Teddy.

"Hello, Marcus. How are you?" Teddy easily returned the same grin Marcus was wearing.

Marcus balanced a picnic basket on his lap and turned his full attention on Teddy. "Great. How do you like Northville so far?"

"It's very nice." Teddy held an inner pep talk. He could hold down a normal conversation that lasted more than a few sentences with the attractive man. His heart was beating a mile a minute. Teddy glanced down and noticed Marcus' nice arms and hands, quickly turning red, remembering the incident from the café. He looked back up into Marcus' mesmerizing, bright, blue eyes. His short black hair helped the blue pop out more pronounced. They were captivating, as if time stood still for a moment.

"It isn't what I expected. I'm used to living in the city. But I've grown to really like it here. The people seem friendly enough, much more friendly than the people I used to live around. At least here, people smile at you when you're walking down the street. Then you guys have Daisy. She is something else. Kind of reminds me of my older sister, and best friend combined."

“Aww, Daisy. Everyone should have a Daisy in their lives. She is one of a kind. I personally think she helps make this town,” Marcus contributed. “In fact, I bought one of those small premade picnic baskets from her. Would you like to join me? That is if you haven’t had lunch yet?”

“Oh, umm...” Teddy looked around, unsure what to say. “Don’t you have anyone else you’d rather share it with? Like your boyfriend?” Teddy unconsciously started to play with his hands and look away when he said “boyfriend.”

“No boyfriend. I’m very single...” Marcus paused. “For now. You never know what might come up.” Marcus winked towards Teddy and very deliberately moved his eyes up and down slowly, checking out Teddy, causing a redness to blossom on Teddy’s face.

“So, that blond I see with you all the time, isn’t your boyfriend?” Teddy wanted to confirm it.

Marcus snorted. “You mean Nate. No way. He’s my best friend. I simply don’t and never will see him as... ‘boyfriend material.’” He did air quotes around boyfriend material. “I’ve known him since, forever. More like a brother than anything.”

“Yeah. I have a best friend like that too, named Paulie.” Teddy sighed in relief. He was happy to hear that Marcus was single, and that Nate wasn’t even on Marcus’ radar. Though, at that time he refused to admit why.

“So, how about it?” Marcus picked up the picnic basket and looked hopefully at Teddy.

“Well, um, okay. If you are sure.” Teddy was hungry, and Marcus did offer.

As they settled down, Marcus surprised Teddy with his favorite asparagus grilled cheese. When he told him it was his favorite from Daisy’s, it was Marcus’ turn to blush. They sat back and ate as they watched the dogs run around and have fun. Teddy told Marcus all about Mags, who was becoming fast friends with Marcus’ family dog, Rosy. It was pleasant to have someone to talk with. The longer Teddy talked with Marcus, the easier it was to feel relaxed around him. Marcus told Teddy about the family business, and how he still had a lot he could learn from his dad and uncle about their businesses, but he loved it. He confessed to Teddy that he enjoyed working with his hands and being outdoors.

“So what do you do for a living?” Marcus asked Teddy.

“Well, I used to work for a local TV station before I moved. Behind the scenes. I don’t need to work anymore. I got an inheritance.” He didn’t go into detail. “It’s nice to have some free time, though. I really want to try to put in a garden. Not that I’ve ever had one, but I thought some tomatoes, and maybe some squash, peppers, and a few other things would be nice to have on hand.”

Marcus sat up with interest, when Teddy brought up the garden. “I’d be glad to help you out. I was practically born and raised in the greenhouses. That is if you would like help...” He tapered off.

“You wouldn’t mind? Wouldn’t you rather spend your free time with your friends and such?” Teddy was hoping his excitement was kept at bay.

“No. I wouldn’t mind at all. I love gardens, and I’d be more than happy to help you out.”

“Then, I guess I’ll be taking you up on your offer. Thanks.” Teddy lips turned upwards with happiness. His body felt warm and he couldn’t keep the smile off his face. He couldn’t believe his luck. He was able to hold a decent conversation, without embarrassing himself, and he would be seeing Marcus soon.

Then he turned around and made a scene. He thought Mags was being ganged up on, and when he tried to run over and “save” her, he tripped. He ended up with his ass in the air; his pants had pulled down some, showcasing his Avenger’s boxer briefs. To make it worse, his hand landed in dog poop. He could hear Marcus’ laughter become louder as he got closer. He was too embarrassed to move.

“I am sorry for laughing. It was all slow motion on my end.” Marcus knelt down with some napkins. By then Mags had lost interest with the other dogs and ran over to check up on her owner.

“I can’t show my face here ever again,” Teddy mumbled.

“You’re fine. At least you weren’t like poor Mike. Last week, when he leaned down to pick up some trash while he was walking around the lake with his wife, his dog decided to use him like a fire hydrant, and took a piss right on him.”

Looking over at Marcus and taking the napkins to wipe his yucky hand, Teddy joined in with the laughter. “Really? He didn’t tell me that happened to him. That’s hilarious. I think I’d just dig a hole and bury myself in embarrassment if that happened to me.”

“I don’t think anyone really paid you any mind, well except me. I’ve got my eyes on you.” Marcus grinned. “Let’s get you up and to the bathroom, so you can at least wash your hands. Rosy and I will watch Mags for you.”

“Thanks.” Teddy knelt down and whispered to Mags, something about being okay, before he ran off to the bathrooms to clean up.

Chapter Four

Marcus

Marcus couldn't believe his luck. He was ecstatic Teddy agreed with the impromptu date, or at least that is what he was calling it in his head. Well, he started calling it that when Marcus realized Teddy didn't want to let go of his hand. At least that was what he was telling himself.

He told Nate all about it when they had gone out for drinks the next night.

"Nate, he was wearing this red shirt that really helped his green eyes stand out." Marcus didn't feel bad talking about his crush. He had to listen to Nate talk about his girlfriend, Steph, all the time. "And we have things in common like; we both use a mixture of honey and ketchup as a dipping sauce."

"Oh, that's awesome." Nate rolled his eyes.

Marcus ignored Nate as he ranted on about his day at the park with Teddy. "And his dog, her name is Mags, is adorable. And you know the best part?"

Nate sighed and nodded.

"I am going to be spending a lot more time with him. I'm going to help him with his vegetable garden." Joy spread across Marcus' face.

"Really? You want to do that?" Nate asked and Marcus nodded. "Well, have fun. He's older than you, I'm sure he'll get annoyed having you around."

"I think you're wrong. I think we are going to hit it off great, if our first outing was anything to go by."

"If you say so." Nate sounded bored.

"You could at least pretend you are excited for me. I do when you talk about Steph," Marcus huffed.

"I'm sorry. I wish you the best." Nate plastered on a fake smile.

"Thanks!"

Marcus found Teddy very attractive, even without the flush. He attempted to show his interest, blatantly. He caught Teddy checking him out while they were eating, too. He planned on really showing off his body when it came to

gardening. Marcus was bound and determined to grab and hold Teddy's attention, and get himself a sexy boyfriend. They'd exchanged numbers and had been texting each other, and talking on the phone. Just hearing the man's sexy, velvety voice was enough to encourage Marcus to want more with the other man. He wasn't sure why Nate seemed against it. Maybe he was jealous. Though, he'd be spending more time with Teddy and not Nate, he told himself not to worry; he'd still find time for Nate too.

It became apparent quickly that Teddy was oblivious to gardening, the first day he'd gone over to lay the tarp down, which was the first step to setting up a good garden. It helped kill all the vegetation, making the next step, tilling, easier.

"I just assumed we'd dig a hole and plop the plants in. Be done," Teddy stated, making it obvious he was an amateur gardener.

"Yeah... no. There is an art to gardening. It's more than just dirt and water. There are the pH levels, and how much sunlight exposure, and irrigation." He saw the look of horror on Teddy's face.

"Trust me. You'll have the best vegetable garden ever. Luckily, you had already started to pull out the weeds and dig up the grass. We laid out a tarp almost two weeks ago, and layered it with bricks, to help speed up the process. Today, I'm going to take a look to see if it's good to continue." Marcus knelt down and peeked under it. "I think to be safe, we should leave it on for a few more days. Okay?"

Teddy nodded yes. Marcus really enjoyed spending these last couple of weeks hanging out with Teddy. He would play with Mags, and watch TV or movies with Teddy. Usually, they ended up eating dinner. Unlike Marcus who lived on a lot of Daisy's food and frozen dinners, Teddy enjoyed cooking. He even offered to help teach Marcus. When he wasn't having his routine lunches at Daisy's, he would cook food for himself. Unbeknownst to Mags, she was Marcus' partner in "trying to catch Teddy." She insisted on taking over half the couch, squishing Teddy and Marcus closer together, since there was nowhere else to sit.

"Sorry, she's a couch hog. You'd think for something so tiny, she wouldn't take up so much room," Teddy mentioned one evening.

"It's okay. She is the queen bee of your house. Plus, look at her. She looks so peaceful sleeping like that, with her little legs sticking straight up." They looked over at the pup in question. She was lying across the cushion, on her back with her little legs sticking up, and she was sleeping like a log.

Their knees and legs would accidentally touch each other, but Teddy never broke the contact, which Marcus always took as a good sign, even if Teddy seemed oblivious. Or at least acted like he was. The verdict was still out.

Finally, the day came when the tarp could come off. Teddy spent most of the day following Marcus around and listening to his orders. Marcus was in his element, and was excited to show off his skills to the older man. He wanted Teddy to see him as an equal and not “that young lad.” Teddy seemed impressed by Marcus, if Marcus was reading his body signals right. He even asked some good questions, proving to Marcus that he saw Marcus as an expert gardener. They cleared off the tarp and tested the pH levels, which were excellent, making the next step easier. Teddy and Marcus drove out to Mike’s cattle farm for some compost.

“Wait. So you’re telling me I am standing in cow poop?” Teddy snapped out of his trance, while he was staring at Marcus’ arm bulge as he lifted loads of literal “shit” into the back of the truck.

Laughing, Marcus shoveled another mound of compost into the bed of his truck. “Technically, yes. It isn’t that bad. What did you think it was?”

Teddy mumbled. He liked to feign ignorance, despite knowing the truth.

“Anyway, it is rich with nutrients that will help make your plants very happy. If you’d start helping me shovel it, we’d be done sooner,” he stated, prompting Teddy to take his own shovel and help fill in the bed of the truck.

“It doesn’t smell nearly as bad as I anticipated. But whatever you do, don’t push me down in it. I think I’d want to bleach myself into next week if I fall in this shit,” Teddy replied as he continued to shovel.

“I promise I won’t push you down in it, and if you tripped face first into it, I’d try my hardest not to laugh at you.”

Teddy shook his head. “Don’t lie. If my clumsy self tripped and face-planted in this, you’d burst out laughing. You wouldn’t be able to hold it back.”

“Okay, you’re probably right.” Marcus nodded his head up and down.

Since they came and did all the labor themselves, Mike didn’t charge them anything for it. Kate, Mike’s wife, offered them some fresh lemonade before they left. She was a friendly well-mannered woman. When Mike and Marcus found out that Teddy had never been near a cow before, they dragged him off into the field, where the herd was grazing. When the cow Teddy was very cautiously petting turned her head suddenly towards him, he launched himself

backwards, tripping and landing very close to a cow patty. Mike and Marcus laughed so hard, there were tears in their eyes.

“She isn’t going to bite you.” Mike took pity on Teddy and offered him a hand.

“So much for not laughing at me,” Teddy said with a sparkle in his eyes.

“You didn’t land in the cow patty. So, it doesn’t count.” Marcus lent his other hand, and together with Mike, hauled Teddy to a standing position.

“Well, how was I to know that. She could. You didn’t see the look in her eye.” Teddy’s eyes were big as saucers.

“Oh, yeah, she seems to be out to get you.” They looked at the cow in question, who had gone back to munching on the grass, ignoring the three silly humans near her.

They headed back over to Teddy’s with the fertilizer. The tarp had done its job, killing off the rest of the grass and weeds. It was a warm spring day, a gentle breeze dancing around their bodies. Marcus didn’t waste any time setting them to work. He pulled the appropriate tools out of the cedar shed that was located under a giant oak tree. The garden was located in front of the shed, at the side of the house, so Marcus had backed his truck up to where they both worked at dumping the manure. Dust flew everywhere as they were raking the new dirt over the garden, tilling it one direction then another.

Towards the end, Marcus took his shirt off, declaring he was hot and sweaty. Teddy’s face heated up when Marcus revealed his nude upper body. Marcus caught Teddy’s eyes roaming over his arms particularly. Marcus tried to talk Teddy into taking off his shirts, but Teddy refused, stripping down to his tank top only. It was a partial win, in Marcus’ book. Teddy invited Marcus to stay over for dinner again. Marcus was more than pleased to stick around and hang out with Teddy.

Marcus offered his help, but Teddy insisted he should keep the dog company while he pattered around and fixed dinner. It wasn’t anything fancy, just a simple chicken Alfredo. While Teddy was cooking, Marcus took the time to check out the rest of the small cottage. Besides the front of the house, he traveled down the hall, poking his head into the other spaces. He stopped in the guest bathroom, where he used a wet washcloth to wipe himself down, cleaning off some of the sweat and grime from earlier. He was impressed by the tone Teddy had set for the whole house. It made one feel cozy, safe, and

comfortable. He took a few extra minutes in, what had to be, Teddy's bedroom. He had his clothes littered in a pile in the corner. Then his eyes focused on the bed; it was huge. He'd never seen a bed that big before. The light-blue comforter was ruffled, as if Teddy had just rolled out of bed. He'd glanced behind him before he went and lay out on the bed, spreading his arms and legs wide, like making an angel in the snow. He breathed in Teddy's manly scent from his pillow, making Marcus' blood run south. He peeked into the night stands, finding a half-used bottle of lube, causing a blush to creep up his face. His imagination was going rampant with pictures of Teddy lying out on his bed, masturbating. He flipped off the bed, and Mags followed him into the en suite bathroom, snooping through his medicine cabinet and under the sink. Soon, he traveled back up front along with Mags.

"Here you go. I hope you like chicken Alfredo," Teddy said as he handed off the plate to Marcus who had settled on the couch after he had taken the time to become acquainted with Teddy's home.

"If it tastes as good as it smells, I think I'll love it. Thanks." Marcus took the offered plate.

They sat around and watched a few episodes of *Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, which Teddy owned on DVD, as they ate their dinner. He supplied two cans of soda to accompany their dinner. They laughed and joked as they watched TV.

Marcus grabbed his side, laughing so hard. "Oh, they have some awkward moments don't they?"

Joining in with his deep chuckle, Teddy replied, "Yeah, I know all about awkward moments. I have definitely had my share."

"Oh, don't leave me hanging. Spill the beans. I promise if you share a moment, I'll share one too." Marcus smiled.

"Okay, if you will share one too. Um, let's see. How about my first crush. It all started..."

Teddy told Marcus about his first date. Well in his mind, it was a date. He was fourteen going on fifteen. A group of them (including his crush) decided to go to the State Fair. He really needed to pee and all they had were porta-potties. In his haste, he forgot to lock the door. In midstream, someone, of course it was his crush, opened the door. Teddy turned around, startled, and peed right on him. He was so embarrassed, he snagged his skin as he quickly zipped up his

pants and ran the whole way home. Needless to say, it was all over school the next day and his crush gave him weird looks and avoided him. Marcus laughed so hard, there were tears in his eyes. He could just imagine a younger Teddy doing that.

Though, in return he told him about his “horrible crush” story, which by coincidence also involved peeing. He was younger and was invited to a party where his crush would be also. He was so nervous about talking to his crush. When his crush cracked a joke, he laughed so hard, he peed himself. In front of his crush. It was devastating. Luckily, his best friend Nate was there. He took his bottle of water and splashed water on the front of his pants, covering up the real reason Marcus was wet. He was just happy his crush was nice enough to not repeat the real reason and just avoided him from then on.

Finally, the evening was over, and Marcus needed to head home.

“I had a real fun time today.” Marcus grinned at Teddy.

“Yeah. You are just breaking me in.” Teddy’s eyes lit up. “First, the garden. Today, I got to see a cow up close and personal. Even touched it, until she tried to eat me. I wonder what will be next.” He grinned.

“Oh, I guess we’ll find out.” Marcus winked.

He had an early day tomorrow. He was helping his uncle with Daisy’s landscaping. Every year, she paid them to fix up her yard, and add in different flowers. She had an actual bedframe in her front yard with a “bed of flowers” in it. Marcus promised he’d text Teddy though.

“So, I saw Teddy in your truck yesterday heading back from Mike’s.” Marcus heard his uncle start when he got into his uncle’s truck to travel over to Daisy’s.

“Yeah. I’m helping him with his garden. Poor soul knows nothing about gardening,” Marcus replied nonchalantly.

“So, you’re friends now. When did that start?” His uncle cocked his head towards him.

“A few weeks. He’s really fun to be around.” Marcus’ face shone with happiness.

“Oh, so he’s the reason you have been wearing a smile more lately. Nate was complaining he hasn’t seen much of you besides work,” Jeff commented.

“Yeah. I guess I’ve been spending a lot of my free time with Teddy,” he admitted and shrugged his shoulders. “I should try to make time for you all too. I’m sure you remember what it feels like when you have a crush. You want to spend all your time around them. I flirt with him shamelessly, all the time, trying to catch his attention. I really want him to like me as much as I like him. There are moments, when I make eye contact with him, and I am so sure he is feeling it too. My heart feels like it is going to beat out of my chest when we touch each other.”

Blood rushed to Jeff’s face. “Now. Now. I don’t need those types of details from my innocent, sweet, little nephew.”

Marcus’ head shot up and looked at his uncle in confusion, replaying what he said in his head and started to laugh. “Get your head out of the gutter. I didn’t mean like that. I mean our knees and legs touching when we are on the couch, or when our hands brush over each other. It isn’t needed. You only do that with someone you are, at least subconsciously, attracted to.”

“Yeah, I agree. Anybody who wasn’t interested in the other person on some level wouldn’t allow that, man or woman.” Jeff nodded his head in agreement.

“Right!” Marcus’ face lit up when Jeff agreed with him, giving him hope. “I am sure he likes me too.”

Daisy was one of their easier customers to deal with, since she mostly allowed the men to do what they wanted. She always gave them an “idea” of what she wanted, and as long as her “bed of flowers” was the main focus, she allowed them to go with it. As long as it wasn’t too expensive. This year, they even went the extra mile by fixing up her iron bedframe, and painting it a nice white. They chose a very pretty arrangement of flowers that would have beautiful blossoms that would stick around until late fall. Marcus got a text from his dad, asking if he could help close up the shop. His closer had gotten sick, and he sent him home. Marcus shot his dad a quick reply, stating that Jeff and he were making good time, and he should be able to come help after his shift.

It was a nice change to be indoors, out of the sun. He ran the register, while his dad helped customers and started to stock the front of the store for the following business day. They had a few stragglers towards the end of the day, but it was another successful day.

“So, heard from Daisy that you’re helping Helen’s nephew with a new garden. That’s nice of you,” his dad brought up, as they were closing down the till.

“Yeah. I saw him at the park when I took Rosy, we got to talking, and I offered to help him out. You should see his new dog. It’s this little mix. She’s pretty cute, and she and Rosy have become fast friends. I will probably take her over to Teddy’s more often. She helps keep the puppy in line while we are busy with the garden. You know puppies. She is going through that ‘anything I can get my mouth on I’ll chew’ phase. Think it will do them both good, to play and wear themselves out.”

“Well, I can’t argue you with you there. Rosy might be a bit older, but don’t tell her that. She still thinks she’s a puppy, with her bouncing around everywhere. Just last night her tail knocked down that flower vase we have in the entryway. Shattered everywhere.” His dad sighed and shook his head. “Your mum was pretty angry at first. That was her favorite one. But it wasn’t like Rosy meant to knock it over. Scared the wits out of her too. Poor thing came barreling down the hallway when it landed.”

“She could have hurt her paws if she stuck around. Guess it was good she got scared,” Marcus added.

“Yep. Anyway, yeah, I think it’s great that you are befriending him. He seems pretty shy.”

“Yeah, but once you get him started, he seems fine. You’ll probably meet him tomorrow. I’m going to bring him around to buy the vegetables plants to put in his garden.”

“Well, I’m looking forward to meeting him.”

Marcus spent the rest of his evening composing a list of vegetables he thought Teddy would like. His garden wasn’t huge, but it wasn’t tiny either. He drew up a few layouts that would work well in the garden. Marcus would sit down with Teddy tomorrow and decide on which one he liked best before heading over to his father’s greenhouse for the supplies.

Chapter Five

Teddy

“So, how’s the simple life treating you, little brother?” Grace smiled from the computer screen. Teddy was okay with texting and talking on the phone to keep in touch with his sister, but she continued to insist on Skyping sometimes. He never would admit it, but it was nice to see the faces of his loved ones, even if it was through a computer screen.

“I’m sorry I’ve only shot you a few texts these past few weeks. I’ve been busy.” Teddy returned her smile.

“Look what I got...” He moved away from the camera, but he knew Grace could still hear him speaking to Mags. When he returned to the camera he showed her his cute little dog. “Grace met Mags. Mags wave hi to Grace.” He took her little paw and waved. The little red and white pup’s tongue was hanging out, and it made her look like she was smiling.

“Aww, isn’t she adorable. I know you always wanted a dog. I am sure if Mom wasn’t so allergic, we would have had one growing up.” Grace was making cooing sounds towards the puppy. “When did you get her?”

“A few weeks ago. It’s one of the reasons I haven’t been around to Skype with you. I went in thinking a lab or something of that size, and housetrained. But this little devil stole my heart. Bounded right up to me and claimed me as her new owner. I didn’t stand a chance.” Teddy set the squirming little pup back down.

“I bet she keeps you busy. I wondered why you quit taking selfies.” Grace loved dogs. The moment she moved out of their parents’ house, she bought a dog, a goldendoodle. Loved it so much, when it passed at the age of twelve, she got another one.

“Oh, she’s a typical puppy. She ate two channel clickers and my favorite blanket.” Teddy paused for a moment. “I was so angry when I found a big hole in it, but I just had to let it go. It’s her blanket now and she loves it. She also really loves the KONG toys, too. She already has a new doggy best friend, Rosy. Rosy is Marcus’ family dog, a golden retriever,” Teddy rambled on. “In fact, I think Marcus is bringing her over tomorrow for another playdate.” Teddy blushed, remembering Marcus with his shirt off. He’d been meaning to ask

about the two tattoos on Marcus' arms, but got distracted by those gorgeous arm veins.

"So... who's this mysterious Marcus? Already coming over to your house... umm?" Grace propped her elbows up on the table and rested head in her hands. "Is this the reason you quit taking the selfies around town?" Grace's eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Oh... well... you see..." Once Teddy started talking Marcus and Rosy, he didn't stop. He was sure he blushed the whole time. He thought he wouldn't have much in common with Marcus, but Marcus surprised him. He found out they had similar tastes in TV and movies, and they both shared the same favorite color, red.

"Wow, pining after a younger man for once. You always tended to go for the older men." Grace began, "Early twenties, uh. I can tell you are smitten with him. He is just a few years older than my kids, which just makes me feel old. Makes me realize my kids are growing up so fast. Before we know it, they'll be old enough to drink." Grace shook her head and refocused on Teddy, her eyes sparkling with humor. "So, did you tell him that his dog's name is your childhood nickname too?"

"Absolutely not. And only you ever called me by that nickname. I'm so humiliated that our parents named me Teddy Roosevelt Armstrong." Teddy shook his head in shame. It didn't help that he blushed easily, earning him the nickname "Rosy." He remembered one time when he was around ten. He was at the grocery store, and his sister called for him using that name. He was so embarrassed. It was one thing to be called "Rosy" at home, but in public... luckily his mother put a quick stop to that.

They talked for a little bit longer. He had previously told her about Mike, when he took a picture with him, weeks ago. He and Mike had hung out a few times, but he hadn't spent much time recently. In fact, he spent most of his free time with Marcus.

Grace updated him about her kids, who were in college, and her husband, Rupert. Rupert had recently received the promotion he'd been aiming for. Afterwards, he sent off an email to Paulie, who was currently working overseas for his job. It was easier to keep in touch via email and Facebook. He even included some pictures of Mags. Paulie missed his new baby girl named Samantha and his wife, Bella.

If he was asked, Teddy would refuse to admit he went through about ten different wardrobe changes before Marcus showed up the following day. He

finally settled on his original outfit, a nice fitting white T-shirt, and an older pair of jeans that fit nicely, accentuating his firm round butt. When Teddy greeted Marcus and Rosy at the front door, Mags yipped catching Rosy's attention, causing her to trip Marcus towards Teddy as she rushed to greet her friend. Instinctively, Teddy reached up to catch Marcus as he crashed forward. Marcus' foot came up and landed in between Teddy's. Teddy's arms came around and embraced Marcus, their chests touching, Marcus' head over Teddy's left shoulder.

Time stood still, if only for a moment.

As Marcus corrected his stance, Teddy couldn't help himself. He let his fingers wander down Marcus' arms, brushing gently over the veins on Marcus' forearms, before taking a step back himself. His ears were burning when he realized what he was doing.

"Sorry..." He couldn't look Marcus in the eyes right away.

"No need. I'm sorry Rosy lost her manners. Thanks for catching me." Marcus maneuvered so he was making eye contact with Teddy. "It's okay to ask about them?"

For a split second, Teddy thought he had meant his veins, making him stutter at first, before responding coherently. His felt the flames coming off his ears. "You mean your tats on your arms? Yeeess. That was it," he drew out.

When Marcus smirked, Teddy knew that Marcus had seen through his lie. "I got them when I was eighteen. Nothing special to them. I'd gone through the artist's sketchbook. I liked those. Thought they looked cool, with the cross, peace sign, and wings, like they were flying away. It wasn't because of anything religious. I am not into that."

"Me neither." Teddy grinned. "Though, I do believe in ghosts, and werewolves, and oddly enough vampires. I was sure I'd see Aunt Helen's ghost in the cottage when I got here," Teddy chipped in. "And no, she hasn't shown up at all."

"Oh, you'd probably be scared stiff, if you saw her ghost," Marcus stated.

"Yeah, you're probably right." Teddy nodded in agreement.

"I am a fan of the supernatural too. I love reading books with werewolves and vampires in them." Marcus toed his shoes off onto the mat by the front door. "Though, I did love *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* series. Oh, I was all team Angel, he was so sexy."

“Oh, I switched teams... there was a while I was all team Giles. I know... don’t get me started. I just thought he was so sexy with those glasses. By the end, Spike really grew on me. Do you have any idea how disappointed I was when I found out he wasn’t really British!” Teddy felt outraged.

“Ha-ha, I bet that ruined your fantasies about him when you found that out.” Marcus chuckled, as he started walking over to the little kitchen table, which was off to the left of the front door, to lay out his papers. The kitchen was sectioned off from the dining room by the island.

“It really did. You have no idea. So, what was your favorite episode? I know you must have one.” Teddy slid into his seat, dragging his chair over next to Marcus’, causing their legs to touch. “Mine was the one with the team jersey that made all the girls turn obsessed with that student.”

Marcus snickered, enjoying the feeling of contact between them. “I don’t know what was funnier. Willow trying to cast a spell to change him into a girl, or Buffy taking the bazooka to kill the principal and Spike tackling her. My favorite though was, ‘Hush, Hush.’”

“Really? I’m surprised. Why that one?”

“When Giles is holding the session with the gang and Buffy was trying to make the hand motions to spike them.” Marcus made the motions with his hand. “It looked like she was jerking off. I laughed so hard, I almost fell off the couch. Plus, almost that entire episode was in silence, but it didn’t lack in any details. It was really amazing.”

“*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was one my favorite series. Great, now I’m in the mood to watch it. I own the whole series.”

“Well, if you want and don’t have any plans, we can watch them after the garden is put in. I’m sure Rosy won’t mind sticking around, and I’d really enjoy hanging out with you,” Marcus offered.

“Well...” Teddy pretended to ponder the idea. “It would be a lot more fun to have someone to watch it with. I can’t believe we didn’t have this conversation before.” Teddy turned his attention to the papers. “Well, let’s get started then. So, what do you have here? Looks like you’ve been busy.” He pointed to all the papers laid out on the table.

“Well, here is a list of vegetables I thought you’d like. And I wrote up a few plans of how they could be set out. Figured we’d get on the same page before we head over. If not, I’ll end up making you buy out the whole store... I’ve

been known to suggest a little too much before. There are just so many options.”

They spent the next half hour going over the list, crossing some items off, and then they moved onto the designs Marcus had come up with, showing where each plant would go. Teddy was pleased by the depth and time Marcus put into his garden. When it was time to leave, Marcus told him to bring Mags along. He wasn't too sure if that would be okay, but Marcus just nodded his head and asked Mags if she wanted to come along. Mags licked his face in her response, her little tail wagging at the attention she was receiving.

“My dad often takes Rosy to work with him, and lets her roam freely through the place. As long as we keep Mags on her leash, my dad should be okay with her coming along,” Marcus explained.

“Okay, I think she'll have fun coming out with us.” Teddy grabbed Mags' light-green harness and her leash before they headed out the door.

Teddy was startled when he met Marcus' dad. Which was ridiculous. He should have assumed he would be meeting him, since he was the owner of the store. Marcus and he were just friends, even if he liked him. He wasn't one hundred percent sure about Marcus. He felt that Marcus had flirted with him a few times before, but he hated to assume the younger man was interested in more than just friendship. Perhaps Marcus wanted him to meet his parents, to gauge their reaction to Teddy. But perhaps he was reading between the lines, to what his hopes were aiming for. More than friendship with Marcus. In fact, Marcus' mother was there too, which from the look on Marcus' face, wasn't something that happened often. His father was an upfront and friendly man. He could see a lot of him in Marcus.

“Hi! It's nice to meet you, Teddy.” Marcus' father held out his hand to him, which he took.

“Hello, Mr. Wisheart.” Teddy shook with his free hand.

“Mr. Wisheart makes me feel old. You can just call me Brian, and this here.” He pointed to a shorter woman with brown hair and hazel eyes. “Is my wife, Anna.”

Teddy politely took Anna's hand and exchanged pleasantries. She darted her eyes between the two of them and smiled broadly at them, nodding her head as if she was in agreement with some conclusion she came to.

“So, who do we have here?” She motioned to his other arm, which was currently cradling a squirming pup.

“This here is Mags.” He picked up her paw and waved “hi” to them.

“Yeah, she’s Rosy’s new friend, the one I told you about. Isn’t that right, Rosy?” Marcus patted Rosy on the head, and she barked in response, causing the group to chuckle.

“Well, I brought along a list. So, I guess we’ll get started. See you around, Mom and Dad.” Marcus grabbed a buggy and started further into the store, Rosy quick at his feet. Teddy tipped his head towards the parents and headed off after the younger man.

“I’m sorry about that,” Marcus spoke once they were out of hearing range. “I didn’t know Mom would be here too. My dad must have said something to her. I talk about you to them often.”

“Hey. No worries. Your folks seem nice,” Teddy replied.

Marcus hustled around with Teddy in tow; he crossed things off the list as he picked them up and added them to the cart. Mags seemed to have fun, and of course, the few customers that were in the store all came over, cooing how cute and adorable she was, which she ate up. With Marcus’ help, they finished up relatively quickly, and they were on the road back to Teddy’s before they knew it. They made a few stops on the way to pick up some beer and stuff to make a pizza, to enjoy later on during their *Buffy* marathon.

Once again, Marcus took command over the garden. As he started to section it off, he ordered Teddy to bring the plants from the truck. They’d both fallen into a comfortable silence while they did their tasks. Finally, after Marcus seemed satisfied, he showed Teddy the “proper way” to put in the plants. Teddy just nodded, though it looked like all you did was take the trowel, dig a small hole, drop the small plant in, and move on to the next spot. By the second row, Marcus deemed it too hot and took off his shirt, daring Teddy to do the same. Teddy decided to throw caution to the wind, and removed his shirt too.

“Don’t laugh at me.” Teddy had his hands on the hem of his shirt, as he was preparing to show off his naked upper torso.

“Why would I laugh at you?” Marcus soaked in the delicious sight in front of him as he stared at Teddy shirtless. He was surprised to see that Teddy had his nipples pierced, with a few chest hairs and a very noticeable happy trail, leading from his navel on down.

“Look at you and then me. You’re young, and fit and toned. You have an amazing, sexy-looking body.”

“Well, thanks. I personally think you look pretty sexy, especially with those nipple piercings. That was a welcomed surprise.” Marcus leered at him with heat in his eyes.

“Oh, well I got those in college. Let me tell you, don’t get drunk and play truth or dare. Needless to say, I lost.” This time the blush traveled down his whole body as Teddy was enjoying the look Marcus was giving him.

“Well, I approve.” Marcus winked flirtatiously and flexed his arms, knowing Teddy would like his arms. “Let’s finish up, so we can go inside to... eat.” Marcus winked when he said “eat.” Teddy at this point had no idea what Marcus planned on eating, but was on board for either or both. His mind was in the gutter.

Teddy was lost in his thoughts as they finished planting the garden. He couldn’t believe it. Marcus was flirting with him. *What do I say? What to do? How do I flirt?* Was he pulling it off too? He was never good at reading signals. Then it dawned on him. They’d been flirting for weeks. Would Marcus see the blush reaching down to Teddy’s chest? Teddy finally realized the truth; Marcus was interested in him. All those times their knees touched or when Marcus’ hand would “accidentally” brush against his. In fact, he had done it to Marcus too. Those weren’t accidents at all. How could he have been so unaware? It seemed Marcus had been interested in him for a while, maybe as long as he had been attracted to Marcus. They’d already become fast friends over the time he had known him. Now it seemed that they could be more if one of them had the nerve to take the next step.

Chapter Six

Marcus

He was itching to walk over and lay claim to those nipple piercings the moment he saw them. He wanted to grab them, twist them, suck them into his mouth, and tug them with his teeth. But he had restrained himself. Marcus watched Teddy on the other side of the garden, who seemed to be lost in thought. He saw Teddy's face turn red, and his eyes shone with happiness. He wasn't sure what Teddy was thinking about, but he knew one thing for certain, he was starting to get hard. It was one of the reasons he hastened to finish up the garden.

The garden looked good after they finished setting it all up. They trudged inside and Teddy declared to Marcus he was too sticky and dirty, and was going to take a shower. Instead of using his en suite shower, Marcus watched Teddy walk into his guest bathroom. Marcus noticed that bathroom backed up to the kitchen. He could hear the water running while he set to making the pizza topped with mushrooms, pepperoni, onions, and hot peppers. It brought images of a naked, wet Teddy to his mind. As he was setting the pizza in the oven to cook, Teddy came out looking like an Adonis, at least in Marcus' eyes. His hair was still damp, cargo pants hanging low and loose on his hips, showing off the well-defined hipbones. As Teddy walked towards Marcus, his muscles flexed as he donned a white tank top. Teddy shook his head and grinned at Marcus' open and honest facial expression. Marcus saw the smirk on Teddy's face, knowing Teddy was aware of the impact it was having on him.

Marcus' lips parted as he stared at the sexy man in front of him. Suddenly, his erection from earlier was starting to make a valiant comeback. It was Marcus' turn to avert his eyes as his cheeks started to flush. It took a couple of tries before he was able to regain the ability to speak, stunned speechless from the gorgeous view. He announced he should take a shower too. Because he was sweaty.

"You know where the shower is, and the clean towels are under the sink." Teddy hitched his thumb over his shoulder towards the hallway. Marcus was still showcasing his naked upper body, having never put his shirt back on since he had taken it off outside earlier. Once he entered the bathroom, he didn't waste any time jumping out of the rest of his clothes, his hard, leaking prick bouncing onto his stomach when he dropped his pants and boxers. He ignored it

before he got into the shower. The moment he was under the hot water streaming from the showerhead, he started to stroke himself, relishing in the feel of it. He leaned his other hand against the wall and worked quickly towards a release, trying his hardest to keep his moans from getting too loud. He didn't want Teddy to overhear what he was doing in the shower. He was still coming down from his orgasm when he heard a knock on the door, scaring the bejesus out of him.

“Marcus?”

“Yes,” Marcus squeaked, letting go of his wrung-out dick.

“I brought you some clean clothes. I will just leave them right outside the door, okay?”

“Thanks, Teddy.” Marcus heard Teddy walk away and sighed deeply. His whole body was flushed, and it wasn't because of the hot water cascading over him.

After the shower, he found the clothes, very similar to the ones Teddy was wearing. It was nice that they were almost identical in size, though he was slighter taller than Teddy. Teddy's shorts were a little loose, but still fit comfortably, even though they hung low. He made it a point to walk out to the kitchen where Teddy was, and waited until Teddy noticed him. He stretched his arms high above him, making sure to flex his abtastic abs and his arms. The pants slipped a little, totally by accident before he slipped the borrowed T-shirt over his head onto his body.

Teddy had already set up the DVD player for their *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* marathon while he was in the shower. They discussed it earlier, and decided to start from the beginning and watch every episode. Eventually, they'd finish all the seasons. It would be something for the both of them to look forward to (and an excuse to spend more time together). He saw a very content Rosy, and Mags lying on the biggest dog bed ever in the corner of the living room, both working on a KONG.

“I hope you don't mind. I had made some healthy stuffing, and had it frozen in the KONGs for them.” Teddy looked sheepishly towards Marcus

“Did you go buy Rosy a KONG?” Marcus felt happy at Teddy's kindness.

“Yes. I felt bad and didn't want Rosy to feel left out.” Teddy fidgeted in his space.

“You're just a big loving Teddy bear, aren't you?” Marcus glided up into Teddy's personal space. “That was very nice of you,” he said seductively. Then

he smirked, as he reached around him and opened the fridge, snagging the six-pack and winked at him. "Grab the pizza, I got the beer."

By the end of the third or fourth episode, it was obvious they shouldn't be allowed to mix beer and liquor even though they drank a glass of water before switching from one to the other. After the beer disappeared, they decided to make up their own rules for taking shots of Jack Daniels. Every time Giles snuck up on someone. Buffy was annoyed by Angel. Buffy says the word vampire. They were pretty tipsy. They were responsible enough, though, to put it away and move on to strictly water. Though being tipsy had led them to some "awesome" ideas, which led to them sitting facing each other with a small bowl of hot peppers in between them.

"Okay." Teddy giggled a little. "The rules. How many hot peppers can we eat before reaching for the glass of water?" Teddy was grinning like a goon.

"You are so going to lose! Ready. Set. Go!" They ended up tying in the end, both of them eating five. They were both sweating, and Teddy thought they needed ice cream to help soothe the hotness burning their throats, since he'd run out of milk that morning.

It got a little dirty. Marcus had dropped some ice cream on his arms. Heat reflected in Teddy's eyes as he watched the ice cream drip down and off Marcus' arms, who was giggling that he missed his mouth. Teddy took hold of Marcus' arm, and made eye contact with Marcus, who reflected the same lustful look. Maintaining eye contact, Teddy brought the dirty arm up and licked off the offending ice cream, slowly and deliberately. Then just as he finished, Teddy's focus snapped. He let go, and sat up straight, startled.

"I'm sorry!" he rushed out. "I don't know what came over me. Um... I..." he stuttered, "have to go take care of something..." He jumped off the couch, accidentally giving Marcus an up front and very nice view of the outline of Teddy's hard, thick cock. A rosy tint colored Teddy's cheeks, as he turned and bolted towards the bathroom in the hallway. Marcus watched Teddy hustled into the bathroom with his hot pepper stained hands, closing the door behind him. It didn't click and the door was slightly ajar, something Marcus was sure Teddy hadn't noticed.

Teddy's tongue on his arm seemed crazy erotic to Marcus. If he was wondering if Teddy was interested in him before, he got his answer. The dogs were going for Marcus' ice cream bowl that he just realized he'd dropped when Teddy was licking him. As he hustled the two dogs past the bathroom door, he

got a glimpse of Teddy bent over, with his naked, perfectly firm ass in full view. He hadn't heard Teddy wash his hands, so he suspected Teddy would be getting a sizzling surprise soon. He quickly shooed the dogs outside, and let the door swing shut and without looking to see if it closed, he hurried back to the couch at the opposite end where the living room was.

Marcus, who was already half-hard with that fantastic display, only got more erect, as he heard the noises that started coming from the bathroom. Quickly though, the moans turned into a yelp and the older sexy man came out of the bathroom, his Mickey Mouse boxer briefs pulled down to his thighs. His now fully erect cock bouncing as he came waddling towards the living room.

"It burns! It burns!" he whined as he rushed over to his bowl of ice cream and doused his penis in it, moaning in relief. He sat down on the couch and kicked himself free of his briefs. Marcus watched as Teddy leaned his head back and sighed with relief. Marcus burst into laughter, only to have his laughter increase when he saw the look on Teddy's face. It seemed that Teddy had forgotten for a moment that he had an audience. But it only lasted a second, until a lustful look passed over his eyes. Teddy boldly, against his usual character, pulled his erection out of his bowl of ice cream and stroked himself, using the melted ice cream as lube. Teddy pointedly locked eyes with Marcus and grinned. Marcus watched intently as Teddy brought his sticky fingers to his mouth. Teddy purposely took his time putting each one into his mouth, sucking it clean.

"Look at you, you dirty boy. You made a mess. I better help clean you up." Marcus' eyes were full of lust, looking up at Teddy, whose eyes were locked on him, licking his lips seductively, and staring intently at Marcus' mouth. Teddy's cock was dripping in melted ice cream. Marcus glanced down at the fat, delicious looking cock, and fell to his knees, looking at Teddy for the okay.

The moment Teddy nodded and slid down the couch cushion more, spreading his legs invitingly, Marcus laid his hands on either side of Teddy's thighs, and leaned down, lapping around the base of Teddy's cock. Then he gripped the object of his desire and engulfed as much as he could, twirling his tongue around the upper half of Teddy's cock. Marcus proceeded to drop down and alternated between Teddy's balls, popping them in his mouth, suckling them, drawing a moan out of Teddy. Teddy grabbed the blanket he was sitting on.

Grinning, Marcus stuck his fingers in Teddy's bowl of ice cream. He wrapped his sticky fingers around the base of Teddy's cock, fondling his balls

with his other hand, before he dove back down. Marcus heard Teddy mewl in appreciation as soon as the cold sensation touched his cock. Marcus moaned in happiness that he was drawing sweet sounds from Teddy. Marcus could hear Teddy pant more quickly, sobbing louder as Marcus worked him. Next thing Marcus knew, he felt Teddy placing his hands on his head, trying to make Marcus stop.

“I’m going to come,” Teddy moaned, and his body flushed a nice rosy red. Marcus really wanted to drink him down, but he had enough restraint. He gave one final hard suck before removing his mouth. He took his other hand, gripped Teddy’s dick, and pumped. Teddy’s dick was a bit shorter than his, but he made it up in girth.

Teddy started to spray Marcus with his cum, coating Marcus’ chest, some of it landing on his face and in his dark hair from where Marcus was still kneeling. Teddy grabbed the blanket he was sitting on, handing it over to Marcus. He dragged Marcus up onto the couch to lie down, to catch their breath. Just then, the dogs, whom they had forgotten about, made their presence known. Mags jumped up on the couch, landing directly on Teddy’s lap, causing him to yelp in pain as she landed on his now soft, very naked, and overly worked penis. Rosy head butted Marcus, knocking him over, and they both burst out laughing.

“Next time, I need to make sure the door is shut properly outside.” Marcus snickered as he stood up, reaching for Teddy’s hand to help bring him up. “I think we need another shower... do you think we can both fit in there?”

Teddy slithered his hand down between their bodies, still dazed, and grabbed hold of Marcus’ long, hard leaking dick, giving it a teasing stroke before he backed off. “Yeah... looks like I need to give you a helping hand too, while we’re in there. Let’s go use the master bath, it’s roomier, and I added a few features,” Teddy breathed, leaning into Marcus, giving Marcus the lightest of kisses.

“Oh, you won’t hear any complaints here.” Marcus reluctantly removed Teddy’s hand, intertwining their fingers and dragging them off to the shower, where Teddy made action on his promise. Marcus sat on the built-in shower seat as Teddy got on his knees on the hard floor; the only cushion was the shower mat. Four large, super strong showerheads cascaded water around them. Marcus didn’t last nearly as long as Teddy, but from Teddy’s happy humming, he got no complaints. They took turns lathering each other with suds and rinsing them off. The water finally turning cold ended their time in the shower.

“Do you want to spend the night?” Teddy asked hesitantly as they were drying off after their extra-long shower, then added quickly, “What about Rosy?”

“She was going to spend the night with me anyway.” Marcus hung up his towel.

“Not that I am up for any more action, I think Mags put me out of commission for the rest of the night.” Teddy rubbed his sore nether regions.

“There are a lot of other things we can do to entertain ourselves.” Marcus let his hands roam over Teddy’s chest. Both of them had sobered up a lot after the “ice cream incident,” followed by the “very fun shower.”

“Yeah, I’d be game. Let’s feed the dogs and let them out again before we settle in for the night,” Teddy replied as he pulled on a new pair of boxer briefs that had a panda’s face on them. He lent Marcus a pair of old worn sweatpants to wear before they went to bed.

“Okay... sounds like a plan.” Trying to hold his laugh at bay. “Loving your boxer briefs. Do you have any plain ones?”

“Me?” Teddy pointed to himself. “Never. Each pair is unique.”

“Oh, something to look forward to. Wonder what I’ll see next time?” Marcus wiggled his eyebrows up and down and laughed.

As Teddy took care of the dogs, Marcus cleaned up their dinner and dessert, putting the leftover pizza in the fridge, surprised the dogs didn’t eat it. Though, they were very helpful in licking out the ice cream bowls. Then he followed Teddy to his bedroom, thankful that Teddy had a king-sized bed. After slipping off their attire, they crawled naked under the covers, twisting around facing each other. By now, they were sober as a board. Teddy started to shift his eyes around, turning red again.

“Okay, Rosy Red, we had our dicks in each other’s mouth. I think we should be over the shyness,” Marcus quipped.

“How did you know?” Teddy exclaimed and clamped his hand over his mouth.

“Know what? Ohh... you have to tell me now.” Marcus grabbed those tempting nipple piercings and tugged them gently.

“You are going to laugh.” Teddy arched towards Marcus, his eyelids fluttering.

“I can’t make promises.”

“You have to promise not to repeat it. It reminds me of my sister and thinking of my sister in this situation is a turnoff,” Teddy countered.

“Okay. I agree. Your sister shouldn’t be on your mind at all while I am lying naked with you.” Marcus twisted the nipple rings.

“My childhood nickname was Rosy, like your dog. My sister always teased me because my parents thought it would be cool to give me the middle name Roosevelt, and I tend to blush at almost everything.”

Marcus snickered. “Your name is Teddy Roosevelt. Oh, what were your parents thinking? And Rosy. Oh, I’ll never been able to say my dog’s name again without laughing.”

“Promise me.”

“I promise I won’t call you Rosy. I’m not that mean,” Marcus agreed and then smiled, gazing at Teddy. He leaned in and licked Teddy’s tempting neck. “You’re so sexy,” he mumbled.

“You’re the sexy one...” Teddy grabbed Marcus’ wrist and brought it up to his mouth. He started from the hand and traced the vein up his arm with his tongue. “Your arms are so sexy.”

“What is so wonderful about my arms?”

“You have such sexy veins... well defined, but not too much.”

“Oh, you have a thing for veins, do ya?” Marcus smirked as he offered his other arm up to Teddy, who gladly accepted.

“Hand and arm veins only,” Teddy replied offhand, as he was licking and suckling Marcus’ arm, but not hard enough to leave hickies.

“Well, guess I should be happy I have nice veins, then.”

“You don’t think I’m weird? I can’t believe I just confessed to you about my veins fetish. I’ve never told anyone.” Teddy looked at Marcus with big eyes.

“Well, I confess I knew you liked my arms. Just wasn’t aware about the veins. If it makes you feel better, I am a bit obsessed with your nipple rings,” Marcus replied nonchalantly. “So now we’re even. Been fantasizing about those nipples since I saw them.” Marcus leaned forward and sucked one of them into his mouth, twirling his tongue around the piercing before sucking really hard on it.

“Oh... that feels really good,” Teddy cooed.

“Oh, this is just the beginning. We have all night to explore each other’s bodies,” Marcus said as he was switching over to the other nipple.

Teddy pulled Marcus’ head up to him and brought their lips together, a kiss that turned to a dueling of tongues and saliva, as their hands roamed over each other’s bodies.

“Yeah, we do,” Teddy whispered before connecting their mouths together again.

Neither of them got a lot of sleep that night. Marcus was just glad that he had the following day off work, since they’d finished Daisy’s yard before the deadline.

Chapter Seven

Teddy

A faint scratching sound brought him from the land of dreams. He groaned and stretched, hitting something beside him, and felt movement and mumbling next to him. Then all the memories of last night came rushing back to him. Marcus on his knees, looking magnificent with his cock in that delightful wet heaven. Then how things progressed over the course of the night. Marcus was right, there was a whole lot they could do, and Teddy caught himself smiling, remembering. Marcus did things to him that made him feel like a teenager. Who would have thought a rimming would be such a turn on? Why hadn't he ever let anyone do that to him before?

A whine brought him back to the present.

The warm body next to him grumbled and snuggled closer to Teddy's warm body. "Five more minutes, Rosy." It took a second for Teddy to realize Marcus was mumbling to the dog.

"I'll let them out. Stay in bed, I'll be back." He hesitated at first. Kiss Marcus on the forehead or not? He slipped out of bed, and put on a pair of Hello Kitty boxer briefs. He left a featherlight kiss on Marcus' forehead before heading out of the bedroom.

Teddy was so lost in lust last night, he'd completely forgotten to put Mags in her kennel, and did a check around the cottage after he let them both out back. He was fortunate to find only a couple pieces of paper chewed up and littered over the living room floor, and the shoelaces were chewed off his tennis shoes. After cleaning up the mess, he turned on the coffee, and slipped into the second bathroom to take care of business, throw some water on his face, and brush his teeth. Yes, he did keep both of his bathrooms stocked with supplies.

After feeding the dogs their breakfast, Teddy crept back into the bedroom, along with two cups of coffee.

"Oh, you're a lifesaver!" Marcus rolled onto his back and scooted up into a sitting position. "How did you know that was exactly what I needed?" Marcus beamed as he made grabby hands for his mug. Teddy handed it over and slid back under the covers with his in tow.

"So..." Teddy started off, taking a convenient sip of his coffee.

“So...” Marcus mimicked teasingly as he moved a little closer to Teddy.

“Um...” Teddy twisted his mug in his hands. “Not sure how you handle a morning after. I feel like a mixture of an old perv and a horny teenager, to be honest.”

Marcus snorted. “You’re not old and if you are a perv, then so am I.”

“I am the older one here, but you introduced me to things... The things you can do with your tongue... just... Wow.” He flushed and fidgeted.

“You weren’t complaining last night. Still can’t believe you’d never let anyone rim you before.” Marcus grinned.

“Oh, obviously I have been either crazy or just waiting for the right moment.” Teddy stole a glance at the sexy naked man next to him. He seemed at ease.

“Well, my pleasure is your pleasure.” Marcus’ eyes lit up. “You were so sexy, squirming under my control. I almost came just watching you. In fact, I’m pretty sure I did that one time...” Marcus set his coffee down and grabbed Teddy’s, placing it on the bedside table. Teddy didn’t have any complaints when Marcus straddled him and ground their morning wood together.

“Mmmm... how do you like that?” Marcus hummed.

“I think I can hop on board with you.” Grabbing Marcus’ hips and flipping him over, they welcomed the morning enthusiastically.

Eventually, their stomachs started to demand food.

“Is your stomach trying to hint it wants me to cook you breakfast?” Teddy teased Marcus later on, as they were still lolling around in bed.

“Please, your stomach is agreeing with mine too.” Marcus poked at Teddy’s growling midsection.

“Well, let’s drag ourselves to the kitchen then. I’ll make us something to eat.” Teddy slid out of bed, pulling his Hello Kitty boxer briefs back on.

Teddy was fretting over what their status was now. He was never good at labeling. Were they boyfriends? FWBs? He surely hoped Marcus saw him as more than a friend with benefits. He just hated questioning himself. He tended to get himself all worked up over nothing. Better to just ask for clarification. Not that they really had gone on “dates” before. Really, he was just some average looking, older, dull man. Why would Marcus want to attach himself to him of all guys? He just couldn’t wrap his head around it.

“You need to stop overanalyzing, whatever you’ve got going on in your head.” Marcus snuck up on him and flicked him on the forehead. Teddy snapped out of his inner dialogue and made eye contact with Marcus. “Come on; tell me what you are thinking about, Teddy.”

Teddy flipped the cheese and mushroom omelet he just finished onto a plate, handing it off to Marcus. Then he started on another for himself. Marcus grabbed his toast and reloaded the toaster for Teddy.

“Well...” Teddy said a minute or so later, thankful he was busy cooking so he had something to do with his hands. “I just want to get things straight with us. I mean on the same page, not straight, straight.” Heat blossomed over Teddy’s face as he got tongue twisted.

Marcus just laughed as Teddy got tongue twisted. He was filling two glasses full of orange juice.

“Teddy, would you do me the honor of letting me be your boyfriend?” Marcus sipped his juice as he watched Teddy still for a moment, before turning around real quick.

“Really! You’d be okay being called my boyfriend? This town isn’t very big and everyone knows us.” Teddy turned back to his omelet that was almost done.

“It’s none of their business. I like you. You like me too I presume?” Marcus put his left elbow on the table, resting his chin on his hand. Teddy saw Marcus’ eyes sparkle as he waited for Teddy’s response.

“Um, duh. I think we covered that intimately last night. But what about your parents? Aren’t you worried about how they’ll react?” he asked worriedly. He didn’t want to come between Marcus’ close-knit family.

“My parents, well my dad... especially, might be shocked that we’re more than friends. Though, I think my mom has a strong suspicion already. But they raised me to be myself and be open-minded. They were fine when I came out to them. I’m sure they’ll accept you too. You’re a likable person.” Marcus leaned back in his chair and waited for Teddy to join him at the table before they started to eat. “You were already planning on meeting my friends on Friday night, officially. Mike will be among them, too. How do you feel about announcing we’re more than friends then?” Marcus stated matter-of-factly.

“I’ve talked with Mike on the phone a few times, but I’ve been neglecting hanging out with him. He joked with me about finally meeting the rest of the

gang this Friday.” Teddy stood next to Marcus as he cleaned off their dirty plates. He didn’t ask Marcus to clean; it was just one of those acts that he did without a word. “Okay, I’d like that. If I am going to be friends with them, I’d rather start off with them being comfortable that we are an ‘us.’”

“Excellent.” Happiness shone on Marcus’ face, and his grin lit up the room.

After that, Teddy rolled the word boyfriend around in his head. He liked the sound of that very much. He’d been pining after him for weeks, having wild fantasies about the younger man. Not that he told Marcus about them. Teddy had several hot, smoldering sex dreams about Marcus pouncing on him and pounding him into the next county, bringing yells of ecstasy from him. His heart was beating fast, like a hummingbird, with nerves and excitement about the upcoming Friday announcement. At least Mike would be there too. He knew Marcus would be the one to tell everyone the news when they met up. All Teddy would have to do is be there, by Marcus’ side, something that he had fantasized about, but never thought it’d be a reality. Life was fantastic. His sister had told him to get out and meet new people, though he was sure she didn’t mean this way. Though he was nervous, a part of him, primal and raw, was looking forward to laying claim on Marcus. He was his, and no one else’s.

They hadn’t announced it yet and as far as Teddy was aware, Marcus was waiting until Friday to tell everyone. He hadn’t even told his sister yet. He was telling himself he was still getting used to the idea, but he was also a bit nervous about her reaction. He was contemplating telling Mike before Friday. Mike was meeting him at the dog park with his dog, to let their dogs play on Thursday. It had been a while since they’d gotten to hang out, and Marcus would be busy at his job. He didn’t want to be one of those people who neglected everyone else when they started a new relationship.

It was nice though, that Marcus was letting the two of them have the rest of the week to just focus on themselves, but Teddy was ready to go out on a date. A real one. So, on Wednesday, Teddy asked Marcus if he wanted to go to lunch at Daisy’s. Teddy felt a little guilty skipping out on his lunches at Daisy’s recently, too.

When Teddy tried to pull his hand out of Marcus’ as they neared the entrance, Marcus held on tight and pulled him in, waving his hand at Daisy as he paraded him across the café to a corner table. Living up to her name, Daisy had a delighted look on her face when she bounded over to their table with their

usual drinks. Both of them loved Mountain Dew. Teddy was shocked that Daisy's beaming smile didn't shatter the windows; it was so big and bright. He let go a breath he didn't know he was holding. She slid into the chair opposite them.

"Boys! I am so happy to see you both... and together." She beamed, knowingly. "I just knew it. No wonder I haven't seen you in a little while."

"Well, actually, Marcus has been busy helping me plant my garden," Teddy corrected her.

"Oh, is that what they are calling it these days." Daisy winked at him.

Teddy could feel the heat rise up on his face. Well, that too...

Marcus barked out a loud laugh. "Well, I did also offer to help him with his garden. It was the perfect opportunity to flaunt myself in front of him, and catch me a handsome man. I think it worked pretty well. Got me a boyfriend now." Marcus glanced over at him as he was currently flushing a nice rosy color. Marcus chuckled probably remembering Teddy's childhood nickname.

"Maarrccusss..." Teddy kicked him in the shin and looked at Daisy with big eyes.

Marcus laid his hand on Teddy's thigh. "Sorry. I just outed us. It's Daisy and she already knew. Anyway, it wasn't like you were going to approach me. You kept running away and avoiding me. Did you really think it was a coincidence that I just happen to have a picnic basket from here *and* have your favorite sandwich?"

Teddy's eyes popped out of his head as his jaw hit the ground. "Oh." He looked at Daisy who was bouncing in her seat with excitement for the two of them. "Well, I guess it's okay. Guess she figured us out the moment she saw us."

Daisy beamed and nodded. "Marcus here, came in and asked what your usual was, so I felt it was my duty." She placed a hand over her heart. "To help him out. You boys are going to have a string of heartbreaks when people find out you're both off the market. Though, I totally called it. I'll be back over with your food in a little bit," she told them as she stood up to greet a couple of customers who had just entered into her café.

"Maybe you." Teddy continued the conversation. "I am not sure I'll leave any behind."

“Teddy. You are very handsome. Just because you hardly noticed it or just ignored it, there were a few locals who were eying you up.”

“Really?” Teddy was surprised and then shook his head. He never was very good at being aware of things like that.

“Trust me, yes.” Marcus nodded.

“If you say so. Doesn’t matter. I only have eyes for you.” Teddy grinned and winked at Marcus.

Laughing, Marcus just shook his head.

As they waited for their food, Marcus confessed that he had planned the impromptu date at the dog park with Teddy, when he saw them together there. Now that Teddy thought back over that day, it was like a date. Ha, it never really occurred to him before. He was ambushed from the sidelines with a first date, and didn’t even know it. It just made him proud that Marcus would go to that extent to reel him in. Anyhow, it was he who brought up the gardening, so he just opened up the perfect way for Marcus to weasel himself into his life. Not that he had any complaints. He became very aware that his mundane life was about to change drastically, with Marcus by his side, even more so.

“I’ve had some horrible dates. Let’s just say, it was good we met the way we did. If Daisy tried to set me up on a blind date with you, I’d have refused.” Teddy gestured towards Marcus with his hand that was holding his soda.

“Oh, this sounds juicy.” Marcus leaned on his elbows on the table. “Do tell.”

“Oh, it was horrible. A complete disaster. You just don’t know.” Teddy shook his head.

“Oh, I’ve been on a total of one blind date myself. It was horrendous. You tell me yours and I’ll tell you mine,” Marcus offered.

They were equally bad. Teddy had agreed to meet a man through a friend of a friend. The date had gone horrible. First, his date insisted on driving, and Teddy caught him drinking a beer, which he pulled out of somewhere! Then during dinner, because he was damned if he wasn’t going to get at least a free meal out of the deal, his date checked out everyone and made rude comments about them. It got worse. He asked for a to-go container, and as Teddy had left to use the restroom, his date threw all, and he meant everything, into the containers and left him with the bill. The plates, silverware, even the salt and pepper shakers all left with him.

Teddy was mortified. Thankfully, the waitstaff, who witnessed the horrible evening, took pity on him and paid for the meal and even the taxi for him to go home. Too bad they didn't see his date take off with their property.

"You know the worst thing." Teddy laughed, remembering the humiliating experience.

"What's that?" Marcus grinned.

"He had the audacity to text me to let me know it wasn't going to work out because, and I quote." Teddy made air quotes. "My nose wasn't cute enough."

Marcus snorted so hard, he literally fell out of his chair.

"Oh, that is horrible. No wonder you gave up on blind dates. Mine was pretty bad too, but I don't know if it was as bad as yours."

Marcus also was talked into a blind date, through a friend of a friend. He should have known better when he first saw his date, who insisted on meeting at the restaurant. He was dressed very nicely. His date was pretty vague during dinner, and Marcus kept catching people looking at his date suspiciously. Still, he didn't say anything. Then towards the end, a woman came walking in, an air of authority and anger swarming around her. You could practically see the fire flaming behind her. When his date turned around and saw her, he let out a high-pitched scream and jumped up, knocking Marcus' water all over Marcus' pants. But quickly the focus was off of him. The restaurant went quiet. The man peed himself. You could see it running down his pant leg. Her voice was eerily calm as she told him he was to be home within ten minutes, she had left their kids alone.

Then he scrambled out quickly. She sat down across from Marcus and picked up a French fry off the abandoned plate. Apparently, this wasn't the first time her husband had done this. That's right, her husband. Her husband's friend would find naïve, unsuspecting people who they would bring in under the presumption of a date. While one of them was having dinner, the other one would break and steal their car, taking it to a scrap yard and stiff their unsuspecting date with the bill and no car. He apparently had just gotten out of jail for doing it. But he was stupid enough to try to pull a con in her own restaurant. No wonder everyone was staring at them. Luckily, they called her and she'd called the cops, who caught his friend smashing Marcus' window in as they arrived. She was nice enough to pay for a new window and promised her husband would be "properly taken care of," which by her tone of voice and facial expression, he wasn't sure he wanted to know what that entailed.

They enjoyed the rest of their meal, and as they left, Teddy brought up about tomorrow.

“So, since you are working tomorrow, I am going to be taking Mags to the dog park. Mike is meeting me with his dog. I’ve been holed up with you and haven’t hung with him in a while. I have been thinking of telling him... about us. That is, if you are okay with that?” Teddy mentioned to his boyfriend.

“Sure, I don’t have a problem with that. He’ll find out about us anyway when we all meet up at Phil’s.”

Marcus, who drove, dropped Teddy off at his house before heading home. He had an early day with his uncle tomorrow.

“So, what is new with you?” Mike asked as they sat on the bench in the dog park, as their dogs ran around with a few others.

“Well, um... I finished my garden earlier this week and have been hanging out with Marcus a lot lately, as you know,” Teddy started off, twiddling his thumbs.

“Marcus is a good kid. He is a good friend too.”

“He is. I get along with him so well and I really enjoy spending time with him.” Teddy huffed and flushed.

“Something going on with the two of you?” Mike asked him as he suddenly couldn’t make eye contact and was turning redder by the minute.

“He’s my boyfriend,” he rushed out.

Mike sat up a little bit straighter. “Oh. Well... umm...”

Teddy looked at Mike with big puppy eyes, pleading for acceptance.

“A bit surprised.” Mike was still shocked. “There were rumors... but I tried to ignore them.”

Teddy blanched. “Rumors, already?”

“Oh,” Mike piped up. “I’m sorry, Teddy. Rumors about you being gay. I haven’t heard any rumors about you and Marcus, yet.”

Teddy took a deep breath. “Oh, you had me scared for a second. I knew this was a good idea.”

“What was a good idea?”

“Telling you about me and Marcus. Marcus wants to announce us when we all get together.”

Mike nodded knowingly. “Ah, you’ll be fine. Marcus has been out and proud since forever. Though, truth be told, you’re the first guy he has dated, who is a local. He must really like you.”

“I really like him too. So, we’re good?”

“Yeah, we’re good.”

Chapter Eight

Marcus

Marcus was excited that he and Teddy were finally an item. Unlike their previous experiences, he really wanted this to work out for both of them. He spent most of his free time with Teddy, much like before, but now, there was a lot more hands-on exploring and kissing. He didn't tell anyone; though he was sure a few people suspected something had changed with his and Teddy's friendship. He had texted Nate, telling him he had something important to announce on Friday, but he wanted to do it in person. It took all his willpower not to break the news to his best friend, but he knew unlike Daisy, Nate would tell everyone. Daisy, who was bubbling with excitement, refrained from spreading the news. She stood by their choice to wait until they came out with their friends and Marcus' parents.

Tonight was the big jump, letting others know about them. When Teddy mentioned about the conversation with Mike, he seemed much more relaxed. Even though he didn't say anything, Marcus was certain that Teddy felt better about tonight, knowing he had Mike there, on their side. Marcus had a sneaking suspicion that Daisy may have hinted about the two of them being a couple.

He really enjoyed being around Teddy. He made him laugh and feel more himself, even more relaxed than with his best friend, Nate. He and Nate had known each other forever, so that was saying something. Though, Nate had been acting strange lately. Whenever he talked to Nate about Teddy, Nate always seemed jealous. Though Marcus couldn't pinpoint why, it wasn't like Teddy was Marcus' only other male friend besides Nate. Marcus was looking forward to showing Teddy off in public, as his. Everyone could look, but they couldn't touch. That was reserved only for him now. He planned on keeping it that way. Let people be jealous, he was the one who snagged Teddy. It was the first time Marcus dated, let alone called someone boyfriend, who lived in the same small town. He never did before, because if things went down badly, he didn't want that awkwardness afterwards. He was willing to chance it with Teddy.

Phil's Pub was actually owned by Dillon Philabom. Thinking Phil's Pub was a bit more catchy, he played off his last name. It was a place where friends would meet. Where everyone knew your name, like from that old sitcom,

Cheers. That applied to Daisy's place too, but she didn't serve liquor. Dillon had a little makeshift stage for karaoke night, and had a few pool tables off to the side. His menu was simple: mushroom and jalapeno poppers, French fries, chicken nuggets, cheese sticks, and a few sandwiches. Nothing fancy, unlike Daisy's. Marcus and Teddy were meeting up with a few of Marcus' friends, including Nate, his uncle Jeff, and of course, Mike. Not that he'd told Teddy that Jeff would be there. He knew Jeff wouldn't spill the beans to his parents (who he thought might already know about their new status). He made plans to have dinner with them the following day, with Teddy, in the next town over, where the movie theater was located.

Marcus noticed Teddy was nervous, before they pulled into the parking lot. Teddy had been wiping his hands against his pants on their way there.

"Teddy. Breathe in." Marcus took a deep breath for emphasis. "Breathe out. It's just the guys. They will like you. You, Teddy, are a very likable guy. Remember Mike is here too." Marcus got out of the car, took Teddy's hand (which Teddy had wiped on his pants) and walked into the pub, with his head up high. He noticed Jeff first, whose eyes drifted down to their linked hands, and just shook his head with a grin on his face. Well, that was a good start.

"Hey guys!" Marcus' voice rose over the music. They'd already snagged a pool table. "If you don't know, already. This is Teddy." He raised their intertwined fingers. "And he's taken. By me." Teddy lit up like a Christmas tree, looking down to the floor for a moment.

"Good to see you both." Mike greeted warmly before he leaned back over, as he lined up his shot at the pool table.

Marcus pointedly looked the rest of the guys in their eyes. He wanted to make it clear that Teddy was his. So, don't go trying to hit on him. He knew it was illogical, not everyone was interested in Teddy, like he was. Everyone knew he was gay, and there were rumors that Teddy might have been too, but now that he announced it, he was sure new rumors would start up. Everyone gave a halfhearted hello and congrats before returning to their previous thing. It was a very anticlimactic entrance. Teddy hadn't uttered a word, his grip on Marcus' hand tightened, as if he was waiting for all hell to still break loose after the announcement.

"Want to team up with Teddy and play a game against me and Nate?" Jeff smiled, nonverbally letting them know, he was okay with them being a couple. Teddy's hand loosened.

“I don’t think we have officially met before. I’m Jeff.” He held out his hand. “Marcus’ uncle slash boss.” He laughed when Teddy looked like he was about ready to shit himself. “I am glad to see my nephew happy.” Teddy relaxed and gave Jeff a hesitant smile.

As Jeff engaged Teddy in conversation, Nate grabbed Marcus’ arm roughly, dragging him off to the side. When Marcus was finally able to see his friend’s face, he was surprised by Nate’s facial expression. He would have thought, out of everyone, his best friend would be okay with him and Teddy. But the impression he was receiving was one of hurt, anger, and disappointment.

“Are you serious?” Nate hissed loud enough for Marcus to hear.

“About me and Teddy? Absolutely.” Marcus stared at his best friend, in confusion.

Nate dug his fingers into Marcus’ arm. “You finally decided it was okay to date a local. And you chose him. *Him!* What’s so special about that?”

Marcus had never seen his friend act this way before. Nate never seemed to care about Marcus’ previous relationships.

“What the fuck is your problem, Nate?” Marcus became angry, yanking his arm away. “You didn’t have an issue with Gavin, or anyone else before. Give Teddy a chance. He’s a really nice guy, and I really, really like him.”

“Ha-ha. Gavin. That douche. I wasn’t worried about him. He lived an hour away. You know how long I waited...” A look of sadness and hurt crossed Nate’s eyes before they became hard with anger again. “Then he swoops in from nowhere.”

“Wow. Wait. Just wait.” Marcus threw up his hands. “What are you trying to say? What about your girlfriend, Samantha?”

“Oh, she’s nice and all. Something to pass the time, as I waited for you to finally notice me. Don’t look so shocked. You know I’m bi. I can’t believe you chose him over me. I figured I’d let you have your time playing garden with that man, and you’d finally realize he wasn’t anything worth your while. Just eye candy.” Nate stared daggers at Teddy’s back.

“Teddy isn’t just eye candy.” Marcus was pissed. He got up into Nate’s space. “What we’ve got might be new, but I haven’t felt this alive. Ever,” he hissed. “You need to lay off. I’m sorry. But you and me. It isn’t ever going to happen. You’re my best friend and that’s all you’ll ever be.”

“Well guess what? Fuck you. I can’t. I can’t do this right now.” He shoved past Marcus and purposefully, knocked into Teddy, hard, as he stormed out of the bar. Jeff helped steady him and they both looked at the back of Nate as he left, and then looked over to Marcus. Marcus was shell-shocked. His best friend just confessed his love to him, and then walked out without a backwards glance. He never expected it. His eyes were bugging out as he watched Nate leave the pub. His mouth was opening and closing. His head spun as he tried to grasp what had just happened. He never suspected Nate saw him as more than a brother. But he refused to let Nate’s behavior ruin his, and Teddy’s first night out as a couple. He threw up a fake grin and walked over to the group.

“Something came up with Nate. Something about Sammy, his girlfriend.” He offered the info for Teddy’s sake. “So, maybe we can talk Fynn into being your double, Jeff.” Marcus noticed that neither of the men believed him, but let it go.

“Sure, let me go and ask him. Looks like Mike and Vic’s game is almost done.” Jeff turned and hustled over towards Fynn, who was at the bar.

“Everything okay?” Teddy leaned in with concern laced in his tone.

“Yeah.” Marcus nodded. “Everything will be okay.”

“Nate doesn’t like me.” Teddy looked hurt. “He’s your best friend. I’m sorry. I don’t know what I did to tick him off.”

“It isn’t you.” Teddy raised his eyebrow at him. “Really, it isn’t you. He’s just jealous I’m so happy with you. I think he has some problems with his girlfriend right now.” Which wasn’t really a full-out lie.

“Okay. But if you need to talk, I’m here to listen.” Teddy let his hand caress gently down Marcus’ arm. Marcus appreciated that Teddy let it go.

Marcus smiled and gave Teddy a quick peck on the lips. “Thanks.” He took his hand again. “Looks like we’re up. You any good at pool? We usually wager to make it more fun.”

Smiling mischievously, Teddy replied, “Guess you’ll have to wait and see.”

Teddy and Marcus dominated the table. Teddy practically ran the whole table by himself. He quickly gained everyone’s acceptance. Teddy was in his element when he was holding that pool cue, laughing and joking with the guys. He even let Fynn and Jeff think they had a chance... then he swooped in and took over. Luckily, everyone was a good sport.

“This isn’t your first time playing pool is it?” Mike chuckled pleasantly, slapping his hand on Teddy’s back.

“Well. No,” Teddy replied sheepishly. “I was the junior state champion growing up.”

Everyone, including Marcus, stared at Teddy. “Really? You cheater.” Jeff laughed deeply.

“You didn’t ask me, now did you? So it wasn’t cheating.” Teddy joined in the banter.

“Well no. But you definitely led us to believe we had a chance,” Fynn added.

“Well, you got me there.”

“Well, next time Teddy is my partner,” Vic called, slapping his hand on Teddy’s back.

After that, Teddy helped everyone with some tips on playing pool. Teddy and Marcus had nursed a total of two beers each, over the entire time they were there. They both also politely refused celebratory shots offered to him and Teddy. Marcus drove and Teddy wasn’t much of a drinker. He had already gotten tipsy with Teddy once, and drinking wasn’t something he really did often. He usually sipped on one or two beers when he met up with the guys before switching to soda. It really wasn’t his thing. Plus, he was afraid he might get a little bit too much touchy-feely with Teddy if he did. Besides the blindside given by Nate, the few guys who seemed hesitant with Teddy were completely forgotten after the pool game. Marcus was happy Teddy got along with everyone, and he hoped when he broke the news to his parents, it’d go at least half as well.

He wanted to go back home with Teddy, but he had an early day with Jeff tomorrow and needed his rest, even though it was a Saturday. As Marcus dropped him back off at his place, they had a steamy make-out session in his car before they parted ways, making plans to meet up after Marcus got off work the following day.

Nate had called off work the next morning. He was part of the crew Jeff got together to work on Main Street. In fact, it was the same crew who helped them with the park. Marcus wasn’t very surprised that Nate called off work, with the scene he caused last night. Marcus really hoped Nate would come around. Marcus needed his best friend. But he wasn’t going to cut Teddy loose and be

single either. He just simply never saw Nate that way and never would. But he valued his friendship. He felt kind of bad for Nate, but felt worse for poor Samantha. She mentioned to a few people that she thought they were serious, maybe even leading to a proposal from him. The more he thought about it the more he got angry with Nate for dragging her along like that.

Jeff, of course, played twenty questions, repeatedly, throughout the day about him and Teddy. Marcus asked Jeff for advice with his parents. He confided in Jeff, that he was nervous about his dad. At least his father, along with his mom, was okay with his only child being gay. His parents' only complaint about him being gay was that they weren't likely to become grandparents. They wanted a grandchild that was biologically linked to them and in their minds, that wouldn't happen, if Marcus wasn't interested in women. He didn't need a wife to have a kid. Just like a woman didn't need a man by her side to have a baby. There were egg banks, surrogates, adoption, et cetera. A lot of options were out there if he decided he wanted children later on. Not that he was thinking that far ahead with Teddy. Not yet.

He called his parents during his lunch break to confirm their dinner plans later on that evening. It had been a while, and it would be nice to go out for dinner together. He even told them he wanted them to meet someone, but wouldn't give them any more info when they asked. Since there weren't many choices in Northville, they decided on the nice Italian restaurant, about a twenty-to twenty-five-minute drive. The nearby town even had a small movie theater, and he thought it'd be nice to go to the movies, before or after dinner, with Teddy.

Saturday after work, Teddy picked him up at his apartment, and they went back to Teddy's place. Mags was pretty excited to see Marcus if all the face licks were a sign when he sat on the couch. Finally, Mags settled down on Marcus' lap and Teddy sat pressed up against Marcus as they enjoyed a few episodes of *Buffy*. Teddy was tracing Marcus' veins on his arms, as they were cuddling on the sofa. It was relaxing, and felt domestic to be sitting with his new boyfriend and Mags lying on his lap. Nothing was demanding. It was Marcus' idea to "help" release the built-up tension of the impending "meeting of the parents." Marcus let Mags outside, and without her to jump on them in surprise, they decided to test out the couch, horizontally, seeing who could make the other come first. They were both very enthusiastic and Marcus won by sheer willpower.

Chapter Nine

Teddy

Being a smaller movie theater, there weren't a lot of times to choose from, so they decided to go after dinner. Marcus gave Teddy a heads-up that his parents were aware they'd be meeting someone, just not who. He was surprised they hadn't heard, since the town was relatively small. He'd already met the parents once, but that was just as Marcus' friend. This. This is a whole new level. Would his parents still smile and welcome him, knowing they were more than just friends? Would they assume he was robbing the cradle? He was eighteen years older than Marcus, only two years younger than his parents. Besides Nate, no else seemed to have an issue with them. It was probably just him making a huge deal of nothing. That was then; this is now. He was sure if he had met Marcus when he first met Aunt Helen, he probably wouldn't even have been on his radar. Just some awkward, punk teenager, growing into his adulthood. A part of him was happy he just met Marcus now and not back then.

He still needed to break it to his sister and Paulie. At least Grace wouldn't be completely in the dark. It still kind of creeped him out that his nephew and niece were only four years younger than Marcus. Truth be told, he was more worried about the twins' reactions than anyone else. But first things first. Being introduced as Marcus' boyfriend. To Marcus' parents. Breathe. In... and out. Thank goodness Marcus had decided to do it in a town where no one knew them, and in a public setting.

The restaurant was small but cozy. It was busy, with laughter and chatter in the background. Teddy followed Marcus in and quickly located his parents, who had beat them there. Navigating the tables and waitstaff, they came upon his parents who were smiling but looked confused.

"Hello, dear." Anna welcomed her son. "Teddy? Right?" She seemed surprised to see him. "Nice to see you again." They slid into the two unoccupied seats at the table.

Good sign. No knives were being thrown yet.

"Did your date cancel on you, Marcus?" his mother, still not catching on, asked.

"No." Marcus took a noticeable swallow. "This is him."

His parents were speechless. You could practically hear the crickets chirping. Marcus smiled weakly. Teddy turned redder than the special spaghetti sauce that was being featured on the front of the menu. He twiddled his thumbs, eyes landing everywhere but in front of him. He was ready for the floor to open up and swallow him whole.

“Umm,” he stuttered. “Nice to meet you again, Brian... Anna.” He took a deep breath and made eye contact with them. Anna looked stunned for a second, and Marcus’ father looked like he was about to jump across the table.

“Marcus.” Brian’s anger was laced under his quiet tone. “What is the meaning of this?”

Marcus grabbed Teddy’s hand and held on tightly.

“Teddy and I are no longer friends. We’re boyfriends. Dad.” Marcus squeezed his hand.

“Brian. Anna. Marcus has been kind enough to put up with being my friend. I was very happy when he officially asked me to be his boyfriend. I hope you’ll come to like me too.” Teddy was proud he said it clearly and with conviction.

“I’m no longer hungry. Anna. Come, we’re leaving.” Brian stood up and started to walk off, then stopped by his son. “He is almost my age.” He turned to Teddy. “You’re sick.” Then he looked at his wife, who was still sitting. “Anna, I said we’re leaving.”

“No,” Anna replied calmly.

“Anna.” Teddy heard Brian’s voice became more stern as if Brian anticipated the difference in tone would change her reaction. It didn’t.

“No, Brian. I would like to get to know my son’s boyfriend better. You may go. I don’t have you on a leash. But I would have thought you’d react better. We discussed my suspicions about them on the way here. Especially after hearing the rumors around town.” Anna spoke directly to her husband. Marcus and Teddy sat motionless, besides their eyes following the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Wisheart. “Brian, please take a seat. We don’t want to cause a scene, any more than we have.”

“Anna. He’s...” Brian pointed to Teddy. “And Marcus is just a kid...”

“Marcus is our baby, but he’s also an adult. Something you need to come to terms with.”

“Well, that isn’t going to happen. I’ll go on ahead to the store. Call me when you’re ready.” Brian huffed and walked out.

Anna apologized for her husband, and then recommended the eggplant parmesan to Teddy; it was the best he'd ever tasted. Teddy felt awkward in the aftermath of Brian's departure, and asked if perhaps he should leave, but Anna just shook her head no, stating he'd come around. She replied that in Brian's eyes, Marcus was still that little boy that followed him around everywhere. Not an adult who could make his own decisions. She also informed him, that his and Jeff's parents had a fifteen-year age gap themselves, and really, age wasn't the issue. Teddy's face lit up with joy when she said she hadn't seen her son smile so much since he showed up into his life. Teddy felt bad that now, two men who were important in Marcus' life seemed to disapprove. At least he had Anna on his side. A smaller stocky woman, but where Marcus got his looks from his father, he took after his mother's personality and no-sass attitude.

Teddy was very pleased with the eggplant. It was fabulous, especially mixed with the homemade mashed potatoes (he got in place of spaghetti). He didn't even mind when Anna bombarded him with questions about himself. He felt happy that his boyfriend's mother seemed sincere when she said she was happy for them. He talked about his older sister, Grace. Despite being seven years older, they always had a good relationship. He talked about the twins, Jason and Erica. How, they both got full scholarships to their college, Jason, academic and Erica on basketball. He told them about Paulie and his adorable baby girl, and showed pictures to Anna, who cooed over the baby girl who was growing like a sprout.

Anna shared stories about Marcus growing up. For once, he wasn't the one turning shades of red. Like the one time where Marcus was sure he could fly like Superman, and jumped out of the tree with his cape... only to fall to the ground, the tree branches slowing his descent. He was lucky; he had only broken his wrist. Teddy took pity on him and shared the story of when his sister convinced him she made him a chocolate cake, only it wasn't chocolate it was mud. Then he chased her and tripped, his pants ripped at the seam, and all the kids at the playground laughed at him.

Anna asked them what their plans were after dinner, and Marcus told her about going to the movies. At the end of dinner, she hugged them both and patted them on the arms, assuring them that she'd handle Marcus' dad and don't let it worry them. Then she "joked" that if Teddy hurt her baby in any way she'd hunt him down... Marcus laughed and Teddy just pretended to. He was pretty sure she wasn't joking. He might tower over her, even at his short five-foot-eight height, but he was certain she could take him out. He knew. His sister might be shorter than him, but she could throw a punch with the best of

them. There were quite a few fights she'd gotten into with bullies who'd tried to boss her kid brother around. No one messed with her baby brother, but her.

The movie was supposed to be a hardcore serious action flick. It was horrible. The only way they survived it was pretending it was featured on *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* and they were the commentators. They sat in the back of the nearly packed theater, their shoulders touching, as they leaned in and snickered, making funny comments. The people around them gave them death glares and moved seats, away from them. In fact, it helped lift some of the tension that had built up from earlier. Teddy had been devastated by Brian's harsh reaction.

On the way home, Teddy broached the subject of Nate, and Marcus' dad.

"I'm sorry." Teddy glanced over to Marcus who was looking out the passenger window of Teddy's car.

"What do you have to be sorry about?" Marcus returned his look.

"About your dad and Nate. I don't want to be the reason to cause problems," Teddy admitted.

"Teddy, don't get worked up over it." Marcus leaned over and grasped his thigh before sitting back up.

"My dad... Mom's right. He'll come around. Just give him a few days. He just doesn't like to think of me as growing up. Too fast too soon, in his eyes. And Nate..." Marcus tapered off with a mournful look.

"What about Nate? Do you want me talk to him for you? I will for you, that is, if that's what you want." Teddy would too.

"That is sweet of you Teddy, but no. Nate is angry with me more than you. He's just taking it out on you." Marcus twisted so he was facing more towards Teddy. "You see. All the guys I've dated haven't been local. You're the first one. And that is really saying something. Our town isn't that huge, so word gets around pretty fast. But I really like you."

Marcus smiled and paused for a second. "You see... that night... and don't get jealous or anything. Nate got angry because you're a local, which means I am serious about it even though what we have is still in the beginning stages. Nate realized it and got pissed, because I chose you over him."

"What? I thought he had a girlfriend. I'm confused." Teddy stopped at the red light and looked back over to Marcus.

“Yeah. More like he is bi, though he leaned more towards girls... until that night, I found out the truth. He didn’t want any other guys but me. And really, since that night, I can see it. The guys he had flings with, did resemble me in one way or another. He assumed I’d finally catch on and pick him. I didn’t. I even told him, very sternly, that there would never be a chance. He would always just be a friend to me. I hated hurting his feelings, but I didn’t want him to be dragged along with false hope. Plus, it’s a piss poor move, treating his girlfriend as second best,” Marcus rushed out.

“Oh.” Teddy was speechless.

“So, don’t worry. I’m sure once he comes to terms, he’ll be back around. He just needs time to lick his wounds, as one would say.” Marcus leaned over and gave Teddy a quick kiss before the light turned green.

“I’m happy you chose me,” Teddy finally said, after a few minutes of silence. “But I’m sorry for your friend. I hope in time, he’ll come to like me.”

“I’m sure he will.”

Marcus didn’t want to take a chance at seeing his dad that night, so he asked if he could stay with Teddy.

“You can stay over anytime you want.” Teddy’s eyes sparkled, as he let the happy, yipping pup out of her kennel.

Marcus shot his mother a quick text, as Teddy rushed Mags out before she could do more than tinkle the little bit when she hopped out of the kennel. Marcus got the cleaner and wiped up the mess as Mags came running back from outside, jumping up on Marcus’ knee. Her tail was going a mile a minute as she coated him with welcome-home kisses. Teddy could see Marcus’ spirit rise a little with the help of his little puppy.

They settled in and watched an episode of *Buffy*, then switched to *Always Sunny in Philadelphia* because Teddy felt they should have a few good laughs before heading off to bed.

Even though Teddy was hoping to enjoy a night of passion with his Marcus, he knew that Marcus was more hurt by his dad’s rejection than he let on. His boyfriend seemed drained and a little bit depressed. He lay there, curled up with his lover, thinking about what he could do to make things right. Teddy listened to him snore slightly and absently rubbed his hand in circles on Marcus’ stomach. Soon, he joined him in the land of dreams.

Chapter Ten

Marcus

Marcus had been content and happy just snuggling under the covers with Teddy the previous night. They spent Sunday lolling around Teddy's place and watching the full fourth season of *Buffy*. He wasn't really in the mood to initiate anything very intimate with Teddy. He was still sad over his best friend's and father's reactions. He tried his best to keep his emotions and disappointment at bay, but he was sure he failed at it. Sure, he was startled by Nate's surprise confession and rash behavior, but his dad? He thought his dad would honestly be okay with it. It tore him up inside that his dad would reject Teddy, and in doing so, him.

Since he didn't have his truck, his uncle, whom he texted Sunday night, came to pick up him up at Teddy's on Monday morning. As they drove into town, Marcus was uncannily quiet, very unlike his bubbly, talkative self, something he knew Jeff caught on, by the look on Jeff's face. Marcus was finally talked into recounting what happened with his father. Marcus was aware that Jeff knew firsthand how Marcus' father could overreact, and Jeff was concerned for his happiness.

"Don't worry about your father. He'll come to realize he was in the wrong soon enough. Sometimes he lets his emotions rule him. I'm sure if you had introduced your boyfriend as any of the guys that live here, he would have embarrassed himself with his reactions. It's different when your loved one is dating someone you'll see around town. There's no avoiding it, like your past boyfriends. He could stay in his cocoon of denial that his son was growing up," Jeff offered.

"He wasn't like this with my exes." Marcus sighed.

"Well your first boyfriend was from high school, and we all knew it wasn't really serious. Then you dated Gavin. Whom none of us approved of, but he lived further away, and we were sure you'd soon enough see reason. Sadly, you got hurt along the way, but you learned from your mistakes. Teddy. He's a nice guy. He seems to be more open since you came into his life." Jeff smiled encouragingly.

"Yeah. You should see him with Mags. They're both a hit at the dog park. I am pretty sure they have a fan club. Sometimes he gets in his own little world, and runs around with the dogs playing with them. It's adorable."

Marcus grinned at the memory a few days ago, at the park. One of the other owners had brought a Frisbee, and Mags was so funny trying to drag it over to them to throw. Teddy got on his hands and knees, and pretended to play tug-of-war with it, before throwing it for the dogs.

He noticed Nate when he got to work. He wasn't in the mood to hear more crap from him, but was saved when Jeff ordered them to work on opposite ends of the street. He'd forgotten Jeff was there that night. Even though he didn't know the reason for the fight, Jeff still knew him well enough to intervene, giving Marcus some time to focus on himself. He worked on weeding, which seemed easy, but some of those weeds liked to give a fight. He even had to bring out the trowel a few times, to dig up the roots. It felt good to work with his hands, and have a task that needed his focus.

He had a bad feeling throughout the day. Jeff broke them up for lunch, and he gave Teddy a call.

"Hi." Marcus' voice was warm and happy.

"Hey." Teddy sighed.

He asked Teddy if everything was okay, but Teddy wasn't acting like himself on the phone.

"Marcus." Teddy sniffled. "I can't do this."

"Do what?" Marcus' voice rose a little bit.

"I've been thinking. I can't with good conscience continue this with you, without your father's consent." Teddy hiccupped over the phone.

"No. No. No," Marcus said quickly. "I told you, he'll come around. He'll see reason."

"I'm sorry, Marcus," Teddy cried full out.

"Wait—" Marcus was cut off with a dial tone.

He sat there and cried. He couldn't believe this. His uncle came to collect him after lunch, and noticed his nephew crying. When he asked what happened, Marcus told him about the phone call. Should he go over to Teddy's? Go see his dad? Jeff said to give Teddy time. That if Brian didn't give his approval, Teddy would most likely stick by his statement, even if he hated it. Marcus halfheartedly worked the rest of his shift, and Jeff took him home. He tried to call Teddy a couple of times, but he got the voice mail every time.

He wasn't very talkative the next day at work. He was replaying the past few months since he'd met Teddy. He didn't want to lose this. The only way to fix it was to get his dad to accept them. Marcus stopped over at his parents' house after work to catch his dad, who he knew had the day off from work.

"Son," Mr. Wishart greeted his son and waved him into the house. Marcus' eyes were red from crying, and he had bags under his eyes. His father followed him into the kitchen and sat at the table.

"What can I do for you?" his dad asked him, as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"I want you to accept Teddy," Marcus replied.

"I'm sorry. I can't. It would be like if I dated Nate. That's just wrong." Brian looked disgusted.

"He's the one. I can feel it in my blood!" Marcus yelled.

"You're young. Soon, he'll get tired of you and leave you."

"He already broke up with me. Because he didn't want to come between us." Marcus stood up and started pacing.

"See. You'll get over it. I don't think he's good enough for you."

"If he was Nate's age, would you still think the same thing?" Marcus tried to change his tactic.

"Doesn't matter, he isn't."

"Well guess what? I can't be around you anymore, Dad. I lose Teddy, you lose me." Marcus started to walk towards the front door and turned back once. "Unless you accept Teddy, consider this good-bye." He slammed the door on his way out.

He climbed into his truck, tears streaming down his face. He didn't really remember driving to Teddy's, but was surprised to see Mike there. Mike was startled to see him there.

"Hey, Marcus. You look like shit." Mike motioned Marcus through the back gate, to a spastic Mags, who was very excited to see him. "She isn't that excited to see me."

"Um... why are you here, Mike?" Marcus finally got up the nerve to ask.

"I'm watching Mags for Teddy. He had to leave and fly back home."

Marcus crumbled to the ground and cried. Teddy left him. Marcus ruined everything. Teddy didn't even want to be his friend anymore. Mags jumped around and gave him kisses. At least Mags still liked him.

"It isn't because of you," Mike finally broke through Marcus' inner talk. "His best friend's dad is in the hospital, and he went to see him. He had to leave quickly, and asked me to watch Mags."

"I'll do it." Marcus stood back up and wiped off his knees. "I have free time now. I have the next week off from work."

Marcus saw Mike give the don't-lie-to-me look, before he followed Marcus into the house and helped him pack up her stuff for Marcus. Mags chose Marcus over Mike. Marcus noticed as Mike fidgeted some. He could feel Mike's unhappiness about his and Teddy's current state. They were good together. Marcus watched as Mike nodded to himself, as if Mike had made a decision. He highly suspected it was about him and Teddy. Marcus would never ask for help, but he'd accept any form of it.

Chapter Eleven

Teddy

He'd gotten the phone call from Paulie at two in the morning, the day before. His dad, Mr. Runekett, had a heart attack, and crashed his car. He was currently in the ICU, hooked up to a ventilator, and in an induced coma. He wanted to call Marcus, but he couldn't bear to hear his voice. He was already torn up over having to break it off with him, and now this. His heart couldn't take much more. So, instead he'd called Mike, who was groggy, but offered to come drive him to the airport. Teddy thanked him, but said he was just going to leave his car at the airport, but if he could please take care of Mags, until he got back, he'd really appreciated it.

Grace was there when he had landed. He'd called her as he was driving up to the airport, to take the first flight that morning. She told him she'd pick him up at the airport, and he could stay at her place. The twins were still away at college, so he could stay in one of their rooms.

"You look like shit," was how she greeted her younger brother. His eyes were red and puffy, with dark circles under them.

"I know..." Teddy hugged her tightly. "It's good to see you. Have you heard anything else?"

They drove to the hospital, and she updated him with everything she knew. Mr. Runekett luckily wasn't driving too fast, and sideswiped a tree on the passenger side. The windshield shattered, littering him with glass fragments and cutting him up. When he was thrown into the dashboard, the impact broke his right arm. His legs were busted up badly also. Thankfully, someone was driving behind him, and called 911 right away. When he had initially gotten to the hospital, they ran a series of tests on him, and found out his heart was ninety-five percent blocked, and he had to be rushed to have a stent put in. He had to have pins placed in his broken arm and legs, and put into casts to begin the healing process. They almost lost him a few times on the operating table. He was lucky he didn't die, by some miracle.

They met up with Paulie's wife, Bella, at the hospital. Her brother was watching their daughter. Paulie was actually on the way to the airport when he'd called Teddy; his flight was scheduled to land a few hours later. His company allowed him to come home a few weeks early because of his father.

“Bella.” Teddy gave her a peck on the cheek and squeezed her into a firm hug.

“Teddy.” She sniffled. “They say he’ll be fine... but he looks horrible. Bruised up and hooked up to all those machines...”

He rubbed her back and told her everything would be okay. The ICU had different visiting hours than the rest of the hospital. They’d gotten there at the tail end of the morning visiting hours. The ICU was closed to visitors every day for two hours in the afternoon. Grace talked them both into leaving. She’d drop Bella off at her place to shower, and give her time to go pick up Paulie from the airport, and Teddy could get settled in, while they had time for visiting hours to start up again.

“Want to tell me why you look so horrible?” she asked him. Teddy felt ten times better after the hot shower and a fresh set of clothes. They were currently sitting in the living room.

“I was already having a bad couple of days when Paulie called me.” He rubbed his eyes.

“Well, we got some time. I’m all yours.” She threw her arms out and leaned back into her recliner.

He told her about Marcus. How he’d been spending so much time with him, and had really started to have feelings for him. He told her they’d finally had a moment, which he refused to go into detail with her, and they officially became an “item.” Teddy proceeded to tell her about Nate’s reaction, and how he’d thought they were a couple before Marcus told him otherwise.

“The worst thing is his father. I tried to overcome it. His mother was fine with us. In fact, she was happy for both of us. But his dad went off his rocker when he found out. He hates me.” Teddy started to sniffle again.

“I thought you said he seemed nice, when you met him the first time.” Grace moved over to sit beside her brother.

“He did. Then he found out that I want to be more than friends with his son, and he told me I was sick. Sick, Grace.” He shook his head.

“You’re not sick. I’m sure he was just startled over it all. You’re a great guy, and his son is what, you told me in his early twenties.” Teddy nodded. “Well, he should be happy that his son chose you. He could have picked someone worse, like an abusive bastard, or a serial killer.” She pulled him to her, laying her chin on top of his head when he leaned against her.

“I broke up with him. Told him, I couldn’t be the reason to cause a rift between them.”

“Yeah, that sounds like something you’d do. Have you talked to him since?”

“No.” Teddy sat up and looked at his sister.

“You just told me all about how good friends you were with him. Just because you’ve broken up, currently, doesn’t mean he doesn’t still care about you. You left without telling him a thing. You need to call him.” Grace stood up to walk away, giving her brother some privacy.

“But...” Teddy started as he turned his phone back on. He’d been so preoccupied when he’d gotten off the plane and seen Grace, he’d forgotten to turn his phone back on.

“No buts, mister.” She pointed her finger at him. “You need to suck it up and call him. If you want any chance at making it work with him, if... *when* his father gives consent, you need to stay on good terms with him.”

He had a missed call from Mike and a few missed texts, from both Mike and Marcus.

Mike: I can't believe you didn't tell Marcus you were leaving.

Mike: Your dog is a traitor. Wants Marcus over me. He took her.

Mike: Call him!!

Marcus: Heard what happened. Hope all is well. I took Mags from Mike.

Marcus: Don't be angry at him. I insisted.

Marcus: Mags misses you... So do I.

He listened to the message. It was from Mike and was only two words. “Call him.”

Teddy played with the phone for a minute, building up courage, and finally hit speed dial number two for Marcus, since number one was reserved for voice mail. He listened to the phone ring.

“Hello!” Marcus seemed out of breath.

Silence.

“Teddy! I know you’re there. I hear you breathing.” Marcus sounded concerned. “Is everything okay?”

“I’m sorry,” Teddy finally managed to get out. “I should have called you. That was a dick move.”

“It’s okay, Teddy. I know you were probably distraught when you got the call, how is he?”

Teddy smiled even though he knew Marcus couldn’t see him. Despite him breaking it off, Marcus still cared about him. “The doctors say he’ll be okay. He is like a father to me.” Teddy turned to lie on the sofa.

“Well, that is good to hear.” Marcus paused for a moment. “I don’t know if you got my text. I went over to see you today, and ran into Mike. I took Mags. She is staying with me for now. Hope that’s okay.”

“It is. Thanks. You really didn’t need to.” Teddy threw an arm over his eyes.

“I know, but I wanted to. Just because you are adamant about my father’s approval, doesn’t mean we can’t still be friends. Plus, Mags is a great roommate. No wonder you picked her.” Marcus sighed.

“Yeah, she is. Have you talked to your dad?”

“I have and he still won’t budge.” Teddy could hear a hitch in Marcus’ voice.

“I’m sorry I caused a problem between you and your father. You two were so close before I came into the picture.”

“No, I don’t want to hear that.” Marcus’ voice rose. “It’s his fault. Not yours or mine. His. It’s none of his business who I want to date. I’m an adult. I asked if he would have a problem with us if you were my age. If he’d had an issue with it, and he couldn’t even answer me.” Teddy could hear Marcus take a deep breath over the phone. “I don’t want us to be broken up. I miss you, Teddy and it’s only been a couple of days,” Marcus whispered his confession, his voice laced with sadness.

“I miss you too... I’m sorry, but I can’t. I don’t want your dad to hate me. It means a lot to me to be approved by your parents. Both of them.”

“Well, I told him I won’t ever talk to him again, unless he approves of you,” Marcus huffed.

“Marcus... I don’t know what to say. I understand what you’re saying, but a part of me is still blaming myself. I can’t see how it would work out for us, if he’s going to be in your life. I don’t want to be the reason you never see him again. Hopefully in time, he’ll come around. But until he does, I have to stand by my decision about us.” Teddy missed his father and mother every day. That was the real reason he’d broken up with Marcus. He didn’t want to cause problems between them, and it seemed that the damage was already done.

“I hate this. I hate that this is happening.”

Grace walked in and tapped her watch and Teddy nodded.

“Look, Marcus. I have to go. We are going back to the hospital,” Teddy regretfully replied.

“Oh. Well. We’ll talk again?” Marcus hesitated.

“Yeah... whenever I have time. Thanks again for watching Mags for me.”

“Always. I miss you,” Marcus told him one more time.

“Me too.” Teddy knew he shouldn’t leave hope for Marcus, but it was the truth. “Bye.”

“Bye.”

Paulie was sitting next to his dad, holding his hand when they arrived. Mr. Runekett looked bad. It wasn’t like when you see it on TV. They could hear the steady beep of machines, and the humming sounds coming from the ventilator. A tube was placed down his throat. His arm was in a cast, and he had two black eyes and several slashes across his visible skin from the glass. A blanket was covering his body, so Teddy couldn’t see his legs, but he could see the outline of casts. He had more than one IV hooked up to his arms, and he was lying there so still.

Teddy felt haunted by the past when he gazed upon the man who was like a second father to him. The last time this happened was with his mother. Their parents were heading home from a business party, and were hit by a drunk driver. His father died before help got to them, and his mother... was broken and beaten up like a rag doll. She was in a coma, but her organs were failing her. Only the machines were keeping her alive. He was around Marcus’ age when it happened. Grace was married, and had a set of twins, in their terrible twos. It was the hardest decision the two young siblings had to make. To keep

her on the machines, or pull the plug and let her go. They knew what their mother wanted, but it was still hard to do. Paulie and his family, along with Bella, who was Paulie's girlfriend at the time, stood by them the whole time. The Runeketts helped Grace and Teddy with the funerals, and everything that came afterwards. He moved in with Paulie and his parents, selling their parents' house to help with the bills.

"Good afternoon, I'm Dr. Hendrix." An older looking fellow in a white lab coat with his name embroidered on it entered the room.

"I'm Paulie Runekett, his son," Paulie offered up the information. "Can you give us an update?"

"If he continues as he is, we might be able to bring him out of the coma in a day or two. But, he'll still have to stay for observation for a few days afterwards." The doctor smiled and made eye contact with everyone in the room, which was just Paulie, Grace, and Teddy at the moment.

"Thank you, doctor. Do you need us to step out?" Paulie didn't let go of his father's hand.

"No. I am just going to do a quick checkup, you all are fine."

Teddy texted Marcus later on that evening, telling him he'd be there at least until Mr. Runekett was brought out of the coma, and Marcus replied to take all the time he needed. He and Mags were doing just fine. Teddy lay in bed that night thinking of Marcus. He knew he wanted him. But he also knew that if Mr. Wisheart didn't come around, that it would only blow up in their faces later on. It was better to just cut it clean before their feelings grew stronger. He kept telling himself that as he fell asleep.

Chapter Twelve

Marcus

Marcus missed seeing Teddy. At least he was on texting terms with Teddy at the moment, besides the first and only phone call between them. He understood. A lot was going on and it was hard to hear his voice. He desperately wanted to snuggle up to him and inhale his scent. At least he had Mags. She seemed content staying with him, and having time to play with Rosy. It had been almost a week since Teddy had left. He kept him informed with texts. Paulie's dad was doing better. Teddy planned on heading home in a few days.

Jeff allowed Marcus to call off work, and mope around for three days before he came over to his house, and dragged his ass to work.

"This isn't healthy," Jeff chided. "I allowed you to mope around for a few days, but work needs to get done. I need you. I'm sorry about your dad. Trust me. I am tired of this tantrum he's throwing. I can't have the both of you being a damper on my life. I'm coming over to dinner with your parents tonight, and you're going to attend."

"But..." Marcus started but was cut off by Jeff.

"No buts. This needs to get settled. And don't think I didn't notice you had Teddy's dog in her kennel when I came to get you this morning. I'm sure he doesn't like that you stole his dog."

"I didn't steal her. Teddy had to leave to go back home. His 'father,'" Marcus did air quotes when he said father, to point out it wasn't Teddy's real dad, "was hospitalized, and he had to leave Mags. I kindly offered to take Mags off of Mike's hands."

Jeff snorted. "If when you said 'kindly,' you mean insisted, then yes. I talked to Mike. I don't think it's healthy you watching his dog after you two broke up."

"Depends on who you ask..." Marcus muttered. "I need to just fix everything to make it right."

"Well, luckily, you have a few of us who are on your side. Mike and I talked about it, and you and Teddy are a sloppy mess because of this incident.

I'm going to fix it. Because I like Teddy, and I see how he makes you happy. Don't worry. I'll talk to my brother."

"Thanks. I tried, but he won't listen to me."

"I'll make him listen," Jeff said as they pulled into the site. "But for now, we are going to work. Okay."

Marcus nodded and set off to start the day. It was good to be working with his hands again. It helped keep him from fretting over his current situation, and it was nice to get out of the house. He hadn't heard from Nate since that night of the confession. He'd shot him a couple of texts, but he never heard anything in reply. For it being a small town, Nate was very good at being evasive. He was thinking about taking Mags and Rosy to the park after work when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

"Marcus. It's lunch time." Marcus looked up to see Nate looking down on him, with a guilty look on his face.

"Thanks, I am almost done with this section. I didn't notice you when I got here."

"Yeah, I came in a bit later. I heard about Teddy and you. For what it's worth, I'm sorry about well... everything. I was an ass." Marcus nodded as he went back to work. He wanted to finish up this section before he headed off to eat.

Nate knelt down beside him, and offered his help. He didn't seem like he was in the mood to shoot daggers at Marcus, so he accepted his help. As they worked side by side, it felt good, like the old times. Finally, Nate got around to apologizing again to Marcus, for acting like an ass. He knew deep down that Marcus would never see him that way. It wasn't like a romance novel. Nate informed him that he brought the truth up with Samantha. Which is how, now that Marcus was looking at Nate without the sun blocking the view he noticed the black eye he was sporting.

"Wow. I'd say I'm sorry, but I'm not. You deserved that for being a bona fide jerk to her. You know she thought you were going to propose to her." Marcus stared at the shiner she left on Nate's face.

"Well, I didn't until last night. I told her there was something important I wanted to tell her. She thought I was going to propose, not admit I was in love with my best friend." Nate glanced away for a second. "I do. You know. Love you. I know I don't have a chance with you. But this past week or so, I realized

I missed having you as a friend even more. I kept catching myself wanting to call you or return your texts. I just needed time to come to terms with myself. I hope you will accept my apology.”

“Of course, man. Teddy deserves one too.”

“You’re right. It really isn’t his fault. I’m just jealous of him. I’m sorry to hear that he broke up with you. I heard from the guys that your dad didn’t welcome him with open arms,” Nate countered.

“I miss him.” Marcus looked sad.

“Don’t worry. I’m sure your dad will come around, eventually. He just needs to realize you’re an adult and not a little kid anymore.” He patted Marcus on the shoulder.

“Thanks.”

By the end of the day, Marcus felt a ton better. He got his friend back, even if it was still a little rocky. But at least Nate was trying to right his wrongs. He even offered to apologize to Teddy the next time he saw him in town. They made plans to go out for drinks on their next day off, and parted ways at the end of the day.

As Marcus ran up to his apartment for a quick shower and change of clothes, his uncle headed off to the main house, to “have a few words” with his brother. When Marcus emerged from his house, he saw his father sitting on the top step of his stairs leading down to the ground.

“Dad?” Marcus closed the door.

“Son.” His father stood and turned toward Marcus. “Your mother and uncle spoke to me and made me see reason. I’m sorry for acting like that in front of you and that man.”

“His name is Teddy.” Marcus crossed his arms.

He took a deep breath and repeated, “Teddy. It’s one thing to know my own parents have a huge age gap. But now I know how their parents must have felt when they met their child’s significant other. I can’t say I like the idea. But he seems like a nice man, and the customers haven’t said one bad thing about him. And to answer your question from before. If he was your and Nate’s age, I’d have welcomed him with open arms. I just worry about you. You’ll always be my child. And, I love you.” His father stepped up to close the gap between them, bringing him into a hug.

“I love you too, Dad.” Marcus returned the embrace.

“Just give me some time, is all I ask.”

“I hope you play nice with him. I really like him.”

“I know.” His father smiled at him. “Now come on, your mother has dinner ready for all of us.”

His dad insisted that once Teddy got back into town, he’d go visit him personally. He hated having his son ignore him, and watching him mope around sadly.

With the tension resolved, dinner was a better affair. Marcus was glad to mend the fences with his best friend, and his father. His father asked if he wanted to come along for a day trip tomorrow. He was going to into the city to buy a present for his mother’s upcoming birthday. He wasn’t sure because he had just started back at work, but Jeff just waved his hand and told him he’d be fine, and go spend the day, father-son bonding.

Chapter Thirteen

Teddy

Teddy arrived home the following Friday night. He'd spent almost two full weeks across the country. Mr. Runekett had a few setbacks, but now was on the road to recovery. He would need months of rehab to learn to walk again, and to use his arm properly again. Luckily, the stent seemed to be working well, and his heart was working better than it had in years. Overall, he was a lucky fellow, much to everyone's relief.

He sparsely texted Marcus a few times, keeping in touch about Mags, who seemed perfectly okay with Marcus and not having him around. She was behaving well for him, though she did apparently chew up a pair of his favorite shoes and the corner off of a library book. Teddy informed Marcus he would purchase replacements, but Marcus said he already had. Marcus' texts started to sound more happy and chipper as the days passed, but Teddy wasn't sure why. He hoped he hadn't already met someone new, which was selfish of him. He was the one who broke it off; it wasn't his concern anymore. Just because he was the one who did the breaking up, didn't mean he wasn't taking it hard. Despite only knowing Marcus for a few months, the connection he felt with him was stronger than any he ever had with another guy. A connection he felt in his bones was a "once in a lifetime," not that he'd tell Marcus that. At least not anytime soon.

He phoned Marcus about picking up Mags, when he finally emerged from a long and fitful sleep.

"Hey!" Marcus was cheerful when he answered.

"Hi," Teddy replied. "I'm finally home."

"Oh, that's good. So, everything is okay with Mr. Runekett then?" He'd learned the name from the texts they had exchanged.

"Yeah. He'll be fine, but he will be in rehab for a while. At least he's alive. He seems pretty excited for someone who just survived a heart attack and car crash."

"Oh, well maybe he's just happy to be alive. I know I'd be."

"Yeah, I would be too. Are you working? I was thinking about meeting you to get Mags." Teddy finally got around to it.

“Yep. I’ll be here for a couple more hours. She is doing well. I left her with her KONG. I can bring her over after work... okay?” Marcus hesitated at the end.

“Thanks. You’ve been so helpful and understanding, even though I was such a jerk to you.” Teddy sighed. “I’m sorry, again.”

“Well you are a dick. Breaking up with me by phone call, then leaving town without a word, but I get it. Even though I don’t agree. I’m not an asshole though. You needed help, and I couldn’t let poor Mags suffer because of what happened between us. She’s just an innocent puppy bystander.”

The corners of Teddy’s mouth moved upwards. “Thanks, Marcus. You’re the best.”

“Don’t forget it. I’ll talk to you soon.” And with that, Marcus ended the call.

Teddy decided to make the best of the few hours without Mags around to clean up the house. For only being gone two weeks, a lot of dust had settled. He hooked up his iPod and played it as he pattered around cleaning. He cleaned the refrigerator, and threw out everything that had gone bad. He changed into some old clothes to go work in the garden, and was stepping outside when he heard a car pull up into his driveway. He didn’t recognize the car, but upon further inspection, he noticed the driver, Marcus’ father. Teddy really wasn’t in the mood to be bitched at and called “sick” or “pervert” but he was going to stand his ground.

He was standing there with his hands on his hips, a scowl on his face, as Brian walked up the sidewalk to him.

“Hello, sir.” Teddy broke the silence first.

“Teddy.” Brian averted his eyes and wiped off imaginary dust off on his pants as he stopped a few feet from him.

“What can I do for you?” Teddy shifted from one foot to the other.

“Um... I’d like to talk... can we go inside, please?” Brian finally looked up to Teddy and took a deep breath.

Teddy opened his door again, stepping to the side and waving Mr. Wisheart into his home. He was happy he’d just finished “spring” cleaning his living room, dining, and kitchen area. Teddy toed off his shoes again, and started to walk into the kitchen.

“Please take your shoes off; I don’t like to track mud on the floors. Do you want anything to drink?” Despite the fact he wasn’t happy to see the man, he refused to be a rude host.

“Water?” Brian unlaced his shoes and placed them beside Teddy’s.

Teddy grabbed two bottles of water, and walked over to the kitchen table, motioning with his hand for Brian to take a seat. He sat opposite the man who rejected him for his son, giving him the bottle of water. They sat in silence for what felt like an eternity. Brian played with his label on his water bottle, tearing it off, before he began to speak.

“First off, I’d just like to apologize.” Brian looked over at him as he tried to keep a blank expression on his face. “I overreacted when I found out.”

“Overreacted,” Teddy finally responded. “You caused a scene, embarrassing us all. You called me sick!”

“I know. And I regret all of it.” The expression on Brian’s face reflected that he was sincere. “It’s just... all I saw was the age. You’re only a couple years younger than me.” He made eye contact with Teddy and told him the truth. “At first, I thought. My God! He’s perving on my young son. What could a man want to do with a kid? Because I’m biased. All I see when I look at my son is my child, not a young adult.”

“Age has... had nothing to do with it. Your son was my sunshine on a cloudy day. He made me want to try new things. He pushed me when I needed a push.” Teddy placed his elbows on the table. “I broke up with him. I hurt him. I didn’t want to, but I did. I hurt myself too. But I refuse to be the reason a father and son fight. I won’t be part of it.”

“It broke my heart to see my son so torn up. I really thought I was in the right at first. But he just moped around, and told me off. My son has never been that angry before, especially with me. And I didn’t know how to fix my feelings over it. But then he asked, ‘Would you have reacted the same if Teddy was mine and Nate’s age?’ I couldn’t answer him. I didn’t want to.” Brian took a sip of his water and looked down to his hands before making eye contact again.

“Well? Would you?” Teddy edged Brian on.

“In the end, I was sat down in an intervention with my wife and brother.” He glanced out the dining room window for a second before he continued. “They were angry at me too. They tried to be understanding. My wife... I knew she was disappointed in me. She told me about the dinner I walked out on. She

was so happy to see her son smiling all the time, and it was because of you. You. I would feel more comfortable if you weren't closer to my age..."

Teddy leaned back in his chair, crossed his arms, and waited patiently as Brian got his words together.

"Then my brother came over, and they both sat me down. Did you know my parents have a big age gap too?" Teddy merely nodded. "Well, I never looked at them and thought, wow, Mom's so much older than Dad. Her parents were so angry when they found out their lawn boy was the father of her unborn child. But they stood together, and they got married and ended up having both my brother and myself. They're still happily married, all these years later. I've never seen a love as strong as theirs." He paused for another sip of water and fidgeted in his seat. "What I'm saying is no. I would have been fine if you were Nate's age. Everyone in town only has nice things to say about you. You get along well with my son, and you make him want to be a good person. Don't think I didn't see him with Mags. My wife told me about it all."

"Your son is a good, kind hearted person," Teddy agreed.

"He is. What I'm saying is that I'm willing to work on not seeing just the age difference. You treat my son well, and you're the reason he smiles. But..." Brian stared daggers at Teddy. "If you end up hurting him, I'll track you down, and make you regret it."

For the first time that day, Teddy's frown turned right side up and his eyes sparkled with joy. "Thank you, Mr. Wisheart. I'll treat your son well, and be sure to keep that smile on his face."

"Please, call me Brian." Teddy nodded and saw Brian to his car, and watched him drive away.

Teddy's whole demeanor did a one-eighty after Brian left. He would even call himself giddy with joy. His plans changed drastically when he found out he and Marcus could get back together, assuming Marcus would give him a chance. He fluffed up some clean bed sheets and changed his bed. Then Teddy ran into town to buy a few groceries for dinner, and a couple other items he needed.

He went through his wardrobe, and picked out a pair of slim-fitting jeans, and a tight, white Henley T-shirt. He heard his phone ding, and picked it up off his nightstand.

Marcus: *Off work now. Be over in about 30.*

He texted back “okay” and then hopped into the shower, and made sure he scrubbed and cleaned every inch of his body. He dried himself off, put on his outfit, and fixed his hair, making sure he had no strays sticking out. He was just walking out towards the living room when he heard the doorbell ring. Teddy did a last check in the mirror by the door before he opened it, grinning. His heart leaped out of his chest at the sight of Marcus. How was it possible? He looked even better now than the last time he’d set eyes on him. He was wearing a pair of jeans with a red, revealing, tight tank top.

“Hi.” Marcus beamed as he was holding a squirming puppy, and a tote filled with her stuff. “You want to take her? I still have to get her crate.” He shoved the puppy into Teddy’s arms, and turned and hustled back towards his car.

Teddy just stood there, a puppy licking his face and whining with happiness as her owner watched the man of his dreams run to his car. He was still standing there, watching him, very blatantly, when the younger man returned with the crate.

“Hi,” Teddy belatedly responded after Marcus grinned at him, and pushed his way into Teddy’s house. He followed the other man into his house, with the happy-go-lucky puppy. He finally set her down and put his hands in his pockets, watching Marcus silently putting her stuff away.

“So.” Marcus turned and smiled at him. “How was your day?”

“Great. I...” His face started to flush, for no apparent reason. “Your dad stopped by.”

“He did...”

“Yeah... and he apologized...” His face lit up with delight.

“I can’t believe he already did it!”

“You knew he was going to.” Teddy was shocked. “No wonder your texts have had a more cheerful tone.”

“He said he wanted to apologize properly first. So... does it mean...” Marcus glided up into Teddy’s space, his eyes twinkling.

“Yes.” Teddy threw his arms around the younger man and kissed the ever-living daylight out of him. Hands roaming everywhere, asses being squeezed, moans emerging from both of them.

“I’ve missed you so much.” Marcus said, a tear dripping down his face. Teddy gently wiped it off, and kissed both of his temples.

“Me too.”

Marcus shoved his way back into Teddy’s space and brought their lips back together, walking him backwards until they hit the side of the couch. He pushed Teddy over the edge, Teddy scooted back to lay on it, completely. The eager young man crawled on top of him, and dove back in, swapping spit with Teddy. Teddy pushed his hands under Marcus’ shirt and pulled it off. Marcus quickly followed suit, removing Teddy’s shirt. Marcus nipped and tugged at Teddy’s lips.

“You’re really here.” Teddy moaned as his hands caressed over Marcus’ back.

“Yes.” Marcus moaned into Teddy’s mouth, as he rutted against him like a horny teenager.

“Oh, God!” Teddy yelled, as his hips ground up to Marcus’ one last time as they both exhaled and collapsed together. He wrapped his arms around Marcus as he laughed.

“What?”

“I just came in my pants. I haven’t done that since I was young.” His eyes sparkled.

“Me too.” Marcus leaned down and nipped at Teddy’s abused lips. “That was awesome.” He lay his head back down and closed his eyes.

“We didn’t get very far, nor did it last long.”

“We had a lot built up.”

“Well, we have all the time in the world now...”

After they cleaned themselves up, Teddy asked if he wanted to stick around and have dinner.

Marcus playfully smacked him and replied, “Absolutely, I’m not going anywhere.”

They had a lot of catching up to do from the past few weeks apart. Teddy knew that Marcus liked most food, and offered to make a stir-fry with his fresh pickings. Marcus was more than happy to help prepare everything alongside Teddy. Nothing could take the smiles from their faces.

“What do you want to do?” Teddy asked in regards what to watch on TV.

“Well, we never finished watching *Buffy*, unless you did without me?” Marcus was leaning back against the counter watching Teddy as he cooked.

“I didn’t. That was our thing, and I didn’t want to watch it without you.” Teddy stole a glance at his boyfriend.

“Then it’s settled. I’ll go set it up for us.” Marcus pecked Teddy on the cheek before heading over to the other side of living room.

The stir-fry came out extra tasty. The vegetables weren’t too hard nor too soft. Unlike Teddy, Marcus liked to douse his in soy sauce.

“Do you want some stir-fry with your bowl of soy sauce?” Teddy teased.

“Har-har. You’re sooo funny. I like my soy sauce.”

“I would have never guessed,” Teddy joked.

“I’ll let Mags out.” There was a nice warm breeze outside that Mags could enjoy while they ate dinner in peace.

They sat side-by-side as they ate their dinner. The fifth season of *Buffy* was playing on the TV. Teddy cuddled with Marcus after he disposed of their empty dishes into the sink, and let Mags back inside. She lugged one of her favorite nylon bones up onto the couch, and curled up next to her two favorite people, chewing her toy as her humans relaxed and enjoyed the evening.

Soon, it was time to head to bed. As Teddy cleaned the dishes he left from earlier, Marcus took care of Mags, feeding her, and taking her outside for one last potty break before putting her up in her crate for the night.

“Let’s take a shower,” Marcus told Teddy.

“We don’t really need to.” Teddy eyed Marcus’ naked chest as Marcus removed his shirt.

“We don’t need to, but I want to.” He lifted Teddy’s shirt up over Teddy’s head.

“You and me, naked and wet. I won’t turn that down.”

Teddy heard Marcus snicker when he saw Teddy’s boxer briefs that were just two big hands “grabbing” his ass. Teddy made sure the water was warm before he allowed Marcus and himself to step inside the stall. It was a very hands-on experience as they took their time as they lathered each other up.

“I love how you feel under my hands,” Marcus whispered as he ran his hands through the suds left from the apple-scented bodywash over Teddy’s chest. Teddy attempted to reach down to stroke his hard cock, but Marcus swatted it away, tsking at him.

“Marcus...” Teddy whined.

“No. We are leaving them alone. I have plans for us after this.” Marcus gestured to his own erection as he continued to wash Teddy.

“What do you have planned?” Teddy’s face was flushed.

“Oh, good things...” Marcus hummed as he turned Teddy around, and moved his hands down Teddy’s back to his buttocks. “Fun things.”

Chapter Fourteen

Marcus

Marcus had Teddy exactly where he wanted him. Teddy lying on his back, squirming and moaning under his control. He'd made sure he'd very thoroughly washed Teddy not even twenty minutes ago, because he knew where he wanted his mouth to be.

Marcus popped off Teddy's dick, and crawled up his naked boyfriend, and nibbled at Teddy's lips, silently asking for entrance. His tongue dove in when he parted his mouth, allowing Teddy to taste his pre-cum. "Suck," he commanded when he broke the kiss and offered Teddy two of his fingers. Teddy obeyed without a beat. Marcus pulled them out when he felt they were slathered enough, crawling back down Teddy's body, leaving wet sloppy kisses down the way, tugging Teddy's nipple rings gently with his teeth.

Once he was back down where he wanted to be, he opened his mouth, and without hesitation, took Teddy down to the root. Teddy arched off the bed, his hands flying to grab hold of Marcus' head, holding him there for a moment. Marcus used his unlubed hand to fondle Teddy's balls, as he circled one of his saliva-lubed fingers around his entrance. Teddy moved his hands back to his side, and squirmed in pleasure.

Marcus looked up, and watched his lover fidget under him, smiling at the scene.

"Don't you dare come," he told Teddy, as he teased him with the tip of his finger. Teddy nodded. "No. I need to hear you say it."

"Yeeesssss." Teddy stared down with his heated eyes and subconsciously pulled his bottom lip into his mouth.

"I mean it. You feel like you are going to come, you tell me."

"Yes, please..." Teddy pushed his cock towards Marcus, getting a grin out of him.

He licked at the base of Teddy's penis, and followed the vein up to the head, then twirled his tongue around as he moved back down. Teddy was writhing in so much pleasure, Marcus wasn't sure if he even notice when he breached Teddy with his finger at first. Soon, it was joined with a second finger, scissoring his hole open.

“Marcus... I’m close...” Teddy cried out. Then there was nothing for a second, before Marcus squeezed him tightly, cutting him off from coming all over himself. “No... please... don’t stop...”

“Oh, we aren’t. I don’t want you to come until I’m balls deep in you.” Teddy met him halfway as they dueled with their tongues once again.

“Hold your legs for me.” Marcus demanded as he spread Teddy’s legs open again, and bent them upwards. Teddy grabbed hold of them, and spread himself wide open so Marcus could do as he pleased.

Marcus sucked on his two fingers, before returning them to the stretched anus, stroking Teddy a few times before he knelt down, and started to work his tongue into Teddy’s asshole. He removed his fingers, and used his hands to hold Teddy’s cheeks apart, giving him better access. He nipped and sucked around the entrance, and teased it with the tip of his tongue.

“Oooohh! That feels so good!” Teddy exclaimed, trying to ram Marcus’ tongue further into him.

Marcus stuck the tips of his thumbs in to hold him open more, as he dove in and speared him with his tongue, in and out. Marcus was bringing out delicious sounds from Teddy as Teddy squirmed, still holding himself open for Marcus.

“Marcus...” Teddy let go with one hand and reached down to grab hold of himself. “Stop. I want it now.”

Marcus gave one last nip before he sat up, moving his hand to his hard cock. “What do you want?” he asked as he stroked himself slowly, watching Teddy’s eyes zero in on it, licking his lips.

“Your dick. In me.” He reached over to his nightstand, and fumbled around for a moment, grabbing some lube and condoms, tossing them towards Marcus.

“Oh, were you expecting to get lucky...” Marcus tore open one of the packets, rolling the condom down his hard cock.

“I got them for us.” That earned him a kiss, so Marcus slithered up Teddy’s body, and devoured his mouth again.

“You ready?” Marcus grabbed hold of himself, and rubbed the tip of his covered dick at Teddy’s entrance. He didn’t want to hurt his lover.

“Yes. Just... go slow.” Teddy hooked his arm around his legs.

“Of course. Tell me if you need to stop, I don’t want to hurt you.” Marcus started to push his way into the hot channel, looking up and watching Teddy’s facial expressions.

Little by little, he made his way in, stopping to let Teddy adjust before going farther in. It was agony, he wanted so desperately to move faster, but he didn't want to chance causing pain to his lover. Teddy had mentioned he hadn't had sex in a while, not since his last boyfriend, which was a few years ago. Finally, after an eternity, he was settled the whole way in. He had to stop, and give himself a moment, if he didn't want to come just by the feel of Teddy squeezing him so delectably.

"Kiss," Teddy commanded and Marcus was happy to oblige. Teddy let go of his legs and wrapped them around Marcus as they exchanged spit.

"You can move now." Teddy finally gave permission. Marcus placed both his hands on either side of Teddy as he deliberately pulled his cock until only the tip remained in Teddy before he pushed himself back in, slowly. He made love to Teddy, moving at a gentle and steady pace.

Soon, he leaned down to Teddy's right nipple, and sucked it into his mouth, twirling his tongue around it. He held on to the ring with his teeth and tugged at it, before returning to mouthing it, lathering it with his saliva, all along fucking Teddy slow and steady. He gave Teddy a quick kiss before he moved on to his other nipple, to attack it as he did to the first one.

Teddy rubbed his hands all over Marcus' back, holding his head down when Marcus was suckling his nipples, moaning with pleasure.

"Faster." Teddy eventually urged Marcus on.

He held Teddy's legs apart and started to move at a quicker pace, the only sounds were their voices emanating lustful sounds. Teddy grabbed hold of his leaking cock and started to stroke it in rhythm to Marcus' thrusts, writhing in pleasure.

"So close," Teddy whimpered. Marcus picked up his speed, pounding into Teddy with quick sharp thrusts.

"Oooohhhh!" Teddy sobbed as copious amount of cum exploded from his cock, coating both of their chests.

"Teeeddyyy!" he cried out as Teddy spasmed around his cock, drawing out his orgasm. He felt the condom fill with his cum, giving a couple last short thrusts, letting Teddy milk him dry. He grabbed hold of the condom, and pulled out his spent dick, peeling off the used condom and tying it off before tossing it into the wastebasket next to the bed. Teddy rolled onto his side, and Marcus lay beside him, facing him.

They spent a few minutes just catching their breath, their hands roaming up and down their sides. Teddy pulled Marcus closer to him and kissed him. "That was worth the wait."

"I didn't hurt you?" Marcus' voice was filled with concern.

"No. I'm a little sore, but it feels great." Teddy brushed his fingers over Marcus' cheek and rested his forehead against Marcus'.

After a moment, Marcus rolled off the bed, Teddy's hand following him, not wanting to break contact. He turned around and grinned. "Let me get a cloth to wipe us down. I'll be right back."

Marcus walked to the en suite bathroom as Teddy mumbled, smiled, and turned to watch him. Soon Marcus returned with a washcloth, and wiped his boyfriend down. "Do you need anything?" he asked.

"No. Just want to sleep now, with you," Teddy replied, and earned a nod from Marcus as he dropped the used washcloth into the clothes hamper. Marcus saw Teddy watching him as he walked back around to his side of the bed, and pulled the sheets down, making Teddy move to get underneath of them.

"Come here," Teddy whispered, fighting to keep his eyes open. Marcus turned around to be the tiny spoon and scooted back into Teddy's open arms.

Marcus sighed in happiness, and they soon passed over into the land of dreams. It was the first night they'd slept soundly since they'd been separated.

Marcus woke with a smile on his face, a warm body covering him from behind. Teddy was snoring slightly. He glanced at the alarm clock, and noticed it was almost ten in the morning. Regretfully, he had to get up. Mags needed to go out, and he needed to use the bathroom. He gingerly lifted the arm that was lying on top of him, and slipped out from under the covers, placing it back down next to the sleeping man. He stood there for a moment, watching Teddy sleep so peacefully, a memory he intended to lock away. He went through Teddy's drawers until he found a pair of sweats he could slip on before he headed out of the room.

Mags was whimpering when she saw Marcus come around the corner from the hallway. Her little behind was shaking along with her tail; she was so excited to see him.

"I'm sorry, girl. Let's get you outside." He leaned down, scooped her up from her crate, and took her straight to the back door to prevent her from

having more accidents. As she was doing her thing outside, he took a quick trip to the guest bathroom, before going to clean up her cage, throwing her puppy blankets into the wash.

He peeked back into the bedroom to see that Teddy had grabbed the pillow Marcus had slept on, and was snuggling with it, still snoring quietly. He silently closed the door again, and jumped into the shower in the guest bathroom. Feeling like a new person after a hot, refreshing shower, he let Mags back in, and they went in hunt of something to eat for breakfast. He found a container of raw oats, and some frozen blueberries, so he made himself some blueberry oatmeal. He refilled Mag's water dish with fresh water, and fed her a quarter of a can of dog food.

After looking around, he found Teddy's laptop, and decided to surf the net. He wasn't due back to work until the following morning, and he planned to spend the day with Teddy. He grinned again, remembering last night.

It wasn't much later when he heard Teddy's footsteps coming up the hallway. Teddy was rubbing his eyes and his hair was sticking all which-a-way. He'd slipped on the same pair of handsy boxer briefs he was wearing the night before.

"Morning," he greeted.

"Morning." Teddy yawned. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"You looked so comfortable and we had no plans for today, so I let you sleep. I've only been up for a little bit."

"Oh, thanks. I haven't gotten a good night sleep in a while."

"I figured. Me too. I slept well last night though. I already took a shower, why don't you go wash up, and I'll make you some oatmeal for breakfast." Marcus stood up from the table.

"Yeah, I think I will." He yawned again. He added as he was walking down the hallway, "Thanks."

They discussed what they wanted to do that day, while Teddy ate his oatmeal. Teddy needed to go grocery shopping for himself and Mags. Marcus offered to drive the two of them into town, and perhaps stop by the butcher's, to get a couple of good steaks. He'd wanted to cook dinner for himself and Teddy. Teddy was on board for that. They stopped by Daisy's to pick up some take-out for their lunch on their way home.

"Hi Daisy," they greeted the lady behind the counter.

“Boys!” Daisy put her hand over her mouth. “So, all is well.” Her face lit up in happiness.

“Yes.” Marcus beamed as he grabbed hold of Teddy’s hand.

“Oh, thank goodness. Marcus was no good when you two were apart.” She turned her attention to Teddy. “How is your friend’s father?”

Teddy smiled fondly. “He’s doing much better.”

“Good.” Daisy nodded. “You guys eating here or taking it to go?”

“To go,” Teddy replied.

Once they got all the groceries put away, Teddy and Marcus snuggled on the couch with Mags to watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Marcus was content just being close to Teddy and spending time with him. Teddy was absently brushing his thumb up and down Marcus’ forearm, gently caressing the veins on his arm.

Smirking, Marcus glanced over to his boyfriend. “You can be honest. You just missed my arms.”

Teddy burst into laughter. “Yeah babe. You got me.” Teddy leaned over and brushed his lips against Marcus’. “I’m happy you’re here.”

“Me too.”

Chapter Fifteen

Teddy

Teddy was overcome with joy. Not only had Marcus' father accepted him as Marcus' boyfriend; Marcus had given him a second chance. It had been a few weeks since they'd gotten back together, and things couldn't have been better. Marcus spent many nights over at his house. Slowly but surely, Teddy noticed his items were trickling in and staying. First, it was some clothes "just in case I spend the night" as Marcus put it. He didn't mind. It was nice to have reminders that Marcus was in his life, laying around the house.

He was currently sitting in front of his webcam, waiting for his sister to answer on Skype. They'd texted a few times over the past few weeks, but they tried to keep up with face-to-face conversations when they could. Finally, when he was about to give up on getting through, she answered.

"Hey Teddy." She slid into one of the two seats in front of her. "Looking much better than the last time I saw you."

"Thanks. I'm much better. I'm able to sleep well again."

Smirking, she responded, "I would think you wouldn't be getting much sleep with your hot, new stud back in your life."

"Grrrrraace." He covered his face with his hands, the blush already coming up.

She just laughed at his expense.

"So, how are the kids?" Erica and Jason were finally out on summer break, and had both come home to spend it with their parents. They each had summer jobs at the local ice cream parlor.

"Good. In fact..." She looked off screen for a moment. "Here they are."

Teddy waited a moment as Grace was replaced by his niece and nephew. "Hi, Uncle Teddy," they replied simultaneously.

"Hey guys. How have you been?" He sat back and listened as they both fought to speak first.

Erica had a new boyfriend named Ben. He was on the men's basketball team. Her schooling was coming along fine. She had a harder time with the academic part, but she was bound and determined to pass all her classes. She

was hoping a professional team would scout her for basketball, but wanted a backup plan, so she was studying to be a history teacher. She found history very interesting and wanted to bring that joy to others.

Jason was studying to be a pharmacist. It demanded many hours, but he'd wanted to be one since high school. At first, he was hesitant about getting student loans and grants, but with Teddy's inheritance paying for him, it took a load off his mind. He still insisted on paying for all his other living expenses, which was why he was working.

"So, I heard you got yourself a new boyfriend too?" Erica spoke up after they updated their uncle with their lives.

"I did." He couldn't fight off the grin at the mention of Marcus. "His name is Marcus and he works with his uncle's lawn and landscaping business. He has a degree in business and holds a few certificates too."

"That's great," Jason responded positively. "Mom says he's younger than you. How old is he?"

"He's twenty-two."

"Really? You dog." Erica waved her hand towards him on the computer screen.

"Don't you think that's a bit young for you? He only a few years older than me and sis," Jason said seriously.

"His dad had an issue with his age too. But no, I like him for him and he's an adult."

"I'm not worried about him being an adult. Aren't you worried he is just a gold digger? I'm sure everyone who lives there knows you are loaded," Jason debated.

"No. He isn't a gold digger. In fact, my wealth has never really been an issue or topic of discussion."

"If you say so..." he said unbelieving, and stood up. "I don't think it's a good idea," he added before he walked away.

Teddy's eyes bugged out. He wanted Jason to accept Marcus. He knew in his heart Marcus wasn't with him for the money. He insisted on paying his share. Teddy remembered arguing about paying for the steaks Marcus wanted to make for them a few weeks ago, and he refused, paying for them out of his own pocket. "It's my idea. I'm paying." And the argument was over.

“Don’t worry, Teddy.” Erica got his attention back. “I believe you. I’m sure Jason will come around too.”

He nodded and smiled. He could understand where his nephew’s concern came from, but it wasn’t needed. Marcus didn’t care about his money. It was something not many people even asked him about. Which he took as a blessing.

It was a few days later when he took Mags to the pet store to fit her for a new harness. She had grown out of her other one and he wanted to grab a few new things for her anyway. Mags was a good pup in the store, unlike some of the others they saw. One dog took it upon himself to pee on every endcap he could reach, aggravating his owner, who had to clean it up. Teddy thought it wasn’t the dog’s fault. Maybe if the owner neutered him, he wouldn’t have the instinct to leave his smell everywhere.

Mags received a lot of praise and attention from the workers and other customers. Which she ate up. She had chewed through most of her toys at home, which he had tossed. Mags was pretty hyped up picking out new toys. He tried on a lot of harnesses, but ended up picking one that had little flowers on it, with a black extendable lead to go with it.

Marcus and Teddy had a date at the dog park. Marcus was going to stop at home to get cleaned up after work, pick up Rosy before meeting up with Teddy at the park. Teddy and Mags were already inside the enclosure when they arrived, and Rosy was bouncing with joy when she saw the other dogs running about. Teddy was chitchatting with a couple of older ladies, when he saw Marcus arrive. Marcus almost couldn’t get the leash off Rosy before she took off towards the other dogs. Mags was chasing a dachshund around. Teddy politely excused himself, and made his way over to Marcus.

“Hey.” Teddy leaned in and landed a quick kiss on Marcus’ lips. “How’s your day been?”

“Good. Been busy now that it’s summer and the grass is growing nonstop.”

They walked over to one of the benches, sat down, and watched the dogs play, as they talked about their day. Marcus asked if Teddy wanted to come over for dinner at his parents’ house the following day. It would be the first time Teddy had seen Marcus’ parents since they’d gotten back together.

Chapter Sixteen

Marcus

“So, you really think she’ll like them?” Marcus was showing Teddy what he bought his mother for her birthday, which was just around the corner. They were sitting on his sofa in his living room.

It was the first time Teddy had come over to hang out at his apartment. When his mother first asked if he would invite Teddy over for dinner, he’d been happy about the idea. Then he started to freak out. He’d never had Teddy over for more than a few minutes before, and spent a couple of evenings cleaning and rearranging before he asked Teddy.

“Yes, Marcus. When’s her birthday again?”

“On Thursday.”

“Are you going out for dinner?”

“I think so. I really don’t know.” Marcus shrugged his shoulders, then looked up at Teddy with a glint in his eyes. “So, we got a couple of hours until dinner...”

“No.” Teddy threw his hands up. “No. Marcus. I am not having any sort sex with your parents so close-by.”

“They live next door. It isn’t like we’re sitting in my childhood bedroom.” Marcus put his mother’s birthday gifts down on the coffee table, a beautiful green turtle necklace with fake diamonds, and a matching bracelet.

“What if they come up and knock.” Teddy looked horrified by the idea. “And hear something...”

Marcus burst out in a deep hearty laugh. “And? They know you’re here. They know we’re more than just friends.”

He lifted his T-shirt off of himself as he straddled Teddy who was still sitting on the couch, watching Marcus intently, licking his lips.

“Uh?”

As Marcus settled on his boyfriend’s lap he repeated, “I said they know we are a couple, already.”

Teddy’s face turned red.

“I’m sure we’ll be fine.” Marcus tugged at Teddy’s shirt, and Teddy didn’t put up much of a fight as he slipped it over his head. Marcus hummed and leaned over and sucked his left earlobe into his mouth, while playing with his right nipple ring.

Moaning, Teddy gripped Marcus’ ass. “Okay... but if we get caught, I will never be able to face your parents.”

“I’m willing to take that risk,” Marcus stated as he leaned towards Teddy, his lips slightly parted. Teddy reached forward and met him in the middle.

Marcus was holding Teddy’s hand as they headed over to his parents’ house, his lips a little swollen from the heavy make-out session he’d had with Teddy on his couch. They came through the backdoor, walking into the kitchen. The smell of dinner was overwhelming and smelled delicious.

“Hi Mom.” Marcus glided over and hugged his mother. “Thanks for inviting Teddy over too,” he whispered into her ear.

Her grin showed off her dimples. “Teddy, it’s good to see you again. Thanks for coming over.”

Teddy thanked Anna and asked if she needed any help.

“See, Marcus. He offered without being told. That is a man with manners. Thanks Teddy, but Brian already got everything set. Marcus, show him to the dining room and have a seat. I’ll be right in, just have to finish these mashed potatoes.” Anna shooed the two lovers off.

“Good evening, Brian.” Teddy offered his hand towards the older man.

“Hello, Teddy.” He shook Teddy’s hand firmly. “Son.” He nodded towards Marcus.

“Hi, Dad,” he chirped. “Here Teddy, you sit here, beside me.” He pointed to two chairs at the six-chaired dining table.

Dinner was fabulous. Homemade cheese ravioli, with mashed potatoes, and asparagus. They were having a pleasant conversation about Anna’s upcoming birthday plans—she wanted to have dinner at home—when Brian brought up Teddy’s parents.

“So, what do your parents think about your relationship? Did they take it better than me?” Brian asked.

“They aren’t around anymore,” Teddy replied quietly. Now that he mentioned it, Marcus realized Teddy only talked about his sister, her kids, and his best friend Paulie and his family.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up sad memories.” Brian looked towards his wife for help.

“How long has it been?” Anna asked.

“They died when I was in college. A drunk driver hit them on their way home from the theater. Dad died instantly and Mom...” He paused and fought back tears. “Mom was in a coma for a few weeks. Grace, my sister, was her power of attorney. We had to decide to take her off life support. It was the hardest decision of our lives, but we did what was right. Doctors told us she was only alive because of the machines. She was brain dead. We had to let go.”

Marcus didn’t remember leaning over, but he wrapped his arms around Teddy. “I’m so sorry, Teddy. I never knew. It must have been so hard to see Mr. Runekett like that.”

“It was. I am just happy he’s doing so much better.” Marcus placed his hand over Teddy’s as Teddy continued. “It isn’t something I talk about. It was hard losing my parents. Grace was married, and the twins were two at the time. Mom was surrounded by people who loved her to the end. Paulie’s family really helped us get through it all. I lived with Paulie and his parents. It was hard, but I was able to finish college with their help.”

“I am sure they would have been proud of the person their son has turned out to be.” Anna patted Teddy’s hand.

“Yeah. My parents were so loving and accepting. I remember when I came out to them. I had myself all worked up over nothing. I told Grace first, who just smiled and said ‘Hey, now we can go to the mall, and you can check guys out with me.’ They didn’t care, just like Grace and Paulie. It was very anticlimactic.” Teddy’s face lit as he remembered their faces.

Marcus went back to eating his dessert, cherry pie with ice cream. “Ha. When I told Mom and Dad. My dad went—”

Brian cut him off, “I said, ‘Dammit, I lost.’ I had an ongoing bet with his mother on when he’d come out. I lost and owed her twenty dollars.”

Teddy started laughing. “Was he always that obvious to you?”

“Well, when he chose posters with half-naked men instead of girls on his walls...” Brian laughed.

After their meal, Marcus and Teddy headed back over to his apartment. They were lying on the couch, with Marcus in front, enjoying not having any dogs jumping on them as they watched a movie on TV.

“So, did I tell you about Jason?” Teddy commented when a commercial was on.

“No.”

“Erica is super happy I snagged a ‘hot young stud,’ her words not mine, though you are one.” Marcus turned his head to get a kiss from Teddy. “Well, Jason. He wasn’t too thrilled. He has trust issues. Anyway, he thinks you’re just after my money. I know you aren’t.”

“No. I don’t know actually how much you have, but it isn’t my business, nor do I care. I’m not looking for a sugar daddy. I like to earn my own money.” Marcus pushed himself closer to Teddy, rubbing his buttocks into Teddy’s groin area.

“I told him as much. I’m sure he’ll come around. I know you don’t want to be a kept man. I always try to pay for everything, every time we go out, and you always shoot me down. I like that about you,” he said as he let his hand roam down Marcus’ body.

“Yeah,” Marcus replied as Teddy’s hands reached into the front of Marcus’ pants. “Just like I’m really liking where this is going.” He rubbed himself against Teddy’s hardening cock.

“Yeah, I thought you would.”

Marcus really wanted Teddy to spend the night, but Teddy sadly, had to turn him down. He had to head home to take care of Mags, who had been locked up in her kennel for a few hours, and he needed to let her out and feed her.

“You should have just brought her over,” Marcus was telling Teddy as he was walking him to his car.

“She can’t run loose yet. She still needs to be kenneled when she’s left alone.”

“Well, then bring her crate over. Or better yet, I’ll just buy her one,” Marcus debated.

“You don’t need to buy Mags a crate.”

“You bought Rosy a KONG.”

“A KONG and a crate are different,” Teddy pointed out.

“Well, I am buying her a crate,” Marcus concluded and ended the discussion. He didn’t want Mags to be the reason that Teddy didn’t want to

spend the night. Not that he minded spending the night over at Teddy's, but he wanted Teddy to spend time at his place too.

"Fine. I'll bring her crate over next time. You don't need to buy one."

Marcus smiled triumphantly. "Great. Mags and Rosy can have a doggy sleepover, here."

Jeff had to go out of town for a wedding, so he gave his crew time off also. Thursday through Monday, so Marcus had planned on spending all four days with Teddy. They discussed what they wanted to do, and Marcus admitted he had a date night planned for Friday, and that they would be going to the city for it. Saturday, they planned on going to karaoke night at Phil's. It would be the first time Nate would be around Teddy since the day he blew them off.

They lolled around indoors on Thursday. Marcus asked Teddy to bring over season six of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. They had already watched the first five seasons. Marcus and Teddy planned on making lasagna along with a fresh salad for dinner. Mags and Rosy played in the fenced-in backyard.

Marcus could tell Teddy was nervous about having Marcus' parents as neighbors and reassured him that they would leave them alone. In fact, he didn't see his parents nearly as often as he thought he would, with them being neighbors.

"I'm sure I'll get used to being here too. It isn't fair to assume we'll spend all our free time at my place. It isn't like you live in the same house as your parents." It wasn't big. Just a simple one-bedroom apartment, with a pull-out sleeper couch, for those few times Nate spent the night.

"Well, okay. Let's finish up with season six." Marcus hit play on the DVD player, and snuggled close to Teddy. The dogs were still outside enjoying the refreshing warm breeze.

Marcus had a set of black TV trays they used, since he didn't own a kitchen table, like Teddy did.

"This turned out pretty good for our first attempt at lasagna," Teddy commented as he was munching down their dinner.

"Yeah, I was afraid we didn't put in enough sauce, but I was proven wrong. You do realize we will be having the leftovers tomorrow for lunch. I'm not one to waste food," Marcus pointed out as he stole a glance to his boyfriend.

“We can make garlic bread to go with it tomorrow.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea.” Marcus nodded.

After dinner, they let the dogs in and fed them their dinner. Rosy was having a “sleepover” with Mags. Teddy had set up Mags’ crate in the utility room in case Mags wanted to sleep in it. They had also set up some spare blankets in one corner. They gave both the dogs an after-dinner dog biscuit to chew on as they continued their *Buffy* marathon.

“I can’t believe we’re almost done. Only one more season after this one,” Marcus commented.

“Yeah, me neither. Have you thought of any other series you want to watch together?” Teddy was running his fingers through Marcus’ hair, whose head was currently laying on Teddy’s lap.

“I have composed a list.”

Teddy chuckled. “Of course. I should have known.”

“It includes, *Doctor Who*, *Six Feet Under*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *The X-Files*, and *Psych*. Just to name a few.” Marcus counted off on his fingers.

“Well, we’ll just have to do one at a time then.”

“I like that idea.” It meant that Teddy saw himself with Marcus for the long haul. He liked that thought.

Chapter Seventeen

Teddy

It was nice to loll around with Marcus the following day. The couple was at the park to feed the fish some bread and hang out. Neither of them had thought about the dogs trying to chase after the bread for themselves. They had to reel them in on a short lead before tossing the bread into the lake for the fish.

“So, ready to tell me yet what we are doing tonight?” Teddy attempted to get Marcus to fess up to the “secret” date he had planned for them.

“Nope. You’ll have to wait.” Marcus grinned at his lover who was giving him puppy eyes at the moment.

“All you told me was not to wear anything I would mind getting ruined, and we’d be eating out tonight. My mind is going a mile a minute playing the ‘what if’ game. Just to let you know.” Teddy bumped his shoulder against Marcus’.

“It is going to be a lot of fun. But you can guess if you want. I’ll tell you if you get it.”

Teddy attempted guessing the rest of the day. Marcus pulled into the restaurant parking lot along with a very nervous Teddy. It was time for the reveal.

Patting him on the knee, he reassured his boyfriend. “We’re here. Don’t get all worried over it. We’re going to have a blast.”

“So we’re eating first before the surprise?” Teddy looked over at his lover.

“We’re going to eat during the surprise.” Marcus smiled as he slipped out of his truck.

As they walked towards the front entrance, Teddy responded, “Well, color me confused.”

It ended up being “Paint Night.” Teddy had heard about it from his niece, but he’d never attended one before. The two of them, along with other strangers, all gathered to paint a picture on a canvas. Usually, the teachers were art students who give directions on what to do. The end result was a picture. Tonight the picture everyone was painting was called *Spring Awakening*.

“I picked an ‘easy’ one for us. I don’t know about your experience with painting pictures, but mine is limited to finger painting as a child,” Marcus mentioned as he took a sip of his Mountain Dew.

“This looks like a lot of fun. I’m actually excited about this.” Teddy’s eyes lit up brightly as he people watched. They ordered an appetizer to start off with, while they painted. He gasped for a second when the waiter was placing their nacho supreme between them. The waiter’s veins looked very pronounced. Heat flushed over his face as he stuttered to cover it up by asking for a refill on his soda.

Marcus held back the laughter until the waiter was out of their range of hearing.

“Shut up.” Teddy poked Marcus in the ribs with his paintbrush. “I wasn’t prepared.”

“That guy is probably in the back right now wondering what he did.”

“They aren’t as nice as yours,” Teddy whispered, as he grabbed a loaded chip and ate it, trying to hide his embarrassment.

“I hope not or else I’ve got some competition.” Marcus’ eyes shone with humor.

They painted the night away. A few of their other “classmates” went completely off grid and painted something utterly different. The picture was supposed to be a lake at sunset with butterflies in the upper two corners. A couple of nondescript trees scattered around the lake.

As they were driving home, Teddy said, “I honestly didn’t think it would come out looking remotely like his.” Teddy was referring to the teacher’s painting. “I am impressed.”

“I agree. I was thinking about finger-painting like those two older drunk men had done.” He chuckled. “I think I’m going to hang mine up in the living room. How about you?”

“I don’t know. But I think it would be fun to do that again sometime. Thanks Marcus. I had a very fun time tonight. I promise next time you plan a fun surprise date, I won’t question it.”

Teddy dozed off halfway home.

“Hey sleepyhead.” Marcus shook Teddy’s shoulder waking him up.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to fall asleep.” Teddy rubbed his eyes.

“It’s okay. Will you take my picture up with you? We’ll just leave yours in here, since we’re taking it to your place tomorrow. I am going to pick the dogs up from Mom and Dad.”

As they lay in bed that night, they discussed what they wanted to do on Saturday. After some discussion, they decided on heading over to Teddy's after breakfast, without Rosy. Marcus had an idea about Teddy's front yard and sidewalk. He'd been thinking about it for some time and was telling Teddy about his idea. It had a lot of potential. Teddy had a stone walkway that needed to be fixed, and the front of his house looked bare.

"I am starting to think of my yard as 'our' yard." Teddy rolled over to face Marcus. "Not that I mind. If it wasn't for you, it would probably be overridden with weeds. You know I've never had to tend a yard before." Teddy pointed to himself. "City man. Born and raised."

Marcus rolled over and threw his leg over Teddy, resting his head on Teddy's chest. He absentmindedly rubbed his hand in circles over his stomach, playing with his happy trail. Teddy watched as Marcus seemed to enjoy tracing his happy trail up and down, in an almost teasing manner.

"I guess that never crossed my mind." Marcus nodded more to himself than Teddy. "Well, don't worry. With me by your side, your yard is going to look great. You're really okay with me taking over your yard?"

Marcus wanted to clean up the weeds that littered the stone sidewalk and put in some flowerbeds in the front of the house, to make it look more inviting. He was picturing some bright colors and maybe a small shrub on either side of the sidewalk.

"I really like the idea. I'm not very creative, especially with my yard. I don't mind at all. It seems to me that Aunt Helen didn't put a lot of effort into her yard's appearance."

"Yeah. Her idea of decor was a few flower pots that she'd replace every year because they always died. She didn't have a green thumb, unlike you. Your garden is looking great."

Teddy's garden was sprouting veggies left and right. He tended it almost daily, and he was very happy with how well it was coming along.

The pub was packed. Teddy was surprised that karaoke night would be such a hit. Mike, along with his wife, waved them over to where the gang had set up. It was the prime spot to watch people as they attempted to sing.

"Hey!" Mike yelled when they were in close proximity. "You've met my wife, right?" He pointed to the petite blonde beside him.

“Yes.” She pushed her husband to the side and shook Teddy’s hand again. “Hi, Teddy. It’s nice to see you again.”

She’d met him briefly the day Marcus and Teddy had gone over to get compost. Or as Teddy liked to think of it, “The day the cow tried to eat him.”

“Hey guys.” Teddy turned around to see Nate standing next to Marcus. Teddy just stared at him. He wasn’t sure about the guy that Marcus called his best friend. It was the first time he’d seen him since the night Nate shoved him.

“Um... so...” Nate stumbled for words before finally making eye contact with Teddy. “I’m sorry. I was an ass to you, and you never did anything but make my best friend happy,” he rushed out quickly.

Teddy gave the nervous younger man a real smile. To apologize in front of everyone took some backbone. “Apology accepted. But to make it clear, I don’t plan on giving him up to you or anyone else.”

“Heard.” Nate tilted his head towards Marcus. “He said the same thing about you.”

After the tension was broken between them, the night had fallen into laughter and chatter. Teddy was planning on just sitting back and enjoying the others sing. Nate’s attitude had changed drastically from the first time he “met” Teddy. He genuinely seemed happy for his best friend, smiling and joking with everyone. Nate engaged Teddy in conversation and seemed interested in getting to know the man who stole his best friend.

“Oh, come on Teddy. You can’t come out to karaoke night, and not make a fool out of yourself.” Mike looked towards Marcus for support.

“Mike’s right. Anyway, you can’t be worse than him.” Mike pretended to look offended.

“It’s true. I can’t carry a tune at all. But it is still a lot of fun. Just let loose.” Everyone in their group nodded.

As the night had gotten longer, and Nate started to feel more comfortable with Teddy, he actually could start to see why he was Marcus’ best friend. They had similar personalities and he was easygoing and charming when he wasn’t acting like an asshole.

“Just to let you know. If you don’t pick a song, we will pick one for you. It won’t be pretty,” Nate finally told him.

“Fine. I see there’s no getting out of it; I’ll pick one for myself. If I let you pick one you’d probably pick something embarrassing like ‘Peacock’ by Katy

Perry.” A lot of them burst into laughter and the ones who didn’t know it were quickly trying to search on their phones for the lyrics.

The songs people chose varied. Some people sang country, others pop, while a few of them picked classic rock songs. Finally, it was Teddy’s turn. There were so many songs out there to choose from, but after much thought he decided on a song that he knew. A song by Bon Jovi.

“I can’t believe I was talked into this. I should have had a drink or two,” Teddy told Marcus as he ran his hands up over his face and through his hair, exhaling loudly. They decided to only have two beers, and then stick to soda. The two beers were a couple of hours ago.

He was flushed with embarrassment when he took front and center, gripping the karaoke mic. He looked at the group that he considered friends and tried to force a smile at them. The first few beats started and Teddy closed his eyes for moment and took a deep breath. No going back now.

They crowd erupted with cheers when he hit every note like a pro. He was rocking out to “Bad Medicine.” He picked the song because he knew he’d get caught up in it and let his walls down. He almost always sang when he was alone. The few times he’d done karaoke were with Paulie and Grace, so no one here knew he could carry a tune. The crowd cheered as he sang on. He let the music and praise course through his body, moving along with the beat. He bowed at the end of the song and his face lit up in joy.

“You sly dog!” Marcus slapped him on the back as he walked back over to their table. “You have been holding back on us.” Marcus’ smile matched Teddy’s. “That was my boyfriend who put you all to shame!”

Laughing, Nate pointed to Marcus. “He put you to shame too. I can’t believe you can sing. You know you’ll be expected to sing every time we come out now.”

Teddy plastered himself to Marcus. “You mean it, don’t you?” You could practically feel the heat rolling off his ears.

“Yep, stud.” Marcus patted his stomach. “Everyone is going to be talking about this for days. We should have done karaoke weeks ago.”

Marcus was using Teddy’s laptop to surf a few weeks later. Teddy’s back was to him getting refills on their iced tea when he heard a burst of laughter come from Marcus.

“What?” Teddy asked as he was bringing over refills of sweet iced tea for them.

“Is that me?” Luckily, Teddy had just placed the glasses down on the kitchen table before he looked over at the picture in question.

“Oh. My. God.” Teddy tried to fumble for the mouse, but Marcus held it of reach. “Close it.” Teddy blushed. “I didn’t even think about you finding that folder.”

“So...” Marcus dangled the mouse right out of Teddy’s range.

“Fine. It’s you.” Teddy deflated. He wished that sinkhole would come take him away, right about now.

“You have a folder featuring men with nice arms that have visible veins on them. Is this your masturbating folder?” Marcus teased him.

“What? No... I mean... No...” Teddy stuttered.

“I heard that pause... and when did you take this picture?” Teddy psychically tried to make himself look smaller in the chair.

“Does it matter?” he whined.

“No. But I’m not going to stop until you tell me. I’m curious.” Marcus twisted so he could watch his boyfriend with a smirk on his face, his eyes flickering with humor.

“Umm...” Teddy straightened up and tapped one hand on the table. “Remember the first time I met you at the café?”

Marcus recalled the day he attempted to talk to Teddy for the first time and he ran off.

“Well, now I know you were just trying to make small talk with me. But at the time, I thought you’d caught me taking your picture.” Teddy could feel the heat flow off him in embarrassment. “I’d already taken it before I realized what I was doing. Here was this very hot guy sitting just a few feet from me, talking to this random girl and all I could do was stare at your arms. Then you turned your smile on me. I didn’t know what to do, so I fumbled and fled the scene.”

“That was why you ran.” Marcus grabbed his side he was laughing so hard. “You could have just asked to take a picture with me. You were still doing those selfies back then.”

“Well, that didn’t occur to me. I mean now that you mention it, it does. But I was stuck on the disbelief that this hot, younger man was actually focused on

me. And, just to let you know, I've never taken anyone else's picture for the sole purpose of their sexy arms. All those others in that folder are ones I found on the internet. And no, I didn't jack off to them. Well... maybe your picture prompted me to have dreams with you featured in them..." Teddy looked off into the distance and nodded.

"Well, I don't think you need this anymore. Am I not enough for you?" Marcus had turned back towards the laptop.

"Are you jealous of them?" Teddy teased back.

"What?" Marcus rolled his eyes. "Noooooo... maybe. Okay. You can keep my picture. OHHHH... we are going to frame it." He dragged his picture out of the folder.

"Fine. You can delete the folder, but I am not framing that picture."

"Oh, I know what you're getting for your birthday." Marcus singsonged and looked pleased as he emailed his picture to himself after he deleted the "Random" folder.

"Well, at least it will be here and not at your place," Teddy finally replied.

"Oh, that's a great idea." Teddy just set his face in his hands and shook his head.

He heard the ding from his computer.

"What's that?" Marcus wondered out loud.

"Incoming call." Teddy scooted his seat over to Marcus and took the mouse. "Oh, it's a call from Grace. I still haven't heard about Jason yet. It has been weeks since I talked to him. I'm sure Grace and Erica have been telling him all about you." Marcus had been there a few times when Grace and Erica called him on Skype, so he had been "met" and was received well. They really liked him.

"Oh, answer it." Marcus waved his hand towards the screen.

"Hi, Grac—" Teddy stopped and snapped his head back as he answered the call. The person on the screen wasn't his sister. He had darker brown hair, and the same piercing green eyes like himself, with chiseled cheekbones like his father. The other younger man looked at Teddy and then Marcus.

"Hi, Uncle Teddy." He turned his focus onto Marcus. "I guess you're Marcus."

"I am, and I'm guessing you're Jason," Marcus ventured.

“I am,” was the only response he received. The younger man was staring seriously towards him.

Teddy snapped back into reality. “Hi, Jason. I wasn’t expecting you.”

“Yeah. I know. I wasn’t sure if you’d pick up, and I wanted to apologize to you over the webcam. It was the next best thing from doing it in person.”

“I think I’m going to let you two talk...” Marcus started to stand when he was interrupted.

“No. Stay. This involves you too.” Jason added after a pause, “Please.”

“Um, okay.”

Jason went on to explain his absence, and the reason he’d been angry. It was more than just an age difference, which he was embarrassed over. He worried his friends would tease him about it. Though, none of them gave a flying hoot about it. Jason’s mournful face finally broke down and looked towards Marcus.

“I can see you both make each other happy. It’s just... I was worried you were a gold digger. I’m sure Teddy told you that.”

Jason quickly reworded his last statement. He explained it was because for the longest time that was the only reason he could think about why a man almost his age would find someone old enough to be his dad attractive on that level, and not solely because of Teddy’s wealth. But from the stories he’d heard from his mother and sister, who talked to Marcus more than once on Skype, he was able to grasp a different version than the one in his head.

“I really do like your uncle. He’s a wonderful man who makes me laugh and understands me. His age has nothing to do with it. As far as him being rich.” Marcus turned his loving smile towards his boyfriend. “Teddy and I have talked about it before. I refuse to be a kept man. I like to pay my own way too. I’ll admit, is it nice to know that Teddy has some extra money. Yeah, it is. But, I have always liked Teddy for himself, and not because of dollar signs attached to him. In fact, one of the reasons I like Teddy so much is that he never once flaunted his money around. He lives a simple life.”

Teddy heard Jason’s fake cough to break up the moment that he was witnessing between him and Marcus. Teddy was ready to push Marcus down and eat him alive. A scene that Teddy was sure Jason could live without ever witnessing. Jason apologized directly to Marcus. Marcus told him it was fine, and that he was happy that Jason was just looking out for his uncle, but he would never take advantage of him... then gave Teddy a leering look, and told

Jason at least when it came to his money; he couldn't make promises about his body. Teddy saw Jason's cheeks turn red, then he gave a half-assed excuse, and signed off quickly, promising he'd talk to his uncle soon.

"Why did you say that?" Teddy stuttered.

"Did you see his face?" chuckled Marcus. "It was priceless. But I totally meant it about taking advantage of your body... maybe I should do that now."

"I can't believe you." Teddy started as Marcus straddled him on his chair. "I think..." He grabbed hold of Marcus when Marcus started to dry hump him in the chair. "That you'd have better access to take advantage of me if we were on my bed." He leaned his head up to kiss Marcus.

"I like the way you think." Marcus jumped up, grabbed Teddy's hand, and dragged him off to the bedroom.

Chapter Eighteen

Marcus

They'd been together for eight months, though it felt like years. Marcus had gone to work as usual, planning on heading over to Teddy's afterwards. They spent most of their time together, either at his place or Teddy's. Then a bombshell was dropped on him. Nate gave his two-week notice that morning. He was moving away, to another state, to live and attend college. He felt like his best friend was abandoning him. Nate hadn't even brought it up to him before, so it was a shock when he found out he only had two weeks left with him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Marcus looked like a kicked puppy.

"If I told you, you would have tried to talk me out of it. I need to do this. I need to move on, from this place and from my feelings for you. I need to go out and find my own 'Teddy,' and I'll have a better chance in another place. Plus, I've been thinking about my future. A college degree would be good." Marcus saw a glint of hope in Nate's eyes. "Maybe I'll meet my own 'Teddy.'"

"I'll miss you." Marcus hugged him.

"I'll miss you too, but I'll be back to visit. I promise and we can still talk on the phone and Skype, like Teddy does with his family and friends that he left."

"You better or I'll come and beat you up," Marcus jokingly threatened.

Then after work he had headed over to Teddy's, feeling angry and sad about Nate leaving. Teddy was sitting at his kitchen table when Marcus let himself in.

"Hey, babe!" Teddy spoke up but didn't look away from the computer screen. "I was thinking the first week of next month would work?"

"Would work for what?" Marcus wasn't really in the mood to talk. He really just wanted to curl up in bed with Teddy and wallow in his sorrow.

"For vacation. A week away would be good, don't you think?" Teddy turned his head towards Marcus for a moment.

First Nate, now Teddy. "What the hell! You want to leave me too?"

Marcus' snapped reaction made Teddy jump, and give him a confused look. "What? Why would I leave you?"

“You just said you want to leave for a week to get away from me.” Marcus wasn’t paying attention to what Teddy had been saying wholeheartedly.

“Babe. Calm down.” Teddy had stood up and walked over to Marcus, taking his hand. Marcus looked at Teddy and squeezed his hand.

He tugged Marcus to the couch to sit down beside him, holding his hand. “I’m asking because we’re taking a vacation together.”

“Uh?” Marcus’ head shot up. “We are?”

“Don’t you remember when we were all out at Phil’s for karaoke on Friday? We got to talking about going on vacation, and Jeff gave the okay.”

Marcus pulled his head back and looked at Teddy. Now that he was thinking about it, he did remember that conversation. He just didn’t realize Teddy meant so soon.

“You really meant it. You want me to fly back to your hometown to meet your family and friends. It’s going to be Thanksgiving.”

“Yes. I talk about you all the time with them, and they really want to meet you in person. Do you want to go?” Teddy rubbed his thumb in circles over Marcus hand.

“I’d love to meet your family. I’ll have to tell my parents. Usually Jeff comes over and we all have Thanksgiving together.” Marcus’ face lit up in happiness. “I’m sorry I snapped at you.” He looked down, ashamed.

“Hey.” Teddy lifted Marcus’ chin up. “It’s okay. Tell me about your day?” He leaned over and gave Marcus a quick peck on the lips.

Marcus curled up against the warm body, being embraced by two strong arms. He then proceeded to tell him about Nate. Teddy soothed and cooed at his boyfriend, letting him get it all out.

The airport was packed. Marcus had never seen so many people in one place before. It was a bit much to take in all at once. He had a death grip on Teddy’s hand, as if they were superglued together. He was not going to lose him in this chaos. A chaos that Teddy seemed at ease in, as he navigated his way to baggage claim, then to the car rental place and finally, they were on the road.

“Is it always this crowded?” Marcus gazed out the window as they zoomed down the freeway.

“This is actually not busy. You don’t want to see it during rush hour. There is no rushing about it. More like a standstill. A forty-five-minute drive might take you two hours.”

Teddy laughed as Marcus’ jaw hit the ground. “I could never live in the city. Our city is a joke compared to this one.”

“Well, millions live here while our city back home only has a few hundred thousand. It’s a huge difference.”

Teddy drove to the suburbs, where Grace and her family had moved to a few years prior. Jason and Erica would be there also for Thanksgiving break. Erica was bringing home her boyfriend to meet the family too. Though, Marcus and Teddy were the only ones who knew. She’d Skyped them earlier that week to ask if it would be okay.

“Are you sure you’re both okay if I bring Ben along?” Erica had been seeing Ben for a little longer than Marcus and Teddy. But she was now serious with him, and wanted to kill two birds with one stone.

“You just want us to take off the heat?” Marcus laughed and after a second, Erica nodded.

“Okay. Fine. I do. I mean the whole family will already be together, and it isn’t like you guys will be visiting often. This way, Mom will meet both Ben and Marcus in person for the first time. Really if you think about it, we’re doing her a favor,” Erica reasoned, nodding her head up and down as if she was making complete sense.

“Sure, we’d like to meet him. Please tell me that your mom at least knows about him.” Teddy had just assumed she had.

“Of course. She even talked to him on the phone once or twice. She just hasn’t met him yet.”

“Sure. We’ll see you next week.”

Marcus confessed that he was happy that Erica decided to bring her boyfriend to meet the family too. He was so nervous about being front and center, and he had dreams about being thrown into a small room and being interrogated by Teddy’s family. Now he’d have a comrade as he faced the family in person for the first time. Erica seemed to be smitten with Ben, as much as he was with Teddy. In fact, Teddy and Marcus had met him over Skype a few months back by accident. She was Skyping with them when Ben walked through the background only wearing a towel. She blushed hard, which only made them laugh even harder at her expense.

“So, we can’t check in for another hour, do you want to stop for a bite to eat first?” Teddy asked as they got closer to the hotel they had booked.

“I thought you’d want to go meet up with the family first?” Marcus turned his attention to boyfriend.

“Nope. I want to eat first, shower, take a nap, then go see them.”

“Sure... a nap...” Marcus winked at Teddy.

“Well, we could work up to a nap.” Teddy winked back.

“Sounds like a plan.”

Marcus was sweating bullets as they drove down the street Grace lived on.

“I’m the nervous person, usually.” Teddy glanced over to his lover.

“What if they don’t like me?” Marcus panicked.

“You’ve Skyped with all of them several times. The only difference is this will be in person. They already love you as much as I do.” Teddy patted Marcus’ knee.

“What?” Marcus’ head swiveled sharply towards Teddy. Teddy gave him a confused look, as they pulled into the driveway. “You love me?”

“Of course I love you. We just flew across the country to meet my family. You’re practically already moved into my place.” Over the past few months, Marcus’ stuff had started to trickle its way into Teddy’s and stayed. He even had his own drawer for his clothes now, and a space in the closet. He had his own toothbrush and a favorite mug. He’d been staying over at Teddy’s more than his own place.

Marcus snorted. “We’re horrible at this.”

“At what?” Teddy was too confused to be embarrassed.

“We never had the ‘I love you’ conversation nor the ‘Marcus do you want to move in with me?’ talk.” Marcus reached over and grabbed Teddy’s hand.

“Oh.” Teddy started to avert his eyes everywhere but Marcus. “Um, well. I just assumed you were moving in. Most of your stuff has already taken over my house. And we wouldn’t move in unless we love each other... So... umm. And we’ve both yelled out the word while we were having sex...” Teddy started to fidget and his face started to turn rosy red.

“Well, that’s during sex... not... this...” He waved his hands around like it would help make sense. He had taken over Teddy’s yard since the beginning. He even had his own key to Teddy’s now. “I love you, and I’d love to move in with you. Officially.”

Teddy sighed in relief. “We’re bad at this. We should’ve had a romantic dinner where we profess our love, then I’d ask you to move in with me officially, then you’d say ‘Yes’ and then we’d go home and celebrate behind closed doors all night long.” Teddy shook his head back and forth.

“Well, I know what we’ll be doing when we get home.” Marcus leered at him.

Teddy’s eyes flashed with heat. “I like how you think.”

“Confessing our love and deciding to move in officially, while sitting in your sister’s driveway. It’s definitely memorable. I am sure the person peering through the curtains at us, is probably wondering what we’re doing out here.” Teddy leaned over and kissed Marcus before letting go of his hand. “Let’s go meet the family.”

Marcus had never been hugged so much. It was like an assembly line for hugs. Paulie and his family were there too, to greet Marcus and Teddy. Paulie’s dad was doing great. Paulie’s little girl Sammy was attached to Marcus’ hip. He attempted to discourage her, and get her to play with her toys, but she deemed “Unky Mar” was her new favorite. All he did was help her color a picture in her little coloring book, and he was instantly moved to her number one spot.

“You okay?” Teddy sat down next to the two of them. They were watching cartoons.

“Yeah. I’ve just never been around kids before.” Marcus leaned his head on his boyfriend’s shoulder, as little Sammy was bouncing up and down on his lap, babbling at the TV.

“Remember I was here when Jason and Erica were babies. At least you only have one; I had two constantly bidding for my attention. You’re doing a good job with her, and everyone, me included, thinks that you are adorable with her.” Teddy kissed the top of Marcus’ head.

“Everyone is wonderful. I feel kind of bad for poor Ben. They just brushed me to the side with Sammy here when Erica brought him over. Apparently, I’ve already passed the test. He seems like a good kid, and he has the loving look in his eyes when he looks at her.” Marcus sighed.

“Ha. You called him a kid. He’s only a couple of years younger than you,” Teddy teased.

“I feel a lot older.”

“Well then, I must be ancient.” Teddy leaned his head on top of Marcus’.

“No. You’re not allowed to ever be ancient.”

“Then I guess I’ll always be young.” Teddy closed his eyes and threw his arm around Marcus, and relaxed.

Chapter Nineteen

Teddy

Sammy was reluctant to let Marcus go, being too young to comprehend why he was leaving. Everyone finally came around to accepting Ben as part of the family, as they had with Marcus. Marcus was still dazzled by the massive size of the city, but mostly liked it because this was Teddy's childhood home. It brought a smile to Teddy's face whenever he was able to point out things to Marcus that had a story to go along with it. Like the playground where he'd busted his knee so badly, he had to get stitches, the first of many times growing up.

It didn't take very long for Marcus to finish moving in with Teddy. True to what Teddy said, Marcus' possessions had mostly trickled over and found a place in Teddy's already. He left his apartment furnished, so when Teddy's friends and families came to visit, they'd have a place to stay.

Finally, it was their first weekend off, when they didn't have any plans. Teddy had the dining table set up with Helen's "special occasion" china, along with two wine glasses. Teddy was listening to his iPod, unaware his lover had come home. It was Mags who signaled Marcus' arrival as she barked excitedly and bounded over to welcome him home.

"Hey," Teddy said with a twinkle in his eyes. As Marcus licked his lips, Teddy noticed his eyes were sparkling. Marcus wandered over, smiling, and gave Teddy a quick peck on the lips.

"Hey. What's this?" he waved his hands behind him.

"We never had our romantic dinner. I wanted it to be a surprise." Teddy blushed before he turned his focus back to the stove, stirring the contents in the pot. "It's almost done."

"Anything you need me to do?" Marcus leaned over to stare at the contents in the pot.

"You can pour us a glass of wine, and if you want water, you can grab it now too."

"Okay."

Teddy had cooked chicken parmigiana, with spaghetti and a homemade sauce, and dinner rolls. He'd even boiled a piece of chicken for Mags, which she gobbled up and was currently working on her KONG.

Moaning, Marcus took a sip of red wine. "This is phenomenal, Teddy. I understand now why you didn't come over to visit my folks. Wait. Did they know you were doing this?"

Teddy grinned and nodded. Marcus just grinned and shook his head.

"If I didn't already love you, this meal would have sealed the deal." Marcus' eyes sparkled with love.

"I love you too," Teddy said after he took a sip of his wine. "I think I fall in love with you a bit more every day."

"What do you plan on having for dessert?" Marcus eyed his lover from across the table. "Besides the apple pie I see on the island?"

"Me. Naked." Teddy flushed warmly as he leered right back to his boyfriend.

"That's the best kind."

Teddy was starting to rethink his second surprise for Marcus. He'd made a couple of purchases online after a certain discussion with his boyfriend. He'd gotten carried away, when he was searching through many of the online sites. He wanted something sexy, but comfortable. He knew Marcus would be excited. He looked in the full-length mirror one last time, checking out the sexy underwear he'd bought before he went to join his lover in their bedroom. They didn't hide anything, a pair of dark-red boxer briefs that were made of see-through netting. He picked up the small bag that held the other two purchases before walking out. He felt his whole body flush with warmth and embarrassment as his lover growled his approval.

"I haven't seen those before." Marcus' voice was laced with arousal.

"One of the items I bought for our special night. I wanted to show you how much I loved you." Teddy turned around slowly, showing off his sexy underwear.

"What's in the bag?" Marcus pointed from the bed, where he was currently sitting in his birthday suit, his cock already half-hard.

Teddy handed over the bag, and Marcus' smile covered his whole face as he pulled out the items. He glanced back up at his lover. "You sure?"

"I am."

Marcus insisted Teddy leave the lacy underwear on, as he arranged Teddy on his back, his arms comfortably stretched above him. His wrists were held by a pair of soft leather restraints that had an easy release, if Teddy tugged hard enough. They were used mostly so Teddy wouldn't be able to use his hands. The second item he'd bought was a feather teaser.

Marcus hovered over the older handsome man, his lips a breath away from Teddy's. "I'm going to have fun tonight. No rushing, I am going to worship your body like you deserve." He kissed him, closed mouth, breaking into another smile as he broke away. Marcus started at his forehead, slathering kisses over Teddy's face, sucking in the bottom part of his ear, drawing a moan out of him.

He licked his way down his neck, and sucked on his collarbone before he moved on to Teddy's left arm, using his tongue and lips to travel to his fingers.

"Keep your eyes on me," Marcus ordered. Teddy snapped his eyes to him as Marcus very slowly and deliberately brought each finger into his mouth, twirling his tongue around each digit, promises of what was to come later. He repeated the same process to the other arm and hand.

"Marcus..." Teddy arched his back, trying to bring his nipples closer to him.

"Not yet..." Marcus whispered as he lapped at Teddy's navel, pressing his tongue into his belly button. He left a trail of hickies on his inner thighs, not touching Teddy's underwear, or the hard cock that was trapped in them. Soon, he traveled back up, and mouthed Teddy's erection through the underwear, teasing it, but moving back up his body to his nipples.

He pulled the left nipple into his mouth. It was pure torture, the things Marcus could do with his mouth. Marcus grabbed hold of the ring with his teeth and tugged, making Teddy wiggle under him, sounds of pleasure coming from his mouth.

"I love your nipples. You're so expressive when I play with them." Marcus crawled up Teddy's body, driving his tongue into his mouth, commanding Teddy to yield. Then just as quickly as it started, Marcus pulled away, moved back down, and dove onto the other nipple, using his hand to twist the already sensitive one, as he worked the other one up.

He reached over and grabbed the feather teaser, and gently passed it over Teddy's nipples, causing Teddy to arch off the mattress.

"Marcus please..." Teddy begged. He wanted it all.

"Looks who's calling for affection..." Marcus teased as he fondled him over his underwear. "We better get these off before they're ruined."

Teddy lifted himself up with the unsaid order, as Marcus slid them off and tossed them to the side, his own cock leaking pre-cum.

"Please..." Teddy arched into the air, as he tugged gently at the restraints, not wanting to break them away.

Marcus leaned down, licking the very tip of Teddy's penis, and humming in appreciation as he consumed Teddy's pre-cum. He rubbed Teddy's balls in one hand as he used the feather teaser, with his other hand, on Teddy's chest again. He drew out a sob of pleasure from his lover. He quickly squeezed tightly, not allowing Teddy to come. Not yet.

He opened wide and sucked Teddy's dick like a lollipop, slathering it with saliva. Marcus was still fondling Teddy's testicles, and he brought his other hand up to pinch Teddy's nipples. Quickly all the sensation was removed, Teddy's eyes flew open, and he looked to see what happened. Marcus was sitting back, heat in his eyes, staring at him.

"Marrrcusss," Teddy cried.

Marcus crawled up Teddy's body, straddling him on his chest. "Lick it." But it wasn't his cock that was shoved into Teddy's face, it was the top of his hand. He stared at Marcus with confusion before he caught on. He stuck his tongue out, tracing the veins. Marcus moved his arm so Teddy could trace them up his arm.

"Open up," was the only warning Teddy got before his mouth was invaded by a tasty, hard cock. He twirled his tongue around, and sucked and bobbed, tugging at the restraints. He wanted to grab hold of Marcus' hips.

"Do you want me to release you?" Marcus moaned. Teddy shook his head "no" the best he could, moaning as he savored this treat.

"Enough," Marcus said, and moved back down between Teddy's legs. He grabbed the feather teaser, brushing it over Teddy's leaking cock, and drawing out a sob from Teddy. Sweat started to trickle down his forehead.

Marcus reached over for the drawer, bringing out the condoms and lube. "One day, I would love to go bare with you."

“Yeeesssss!” Teddy agreed wholeheartedly. “I want that too.”

Marcus sucked and nibbled around Teddy’s hole, stroking him excruciatingly slow. He finally forced his tongue inside, lapping in the taste that could only be defined as pure Teddy. Once in a while, he’d bring the feather teaser out and tease Teddy with it.

Teddy spread his legs wide, and watched Marcus squirt lube onto his fingers. Marcus shoved two inside of him and caused a jolt of pain from the quick stretch, but that quickly morphed into pleasure when Marcus found his prostate and tapped it repeatedly. He added a third, scissoring them as he reached back up and demanded a kiss.

“I’m ready!” Teddy sobbed. “I’m going to come.” Then the fingers vanished along with the hand that was slowly stroking him. “Noo!” He thrashed at the sudden feeling of nothing.

“It’s okay babe.” Marcus laid a hand on his chest. “I’ve got you,” he promised.

Marcus rubbed the tip of his penis around Teddy’s entrance. “This what you want?” he teased.

“Yess!” Teddy tried to impale himself onto Marcus. “Please!”

Teddy could tell by Marcus’ facial expression how much he wanted to quickly thrust the whole way to the hilt, but instead Marcus slowly pushed his way into Teddy’s hot channel, ignoring Teddy’s pleas to “Move it.” Soon he was seated the whole way in. He didn’t move, letting Teddy adjust to him, before drawing slowly out and thrusting back in quickly. Marcus leaned forward and licked Teddy’s nipple before kissing him passionately, all the while, making love to him.

Marcus leaned back up, grabbing hold of Teddy, and thrust a few quick, sharp times into him. Teddy was so close... he just needed something...

Then Marcus brought the feather over the tip of his cock, and it was too much. Teddy yanked at his wrists, breaking the restraints’ release, and he came. The most intense orgasm he’d ever experienced. He yelled out in pleasure, coating both of them and the area around them with his cum. Marcus started to jackhammer into Teddy quickly, and soon howled in joy as he followed with his own mind-blowing orgasm.

Teddy was too exhausted to move. He made no complaints as his lover dragged himself away to bring back a washcloth to wipe him down, manhandling him so he could remove the soiled comforter.

Marcus snuggled his way into Teddy's embrace, nuzzling his neck. "I love you," he whispered as he laid ghost kisses on his neck.

"I love you, too." He lifted Marcus' chin up so they could share a kiss.

Soon, they both drifted off to sleep.

They'd been living together close to two years now. Teddy couldn't have been happier living the domestic life. Marcus was now Jeff's business partner. They got a few new people on their crew.

"I can't believe you framed it." Teddy was standing by his mantle in their living room, looking at the framed pictures they'd set up on it. Most of them were pictures of themselves, and their families. The one he was staring at was the picture he'd taken of Marcus' arms. Marcus had given it to him as a birthday present earlier that month. Teddy had forgotten all about it and Marcus reminded him that he'd get it as a birthday present. He just never told Teddy what birthday, which only made him laugh.

"Tomorrow is the big day." Marcus tried to rearrange himself and the sleeping pooch, moving her off his lap. Mags slept on.

"Yep. You're going to make a wonderful dad." Teddy walked over and petted Marcus' head, before sitting down on the other side of Marcus, being careful not to wake Mags.

"There's no going back." Marcus looked up to his partner.

"You've been smitten with Sammy since you first met her. And she loves her 'Unky Mar.' Our own kid will love you too, probably even more."

They'd had many discussions about starting their own family. Frankly, he'd been thinking about it since he saw Sammy bouncing on Marcus' lap back on the first trip to visit his family. Marcus' family had been hinting about grandkids for a couple of months now, unaware that they had already been looking for a surrogate. They both agreed they'd keep it a secret until the first ultrasound.

"Our baby is going to look beautiful." Teddy turned to lay down on the couch and laid his head down in his partner's lap.

"I think all parents say that about their children." Marcus was playing with a couple of gray hairs that were starting to sprout on his lover's head. Teddy insisted it was from the stress of upcoming parenthood.

“Yeah, but everyone will agree with us. I hope she or he has your stunning bright-blue eyes and your dimples.” When the subject of who would be the donor, both of them or one of them, Teddy mentioned he’d like it to be Marcus’ biologically. His family line was already passed on, but Marcus’ family stopped with him. Marcus insisted that if they had more children in the future, he wanted Teddy to be the biological father. Teddy agreed.

“You’re about the same age as Grace was when she had the twins.” Teddy tried to comfort his nervous boyfriend.

“Twins.” Marcus sighed. “I’m unsure about having a kid, let alone kids.”

Neither of them slept a wink that night, too excited and anxious about the big day tomorrow.

The big day was upon them, the first ultrasound. Their plan was to take a picture of it, and present it to Marcus’ parents tonight, to break the news about them becoming grandparents.

Roxanne, their surrogate, was very excited about helping bring a baby into the world for them.

Teddy recalled when he and Marcus were talking about finding a surrogate. It was during this conversation that Marcus finally found out how much his partner was worth. Marcus stared at Teddy’s balance.

“I have my own accountant; same one Helen used,” Teddy said nonchalantly. “Anyway you said a long time ago, that you knew I was wealthy.”

“Well, yeah. But not this wealthy. You’re almost a billionaire.” Marcus was mimicking a fish with his jaw opening and closing.

“You said it wasn’t a problem. I didn’t want you thinking that we couldn’t afford to have a baby.”

“Afford a baby. You can buy yourself an island if you wanted to. No wonder you never have to worry about working again. Shit.” He just sat there shell-shocked. “You don’t spend it?”

“Helen left it to me, she may not have had a green thumb, but she was a genius when it came to investments. And I do spend some of my money. I finished paying for Erica’s and Jason’s college, so they wouldn’t be left with student loans like I was.”

“I meant like spending money on a Ferrari or knocking down this cottage and building a mansion.” Marcus waved his hands around in the air.

Teddy huffed. “That’s a waste. I give money to numerous charities also.”

“Really? I didn’t know that.”

“You never asked me...” Teddy shrugged.

So, after Marcus got over the shock, he still insisted on pitching in on the bills for the baby. He made his own money too, he’d never relied on Teddy’s finance before, and he refused to start. Though, knowing Teddy had all that money, made him feel ten times more relaxed about providing for their unborn child.

“Okay, are you ready to see the baby?” The technician brought Teddy back to the present. They were standing on either side of Roxanne, holding her hand.

“Yes,” they both said at the same time.

After a few minutes of moving the wand around, the technician smiled. “Well, that’s a surprise.”

“What? Is the baby okay?” Marcus squeezed Roxanne’s hand tightly.

“The babies are both looking good.” At which point Teddy fainted.

Marcus was driving them over to his parents’ house. He refused to let Teddy drive at all after he’d fainted at the office. He was lucky he hadn’t hit his head on anything as he went down like a brick. Marcus reasoned he didn’t faint was because he was shocked into a statue. Only Roxanne seemed like it was nothing new. She should have been the one freaking out. It’s her body that had to carry them. Twins. They were having twins. Just like Grace did.

“How do you think your parents are going to take it?” Teddy asked Marcus. He remembered waking up looking at the ceiling. They’d used an ammonia packet to revive him. His eyes were still watering at just the memory of it.

“I honestly don’t know. Twins...” Marcus sighed. “I can’t believe it. We are going to be dads times two.”

“Grace was able to pull it off and her kids turned out just fine. Our babies will be loved and cared for. They will be wonderful.” Teddy’s smile hadn’t broken since he’d woken back up.

Mr. and Mrs. Wisheart, Brian and Anna, greeted them at the front door.

“Come in. I’ve got dinner all set out for us. What would you like to drink? I have coffee, lemonade, soda?”

“We have beer too,” Brian chipped in.

Both of them agreed quickly to a beer.

“So, what’s the big news?” Anna asked as they started their dinner. Anna had made baked cod, with rice, and steamed some fresh veggies, homegrown of course.

“Well, we haven’t told anyone yet. We decided to tell both of you first.” Marcus pulled the ultrasound picture from his wallet.

“Um. Well...” Marcus wasn’t sure how to broach the subject. Teddy fixed it for him by taking the picture from him and unfolding it.

“It’s better to just show you.” Teddy grinned. He handed the picture to Anna first. “You’re going to be grandparents.”

Anna started crying. Brian grabbed the picture from Anna, and stared at it. Tears pricking around his eyes, as he tried to hold them back.

“When did you...” He hugged his wife.

“We didn’t want to break the news too soon. Roxanne, our surrogate, is eight weeks along. We’ve been talking about it for months, and trying until finally, it worked. It worked really well. We’re having twins.” Marcus decided that Teddy was manning this show just fine, so he stayed mute.

“Twins!” Anna took the picture back and looked at it again. “Twins,” she repeated more quietly.

The rest of the meal went by quickly. They were asked twenty questions and then some. Anna and Brian were very excited about becoming grandparents. It took a lot of encouragement for Anna and Brian not to call Jeff right away. Marcus insisted they wanted to break the news to everyone themselves.

They spent the next few days meeting up with everyone breaking the great news. They Skyped with Grace first, who was overly ecstatic that there would be new babies. She told them she’d be happy to offer any advice since she was living proof of having twins. Paulie and his wife were very happy for them also. Erica was more excited than Jason, who kept saying, “Thank God, I don’t live near you. I won’t have to babysit for you.”

They gathered the rest of the gang. Mike and his wife were there with Nate, who was back in town for vacation, along with Jeff. They all met up at Daisy's.

"Well, we have some wonderful news. It's been hard keeping it a secret." Marcus had pulled out the picture frame he was somehow hiding in his jacket and placed it on the table so everyone could see.

"Is this for real?" Nate's eyes lit up. A smile broke out on his face.

"Yep! We're going to be new dads to a set of twins! We don't know the gender yet." Marcus couldn't stop grinning, holding onto Teddy's hand.

Congratulations! were said around the table.

They talked about setting up the nursery, and how they were both excited and nervous about becoming parents. Nate had his own announcement. He met someone at college. A very handsome boy who was a few years younger than him, who had piercing green eyes like Teddy.

Epilogue

“I’ll get Sabrina if you get Alex,” Marcus told his husband as he picked up their daughter. She had the same dark hair as Marcus but had brown eyes like her mother. She was adorable with her chubby cheeks.

They’d gone to the justice of the peace and gotten married. They had discussed having a large wedding, but they wanted a chance to bring the whole family together to celebrate. After talking it over with their respective families, they decided to bring everyone out to Northville for a vacation. They’d hold a barbecue at the park. Once Teddy found out Marcus didn’t want a big wedding too, it seemed to seal the deal they were ready for that final step.

Teddy picked up their son, Alex, and came over next to Marcus. “Our babies are the cutest.” Teddy was playing grabby hands with his happy brown-haired, blue-eyed baby.

“Of course they are. They share my genes. Though, Alex looks like both of us.” Marcus glanced over to his shaggy brown-haired partner.

“Well, their biological mother did look similar to me. It’s one of the reasons we chose her.”

The twins were going on six months old, already. Mags took the title “big sister” very seriously. It was a bit cramped having the twins in the spare bedroom. They briefly talked about extending the cottage in a few years, when the twins got older. Perhaps knocking out the back and building onto it.

Everyone had arrived over the past few days for their vacation. Grace, along with her husband, and Paulie’s family were staying in Mr. and Mrs. Wisheart’s house. Erica and her boyfriend Ben were staying in Marcus’ old apartment. Jason insisted on renting a room in town. He’d become more secretive since he’d announced he had a boyfriend, several months earlier. His mother was a bit shocked when she found out he was bi, but she handled it very well.

Marcus and Teddy recalled the Skype session they’d had with Jason when he’d told them.

“My girlfriend and I were at the mall. We’d only been dating for a couple of months and this attractive man walked by who was wearing these tight jeans embracing his fantastic looking bubble butt,” Jason was telling them over Skype. “And my girlfriend goes ‘Damn. That ass is fine,’ and I go, without much thought, ‘Yeah, it is.’”

Marcus and Teddy laughed over that. Jason told them his girlfriend actually took it pretty well. She had always suspected that he might be more into guys than girls.

“Why would she say that?” Marcus asked Jason.

“Well, her parents were out of town, and we were house sitting and I didn’t want to automatically want to have sex with her... In fact, I’d never gotten to the sex part with her.”

Teddy chuckled. “Yeah, well that should have been a sign. So how did you meet your boyfriend? This is your first one?”

“Yes. I fooled around with a few guys when I started college, but nothing more than a quick hand job or blowjob.” Jason flushed. “My ex-girlfriend was the one who set us up on a blind date, actually. She’s pretty cool. We’re still good friends. He’s just wonderful and I know for a fact that you two will like him. He treats me well and he’s so good-looking.” Jason blushed.

Marcus and Teddy finished getting the twins ready, along with two diaper bags. Mags was running around the car waiting to jump in. She took her role as guard dog very seriously. Her new position in the car was in the middle of the car seats in the back.

Most everyone was already at the park when they arrived. They let Mags run in the dog park along with Rosy, and a couple others.

Sammy wasn’t a fan of the twins. She wanted “Unky Mar” all to herself. But she got distracted by the dogs, and lost interest in him.

Mike was dubbed grillman, as he cooked up steaks and hot dogs for everyone. Daisy had closed her café for a few hours to attend the wedding reception cookout. She brought along potato salad, and cherry and apple pies. Marcus’ parents made a few versions of pasta salad. Nate, who’d come back from college, brought the rolls. Nate and Teddy had become good friends over time. Especially once he got a new boyfriend. He talked about him a lot, but then he didn’t give a lot of details. Marcus and Teddy told him he could invite his boyfriend along, during their last Skype time with him. He looked guiltily off-screen, and said he’d see if he could come.

Marcus and Teddy hardly had anytime with the twins, who were being passed around, getting all the attention. Neither of them were complaining. It was nice to sit back and enjoy some time with the just the two of them. There was chatter and laughter among all their friends and family. The weather was

beautiful, the sun was shining, and a nice warm breeze caused some ripples across the lakes.

After a while, they saw Erica weave her way towards them with her hand over her stomach, rubbing it gently.

“Hey Marcus... Uncle Teddy.” She gave them both a hug. Marcus stepped back and gave her a suspicious look.

“Erica. Is there something you want to tell us?” Marcus made a point to stare down at her stomach. She was wearing a very loose-fitting spring dress.

“Well, you know I thought since everyone would be here...” She waved her hands about.

“You’re pregnant,” Teddy stated matter-of-factly.

“Yep. Ten weeks.” Erica’s smile rivaled the sun.

“Do you want to tell everyone today?” Teddy asked her.

“No. Today is your day. I’m not that horrible. I just wanted to tell you first.”

Marcus blanched. “You haven’t told Ben or your parents yet?”

“Of course Ben knows. Why do you think he is standing over there sweating bullets?” The young man in question was pacing back and forth by the bathroom.

“Well with the way he’s acting, everyone is going to suspect something sooner than later. I’m assuming you’re keeping it?” Teddy inquired.

“Yes. I proposed to Ben when I found I was pregnant. He said yes, then I showed him the pregnancy stick. He fainted,” Erica stated matter-of-factly.

Marcus laughed. “Teddy fainted when we found out we were having twins.”

“Oh, thankfully, I’m only having one.” Erica pretended to wipe sweat off her forehead.

“Anyway... I think there will be enough scandal today without me announcing our engagement and baby... I’ll think I’ll tell everyone tomorrow.”

“What do you mean?” Teddy’s voice rose a little.

“Well...” Erica walked over, picked up a piece of pie, and walked back in front of Teddy, with a mischievous glint in her eyes. She lifted her hand holding the pie and threw it on his chest. “Oops... you made a mess. Marcus, why don’t you take your husband to the bathroom to help clean him up.” She

cackled evilly as she bounced towards the bathroom where her fiancé was waiting for her.

“What is with her?” Teddy asked as he wiped the pie off of him.

“Hormones?” Marcus ventured. They walked towards the bathroom and saw Ben shaking his head towards them, eyes wide, trying to pull Erica away, but she stayed put shaking her head “no.” Finally, just as they got towards the bathroom, Ben let go and heaved a heavy sigh, and looked at them and shrugged.

They heard the noises before they actually saw them. One man moaning while another was whispering sweet nothings to his lover. Teddy tried to turn around and walk back out. He didn’t want to interrupt them but Marcus’ face had turned into stone.

When finally one of them said, “Yeah, baby.”

The voice sounded familiar to Teddy. Apparently, Marcus recognized it because he grabbed Teddy by the arm and pulled him into the bathroom, walking to the last stall. To Teddy’s horror, Marcus raised his leg and kicked in the door.

“What the fuck man?” said the same voice as he turned towards Marcus. A voice that Teddy finally recognized, and marched up to Marcus and looked into the stall. It was a scene he knew he’d be having nightmares over. His nephew, with his pants and underwear pulled down to his ankles. Nate was standing behind him. His hard cock was pulled out of his pants.

“Oh. My. God.” Jason scrambled to pull up his pants looking mortified. He shoved his erect cock back into his clothes and the button to his pants popped off as he zipped up his jeans. “Damnit Nate! You told me no one saw us come in here.”

“Care to explain what the fuck you are doing to my nephew?” Teddy shoved his way into the stall, punched Nate square in the face, and yanked his nephew away from Nate.

“Teddy! Stop!” Jason jerked his arm free and walked over to Nate, who was now tucked back in himself and standing by the sink with a red-faced angry Marcus. “Nate is my boyfriend.”

Marcus punched Nate in the arm. “What does he mean?”

“His ex-girlfriend hooked us up on a blind date. I didn’t even know he was your nephew until later on. We were afraid you’d be angry with us, or that

you'd think I'm creeping on your nephew. It was just a coincidence." Nate held onto Jason's hand and placed himself in between them all, in a protective manner.

"Well I can tell you what." Teddy pointed to *the stall*. "I could have lived my whole live without ever seeing that. You should have just told us when you found the connection. But I swear, Nate, if you hurt my nephew, I will step in for karma."

Teddy noticed Marcus' body shiver with want. It seemed Marcus was turned on when Teddy went into protective mode. "Nate. I can't believe you didn't even tell me. I thought we were best friends."

"Well, I am sorry. I just didn't want to jinx it. I really like him." Nate turned and smiled at Jason.

"Well, you better get cleaned up, and come on out. Jason, I think it's time for your boyfriend to meet the family."

Teddy grabbed some towels and wiped off his shirt, before he walked out without looking back, wishing he could forget what he and Marcus just walked into. Marcus sat next to Teddy when they got back out to the pavilion. He wrapped his arms around his husband and sighed.

"Never a dull moment." Teddy nodded his head.

"I think Jason is just what Nate needs. They both came across as happy when they were talking about their mystery boyfriend," Teddy finally said as he watched the two young men walk out of the bathroom. Jason attempted to bat away Nate's hand but finally gave up and held on tight as he approached his mother, whose back was to them.

"Yeah, I am happy Nate was able to move on. I'm happy for them." Marcus smiled at his husband.

Teddy pulled his husband into his lap and wrapped his arms around him, nuzzling him in his neck. Glancing over Marcus' shoulder, he saw Grace hug Jason and Nate, with a smile on her face.

"I love you." Marcus kissed his husband. "I'm so happy you said yes to the picnic that day in the dog park."

"I'm happy I brought up wanting to do a garden. It brought us together, and look where it led us. I've got a loving husband, two beautiful babies, and a family that will always keep me on my toes. I love you too."

Teddy remembered back to his aunt's conversation about living life. He'd finally found his forever man and he couldn't be happier.

The End

Author Bio

For love and justice, she helps fight for her main characters to find love through her writing. She thrives in the fantasy world most of her time and enjoys reading about shifters, vampires, and others who find their true love.

When she isn't writing or reading, she spends her time with her papillons and taking pictures of nature. Her favorite scenes are of clouds and springtime. She also loves to bake and eat sweets, energy to fuel her to stay awake to read and write.

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