

Peonies and Goose Down

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Alan Gregory returned to his bedroom chair with a small cup of tea, all set to continue his nightly routine, or rather, his nightly wait. The eerie blue-white of a computer monitor flooded the room, casting the fox's fuzzy black shadow against the wall, and Alan quietly tapped his fingers around the cup's handle.

Well, what am I waiting for?

The fox took a quick sip of tea, straightened up in the chair, and looked at the computer screen. The thousands of bright blue pixels against the pitch black of his bedroom made his eyes water, but that's how he liked it; it kept him awake.

And with how late I have to wait to talk to Flynn, I certainly need it. That and all the tea I can drink...

Alan grinned to himself and stretched his fingers out over the keyboard to begin typing out his thirty-three character password. Flynn might have managed to come online in the 5 or so minutes Alan had spent making his little cup of energy, and the fox's face began to widen in anticipation.

His pinkie claw hovered over the return key after he finished typing, and without another second, Alan brought it down with a satisfying click. In a moment the pale blue faded to the green rolling hills of Alan's desktop, but the fox barely took the time to notice. Instead his eyes dove onto the small AIM window and squinted through the contact list.

FlynnRabbit#174: Offline

"Damn it," the fox muttered and pushed his square glasses closer to his eyes, "Where are you, Flynn?"

Alan really missed his boyfriend tonight, more than he usually did. The fox's parents had taken him on a hiking trip earlier today, and because of it he hadn't been able to spend time with the rabbit until 4 to his parents' enforced nightly curfew at 8. That was only four hours; four short hours to spend with his favorite person in the world, and it had only felt like half of that.

The fact that Flynn Warden was having difficulties coming online tonight didn't help either. This wasn't even a new problem. The rabbit's parents had always been strict with their offspring's internet time, and on top of that, Flynn had to share the single family computer with his five siblings. But that wasn't all; Flynn swore that his parents were on to their relationship, and the elder Wardens were dedicated to doing everything in their power to limit the pair's interaction, online and otherwise. Damn, the rabbit had even quoted them saying how their blood ran cold at the thought of their child running so astray.

Alan frowned. Flynn's family really was something else. Make no mistake, the fox was pretty sure his parents knew too and hated every bit of it, but at least he was an only child with an older computer to himself in a bedroom where he couldn't and wouldn't be bothered. If only his friend had that kind of freedom; then he wouldn't have to wait longer and longer each night to talk with the person he loved...

The fox yawned and took another sip of tea before checking the computer's clock.

11:19 PM. Later and later each night. At this rate he's going to start coming on after midnight. Christ, my parents might kill me.

Alan queued a few songs and flipped open his web browser, eyes casually glancing over to the chat window for any sign of progress. FlynnRabbit#174's tiny avatar stared up back at him, and the fox's mouth widened into a grin as his tail began to swish around the chair's base.

Don't worry, Flynn. I'll wait as long as you need me too. It's worth it.

The avatar seemed to smile back in reply, and Alan took another sip as he began to check the news and the few other things he found relevant on the internet. It was best to keep himself awake and occupied while waiting.

Time ticked by as the monitor colors danced up against the white bedroom wall and Alan's narrow face. By 11:27 he had managed to drain his tea. By 11:35 he had run out of nearly everything he cared to look at online and instead resorted to reading his computer's help manual while simultaneously flicking through a sloppy game of minesweeper. He was just about to start a new game when he heard one of his most sacred of sounds; an AIM contact coming online.

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The fox's ears sprung up in delight and his fingers dove back onto the keyboard as Flynn's status light blinked to green.

FlynnRabbit#174: Online

Alan couldn't hold himself back another second, and rapidly typed a message into the chatbox as quickly as his black-furred fingers allowed.

Sharp_Ears223, 11:38 PM: Hiya Flynn! I'm glad you could make it online tonight! ^.^ I was afraid I'd have to go to bed without saying goodnight, sweetie!

The fox could barely contain his joy as he watched his friend type out a reply.

FlynnRabbit#173, 11:39 PM: ha. not letting that happen. cant sleep without a few sweet words from u.

Flynn paused before continuing.

FlynnRabbit#173: at least parents dont care when I go to bed. they even forgot to turn the computer off. I of the perks of being 18 and out of school over summer, right? :P nobody cares what u do.

Alan giggled and typed out his reply. His boyfriend wasn't the best typist, but Alan didn't care. If anything, it just made his rabbit even cuter.

Sharp_Ears223: Yup!

FlynnRabbit#173: if only I didnt have 2 share the family pc with my stickyfingered younger brther...

FlynnRabbit#173: brother thats the last time philip eats a pbj at the computer. i mean wth man? XD*

Sharp_Ears223: Eww. What is that kid even doing up this late? Isn't he 12 or something?

FlynnRabbit#173: 15 and beats me. maybe he was watching pr0nz? wouldnt be surprised, and tbh, i dont wanna know. siblings arent the saints my parents think they are. Lol stay up past 11 and theyre freaking animals. im telling you, man.

Alan uttered a childish giggle and pushed aside the empty tea cup. He'd decide to joke a little.

Sharp_Ears223: Woah, woah, woah. Three minutes in and you've already brought up porn? You're getting dirtier by the day, Flynn. You nasty little rabbit, you.

FlynnRabbit#173: u wish, u handsome devil. ;]

Sharp_Ears223: Lol

Alan smiled, his tail wagging behind him as he typed a second reply.

Sharp_Ears223: Anyway. I'm so happy to see ya.

FlynnRabbit#173: same here, alan. :)

The fox peered down into his empty tea cup and began drumming his claws on the table. There was something he had been waiting all night to ask that he really hadn't wanted to bring up in person earlier today. Now he that chance, but it just seemed wrong do it now.

Alan readjusted his classes and positioned his paws over the keyboard.

Screw it, I'm asking anyway. This is important.

Sharp_Ears223: Hey, Flynn?

FlynnRabbit#173: yeah?

Sharp_Ears223: I'm really sorry if this is a bad time, but how is everything over there? Getting better? Getting worse? Staying the same? You worried me yesterday.

There was a noticeable delay between Flynn's next comment. Maybe Alan shouldn't have asked that...

But I have to know... Things definitely aren't getting any better for him over there, and we can't just pretend the

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problems don't exist. This is for the best, even if it doesn't look like that right now.

The rabbit's reply came in a few seconds later.

FlynnRabbit#173: umm. u and i bth know the answer to that, alan. things never get better... especialy for this relationship. :(

Sharp_Ears223: Oh no, Flynn. What happened?

FlynnRabbit#173: i really dont wanta talk about it, okay? its bad bad. im serious.

The fox's nails scraped against the desk as he thought up a reply.

Sharp_Ears223: Talking about it will help. I promise. :}

FlynnRabbit#173: i dont know, alan... and that :} trick doesnt wrk anymore.

Alan couldn't help but smile before regaining his seriousness.

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn. What am I here for? I'm your friend. Keeping it bottled up certainly won't help.

FlynnRabbit#173: okay. just... brace yourself ok? it ugly and youre not going to like it. im not kidding.

Alan leaned back in his chair. Flynn never pulled any punches. If he said it was bad, he meant it.

Sharp_Ears223: Okay. Go ahead. I'm ready.

FlynnRabbit#173: good.

There was a long pause.

FlynnRabbit#173: so... u know how my parents are looking for a house lately?

A lump formed in Alan's throat as he read over the words. He knew where this was going, but rushing would only make it worse.

Christ, maybe asking wasn't such a good idea.

Sharp_Ears223: Yes?

FlynnRabbit#173: they found I. my parents actually found I.

Sharp_Ears223: Oh ggod... Where? How far away?

The message typing indicator went on and off for about 30 seconds. Alan was nearly ready to chew off his paw when the reply finally came through with a trill.

FlynnRabbit#173: 1000 or more miles. its in colorado or something. bye california.

Alan almost choked

Sharp_Ears223: What?!?

FlynnRabbit#173: im NOT kidding, alan. and worst theyre being weird with the details. acting like it's some sort of fun surprse. yeah right. we both know what theyre trying to do with that.

The panic bled through the typos in Alan's next few words. This couldn't be happening.

Sharp_Ears223: Wwll how much do you know?? Whenare you moving? What city is it in?

FlynnRabbit#173: not much. i think its by colorado springs? thats all I can tell u right now. cant answer the other questions.

Sharp_Ears223: you have to know! How can your parents not tell youu??

FlynnRabbit#173: im serious! theyre still working on itt and act like im 5 years old and it will be fun! not telling makes a shitty even better!

Sharp_Ears223: You have to know more than that!

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FlynnRabbit#173: all theyre telling me is its in colorado springs), my dad will have a great job there, and theres a good school or something. the most descriptive thing i can say is that i think its some private religious institution.

Sharp_Ears223: Oh, nno. Flynn...

FlynnRabbit#173: could u stop that? im just as frustrated as u are. its NOT helping.

Sharp_Ears223: Ssorry. I'm really sorry... When did this happen?

Alan braced for the reply.

FlynnRabbit#173: earlier today. i was too scared to tell u in person. Idk. i was just afraid that it might be 1 of our last few days together. I really didnt want to spoil it.

The fox straightened up and quickly typed out his response, black ears twitching ever so slightly.

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn... Don't dont talk like that. They cant separate us that easily. Wwe won't llet them. Remember what we talked about a few weeks ago when they first started house shopping?

FlynnRabbit#173: cmon alan, are u serious? runing away? asking them if the family of 8 can stay in CA so i can stick around with my boyfriend (who they hate to death)? its great youre trying to help and everything, sharpears, but we both know thats not going to work. that thinking was way 2 idealistic and was supposed to distract us from the real problem. we both know it...

There was another pause.

FlynnRabbit#173: alan. i love you. we both know that. but you and I have both seen this coming for as long as weve had feelings for each other. im just as distraught as you, but are you really surprised?

Alan was almost to tears, but there was something to be admired at how focused Flynn could be.

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn. Wer'e not going to lte them do this.

FlynnRabbit#173: i wish we could do something. i really do. but theyve made up their stupid minds, and are going to force me to come even if they end up dragging me. we cant do anything.

Sharp_Ears223: Tellll them you ahve friends at school or something. make up a reason why you have to stay here in CA!

FlynnRabbit#173: alan... we both know that youre my only friend. everybody else at school hates me.

That was true, but thoughts still raced through the fox's mind, there had to be something!

Sharp_Ears223: Tell them you have a grlfriend here!

FlynnRabbit#173: WHAT? and pull 1 out of thin air? alan. we both know that isnt going to work! theyre fully aware of what gender i like! i thought you were trying to be serious!

Sharp_Ears223: I am! I'm just trying to make this work!

FlynnRabbit#173: then we need real solutions not crazy jokes. im as stressed out about this as u are, man.

Alan's response consisted of a single choked word.

SharpEars223: Sorry.

There was a pause for a few seconds, and the fox took of his glasses to clear his eyes. A few tears had already run down his face, and more and more were coming with every minute. This couldn't be happening...

But now it's gone. Ruined. Just like that.

God I think I'm going to puke. This is too much.

Alan glanced up from his desk as Flynn's reply arrived with a beep.

FlynnRabbit#173: im sorry too, alan. i really, really am.

Sharp_Ears223: D you at least know when youre leaving?

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FlynnRabbit#173: Sharpears...

Sharp_Ears223: You have t kno.

The fox wiped his eyes again. His fingers were trembling so badly that he could barely type, and his stomach had become a churning, knotted mess that threatened to erupt at any minute. He was glad the bathroom was next door.

FlynnRabbit#173: i do know, alan.

Sharp_Ears223: Then tel me..

It took another 30 seconds for Flynn to finish.

FlynnRabbit#173: okay...

FlynnRabbit#173: 2-3 days.

FlynnRabbit#173: sorry. i really didnt want to have to tell u that. just makes it worse...

Alan struggled to keep his eyes focused on the computer screen as he tried to type out a reply. He didn't want to do this anymore; all he wanted now was to yank his computer cord and curl up in a little ball of misery.

It was all so confusing. Alan loved Flynn more than anything else, but right now, there was something else mixed in, something almost close to anger. He didn't want to hear this from his boyfriend of all people. At least he could hate Mr. and Mrs. Warden, but Flynn? Never. Flynn couldn't possibly be a target for this.

After a few more seconds, the reply finally made it off the keyboard.

Sharp_Ears223: I needed tknow, Flynn...

FlynnRabbit#173: yeah, i know...

There was another pause.

Sharp_Ears223: Ummmm. Think you can meet tomorrow to talk? Normal place?

FlynnRabbit#173: maybe. i think were going to be packing like crazy. its going to be hard.

Sharp_Ears223: Okay... But I'll be there...

Sharp_Ears223: Even if you aren't... Idk, I just like that place. It makes me think of you. :}

There was no response.

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn? Still there?

Still no response. Alan wiped his eyes and shivered in his chair. The entire desk was vibrating.

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn?

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn???

The typing indicator flashed on and off a few times, and Alan perked up in his seat.

FlynnRabbit#173: hey, um. I second brb

Alan's tail twirled at the message and he quickly replied.

Sharp_Ears223: Okay. I'll be here. Hurry back :}

The fox quickly drummed his fingers on the desk and pushed around the empty tea cup. His stomach was still wrenching, and he was just about to start another semi-calming game of minesweeper before Flynn came back.

FlynnRabbit#173: alan, im sorry, but I have to go. now.

Sharp_Ears223: Wait, no! why? Don't leave, Flynn!

FlynnRabbit#173: no choice. parents gave me 30 seconds 2 give up computer or theyre going 2 literally kick me off,

Sharp_Ears223: Whatt???

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FlynnRabbit#173: they r apparently concerned that talking 2 u will wear me out, and i won't be able to prepare for the move tomorrow. what bullshit.

Sharp_Ears223: Flynn...

Alan's claws scratched across the keyboard as he tried to summon a reply. Flynn couldn't leave! Not now! He couldn't be left alone in this mess!

Sharp_Ears223: Can can you at least meet me tomorrow?

Sharp_Ears223: Please! I have to see you at least one more time!

FlynnRabbit#173: alan...

Sharp_Ears223: Please. Promise me, Flynn!

FlynnRabbit#173: im ssrytdfzfwz

The typing indicator blinked on and off before Flynn's icon suddenly flashed to offline and the contact leaving tone quickly played.

Alan hovered his cursor over the icon and stared at the chatbox with wide, desperate eyes, half-hoping that Flynn's avatar would flash back to green and his boyfriend would reassure him that everything would be okay. The rabbit had always been there to wish him goodnight, to always tell him something that filled him with bubbling joy right before he went to sleep. It didn't matter how bad the day had been, Flynn could always make it better.

But not tonight. God, I need you more than ever, Flynn. Our worst nightmares just became real...

Alan felt another half-dozen tears trickle down his cheeks as he logged off the AIM client and shut down his computer. It felt like he had just lost his friend forever, the gaping hole in his heart was unbelievable, and the fox wearily trudged across his room and collapsed onto the bed in a pile of wet fur.

But amidst all the darkness, he still felt hope. He would see Flynn tomorrow, and that alone filled the fox with a bit of warm, subtle joy. The rabbit always found a way to sneak away; he would be there.

Alan felt a half-smile form beneath the tears, and wrapped his arms around the pillow in a tight squeeze. As long as he had Flynn, there was still a chance...

Goodnight, Flynn... We'll sort this out tomorrow. I promise.

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Terrier High School lay sprawled out in the center of the suburbs, an oasis of haphazard low buildings and yellow, under-watered grass. Cars zoomed around the surrounding streets to dash in and out of their owner's houses before darting out into the city further on, but not a single one crossed the half-dozen speed bumps that lead into the faded, cracked parking lot. Like any school during a summer weekend, Terrier was abandoned.

And naturally, that made it a choice hangout.

Alan sat comfortably on the roof of the primary building, carefully positioned just under the shade of an air conditioning unit. His eyes casually took in the rest of the school's beaming white roof and the dome that was today's beautiful blue sky, and with a slim smile, he realized that things were almost perfect.

He had been coming up here almost for as long as he and Flynn had attended the school, and much to the ire of the administration, they were not alone. A pile of hastily smoked cigarettes containing anything but tobacco littered the building's corners and rain gutters, and were joined by a few cans of RedBull and even a glass bottle long-since drained of beer. Truth be told, to the uninitiated Terrier Roof was a hot, unattractive dump that had seen more than it's fair share of high teenagers, but to Alan and his fellow students, it was the most private place in the entire city.

And now all I need is Flynn to share it with me... one last time.

Alan quickly caught the negative thoughts, bit his tongue, and promptly corrected himself.

No. I need Flynn to share it with me so we make sure we can keep doing things like this, and anything else together. Christ, I just hope he makes it...

The fox suddenly chuckled to himself and flipped his tail. What a silly question. Flynn could weasel his way out of the Warden house anytime. He even joked he could do it in his sleep.

The hardest part is waiting for him, but even that will be over soon enough...

A subtle breeze began to flow across the roof, and Alan opened up his mouth and turned to let the cool air trickle down his throat. He needed every ounce. It was getting hotter up here by the minute, and the fox checked his tawdry analog watch for the time.

11:53. If I'm not careful I might start roasting up here by noon. I need to find somewhere cooler. Screw it. I'm getting bored anyway.

The fox shifted around the corner of the air conditioning unit and squeezed his body into the small patch of shade. He was now overlooking the school's yellowed field and a small stop-sign lined intersection, and gave out a wide yawn before closing his jaws with a snap.

It only took 20 seconds before the waiting started to kill him again. Alan swore that he had some sort of attention disorder, and anytime when he wasn't busy or entertained by something may as well be called torture. He began to shuffle around, drum his fingers on the thin metal of the A/C unit, and even just play with his tail for a few short seconds.

Anything seemed to work, but nothing worked well enough. In a few more minutes he was sick of watching cars and staring at the depressing sun-cooked field, and couldn't sit still for a second more. The fox turned around to yet another side of the unit and leaned with his back against the cold, humming metal.

God, where are you, Flynn... Normal time, normal place... you've never been late before. Please don't fail me now.

Alan licked his lips and stared up at the sky. He had brought a chocolate bar up with him, and it seemed devilishly tempting now, but he'd wait to share it. After all, the rabbit's parents didn't give him close to enough candy, and that made Flynn tend to treat whatever he got like a gift from gods. The fox would just have to do something else.

Alan reluctantly snatched up a crummy, sun-bleached baseball from a pile of weed cigarettes, and began wordlessly throwing it up against a raised stairwell box that lead down into the school. The ball came back to him with a satisfying thump, and the fox grinned as he caught it and pressed it against his soft paws. As long as he had something to do, he was happy. Even better, keeping occupied gave him the chance to think more about Flynn...

BANG

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The sudden clatter of a body leaping atop metal echoed across the roof, and Alan's head snapped to the right, ears at full attention. Only one person entered the top of Terrier like that.

Christ, there he is!

Alan could see Flynn's rabbit body weave in and out of the air conditioning units, and the fox's face wrapped into a broad, genuine smile. His love was here at last.

"I knew you'd make it, Flynn!" Alan shouted as he leapt up to his paws and dashed across the roof, "Oh my god, it's good to see you!"

"Hey!" the rabbit wrapped his arms around the fox's thin body with enough force to squeeze out a grunt, "I hope you didn't think I was going to leave you all alone up here, you stupid dipshit!"

Flynn hugged Alan a little tighter and fluffed up his boyfriend's hair, "That'd just be rude, eh?"

The fox giggled loudly, "Well, you are late..."

Flynn playfully slapped Alan on the back and released his grip, "Hey, pretty good considering that I just came from a home full of seven rabbits packing like hell. Jesus, it's a madhouse in there, Alan."

The fox flicked his tail at Flynn before walking towards the shade, "Sounds like a normal day in loonyland to me."

"Ha, I wish! Normally I can at least sneak out unnoticed, but today it was all hands on deck. Sometimes I feel like I'm in the army, man." the rabbit's voice suddenly lowered with a sigh, "God, I don't know, Alan, from what I can tell, we're likely leaving in three days. Four tops. At this rate, we'll have the car packed by today or tomorrow, and the furniture loaded on the moving truck the next day..."

Alan couldn't stop his ears from drooping, but tried to stay positive, "Don't worry, Flynn. Everything will be okay. I promise."

The rabbit smiled, "I know, I know," he raised his voice again, "Shit, I'm sorry, man. I think I just spend too much time over there, not like I have a choice. My family's unhealthy for me, I swear..."

Alan looked over to Flynn, "Hey, it's alright. Mine's the same way, maybe everyone's is. Why else do you think I spend nearly all my time locked up in a bedroom?"

That gave Flynn another laugh. He needed it. The rabbit had dark circles under his eyes from a lack of sleep, and his face was unable to hold a smile for as long as usual. His entire figure and body looked like he hadn't gotten an ounce of rest last night, and Alan tried not to look like he noticed as the pair sat down in the closest pocket of shade.

How hard are the Wardens working my poor boyfriend?

The fox curled his tail into his lap and stared up at the sky as Flynn spoke again, "And oh, I'm sorry for last night, Alan. My family seriously kicked me off the computer. I have the bruises to prove it," he smiled broadly, "Just kidding, but I'm really happy I got your last message. That was close."

The fox glanced over to him, "Yeah... They're really wound up about this move, aren't they?"

Flynn yawned and stretched out his long, graceful legs, "Not like I blame them. If I was hauling ass to 1000 miles away I'd be pretty stressed out too," he paused, "I mean, I am stressed and am going that far, but I guess you could say not as much as them, you get me?"

Alan nodded, "Yeah, I do. I'm stressed too, Flynn..."

But not a fraction as much as I dare let him know... Christ, how does he stay so calm?

Another breeze brushed across the roof, and Flynn comfortably placed his arms behind his head, "It certainly is nice up here, isn't it?"

"Yeah." Alan's ears twitched, but fortunately his friend didn't notice. He was getting anxious again, and started fidgeting around with his fingers and tail. He envied Flynn so much, but there had to be something he could do to get his mind of it right now...

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“Oh!” Alan’s voice suddenly perked up, “I brought you something, Flynn.”

He fumbled around in his pocket and quickly produced the chocolate bar like it was the greatest gift in the world, “Tada! A Wonka bar, just for you, sweetie.”

“Aww, you didn’t, Sharpears!” Flynn’s face lit up in pleasant surprise, and he quickly grabbed the bar to break off a piece, “Thank you!”

The rabbit tossed the chocolate in his mouth and gave Alan a quick, cocoa-smelling kiss on the cheek. The second his lips touched fur, the fox paused and stared straight ahead, almost stunned from the sudden action. Flynn had given him more kisses than he could count, but for some reason, they always left him blushing with the same stupid smile.

And the same undeniable, tingling sensation in his crotch.

Sorry, Flynn... I just can’t resist.

Alan suddenly leaned right and gave Flynn a sloppy, tongue-drenched kiss and brushed his muzzle against his face. The rabbit stopped chewing and suddenly swallowed before turning to touch noses with his boyfriend. He looked just as surprised; his fox normally wasn’t that intimate.

“Why hello there, Alan,” Flynn grinned, his face an inch from his boyfriend’s, “That was an unexpected move.”

“You deserve it,” Alan replied and slowly brushed his tail against the rabbit’s body, “Remember the first time you did that to me?”

“I don’t think I’ll ever forget.”

Alan gave him another quick kiss before breaking off a piece of chocolate from Flynn’s paw with a crisp snap and leaning back. He was still blushing underneath the scarlet fur, and glanced up at his rabbit with a smile slinking on his face as the actions sunk in.

Wow. What did I just do? I’ve known him for this long, and yet, I’ve never done something that sensual before...

Alan paused and chewed his chocolate.

But even more than that, I wonder if I can do it again.

Flynn leaned back against the air conditioning unit and snapped off another piece from the Wonka bar. The rabbit too wasn’t exactly sure what to make of that pleasant little event either, and he noisily swallowed the candy to talk again.

“Speaking of first times... that was a hell of a lot better than mine. Good job, Ace.”

Alan almost choked on his chocolate as he burst into a laugh, “Now I don’t know about that!”

Flynn waved a paw across his body in mock protest, “Ha! Don’t pretend like you don’t remember the details, man. C’mon,” the rabbit scooted a little closer and continued in the smoothest voice he could to set the stage, “Tenth grade, middle of the semester... Two new friends who have only known each other for about a month linger alone on the yard as the rest of the students go back into class...” he paused and shifted closer still as his voice started to rise, “You say we should go back, and I agree, but before you have chance to move, I suddenly wrap my arms around you and give that cute little fox the biggest, best smooch I possibly can.”

Alan was blushing so badly now that it felt like his face was next to an open flame, “I remember, Flynn.”

The rabbit took hold of his boyfriend’s paw, “Then how was it?”

The fox turned to face him, “Well... considering that you were my first and only friend in high school and you didn’t seem to have had any practice, I’d say it was pretty sloppy, in hindsight, of course. But cute.”

Flynn laughed again and gently slapped Alan’s knee, “Like you realized it then! You were so shocked after that, I swear, you were frozen to the ground with that stupid, beautiful smile of yours. I practically had to drag your lovestruck ass back to class step by step,” Flynn paused to laugh, “But oh my god, it was worth every second of detention we got from being late inside, wasn’t it? Best move of my life,” the rabbit popped another piece of

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chocolate in his mouth and chewed it thoroughly, "I was just about as scared as you were about it, too. Really, I half expected you to run away and go turn me over to the teacher."

Alan's heart was racing in his chest, "I almost did, but then... then I realized that meeting you was basically the best thing to ever happen to me, and well..." he paused, "I guess you could also say that it basically made me even crazier about you than I already was."

Flynn swallowed the chocolate and broke off another piece. The bar was practically gone.

"Best move of my life," the rabbit repeated happily.

"And, it just got better from there," Alan echoed, his voice dropping off near the end.

He chewed another piece and noisily licked his lips.

And we have to make sure that it lasts for as long as we can possibly make it; against all the odds up against us right now. He may not like talking about it, but I have no other choice.

"Flynn?" Alan spoke up and glanced over to his friend,

"Yeah? What's up?" the rabbit's face held a smile so large that Alan immediately felt criminal for having to break it.

"About your parents and the move. We... we really need to talk about it. Now."

Flynn's expression shattered in an instant, and he reluctantly rubbed a paw through his fluffy brown hair, "Yeah, yeah. I know, Alan. But couldn't it wait just a little longer?"

The fox replied flatly, "No. I'm serious, we have to talk about this now while we actually can. This may be our last chance to see each other, Flynn."

"I know that, but Alan..."

"But what? I'm serious. Why are you so reluctant about it? I don't like it either."

"Alan, listen..."

The fox acted like he didn't hear. He refused to let Flynn interrupt him further, "You need to tell me everything you know. When you'll know exactly when you're moving, when your family will be home and not, when you'll be available at your house."

"Okay, okay," the rabbit shuffled his legs and began, "Like I said, I think we'll be moving in three days, but I'll find out soon. My parents should be home all this week unless they need to tie up some loose ends, and me? Well as usual, I should be at my place all day, every day."

"Sounds good. What else do you know that could be useful?" Alan was methodic, and hated making a plan unless he knew all the details.

Flynn sighed, "Nothing else I haven't already told you, I suppose. I guess I could try and get on the PC tomorrow and tell you anything I find out later," he paused and then stared at Alan with sad, sincere eyes, "But there's something I have to tell you. Right now before we discuss anything else, okay?"

What could that possibly be?

"Okay, go ahead," Alan replied.

It took ten seconds for Flynn to begin speaking, "Alan, I... I hate to ruin your hopes and everything, man, but I have to tell you; this isn't going to work. I'm going to Colorado Springs no matter what."

Was that what he was so worried about? He really is more worked up about it than I am, isn't he?

"Oh yeah, I knew that!" Alan replied perkily, "I more want to try and arrange for a visit every now and then, make sure I get your address so you and I can send each other things, and I don't know, anything else that ensures we get to stay in touch. Sounds good right?"

The rabbit sighed, "No. Alan. I'm sorry to tell you this man, but don't you ever take a hint? I'm leaving for

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Colorado Springs, every bit of me. You and I both know how much my parents hate this relationship, and well, now they're severing it for good."

Alan was just about to say something, but Flynn cut him off, "And to be honest, Sharpears, I... I don't really know if I want to fight that."

The fox's jaw dropped open and closed as he began to mutter a few stuttered words, "Wait, what? Flynn, what... what are you saying?"

His boyfriend continued before he could object to anything more, "Alan, listen. I know how hard this is for you and everything, but this is it. There's nothing you can do, and truth be told, you really shouldn't. I hate to tell you this, but... I'm almost happy to go."

"Flynn... no, no, Flynn, not you..."

How is this happening? He would never say that. He hates his family and loves me... This has to be some sort of mistake!

Alan listened in shock as his friend continued, "Look, Colorado Springs actually looks really, really good. They have a great private school there, and an acclaimed University just a few miles away..."

"I thought you said it was a religious school!" the fox protested. Anything to restore his friend's sanity!

The rabbit's unconcerned laugh made Alan cringe, "Ha, yeah, it is religious, Protestant I think, but I'll be fine, honestly. You really think they'll be able to straighten me out, Alan?"

Normally the pun would have given him a smile. This time it made Alan's stomach buckle with disgust.

"Maybe! Those, those places are crazy, man! You really can't let them do that to you! They'll hate you! You think bullying is bad here, just wait until-"

Flynn cut him off, "C'mon, I'll be fine! I can be straight when I really need to."

No, no. You can't. You think I don't know you? You're too shamelessly sexual for that; it will kill you, you optimistic idiot.

Alan was just angry and confused now, "Flynn, you.. you don't know what you're saying! Christians hate gay people! What the HELL are you thinking!"

"What the hell are you thinking with generalizations like that? So does my family! Dammit man, how much worse can it be than it is right now? We're already in a town with some of the worst ones, don't let that warp your views. I can handle it, Alan, I've had plenty of practice. And it's worth it for the better school! Chill the fuck out, man, okay?"

The last sentence struck much harder than Alan let Flynn know. The fox slowly closed his jaws and blinked quietly.

Oh my god. He's really serious about it. His family must have finally managed to crack him. Christ. He doesn't even know.

And worst of all, I don't think there's anything I can do...

Flynn continued in a quieter tone, "Look, Alan, I'm sorry. But it's better for me there, and not just the school. My dad's getting a promotion or something, or at least that's what he tells us, plus there's fresh air, great forests, and a better house! Forests, man! I've always wanted to live right with nature. It'll be great!"

It took Alan an entire nine seconds to respond in a small squeak, "But no me."

The rabbit scooted a little closer, and put a paw on the fox, "Yeah, I'm really, really sorry about that part of it, but that's really the only way it can be."

"No it's not," Alan mumbled, a few tears running down his face. The emotions were starting to get to him, "What do you think we do every night, Flynn? We can keep communicating through AIM, email if we have to. Maybe I can even send a letter or something to you?"

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His boyfriend sighed deeply, "Sharpears, I, I don't know how to say this, but no. I don't want to get into a long distance relationship, okay? It's too much effort and time for too little reward. Sure we can communicate with email a little bit here and there, maybe. But above all I want to look forward instead of trying to force what we have on the future. This is a chance for both us to move on, meet new people and live new lives. And it's a chance we have to seize, right? We can't stay stuck in the past forever."

Flynn's words may have well been bullets straight to his heart. Alan wouldn't have noticed a difference in pain.

"You're... you're dumping me. You lied last night, Flynn. You're dumping me."

There was a pause, "That's a harsh way to put it, but yes. Yes I am, Alan. And I don't know if I'd call it lying... I just felt like, I don't know, it seemed best to bring this up in person. We're childhood friends, it's not made to last, really! We need to move on. There are so many other people out there. Colorado and California are full of them!"

But that means no you.

"What did I do wrong Flynn? Where did I disappoint? You can't leave me, not... not after all this," Alan continued, "The kisses, those long, secret nights up here over the weekends..."

The rabbit cut him off again, "You were a great first boyfriend, Alan, but that's just it, my first boyfriend. Those are just memories, now, Alan. Great memories of wonderful times, man, and nobody will ever be able to take them from us," he paused and put his paw on the fox's shoulder, "But now it's time for us to make new ones, you and I both, okay?"

Alan stared blankly ahead, "Flynn... No. I don't want to, I don't want that..."

The rabbit sighed, "I'm really sorry, about this man. I really am. But that's life, you know? It's not always what you want it to be, and we have to accept that."

No we don't! We can make life what we want it to be, we can stay in contact until the day we can finally meet again and things can go back to how they were! What happened to that promise?

What happened to that rabbit on the schoolyard, Flynn?

But instead of protesting another word, all Alan did was begin to cry in sharp, painful, wordless sobs that stung in his throat.

"Sharpears, Alan... Alan it's okay," the rabbit scooted closer and wrapped his arms around his former boyfriend, "Really, sweetie. I promise. Everything will be okay in a few months, maybe even sooner. There are a lot of cute bunnies in California, foxes too."

The fox kept crying, barely able to hear Flynn's words before bursting out in a tear-choked voice, "No it won't...none of them are you."

"Alan, Alan... please."

"I'm really going to miss you, Flynn," Alan gasped, "I don't even think you know!"

"I do," Flynn whispered into his ear, "Because I'm going to miss my Sharpears just as much. Maybe even more than he misses me."

That did it. Alan suddenly burst into another series of gasps and tears and suddenly pushed his face straight into Flynn's chest. His paws and fingers grasped at the rabbit's fur while the tears streamed down his muzzle into the t-shirt fabric, and the fox burst into another howling sob right underneath his friend's chin.

Flynn's eyes opened wider at the sudden release, and he softly pulled Alan deeper into his body. He hated seeing his little fox cry like this, and while he was here he promised to do everything he could,. "There, there, Alan," he whispered and kissed his ears, "It will be okay... right?"

"Yeah..." Alan sobbed, "Okay..."

I hate to admit it, but I think Flynn is right... Things may hurt now, but they'll get better... They have to...

But as much as Alan tried to reason with himself, the tears only got worse. He continued to push his face deeper into

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his friend's chest while letting out another low moaning whine. The thin black fingers pulled tighter at the fur and clothing, and Alan's tail twisted back around both of their bodies.

Don't move Flynn... Let me stay here forever.

Flynn looked down and started to open his mouth, but then paused. There was nothing else to be said, and instead the rabbit wrapped his arms closer and closer around the fox's thin frail body until they surrounded him like a cocoon. He kissed Alan again, paws gently stroking his fur, and gave his wet fluffy fox another squeeze. He would never forget this sweet little first love.

Alan choked beneath the tears before voicing his thoughts, "Let me stay here, forever," he squeaked, "Hold me for as long as I live..."

"Sharpears..." Flynn began, but then stopped. He wouldn't ruin one of their last moments, and instead gave Alan two quick kisses on the ears and pulled him even closer.

"I'll try."

Flynn closed his eyes and quietly rested his chin atop the fox's ears. A subtle tear dripped down one eye, leaving a long, thin stain across his cheek, and the rabbit paused. He was crying; he of all people, the privately proclaimed gay Casanova, was crying. And the strangest thing was that it felt so... right.

He gave his fox one last squeeze and slowly petted his body; it was the very least he could do...

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Alan lay on the inside edge of Terrier roof, scarlet fur basking in the California sun to the point that it was hot to the touch. He quietly watched the clouds float above him, careful not to focus too hard on any that resembled a certain rabbit, and reclined a little more before itching his claws down across his muzzle. It was dry.

Good, those stupid tears are finally gone. I even think my t-shirt is starting to warm up. Christ, Flynn. I don't think I've cried that much since my pet rat Cluny died seven years ago. I had no idea it was going to be like that...

The rabbit had left 14 minutes earlier. It had been a difficult parting, to say the least, and the fox had held on for an entire five minutes before finally letting Flynn go. He had begged him to stay, pulled him tighter and closer with every last moment, but Flynn's mind had already been made up.

He said he had to return home, but looking back, it was anything but that. He's always been antisocial around family; Flynn left because it was a good time, for both of us..

Unconsciously, Alan's eyes drifted in the direction he had gone. Half of him hoped he would somehow come back; the other half knew he never would. As much as he hated to accept it, Flynn would never set paw on Terrier roof again.

Alan began to ask if he would either. Right now this place seemed to be nothing but a collection of fresh, sad memories, and if he hadn't felt so exhausted from crying, he would have already left. Instead, all he could really bring himself to do was stay and think.

And more recently, plan. Even though Alan fully realized that the relationship was over and they were both supposed to move on, he wasn't quite done with Flynn yet. He wanted to see him just one last time, give him a final, mature farewell that wasn't choked from emotion and tears, and above all, just thank him for being a part of his life.

He would swing by tomorrow, maybe some time between the morning and noon when they hopefully weren't too busy, just to say a quick goodbye or two. Maybe even a kiss.

The fox grinned at the idea.

I can hardly believe it, Flynn. I actually feel ready to start a new chapter in my life, and I'm so happy you could be a part of the entire thing. Thank you.

Alan's smile grew, and with a flick of his tail he began to think about a certain coat he saw in a store window yesterday. The kind of coat that would be useful for a rabbit going to chilly Colorado Springs...

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Metro bus #Q7 grumbled down the suburban street, shamelessly ending whatever silence had survived the residents and their lawnmowers. Shade from the tree-lined sidewalks caused the sun to sparkle on and off the vehicle's pasty white-blue design, and the bus took one more right turn before coming back into the sunlight.

Like most Saturdays, the transportation line was brimming with passengers. Nearly every seat was occupied, and the few disgruntled riders who had entered to find a full bus grasped the holds for dear life, any second expecting the next bump to throw them off their paws. The suburban line buses were almost universally hated for their unforgiving rides.

The majority of people who put up with it were simple errand-runners looking to save a few dollars of gas and maybe even the planet at the cost of bone-jarring discomfort, while the rest were either too poor or too young to own anything better than a bicycle.

Alan fell into the latter category. The fox was currently the happy occupant of a window seat a few rows from the rear tires, and he used to opportunity to watch the streetlights and small one and two story houses whiz past at rapid-fire speeds. His tail was comfortably curled up in his lap underneath a blue North Face goose down coat and a hand-picked bouquet of peonies and white roses. His paws were folded in a small semi-circle upon the bouquet wrapping paper, and he was currently wearing one of his nicest pairs of clothes: a black buttoned jacket with a subtle red tie. It was nothing terribly fancy, but right now it made him feel like the best dressed fox in the world.

And I certainly need to be if Mr and Mrs. Warden's tastes in fashion haven't changed... They better like this coat...

He had bought that for Flynn at the local consignment shop half an hour earlier, and admittedly, it hadn't been cheap. It was North Face, and only about one to three months old, according to the shop owner and what Alan could find on the internet. Add the goose down lining, and it had come to a grand total of about \$120.

But Christ is it worth it. This is the nicest, warmest coat I've ever touched in my life. I don't think Flynn's going to have to worry about staying warm, if anything; his problem's going to be staying cool.

Alan grinned at his own little joke, and began to absentmindedly rearrange the flower bouquet. He had purchased those just before getting on the bus, and even though he really wasn't too sure about Flynn's tastes in that area, he thought they were pretty enough. The florist had even approved of his own custom arrangement, and that was enough for him.

I just hope Flynn likes it. I don't know, I'd like getting flowers I think? What do you give a boyfriend when he's breaking up with you anyway? Hell if I know.

The Metro bus accelerated away from an intersection, and Alan checked the street signs. *Bramble and 20th*: his stop was next, and he tapped the elderly female cat sitting to the left of him.

"Pardon me, but my stop is next. Could I get out please?"

She looked up from her book for a second, and then pulled her legs and handbag closer to her body as Alan scooted out into the aisle. He was just about to step down towards the door when she called out after him, "Good luck with your girlfriend, sweetie." Her face held a kind, gentle smile.

Alan immediately blushed. Why did she have to say that?

"Umm, boyfriend, actually," Alan stuttered. His tail swished awkwardly and his ears began to twitch as he glanced back at her, "My boyfriend." He never lied to people; it was practically a curse.

"Oh, pardon me!" the cat giggled and went back to reading her book. Surprisingly, she didn't seem to care, but Alan really wished he hadn't just announced his sexuality to the twenty other people sitting and standing next to him. He could almost feel their eyes on the back of his neck as he squeezed by with the coat and flowers to reach the door.

The bus engine suddenly revved as the driver downshifted on approach to their stop, and when the doors opened Alan practically leapt out onto the pavement. He almost swore he heard a few giggles and jeers as he exited, and trotted over to the street intersection as quickly as he could. His face was still burning red from the honest statement. He was such an idiot; why couldn't he just lie to people like anyone else?

And who knew that honesty would be ever be such a bad thing?

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After a few more seconds the bus accelerated with a roar, and the fox braced himself as a stinking cloud of diesel flooded over the sidewalk like a ghastly fog. Alan was coughing immediately, and tucked his muzzle down into his jacket. It always felt like the driver did that intentionally, and even more so today; what a pleasant joke.

It took about half a minute for the air to be breathable again. By that time Alan had already reached the next block, and paused to triple-check the street signs.

20th and October. Here I am, Flynn... just a handful of houses away...

Without another second, the fox straightened out his jacket and turned to walk up October Avenue. It was a pleasant place, with small one and two story houses peeking out behind tree-lined grass, and the street had just the right amount of charm. It was busy today too. Most of the residents were outside doing yard work or playing with their children, and Alan happily continued down the sidewalk.

What a shame Flynn has to leave all this behind... Colorado Springs better be all this and much, much more...

Alan waved at a dog mowing the lawn before glancing down the street again and checking the nearby house numbers. 31, 33, and 35: Flynn's was at 41, and the fox started moving a little faster until he shifted into a childish little skip. The neighbors may have thought it odd, but he didn't care. Alan couldn't wait to see his rabbit's face one last time.

His black paws bounded on and off the pavement and the coat's sleeves jiggled against his body as he approached house #41, and the second he caught a glimpse of the familiar blue paint, his face burst into a smile. He was so close to Flynn, so close to their last little goodbye, and he dashed past the rest of the houses until he had a clear view of theirs.

It was just like the other homes on October Avenue: simple but charming, and the only thing really out of place was the white and red "For Sale" sign positioned in the front yard. A few windows peeked out from the house's white brick and blue paint, and a lovingly painted white-picket fence wrapped around the grassy lawn and the few handfuls of scattered flowerbeds. It was beautiful, and the home almost seemed to beg for a visitor to take a few steps up the speckled stone-grass path and onto the wooden porch.

Alan didn't make it wait another second. As carefully as he could, the fox opened the picket gate and started strolling up the path, occasionally sending a paw through the thick green grass. A soft breeze quietly waved the nearby trees and rustled the leaves, and for a second, the lawnmowers and yard work faded away.

God, I almost forget how much of a paradise it is here. But I guess that's what happens when you live next to the suburb's busiest intersection. Maybe I should talk my parents into moving in.

He smiled at that, and with a playful whack to the hinged "For Sale" sign, trotted off the path and jumped onto the porch with a light, satisfying thump. Claws raced through his hair and fur as he tried to make a few final last minute-adjustments to his appearance, and his expression quickly shifted into one of polite, handsome respect as he stepped onto the "Hello" welcome mat before the door.

But for all the excitement, the sudden wave of wrenching nervousness was like a monster in his stomach. Mr. and Mrs. Warden absolutely hated his gay vulpine guts, and it took nearly all his effort to hide the panic from his face. Hopefully this would be worth it.

Here I am, Flynn... And for whatever it's worth, here's hoping your parents don't skin me alive for this...

The fox's fingers reluctantly hovered over the doorbell for a second, claws scratching on and off the wood, and with a sudden bite at his tongue, Alan pushed against the doorbell. As the tone rang, it felt like he'd summoned the end of his life.

Ding dong ding dong ding dong ding dong

Alan gulped loudly and started to shuffle on his paws as the tone slowly faded into silence. He could barely handle the nervousness, and began to quietly rearrange the peonies to try and take his mind off it. It didn't help; hopefully his ears weren't twitching too badly.

Thirty seconds ticked by in what seemed to be an eternity, and after a quiet but fierce internal debate, Alan rang the

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doorbell again. But there was still no response.

That's odd... The Wardens typically react to the tone of their doorbell with more noise than the apocalypse. Something's wrong... They're never this quiet...

Alan glanced in through the front door window, but didn't see anything beyond a wood table and a couple closed doors. Normally there would have been half a dozen rabbits crowding the glass by now. What was going on?

Did...

Alan quickly stopped the thought before it could get any further. No they didn't, and he immediately began loudly knocking on the door while giving the doorbell a few quick taps, all with his nose shoved up against the glass in anticipation of seeing a glimpse of rabbit.

But as much as Alan tried, the house remained frozen in silence.

What is going on?! There has to be somebody here!

The fox gave the doorbell one more tap before stepping away from the front door and quickly trotting back to the yard path. He glanced up at the windows, every single one had the blinds drawn shut, and then darted around to the garage. It was closed and the car was gone.

Alan knocked a paw on the garage door and paced back and forth across both of the sides like a wild, lonely animal. But there was still no answer, still no Flynn. Alan was getting really worried now; they should have been here...

Nobody can pack and leave that quickly...

The fox suddenly let out a whine as the negative thought leaked through. No! Flynn would have told him, Flynn would have let him know, and Alan swung back around to the front door. He would try the doorbell again, knock as loudly as he could until his paws were sore, and he was just about to dash back up the steps when he heard a voice burst at the edge of the lawn.

"Hey, fox!"

Alan let out a startled yelp and let the coat and flowers fall to the grass as he snapped around, "What?!?!"

The voice belonged to an older stern-faced collie standing just at the edge of the picket fence, and Alan's tail and ears began to twitch again as he stared into the dog's eyes. What did he want?

"What are you trying to do, walking around the Warden's house, eh? You look like a burglar; somebody might call the cops if you aren't careful."

Alan blushed and stuttered a little. He'd forgotten about the neighborhood watch program.

"No, no, sorry, sir, I was just, I was just..."

The collie tapped his fingers on the fence and stared at Alan. He seemed to soften up a bit now that he'd seen his face, "Go on?"

"I was just trying to deliver a few gifts to my friend," Alan suddenly started searching until he found the coat and flowers behind him and then looked back up, "He's moving in a few days, and well, I just wanted to give him a proper goodbye."

His voice stuttered nervously, and he began to scoop up the gifts while glancing back and forth from the ground to the dog.

The collie grunted loudly, "A gift for one of the Wardens?"

"Y-yes, sir. Where are they? I've been trying to find them..."

The dog's fingers tapped the gate even faster until he pulled them off with a deep sigh, "Wow," the pause caused Alan's stomach to lurch, "I don't know how to tell you this, but the Wardens left earlier this morning. Eight or nine, I think."

"What?" Alan suddenly shivered, "They're... they're gone?"

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"Yeah..." the collie patted the fence and looked up at Alan, "I'm really, really sorry about that..."

No... no, no, no this can't be happening...

"They aren't gone," Alan muttered, grasping for anything but the truth, "They said they'd be here; he said they were leaving in two or three days!"

"Listen, I'm really sorry about all this, but I saw them drive away this morning."

A chill began seeping through Alan's body as the reality came closer and closer, "Are, are you sure? Maybe they forgot something, maybe they left a thing or two inside the house."

The collie shook his head and let Alan's words dissolve into the silence, "No, I think they made sure of that..."

The fox stared at the ground for a few seconds. There had to be some hope; something!

"Do you at least know their new address? Number? Anything?"

The dog grunted, "I didn't know them all that well... The Wardens liked to keep to themselves for the most part. Even if they did have a few friends on this street I'm not sure if they would have said."

Alan continued staring at the ground; his legs felt like they'd never move again.

"And look, fox..."

"Alan. My name is Alan," he squeaked. Talking was the last thing he wanted to do right now.

"Alan," the collie continued, "Again, I'm really, really sorry. I know this must be hard for you and all, but is there anything I can do right now? Get you a drink? Try to talk about it?"

"No," the fox squeaked again, voice cracking as he looked up at the collie. *How could he even hope to talk about this?* "But... but thanks for your help, okay?"

"You're welcome," the dog quietly replied with a flat face and started moving before adding a few words, "I'm Rob, by the way. If there's anything you need, Alan, I'm right next door."

"Okay," Alan whispered, "Thanks..."

Rob gave him one last glance before turning and walking down the street, and after a few seconds Alan's eyes fell back down to the stone path, peonies, and Flynn's coat in his arms.

The coat that will never touch the soft, furry rabbit it was supposed to keep warm...

Christ, why didn't this work out, Flynn? Alan felt the tears start to form. *You were supposed to be here... what happened?*

The fox let out a choked gasp for air as the emotions raced inside him, and slowly turned to go back up to the house. His head was spinning. He needed to sit, he was so overwhelmed, scared, and angry, and Alan let out another gasping whine as slapped the "For Sale" sign.

It was all their fault.

The sound of the plastic jingling on the hinges echoed through the yard in agreement, and after a few more seconds Alan collapsed on the steps in a small curled heap. He pushed the flowers off onto the porch wood, wrapped his tail up over the coat, and suddenly burst into tears. He couldn't hold them off for a second longer.

Why Flynn, why?

Alan dove his claws into the bushy tail and yanked it into his face..

You were supposed to be here with me... We were supposed to have one more kiss... one more last goodbye.

The fox inhaled sharply and choked on the tears. His fingers were squeezing his own tail tight enough to produce pain, but that was nothing compared to the crucifying agony of his final thought.

You were supposed to have your peonies and goose down...

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7 years later...

"That tea's going to keep you up all night, hun," James laughed as he poked his head in through the doorway, "You might want to go easy on cup number three."

Alan glanced up with a smile, "Ha. Knowing you, I'll likely need the lift," he returned to the keyboard before speaking again, "Commercial?"

"Yup," the weasel nodded and glanced back to the television, "Love this channel, but hate the ads."

"Tell me about it," the fox muttered and began typing again as James trotted up to the bathroom. Normally he would have been out on the couch with his boyfriend, but tonight he'd had a little more work than usual. But he didn't really mind; this job paid great overtime, and at least it hadn't been too hard. He had just logged out of his tech-support software, and now had half a dozen tabs devoted to social media and the news.

Or however close I come to it. I doubt the average American considers the arrival of a new MacBook and a company keynote 'news.' Of course, half of them seem to have a problem understanding how to turn on a computer too...

Alan smiled and poked around in a game of minesweeper as he glanced over the new announcements and flicked through the social media tabs. There wasn't anything new, really, but it made him happy enough. He kept moving through a few pages and websites until he heard the sound of commercials fade into television theme music.

"Hey, James!" Alan called out the door, "Your show's back on!"

"Crap!" a half-muted voice yelled from behind the bathroom door, "It's never that fast!"

"It is tonight!" the fox grinned widely and chuckled as the toilet flushed and the sink spouted at full blast. A second or two later, James was racing down the hall, furiously holding on to his pants as he flew past Alan's office. The weasel's plaid blue boxers peeked out the sides, and the fox laughed a bit as the sounds of the television flowed into his room and James flopped down in the couch.

Christ, I love you James. Alan smiled. I swear, there's not another weasel as wonderful and quirky as you are.

The pair had met roughly two months ago at an electronics store, and as much as Alan hated to admit it, it was pretty much love at first sight all over again. At the time, the fox had still been getting over his previous ex, a pretty collie dog who had sadly turned out to be more crotch than brains, but in time, he had managed to get it straightened out pretty quickly. Now he and the brown and white furred weasel were about as close as Alan had ever come to anybody, and happily shared an apartment together as well as dreams of what would hopefully be a long, happy future.

The fox smiled.

A future full of long, passionate nights... God, James, you are perfect.

Alan's claw scraped against the edge of his mouse as he closed another tab and started making his last rounds on a social networking site. He rapidly whizzed through a few of his friends' feeds, and laughed at the small collection of pictures and messages they had decided to share with him and the world. The fox loved social networking, and above all was sane enough to see it for what it really was; a colossal waste of time.

But he was finished with it now. Alan was just about to close the browser and log off his desktop when something small caught his eye in the corner of the webpage, something that made him scroll halfway back up the page and do a hard double-take.

In the corner of a page that listed friends of friends, was the name "Oliver Warden."

Alan squinted and highlighted the name with his mouse cursor a few times. Warden... it couldn't be, surely not the same kind of Warden he was thinking of, right? It was a common last name, especially among rabbits with how rapidly they bred, but as much as Alan tried to ignore it and scroll past the smiling profile photo, he kept coming back. He couldn't stay away.

Four seconds later, he was staring at Oliver Warden's profile page. Three seconds after that, he was diving through a

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list of Oliver Warden's friends.

Like any member on the site, there were hundreds in the list, and Alan flicked through a few before giving up on scrolling and instead tapping the find combination on his keyboard. The search box popped up, eagerly awaiting his command, but for some reason, something was holding him back...

Why? That was so long ago, Alan, why are you so reluctant?

A punchline from James' television show burst in the living room with raucous laughter from the audience, and Alan suddenly snapped to his senses and made his trembling fingers type what his brain demanded.

Flynn Warden

In a split-second, the browser dove past the hundreds of people and pictures to focus in on just one, and Alan visibly flinched as he double-checked the name. But it was correct, computers never lied, and the black mouse cursor reluctantly hovered over a photo of a young adult rabbit. Did he dare? Did he really want to go back and look at what had been the cause of the most painful memory of his teenage years?

"What the hell is wrong with me?" Alan whispered as he clicked the profile picture and slumped back into his chair as the page loaded, "What the *hell* is wrong with me? Am I a bloody stalker now?"

In an instant, Alan was presented with about half a dozen photos of Flynn and all the things his high-school boyfriend had been doing, and within a second, the fox knew that this really was his rabbit. He was still recognizable, still held the long, amiable face that Alan had once known, and the fox began clicking through a few of the user details, half in the hope that they would somehow prove him otherwise.

But they only made it worse. Born in California 26 years ago, currently happily living in Colorado, and graduated from a religious college; every detail Alan read reaffirmed what he already knew. This really was Flynn Warden...

I can't believe I've found you, Flynn, after all this time. It's insane...

The fox began scrolling down through the page to take in a few more details of his friend, and surprisingly, it wasn't as bad as he thought it'd be. Of course, he'd had a lot of practice getting over relationships in the past few years, all of them just about as close as Flynn, if not closer...

I guess I just can't forget that memory of crying on the porch with my tear-soaked tail.

Alan kept looking through the page. What he felt wasn't really good, but it really didn't seem as bad as he'd thought. Honestly, everything seemed worse when he was 17 and in high-school, and 7 years was such a long time. Of course he was over this, and now, if anything, he was just oddly curious to see how Flynn was doing...

Alan flicked through a few of the pages. The rabbit was doing pretty well, honestly, he seemed to have a great career, a pretty nice house, but then Alan came on a photo that made him stop completely in his tracks.

Flynn was married.

But that wasn't what made Alan pause, it was who Flynn was married *to*, and the fox stared for 20 hard seconds at a picture of Flynn holding hands with a doe rabbit, a... female.

What the hell? How did this happen to you, Flynn? I didn't think you'd ever change...

Alan clicked the photo to bring up an enlarged image with a handful of captions, and his eyes darted across the text.

A beautiful photo of me and my lovely wife, Anna, taken just outside our home. Thanks to the photographer and everyone else for their help in planning our...

He stopped reading there, and instead hit the back button and began going over a few of the other pictures of Flynn and his wife. Alan could hardly believe it. Everything he'd dreaded so long ago was happening now to his rabbit, and he kept scrolling through a few more photo albums. Flynn now went to church, maintained a close relationship with his parents and other siblings, and was even planning on having kids; if there was something Flynn had sworn against during his youth, he was doing it right now.

Alan loaded another page of images. He didn't even care that he was stalking at this point; going through his first

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ex's profile was too interesting for all the wrong reasons.

The fox paused on another photo of Flynn and the doe, this one at their wedding, and leaned back in his chair with a sigh. As much as he hated to admit it, Mr. and Mrs. Warden had done it; their son was now the 'perfect' child, and best for them, Flynn had never looked happier.

Except when he was with me... Alan sipped another dose of tea and curled up in the chair with a neutral frown. *Christ, where did you go? Was this even your choice, Flynn? Is this even who you wanted to marry? Are you happy with her? Happier than you were with me? Is she everything you wanted?*

The rabbit's bright, cheerful face seemed to answer yes, but Alan couldn't push past his doubt. This wasn't his Flynn anymore; it was Mr. and Mrs. Warden's Flynn, Anna's Flynn, and he clicked the back button again and began digging through a few more wedding albums, half-hoping that he would find some part of the Flynn *he* knew...

In a few more minutes, the television clicked off to end the sounds of British comedy and warm, amiable laughter, and Alan listened as he heard his boyfriend's paws softly padding up the hallway. The fox took another sip of tea and turned towards the opening. He needed the break.

"Still working, hun?" James poked his narrow face in through the door with a smile.

Alan yawned loudly and leaned back in the chair to roll it away from the desk, "Not anymore. Believe it or not I'm actually finished for the night."

That was the weasel's cue, and without another second James glided into the office and swept up behind Alan to give him a loving squeeze around his shoulders, "Yay."

"Yup," Alan gently nuzzled James's face, and gave him a gentle lick on the nose before the weasel glanced up at the screen.

"Who's that?"

The fox looked back at the monitor in surprise. He'd almost forgotten about Flynn when James had walked in, and moved the browser up past a few photos to a close-up portrait, "Oh, just an old ex," he muttered with a smile, "I guess you could say he was my first boyfriend. I knew him all the way back in high school, if you can believe that."

The weasel giggled and gave him another squeeze, "Good taste, Alan. He's cute."

"Yeah," the fox spoke with a growing smile, and gave the weasel a quick lick to the nose, "But not as cute as you."

"Aww, Alan!" James gave him another squeeze and playfully chewed on his ear, "You're too sweet."

"You deserve it, skinny," Alan replied with a laugh before pausing, "Or should I say... sexy."

The weasel squeaked happily and wrapped his arms tighter around Alan, "Foxy!" he gave his boyfriend's ear another touch with his teeth, "You really are too much!"

The pair happily nuzzled for a few more seconds, and Alan kept grinning.

Forget Flynn. James, you are a thousand and one times better...

The fox quietly tapped his paw on James' arm, and the weasel began gently tugging at Alan's body to pull the chair away from the desk, "C'mon, isn't it late enough?" he teased.

Alan glanced up at the computer clock, "Yeah, 11:29... Listen, I'm almost finished here, okay? I'll be right behind you in a second."

"Fair enough, Alan," James licked the fox's face again and playfully spun the office chair before stepping away, "Don't stalk him too badly!"

Alan chuckled and scooted up to his keyboard, "I think I already have."

That gave the weasel another happy laugh, and James slipped out the door and up towards the bedroom to leave Alan alone with Flynn's profile page for a few more moments. The fox glanced up at the screen, eyes staring directly into the rabbit's, and then moved down at the site's IM and "Add Friend" icons.

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There are still so many questions I'd like to have answered and so many things I'd like to ask...

The fox's claw idly tapped on the mouse button.

But why would I? Maybe he's thought about it and this is what he figured out. He seems so happy with Anna, like I'm happy with James. It'd be so wrong to do anything that might change that...

Alan gave the rabbit one last glance before quitting the browser, logging off his desktop, and switching off his monitor.

Just like you said we would Flynn, we've both moved on, and now we're better than ever.

With a small smile, Alan pushed away from the desk and walked out of his office and up towards the bedroom.

He didn't want to keep James waiting.