

Ok, I know I can't say something like "how he almost died" and then never finish the tale. Here's the rest of my story...

Today was the day I told my family that I was gay.

It was Family Day at my University. Ivan and Anastasia Barsukov, my father and mother, were easy to convince to come out and visit. Mom loves doing things like Family Day, and once Mom had decided visiting was a priority, my father got time off from work surprisingly quickly. I think my mother is very experienced at getting people to say "yes" to her. I wouldn't be surprised if she convinced dad in less than twenty minutes.

I had elaborate plans for how to come out to each of them. I wanted to do it personally, one and then the other. I had ideas for how to get both of them in the best moods possible before I dropped the interpersonal bomb I was carrying upon either one. I speculated about which one would take it worse. Mom, who was like a velvet glove wrapped around an iron fist... or my father, who was as inscrutable as a book written in invisible ink. I even thought about how to perform damage control in a disaster situation. Of course, like all the worst disaster situations, I didn't plan for the one that actually happened.

My little sister, Alexandra "Don't call me Alexandra" Barsukov. I hadn't expected her to ever come visit, much less visit at the same time as my parents. Not only did she sweep in like a hurricane, she barged into my apartment at the exact morning that I had Teri, my... well, a friend, over for the night. And then proceeded to tell mom and dad all about it over breakfast. Not only was she a wrecking ball through all my elaborate plans and schemes, but there was no malice or cruelty behind her actions. Nothing beyond a trace of mischief which was, quite frankly, very characteristic of her. I couldn't even hate her for it. I ended up spilling the beans very much earlier than planned. And yet somehow it turned out alright.

The only person who wasn't happy about the revelation was my father. And he was more upset that I'd hidden that I was gay than he was about me actually being gay. I spent the whole day with my family. Free of worry and anxiety. Just able to be me. At the time, I couldn't remember ever having been more happy. The evening ended with a fiercely competitive scavenger hunt, of which our family took second place. The awards ceremony lasted until just past seven PM, and we were all somewhat hungry. Mom and Dad offered to take us out to eat, but my little sister had other ideas.

"Come on! I wanna see you cook!" Alex poked the backside of my left shoulder, her pearly-white teeth on display as she tried to convince me with the grin that had gotten her everything from dad growing up. "You mentioned you had to learn since coming to college. I've never seen you cook before in your life! Cook for us!" My baby sister was wearing her favorite Van Halen T-shirt, a pale gray which stood out along the blue dye she'd coated her snow white fur with. Between the color of her fur, the khaki shorts she was wearing with it, and the deep crimson dye-job

she'd done to her hair, my sister looked like a Primary Colors poster as she displayed her favorite hobby: being an irritant.

"Mom and Dad offered to pay for a meal out. Not working sounds like a much better plan to me, dinner-wise." I snorted as I walked towards Mom's dented blue minivan. "Besides, it's not like I'm a chef or something. I make basic stuff, like rice, chicken, pasta..." I zipped up my old varsity jacket in response to the chill. The red and yellow fabric were a bit worn and frayed from my high school days, but it was still a good jacket. Also one I'd committed to wearing it as long as I could in spite my mother, who wanted to bury it in a time capsule somewhere next to my old baby blanket.

"Pasta! That sounds good! Make us pasta!" Alex clamored.

Mom tilted her head, the bottom part of her lilac sundress rippling in the wind as she walked. "I would be willing to wait for pasta my son cooked." She was cuddled up next to my father, who had his arm draped over her shoulder as we approached her van.

Dad broke off from mom and walked a bit ahead, unlocking the car. "I'll spring for the ingredients." My father said, as he opened the driver's side door for mom, handing her the keys he'd taken out of the pocket of his old raggedy sports jacket. Dad always carried the keys, but mom always drove. That was how it'd been since I was a pup. It was one of the little traditions they had that I hadn't started questioning until I was an adult.

I turned a wounded gaze at him, feeling betrayed. "Dad?!? You too?"

He turned to look at me as I got into the seat behind the driver's seat. "Son, you can either put up with making pasta or put up with your sister and your mother pouting at you for the rest of the night. Which do you believe would be easier?"

There was a moment of silence in which I was aware that my mother and Alex were staring at me. My sister had even chosen that moment to tremble her lower lip. I knew she was doing it on purpose, but it STILL was more effective than it really should have been. I felt the desire to please my family going to war with my desire not to work. The whole violent conflict ended in less than a few seconds.

"...f-fine!" I spat out. "If we're having pasta, though, I'll need some supplies from a grocery store. I don't have half the things I'd need for puttanesca."

"Huh? What's that?" Alex looked over at me, her trembling lower lip bent down into a frown.

"A special sort of pasta sauce." I grinned. "If dad's going to be paying for this, I'm going to do something a bit more fancy than noodles with Prego on top."

“Now wait just a minute here-” Dad started, before Mom started the car on him.

“We'll stop by a grocery store on the way to your apartment, dear. Your father will give you a few twenties and you can buy whatever you need.” Mom practically purred as she drove out of the parking lot. Dad looked a bit angry, but once she'd spoken, he wasn't going to contradict her.

That's how I found myself walking into Tubby Traders, a local supermarket and deli. I needed some olives, capers, and some spaghetti noodles. And since my father had given me two twenties, I intended to buy a few other groceries I had been wanting as well. Dad knew he wasn't getting change back the second he gave me the money.

What? Don't look at me like that. It's a child's prerogative to mooch off their parents.

Most of the ingredients were pretty easy to find. Jars of capers and olives were in the same aisle. Spaghetti noodles were just one aisle over. But as I was starting to pick up some personal items, nature called. I needed to pee, so I left my cart where it was and dashed over towards a bathroom. The bathrooms at Tubby Traders are more like the ones you get at a gas station than the ones at a big business or a restaurant: A single restroom, with a door you can lock. Only one person can use it at a time. So when I found that the Men's bathroom was occupied, I had to stand outside and wait in front of the sickly orange metal door. Standing right there like that, I could hear some weird sounds coming from inside. Now, I try not to stick my snout into other people's affairs, I really do. My father always said that people who poke their nose where it doesn't belong are just asking to get it bitten. But I needed to pee, and I was pretty much stuck there. So I had enough time to work out that the person inside the bathroom was crying.

I felt my ears drooping. What was I supposed to do? Standing there outside a locked bathroom door listening to someone crying felt weird. But at the same time, my family was waiting outside in mom's van. And my own bladder was making its need known with a bit more pressure. I didn't want to chase them out of the bathroom. I bit my lip. After a few more seconds of hesitation, I reached up and knocked on the door. “Hello? I h-heard crying. Is everything o-ok in there?” Suddenly the person in the room went quiet. I heard pawsteps heading towards the door. There was a clicking sound of someone turning a lock. And the door opened.

Teri looked out at me.

His eyes were bloodshot, and he smelled of salt and wet fur. His hair was frazzled and disheveled, and he was wearing a formal suit I'd never seen him wearing before. The outfit was a dark black, with faint gray lines along the fabric. It had golden buttons on the cuffs and matching pants. He was even wearing a pale yellow tie with golden stripes. There were several wrinkles running down the length of it. It was so different from anything I'd ever seen him wearing before. I almost didn't recognize him. His belt was undone, and his undershirt was poking out of the front of his suit coat. His eyes widened for a moment and then he shut the door on me.

And a minute or two later, he opened it again. His eyes were dry and white. His clothes were pressed and wrinkle-free, and his belt was tight around his waist. He was smiling and smelled of sunflowers. I don't know how he did it, but he was suddenly a mask of perfection. With Teri, I always figured it was some sort of superpower. "Kristoph! Fancy meeting you here!" He smiled, his tail curling up behind him, his eyes never leaving mine. "I would have figured you were off with your family. Why are you here at a grocery store of all places?"

"Teri, are you ok? I heard you crying..." I put a paw on his shoulder. Something felt off. Like I was dreaming, or I was looking at an illusion.

He was quiet as he looked up at me. "Oh, that? I was just feeling lonely." He turned and looked towards a stand of bananas nearby. "You know, we've been spending so much time together, I think I'm just sort of missing you, you know? With you palling around with your family having such a gay old time, I guess I just missed you more than I thought." He took a step backwards, letting my paw fall down to my side. "You know me! I tend to make mountains out of molehills just ALL the time, puppy." He wagged a paw up and down as he went on. "Don't worry yourself about it. Once Parent's Day is over... everything will be fine again. I promise!"

"I guess... why are you wearing a suit?" I tilted my head. Teri almost never wore pants to begin with. I didn't even know he OWNED any pants beyond a single pair of blue jeans. I certainly wouldn't have ever expected him to own any suit pants. The only times I'd seen him even wearing long pants was when he'd been forced to by circumstance. I still wasn't sure what he did during winter when it was too cold to leave his legs bare.

There was a moment of silence between us. Teri took another step back into the bathroom. "You know, I really have been missing you, Kristoph. It's only been a day, but I guess I've missed the chance to have you all to myself. I've missed your touch... your scent..." He started undoing his belt. "The sound of you breathing when you hold me against you..." And then he slid off his pants. He pointed a finger at me, curling it slightly. Beckoning me inside.

I probably shouldn't have thought with my cock right there.

Maybe, if I had pushed the issue right there, things might have been different. But I didn't. I followed Teri inside, closing the door behind us, and making sure it was locked. Teri giggled. "Having sex in a bathroom? Oh you dirty boy..." He smiled, licking his lips as he began to tug down a pair of cherry-red panties. It was the only thing he was wearing that really seemed like him. He let them fall to the floor and advanced on me. He tilted his head up and kissed me on the lips, as I felt his paws tracing down my sides, moving towards my jeans. I allowed him to undo the button on the front. At this point, my cock was pressing up tightly against the top of my pants, so any loosening of tension was welcome.

Teri broke the kiss. There was a moment where I felt his breath against my body. He looked up. "Do you want me against the wall, or on the floor? Or would you prefer I had you?" His voice sounded hungry. Needy. I gazed into his brown eyes. He was waiting for me to make a move.

"I... actually, I kinda need to pee first." I reached back to scratch the backside of my head, feeling like a complete dork.

Teri stepped backwards. "Oh, um... yeah." he backed away from me, ears drooping.

I walked over to the toilet, my pants already down. I unbuttoned the front flap of my boxers and let my cock hang out, pointing it towards the toilet before letting loose. I arched my head up, closed my eyes, and let out a sigh. Relieving all the pressure down there felt good... until I felt a sudden new pressure clasp around my cock. I looked down. That insatiable feline had his paw around my cock, and was stroking it gently as I peed. "T-Teri! What the heck?!?" I felt my face getting uncomfortably warm.

Teri's giggle was high and shrill, like the cackling of a demon. "Just making sure you don't let everything leak out." He stroked his fingers up and down my length, never pressing too hard but making sure that my flesh felt it. "After all, it's no fun if it's all limp and floppy..."

If I didn't enjoy him so much, I wonder if I'd let him get away with so much.

The tiger moved his other paw to stroke my balls, which caused me to moan gently. At long last I finished peeing, and the stream ended. Teri scowled as he pulled his paws back. "Ugh! My paws are all soggy now..."

I looked at him. "Your own fault. You were making it hard for me to pee anyway, behaving like that." I turned to wrap my hands around his waist, spreading my fingers out and gripping his thighs tightly.

He broke into a wide grin. "I regret nothing."

I kissed him, pressing his body and mine against each other as tight as my arms could grip without hurting him. I knew Teri liked being held. He let out a quiet purr and started unbuttoning my polo shirt with his damp fingers. I was going to have to wash the shirt later, but I didn't care. I broke the kiss to come up for air. "Ok... we don't have long. My family's waiting for me outside. Up against a wall." I gently pushed him away from me.

The tiger walked towards a wall and pushed his hands up against it, his head turned to stare at it. His tail slowly lifted up, pulling the top of his white undershirt with it. He looked back at me, his eyes narrowed and a small smile on his face. "I don't mind a quickie if you fuck me raw like the wild beast I know you are..." his voice was hushed, but sugar sweet.

I felt my cock twitching as I stared at his ass. I'd never seen Teri exercise a day in his life, but he had an amazing ass. Tight and firm. The tiger had a runner's build: thin and lean, but with hints of muscle underneath surprisingly soft, black-striped orange fur. I took steps forward, putting my paws on his shoulders. "If you want a beast... I'll be happy to give you what you want." I growled a bit, mostly for his amusement. Teri loved it when his playmates were rougher with him. He shuddered as I pushed my cock against his cheeks, slowly penetrating. I wanted to let him feel every moment of it.

Since the year started, I've had sex with exactly three people. All three of them have been casual, commitment-free things. I hadn't wanted anything more yet. I wanted to come out to my parents and my friends before I even thought of a relationship. It didn't feel fair to anyone otherwise. The first person for me was Teri. The person who brought me out of the closet with a metaphorical vice grip and crowbar. The other two of them were people I met through events from the Gay and Lesbian outreach club on campus I've been going to: A wolf two years my senior who convinced me to bottom for him, and a cheetah boy who described himself as a sub and lost interest in me the morning after our time together, saying I wasn't rough enough for him. But Teri was my first ever. The first person I've ever had sex with, and the only person I've found myself in bed with again and again and again.

And his ass felt amazing every time I topped him. The tiger seemed to know how to work his ass around my cock. I felt myself groaning a bit as I thrust inside Teri. He arched his head up and let out a yowl, his voice intermingling with mine. Even though he liked it, I can't imagine taking a cock without lube was a pleasant experience for him. In the back of my mind I was worried someone was going to hear us, but the baser parts of me growled at it to shut up.

I didn't have much time, so I picked up the pace. My paws reached around to rub at Teri's nipples, the tiger closing his eyes and purring like a kitten. Using his chest as a lead I continued to fuck into him, pressing his body against the bathroom wall. He was biting his lip, shuddering as his cock rubbed against the cold antiseptic yellow of the wall tiles. I quickened my pace further. My tongue flopped out as my breath hit the back of his neck. Teri looked like he was biting his tongue to keep from moaning.

It didn't take long, but then I wasn't trying to draw it out and neither was he. Like a volcano I erupted, flooding his innards with my seed. Teri let out a hushed sigh, and looking down I saw a striped paw on his cock, beating it rapidly. He came a moment later, his whole body shuddering as he painted a bit of the wall white. "Oooh, I needed that..." he looked back at me and gave a small smile.

I grabbed some paper towels and began cleaning his cum off the wall. He grabbed some toilet paper and began cleaning my cum off of his butt. "You know I was going to help you with that." I looked at the spunk-covered paper towel.

"I know, but we needed to hurry, right? I can get myself off faster if I do it. Though, that's not saying it's what I prefer." He sat down on the toilet and began disposing of his soiled paper with several flushes. "Wash up, and you go out first. I'll wait a few minutes before I sneak out, ok?" I nodded, washing my paws and trying my best to clean up my scent so my family didn't immediately smell tiger and sex on me when I got back to the car. Water wouldn't make the scent go away, but scrubbing the fur around my crotch with some wet paper towels would at least help. I intended to walk around the grocery a bit to get some fresher scents on me as well. I had to be careful, since sex smells are rather distinct. And undeniably aromatic. I learned that in seventh grade when my mother had caught me masturbating a few hours after I had done it.

I stepped outside, still basking in the afterglow, and leaned up against the wall next to the grey metal bathroom door. While waiting, I pulled out my smartphone and looked over my recent feed. I had received about eighteen texts. From my little sister. The general gist of the subject matter was that she was wondering what was taking so long. At the end she mentioned mom and dad sending her in to find me.

Before I could respond back, the door opened. Teri's head poked out and looked around. When it turned to my direction his eyes were as wide as dinner plates. "Oh! I-I thought you had someplace to be."

I thumbed through my twitter feed. "My parents are waiting outside, and my sister is somewhere, looking for me. I thought if you wanted, we could finish shopping together. And then... um... y-you could meet my parents."

"Hm?" Teri stepped outside to face me, letting the door shut behind him. "You want me to- Oh. Ooooh." He turned his head away from me, towards a display of fruit. "They know?"

"Yeah." I smiled. "They know."

He started biting his lower lip. "And you want them to meet me? Like I'm-"

I put a paw on his right shoulder. "Well, you're already d-dressed to impress, aren't you? Wearing a suit and all. They're fine with me as I am, Teri! Well, as fine as they can be, I think. But they accept me! They do! I'm so happy I don't have to hide it from them! And it'd mean a lot to me if you came along with the family."

Teri folded his arms. "Fine with you as you are. They're REALLY fine with you as you are?" His tail thrashed back and forth like a writhing snake. "Of course they are. Haha. I mean, what's not to like about you?" He turned around, a smile as large as I had ever seen plastered across his face. "You're a great guy, Kristoph! A golden child. Practically a prince."

I looked away, scratching the back of my head. "Aw... t-thank you!" I wagged my tail. "So you'll come with us? I'm making pasta!"

He nodded. "And you came here to get noodles and sauce and stuff? right?"

"And stuff, yes." I nodded back, looking into his blue eyes. "What were you here for? We can get all our stuff together. I'll pay." Dad's extra money was going to be helpful.

Teri looked away, his ears drooping. "S-soda."

"I didn't think you drank soda much. Aren't there too many calories and sugars there for you?"

"Sometimes I get a thirst for it." He turned and walked. "Let's grab my soda later, ok? I think there's a sale on spaghetti sauce we could take advantage of." He took my cart and pushed it forward with him, leaving me behind.

Following him into the rows of sauces and cans, I found Teri holding two identical glass jars of store-brand pasta sauce. "Here, there's a Two-For-One sale going on with this brand." Teri put the two jars in my cart amidst all my other foodstuffs.

"Teri, I'm making a homemade sauce." I stood on the other side of the cart and picked both jars up. "I don't really need these. You ran off before I could tell you. My family requested something homemade, and that I be the one to cook it."

"Oh! Sorry, then. Here, let me put them back for you." As he reached over the cart to grab at the two jars with one hand. He grabbed the metal lids, wrapping his fingers tightly around them, and pulled them out of my hands across the gray metal grocery cart.

One of the jars fell out of his paws and slammed into the floor tiles, shattering. Glass and spaghetti sauce splattered everywhere like shrapnel from a detonating grenade. If I hadn't been standing behind the wire frame of the grocery cart, it'd have gotten on me too.

But Teri was right there at the point of impact. Spatters of meat-flavored red tomato sauce had splattered all over his suit pants. There were shards of glass and chunks of red tomato intermixed beneath his feet. There were diced chunks of pepper on his suit coat. Somehow some of the glass had even gotten into his hair.

There was a moment of silence. But not just between the two of us. It seemed like nearly the entire store was as still as a grave.

"Oh geeze. Teri, I'll go find like a towel or something, let's get you cleaned up and-" I started forward to try and help him.

"It's fine." He closed his eyes.

"But you're a mess!" I felt my ears drooping.

"I said it's fine!" He growled at me. "It's fine! I'm fine!" He took a deep breath, then sighed. "I'm just gonna go." He turned and started walking, the glass making snapping noises beneath his feet.

"B-but..." I hesitated. I've never been sure how to respond when people were angry. I wanted to chase after him. To help clean him up. But he didn't seem like he wanted my help. "What about meeting my p-parents?" I just stood there, ears drooping, watching as he walked out of the aisle and past my line of sight. After a minute that felt like an hour, I wrapped my front paws around the handle of the cart and started getting out of the aisle.

Then my sister hugged me from behind and snapped me right out of my funk. "Hey meathead! You didn't tell us you'd be in here a full half hour! Finally get all the stuff you need?" She lightly bopped me on the head, as per our usual greeting ritual.

I looked down. I had everything I needed in the cart. Not everything I wanted to buy, but everything I needed for the pasta. "Yeah. Sorry about the delay." I started pushing my shopping cart towards the checkout lines.

"Good! Any hungrier and I'd have to eat you." Alex made little pawpuppet motions with her right paw. "Rwar! Rawr-rwar!" As she leaned in to pinch my shoulder. "Chomp!" Her tail was wagging, and she had a wide grin on her face.

I laughed. "Sheesh! Ok, I get the point." My tail joined hers in wagging. "Were mom and dad that mad I was taking so long?"

Alex shook her head. "Nah. Dad's snoozing and Mom's listening to some audiobook. Honestly, I sort of volunteered myself until they let me go." She grinned. "Because I wanted to get you alone for a bit." She walked around me and caught up alongside the cart. "I am so psyched that you're into dudes. I finally know a gay guy! And you know what that means?"

"...no?" I turned my head to gaze at her. She was bouncing. In my experience a bouncy Alex was a bad thing.

"It means that we can do boy-watching together! Come on, what kind of guys turn you on?" Alex smiled, sniffing the air a bit.

I whimpered a bit. "Alex, can you understand that I m-may not be comfortable with this conversation?"

My little sister put her left arm around my shoulders, sweeping her other paw in front of us. "Come on, bro! Quit being a stick in the mud. You're gay now. Let that rainbow flag fly! Enjoy the meat department with me. There's so much on sale right now!"

I was screaming inside. "I'm not sure how comfortable I am, um, 'meat shopping' with my little sister." I squirmed. I knew on one level that my sister was sexually active, but that didn't mean I wanted to think about it.

Alex wasn't listening to me. "Ooo! How about that guy!" She pointed towards a brown furred ferret carrying a basket full of cartons of eggs. "Check out those arms! Not fond of the sweater... but he totally lifts with that kinda bod, you know?" She twitched her tail. "And he's taller than either of us. Mmm... imagine him behind you, his arms wrapped around you. Feeling his breath against an ear as he tells you how hot you are. His cock pushing up against-"

"-Imagining s-someone fucking my baby sister is about the fastest way to kill my mood t-that there is." I slouched over my shopping cart.

Alex rolled her eyes and smacked my right shoulder. "Gah, you're such a prude!"

"Prude?!?" I narrowed my eyes as I stared at her. "Are you k-kidding? I'm no prude, I just-" I clamped my mouth shut. I nearly told my sister I had sex in a public bathroom. I wanted to stop hiding things from my family, but not EVERYTHING.

"Prove it then." Alex's muzzle curved into a petite smirk. "Pick out one guy in the checkout area you'd totally fuck." She tilted her head as she looked me up and down. "Or that you'd let yourself be fucked by. Dunno if you like catching or pitching more." She walked in front of me, hands on her hips. "Gauntlet's been tossed, bro."

I looked around the checkout aisles. "I dunno how comfortable I am, looking at other guys like meat..."

"Why not? Guys do it to girls all the time." Alex countered back.

"W-well I..." I sighed. "F-fuck." I couldn't actually argue that point. "Fine." I scrutinized the crowds for someone decently hot. "Ok, him." I pointed over at a gray and black furred raccoon, clad in a pale gray shirt and black shorts that hugged his ass. He had a lock of his hair, dyed green, hanging over one eye. His snout was pointed down and his eyes were staring at the screen of a cell phone. "I'd have sex with him. Hands down."

"Him?!?" Alex pointed her hands at him. "But he's a scrawny little twig! And he's like a hipster or a goth or whatever besides! Probably buys all his clothes at Hot Topic and acts like they're the height of fashion."

“So? You buy clothes from Hot Topic, sis.” I folded my arms as she stuck her tongue out at me. “Limiting myself only to physical characteristics I like, he meets a lot of my criteria. He’s thin. I think I kinda like skinnier guys.” I tilted my head. “He looks... delicate. Like you could break him by pressing too hard. And I sorta like my guys a bit more effeminate, I guess. I smiled at the image of a cute little twink in an apron and nothing else. “Beyond that, I like his fur pattern. The variances in his fur colors are appealing. But that’s all just physical. I’m not really sure if I’d be attracted to him without considering ment-”

“Oh my gawd you’re dating that tiger.” Alex’s jaw had dropped as she interrupted me.

“What?!?” I looked back at her.

“That tiger! The one in your bed this morning! I met him!” She grinned. “You two are knocking boots! Boffing. Snogging. Mounting up. Doing the Lust And Thrust. Should I go on, or do you get it already?”

I felt my face getting hot. “What? No no, I’m not dating T-Teri...” We’d reached the cashier, so I started getting things rung up.

“You were having sex with him. Like, in your bed.” My sister’s smile kept growing.

“You saw him IN my bed! I explained it already!” I paid the cashier. “He’s just a friend.” I folded my arms and sighed. “He’s a friend I made at college.”

“Who happens to be gay, and who was sleeping in your bed when I walked in.” My sister walked forward and started bagging things with one paw, while using her free paw to wave a finger at me. “I may not be going to an institute of higher learning yet, bro, but don’t insult my intelligence.”

I lifted the bags into the cart, and then started pushing it out the door while Alex walked next to me. “Ok, yeah, we slept together last night. But we really are just friends.” I tilted my head up to stare at the sky. “I mean, that’s what we agreed on...”

“So what’s stopping you two?” My sister grinned. “Come on, he’d be an awesome brother-in-law!”

I had a vague image of Teri in a wedding dress. I shook my head to clear it out. “I’m not sure if we’d ever get married, sis.” I let Alex lift the bags out of the cart while I pushed in into a corral. “I mean, I’ve never dated anyone, and gay couples aren’t really entirely accepted by everyone, you know? And what if Mom and Dad hate him? And besides, I’m not really sure if Teri and I’d even work, you know? I don’t want to lose him as a friend. I don’t have a lot of friends here at this college.”

“Oh my GAWD, Kristoph!” Alex smacked her palm across her face and scowled. “You always do this. You sabotage yourself before you even have a chance.” She moved her hand off her face and snarled at me. “Shut up and listen to me: Fuck other people. Fuck mom and dad. If you really want it, stop letting yourself worry about what could go wrong and fuck that sexy tiger!” She thought, after a few moments. “So does he top or bottom or?”

My sister had managed to make me blush. ‘Sis, that’s really kinda personal!’ I growled as I opened the doors to the van to climb in.

“Hey, I’m just curious. . Little sister’s prerogative.” She grinned as she followed me into the van with the bags.

The trip home was fairly uneventful. Mom and Alex and I chatted while Dad looked at something on his phone. Once we reached my apartment, mom and dad and Alex watched some documentary on TV while I cooked. But the whole time, I was thinking about what what Alex had said. And what my Dad said before her. Did I let myself get in the way of my own goals? Dad said I was a worrier who didn’t let others in on my troubles. And Alex said I tended to sabotage myself. And what if they were right? There was certainly an attraction between Teri and I. And after coming out, I couldn’t think of any reason to hesitate on at least giving him a shot. Maybe as a couple, we could work.

I served my family pasta covered in a homemade puttanesca sauce. It was received very well. My sister was impressed and my father wanted the recipe. I got some leftovers out of the arrangement as well, which suited me fine. During the meal, however, I soon became aware of the fact that my father was staring at me. He would turn to stare at others when he was talking to them, but then immediately turn back to face me. His expression was blank, lips neither bending up into a smile nor down towards a frown. His brow was furrowed, and occasionally he’d narrow his eyes or tilt his head slightly.

It was only just after the meal was done that dad spoke up. "So you going to tell us why you smell of tomatoes and strange felines, Kristoph? We're all eager for a good story."

It took every ounce of willpower I had to avoid flinching. I hadn't bothered to disguise my scents! Alex and her talk about meat markets had distracted me. As if on cue, Alex turned to lean towards me and sniff at my shoulder. I glared at her. "A little rude, sis?" Any canine raised under Mom's roof learned it was impolite to check someone's scents without asking first. Alex gave me a grin that was far too wide and backed off.

As mom reproached Alex, my heart raced and my mind worked. Terinas was the only feline that had been physically close enough to me to leave a lasting scent. I didn't have any good reason to explain why, though. I needed an believable excuse. "I ran into a cat in the s-store." I said. "He was holding a jar of tomato sauce and it fell and broke. I g-guess I got some on me." As lies go, I thought it was at least believable.

"Gracious. Was anyone hurt?" Mom cleaned some sauce off her muzzle with a blue paper napkin, dabbing back and forth against her lips.

"Not that I saw." Alex jumped in. "Kristoph ran into the guy's butt, like right up against it, and the tiger fell over though. He got covered in sauce and stormed off. I guess he thought my brother was a pain in the ass!" Alex grinned at me, then mouthed something along the lines of "Your behind is mine!" when it looked like our parents weren't watching us.

In my mind, I cursed. Whatever conclusion Alex drew was probably going to cost me later. My sister wasn't above blackmailing when she saw the need. But the answer seemed to be enough for mom and dad. She chuckled and changed the subject. And the rest of the evening passed without incident. Alex and my parents made their farewells, then left for my uncle's place where they were staying. It was eight in the evening, and I was left alone, and with time to think.

I had spent the last few months of my life living as a gay man. I'd finally come to accept that facet of who I was, and even embraced it. Yet i'd never found myself in a relationship beyond the skin deep layer of physical intimacy. I'd never allowed myself the time, because I was convinced no one would want to be with me in spite of the obstacles they'd have to surmount. And now here I was, with the road clear in front of me. With nothing getting in the way. And after seeing my family, I found myself feeling a bit lonely, for what seemed like the first time in my life. Mom and Dad had their close relationship, and Alex and her ogling back at the grocers had made me start considering what I'd want in a mate.

And it kept coming back to Teri. Perhaps there was a bit of infatuation affecting my judgement (since he was the first person I'd ever had sex with) but he seemed like everything I wanted in a boyfriend. Someone outgoing and social where I was not. Someone to push me out of my comfort zone. Who was interesting, and just a bit effeminate. Since coming out I was discovering I liked girly boys. And someone who I could be friends with. Teri had dragged me out of the closet, but he'd also stayed there with me afterwards. He'd made an effort to truly be more than just a fuckbuddy.

I wasn't sure if he was open to a real relationship. We hadn't talked about it since the morning after our first time. But he was the one I kept coming back to, and I wanted to at least try. The only problem was I had no idea how to even go about trying. Could I just walk up to him and say "do you want to go steady"? Was what we were in already a relationship? He'd never called me his boyfriend. And I'd had other partners. I had never dated someone before. I had no context for any of this.

But I was going to find out. I got a coat on, and then walked out of my apartment, making for my car. I wanted to see Teri, and to tell him how my day had gone. And to find out if he felt for me like I felt for him.

My tail was wagging as I approached Teri's dormroom. My parents accepted me. My sister... probably liked the idea of me being gay more than I wanted to think about. I was happy. I could live my life, openly, without worrying about losing the people closest to me. I wanted to tell Teri. He'd be pretty happy about it. Especially since it... well, my family was the one thing I was worried about. Before I asked him to be with me.

The door to Teri's dormroom was shut. Standing outside it, in a bright blue sweater vest and khaki pants, was his roommate, a black furred skunk. I'd only actually met him two or three times before. Whenever I visited Teri he seemed to make himself scarce. I walked up to him. "Ah, hey... Xavier, was it?"

He turned and looked at me, sniffing and tucking a green binder under his right arm. "Oh, the boytoy. How are you doing, Kristoph?"

I perked my ears up and growled. "What did you just-"

His eyes widened, and he held up his hands. "Sorry, sorry. I'm just not really sure what to call... whatever you are to Teri. No disrespect meant. Shouldn't have said it."

I folded my arms and growled. "We're just friends." Well, for now, anyway.

Xavier's response was to point at the doorknob to the room he and Teri shared. "I've seen a sock on this doorknob when you've been over. Don't even TRY to tell me that sock was a liar."

My ears drooped as I recalled some of the things we'd... well... ok, maybe I couldn't claim the sock was a liar. "Friends with benefits, then." I pointed at myself. "NOT a boytoy." I sighed and nodded. "Is Teri around?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I was just coming back, and our room is locked." Xavier pulled a keyring out of his pocket, jingled it for a few seconds while he selected the right key, and then jammed it in the door's keyhole, turning it and opening the door.

Light from the hallway leaked into a darkened room as the door opened inward. I heard the clank of wood hitting hollow metal, and looked down. Empty beer cans were scattered along the floor. The door knocked a few away. The room was a mess; both beds rumpled, a lamp knocked over, and dirty clothes scattered along the floor. A large lump was curled up under the green bedsheets on the cot on the right side of the room. A stripey orange tail was poking out, slumped down over the edge of the bed. The scent of rum filled my nostrils. I thought I saw an empty plastic bottle of the stuff in the trash can on the far side of the room, but it was dark. Xavier stepped in, eyes wide. "The... what the heck? Is that an empty bottle of rum? Did... did he DRINK all this?" He looked at all the cans in the room. "How much alcohol did he DRINK?!?"

Frig, how much alcohol can you drink before you, I dunno... poison yourself or something?" He fretted, looking around the room in all the "This is a dry campus. Zero tolerance! If anyone finds out about this, he'd get expelled! Fuck fuck fuck!"

I didn't say anything as I followed him into the room. I wasn't sure what to do. I walked over and put my paw on Teri's tail. "Hey..." I whispered. "T-Teri? Are you ok?" I stuttered a bit. The bulge squirmed, and I felt relieved. A head poked out of the curled lump.

Teri's eyes were bloodshot. His fur was disheveled and his hair looked like a birds' nest. "Mmrrr... go 'way." He growled and swatted at me.

I moved to tug on his blanket. "Hey. We're kinda worried about you. Get up."

Teri squirmed a bit, and then pushed himself up off the bed. "Like you even care..." He spoke with a slur. He was wobbling a bit. "Shouldn't you be with your fucking picture perfect fucking family right now? Fuck you lemme alone." He growled at me.

I blinked. "I-I'm just concerned..."

Teri huffed. "Yeah, because yer so fucking perfect. Yer's smart, kind, built like fuckin' Adonis, family effing cares about you no matter what..." He snarled at me. "You get a fucking fairytale story... literally, 'cause we're fairies.. and you get to lord it over us like some snooty son of a bitch. It's insufferable. Whatever that word even is. You come out and you get t'keep everything. Makes me wanna puke..." He prodded a finger into my chest. "Some people destroy their lives coming out. You didn't have to slog through shit. Your family's so fucking perfect they'll forgive anything of yas. The only suffering you had was being trapped in yer own head! You... you don't deserve what you got handed to you onna silver platter!"

I will admit I didn't handle his words well. He was drunk. He probably didn't mean what he said. I mean, I HOPE he didn't mean what he said. But at the time, the feelings I was experiencing were like... imagine you were at a fancy party, wearing a rented white tux, and your best friend, for no reason, smashes a glass of red wine right into your face. So I snarled.

And before I really knew what was going on, my right fist had slammed into his face.

The next thing I knew, someone was yanking me away from him. I was growling and my fist had blood on it. Xavier had his arms wrapped under my armpits, and he was hissing at me. "Ok, he said some shit. You have every right to be mad. But what you just did was assault. And he's laying on a bed of empty bottles of alcohol in a dry campus. Do you really want to get us all in trouble?" I growled, trying to break through his hold. After a moment of struggling, he added. "Please don't hurt me."

I could have broken free. The skunk wasn't very strong, and I think he knew it. But after a moment of his struggling and mine, I happened to look at the limp figure of the tiger at my feet. A small pool of blood was forming around his muzzle. He was barely breathing. I relaxed my muscles as my eyes widened. "I... oh god." Only a few moments after it had overtaken me, the rage departed.

I tried to back away. Xavier let me. The first thing I did was check. The door to the hall had been closed, probably by him. No one had seen us. "I don't understand." I turned back to Teri. "Why? Why would he say that?"

"I don't know." Xavier bent over to Teri, putting two fingers against his throat. "He feels really cold..." he looked up at me. "He's been gone for most of the day. But when I did see him, he was... depressed. Dunno exactly why, but he's been complaining about Parents Day for the whole week. Seemed to put him in a mood."

I tried to wipe the blood off my knuckles. It was sticking to the fur. "I-I can't deal with this. I can't look at him. I can't believe he said that." I started walking towards the door. "I thought he'd be supportive. I had no idea he'd... I need to think about this." I turned the doorknob. "Are... are you gonna report me?"

Xavier sighed. "If I reported you, I'd pretty much have to report Teri too, wouldn't I?" He snorted. "As much of a pain in my ass as he is, I don't want to do that." He curled his tail. "But... he wasn't all wrong, Kristoph." He stood up and folded his arms. "I don't know the full story, but if what Teri said is true, how your family took you coming out? Not everyone's experience." He turned away from me to look out the window. "It's not like we were friends, but Teri and I went to the same high school. I don't know his life story or whatever. But I heard the rumors around the time when he came out. It got really ugly." The skunk sighed. "The first month we were rooming together, he barely said a word to me. He dressed all in black and mostly kept to himself. I don't really know what was up with that, but..." He swallowed. "I think it's safe to guess, whatever really happened when he came out, he might not have a home to come back to anymore."

I blinked. "It's sort of hard to imagine Teri being quiet and mopey."

Xavier's eyes narrowed as he gazed down at Teri's prone body. "And yet, here we are. I can't quite imagine this is all because he's jealous. But it's kinda similar timing, isn't it?"

I growled. "He still shouldn't have said what he said." I turned around. "I made a living hell for myself hiding so much! If it weren't for Teri, I would still be doing that! I thought if anyone would

be proud of me for being out, he'd be! Should I have stayed in the closet just to make him feel better?"

"No..." Xavier's voice was hoarse. "You shouldn't have to hide, but... you're one of the lucky ones, Kristoph."

I looked at him, then to Teri. I had to think about what he'd said and what he had hidden of himself from me. I didn't know how I felt about him. "He's your roommate. Take care of him." I turned the doorknob and walked out, scowling and growling. I had only taken a few steps when I heard Xavier's voice. "Kristoph, wait! Um, um.... Don't just ditch me here with this mess!" With how far away I was, it was faint. He probably didn't want to shout and risk attracting attention.

I wanted to leave. To wash my hands of the whole situation. Teri had no right to talk about my family, or about me, like that. And it wasn't the first time he'd crossed a line. On one of the first few times we met he came on way too strong. I had to force him off. I didn't understand why he'd ever have felt like he had. Why he'd be so sickened just by the idea of my family supporting me. Why he was jealous that they wouldn't abandon me. Xavier's words came back to me. He'd said I was one of the lucky ones. I hesitated, and stopped walking. I started to bite my lip. One of the only things Teri had ever told me about his family was something about how he had lost the chance to go to a private school on his father's money. Maybe no one had been willing to stick by him. Maybe he'd felt as alone and confused as I had.

I kicked at the floor. On the other paw, if that was the case then he should have been MORE supportive. He'd been through what I feared. What anyone coming out probably feared. I would have stood with him if he'd been coming out. But he didn't know me when he came out. Maybe no one had stood with him.

I felt a paw on my right shoulder. "Kristoph, please!" Xavier hissed into one of my ears. "He's barely breathing and I don't know what to do and he won't wake up since you, um, you know. I think there might be something really wrong with him." He was still trying to keep everything quiet. "I don't- I don't know if his life is in danger. I don't know how to help him. Please." His voice was tense. I could feel his paw trembling. I grit my teeth and growled. I was mad at him. I didn't want to help Teri. This wasn't my fault.

But my family hadn't ever abandoned me, not even when I came out. I wasn't sure I could look myself in the mirror if I abandoned someone now, just because he pissed me off.

"Dammit dammit dammit..." I turned around and walked towards Teri and Xavier's room, passing by the skunk while motioning with my paw for him to follow. I closed the door behind him and looked over towards Teri's body. The tiger was trembling. "It's probably alcohol poisoning." I kicked an empty can of beer out of my way as I walked over towards Teri. "We

need to wake him up and get him sitting up. Drinking water will help as well. He's probably dehydrated. If we aren't calling 911, we have to keep him awake. "

Xavier bit his lip. "We might have to. He wouldn't wake up, even when I shook him."

"We'd need some sort of stimulus. Nothing too intense, but something that-" I closed my eyes. "Go... go get some water. Like a pitcher of it or something." I had an idea, but I really didn't want Xavier seeing what I was about to do.

"We've got a bottle of water in the mini-fridge..." Xavier walked towards it.

"Not enough!" I barked at him. "Go fill a pitcher with water. I'll try to wake Teri up." I waited until Xavier left the room and closed the door. Then I slid Teri up to a sitting position against his bed, sighed, and pried Teri's muzzle open with my fingers. "I really hope this works..." I muttered to myself, taking a breath and then pressing my lips against his cold, clammy ones. I really wasn't sure if this was a good idea or not. But I needed him awake, and I didn't know what else I could do if shaking him wouldn't work. I wasn't really sure if CPR was the best possible option, and I wasn't really sure if I remembered all of my old CPR training. But it was the only thing I could think of. I broke the liplock and began to push against a spot on the center of his chest. In my peripheral vision, I saw the front of his pants stiffening. "Dangit Teri, you're really weird sometimes." I grumbled as I moved to breath air back into his mouth again. I later learned that CPR wasn't exactly a smart idea in that situation. But it was the only sharp stimuli I could think of, aside from hitting him again.

I was just about to pull away from his lips when the door opened and Xavier walked in, holding a pitcher of water.

His eyes went wide as he stared at us both. Mine were probably as big as dinner plates as I stared right back at him.

Xavier looked into my eyes. Then up at Teri. Then back to me.

"I'll... just get some more water." He walked backwards and closed the door. I felt my face getting hot as I moved back to pushing against the center spot around Teri's chest. Eventually I was rewarded with a low moan.

"Uuuugh..." Teri moaned. "M'head..."

I licked my lips clean of some of Teri's saliva and looked up at him. His eyes were bloodshed. "Hey, come on. Stay with me." I snapped my fingers in front of his eyes.

"Do y' hate me?" He blinked, reaching up to put a paw on my shoulder.

I took his paw and moved it away, holding it tight. “No. We’re not going to talk about that right now. We just needed you to wake up, Teri.” I looked up at him.

“Why ar’ you here?” Teri’s speech was still slurred. “You hate me. You hit me...” He tried to stand up. I put my free paw against his stomach to keep him sitting.

“Yeah, you’re not my favorite person right now. But if two gay guys aren’t going to look out for each other, who will?” He was shivering. I reached over and pulled him up against me, putting my arm over his shoulders and holding him against me. “Stay awake. Let’s get you through the night, at least.”

“You should hate me... I’m worthless.” Teri mumbled, closing his eyes. I shook him to keep him awake. His eyes perked open again. “I’m a fuckup. He said so. Just gonna keep hurtin’ people... gonna keep hurtin’ you...”

His body was cold. Too cold. We talked for a few minutes, mostly just so I could keep him awake. Then finally Xavier opened the door again, holding two pitchers of water in one hand. “I’m back. He needs to drink some water, right?”

I nodded. “Xavier, about what you saw earlier-”

“Let’s get some water into the tipsy tiger, then.” He grabbed a sky blue plastic glass from a shelf nearby and poured water into it. He held it out towards me.

I decided to let the matter drop. I took the glass and held it up towards Teri. “Here. Drink this.” I held it for him, making sure he was sipping some of it. After a few moments, Teri took the glass himself.

“I’m impressed he hasn’t vomited.” Xavier looked around. “At least I won’t have to clean that up. It already smells like a distillery in here.” He snorted, his muzzle curled into a frown.

“It’s probably better that he hasn’t.” I looked up at Teri. “He could choke on upchuck, or it could dehydrate him more.” I felt Teri shivering beneath me. “Pass us a blanket, will you? We need to keep him warm if we can.”

The skunk reached up and yanked a blanket off of Teri’s bed, handing it down to me. “You really seem to know a lot about this stuff. How’d you learn? It’s not like you’re a pre-med.” He folded his arms and swayed his tail.

“W-well...” I flatted the blanket over my legs, and then tucked it over Teri’s. I pulled it up over us both. “Mom caught me sneaking some tequila when I was sixteen. She let me drink some of it, but only after I knew exactly the possible repercussions. She sorta wanted me to be sure I knew what could happen to me. I guess it stuck with me. Also, I was a boy scout.”

"Too fucking perfect, 's what you are..." Teri mumbled as he sipped more water.

"Yeah yeah, we know how you feel, drunk Teri." Xavier rolled his eyes. "Hey... Kristoph? Thanks." He blushed. "I... wouldn't have wanted to handle something like this by myself. I was freaking out." He closed his eyes. "I'm not good at dealing with pressure. I freeze up. I was so sure you were gonna beat the shit out of me when I tried to get you off of him. I'm... glad you didn't."

"Yeah, me too." I looked at him. "It wouldn't have been fair to leave you here without support. To you or him. But you were the one who convinced me to come back." I looked at Teri. "I wouldn't have wanted to be the one left with him either, you know? We can handle it together."

Xavier gave a weak smile. "I think I agree. Even if that is so sappy it's gonna make me sick."

As if they'd rehearsed it, Teri's cheeks widened and his paw slammed against his lips, trying to hold something in. I grit my teeth. "H-he's hurling!"

"Not on the carpet! Into the waste bucket! The waste bucket!" Xavier scrambled to grab an empty waste bucket by his desk, thrusting it towards me.

We kept Teri awake for the rest of the night as best we could. We watched TV, talked to him, and slept in shifts. It was a good thing Xavier kept earplugs with him, because we wouldn't have gotten any sleep otherwise. By about six AM, we all felt safe enough to let Teri pass out on his bed. He'd been out of it the whole time. And neither Xavier nor I were that much better off.

I left Teri's dormroom at six thirty in the morning, tired and grouchy. I was still mad about what he said, and a night without much sleep hadn't helped matters much. But my anger didn't burn red hot anymore. I felt calm, but I knew I needed time to think. I didn't know when I'd see Teri again.

At the time, I didn't even know if I wanted to.

You've probably guessed that the story isn't over, but I wouldn't see Teri again until the end of the school year. When both of our lives would change, just a little bit more...