

Courtship

By Terinas Tiger

Part 5: Seeing Eye to Eye

I'm hung up on a guy.

That's my problem, right there. My thoughts keep coming back to him. Admittedly, there's some pretty good reasons for it. Teri was my first, the person who dragged me kicking and screaming out of the closet. He was the first guy I dated, and the first guy I was ever... Intimate... with. As first times go, it was awkward, intense, and amazing. Teri was a heck of a teacher, and he was patient with me the whole way. Maybe that's why it all started. I've had sex with other guys since then, but nothing ever felt as wonderful as my first. Maybe that's how it feels for everyone. I don't have any context. It's not like I've talked with other guys about their first times. But even after that, he elicited feelings out of me I never knew I had: Desire, a hungry lust that I'd never felt before in my life. Want, a possessiveness I had no words for. Passion, a kindled bonfire in my spirit that I had gone without for so long that I wasn't sure what to do with. I chose not to pursue Teri as more than a friend at first because I'd never felt like he made me feel before. And that confused me. Even dating other guys didn't seem to elicit those reactions from me. Somehow Teri pushed me to be more than what I thought I was. No one else ever had, and no one else has ever done that since. It took me months to understand these feelings, and they scared me.

Of course, there's a reason why Teri and I aren't dating. There was an incident, and things were said, and I got so very angry at him, and then I punched him. It was an act that superseded thought. Something I did purely on instinct. And, looking back at it, that terrifies me. I've never been an angry sort of person. I've whole life, I've practically been a pacifist. And the idea that I could hurt someone, just because I got mad at them, that I could hurt HIM in particular... That frightens me. It frightens me that I could be that sort of person. The worst of it was, it felt so right at the time. I never wanted violence to feel right, but at that moment, I saw red and just did what came to me naturally. By the time I'd logically sorted out those feelings, and was ready to apologize, Teri had already committed to keeping his distance from me. I tried to meet up with him on campus several times, but he ignored my calls and texts, and outright ran from me when we saw each other in person. At the time, I thought he was afraid of me. I wouldn't blame him if he was. But I wanted to see him again. At least to apologize. I wouldn't expect him to ever take me back.

So when I finally managed to corner him, it was at an apartment complex. As his prospective roommate (I'm not proud of using this to corner him) it was with mixed feelings that I stood before him. I'd made up my mind that, if he'd have me, I wanted to have him. And yet at the same time, I was worried about hurting him again.

I'd forgotten to set up an alarm and slept in longer than I'd intended. I was going to miss the roommate interview. And I couldn't *do* that. I'd hurriedly loaded all my boxes into the blue, dinged up car I'd been driving since I turned sixteen. Skipping breakfast, I got into the car and sent a text to my friend at the campus, asking him to reschedule. We'd cooperated to make sure that I'd be the first person they interviewed, before they even got to their new apartment. Waking up too late had screwed that up. Grudgingly, he had agreed to stall for me. I hit the road while screaming inside, in a fit of frenzied panic. While I was driving, all I could do was hope that they wouldn't meet the perfect roommate before they I saw them again. Because I had a plan, things were in motion, and I couldn't screw this one up. It wasn't as if I couldn't have lived on campus again for my second year, But there was someone specific I wanted to live with, and I wanted that more than anything else in the world.

The actual interview process was a formality, at best. Xavier and I had kept in touch over the summer, and we'd more or less been friends ever since the night we met. I'd discovered he and I had more in common than I'd initially thought. That had been the one good thing that came out of that night. So I wasn't worried about any questions Xavier would ask. But this, trapped behind a closed door with my other future roommate, was what I had to worry about. Teri and I had a history, and Xavier had passed it on that he intended never to see me long enough to revisit it. Teri stared up at me from his seat on the bed. Eyes that were the color of young leaves followed my every movement.

I stumbled for words. Teri'd caught me off guard. I had expected him to try to push me out, or try to dissuade me. I came expecting opposition. But just twenty minutes after we'd seen each other again, after months apart, we were in a bedroom together. The tiger had surprised me so wholly and entirely that I wasn't sure what was going on in his pretty head. And seeing him on the bed sparked memories. Memories which stirred certain instincts I was having trouble ignoring. I folded my paws along my crotch, hoping to hide any awkward bulges. "So. Here we are." I said, quietly.

"Kristoph..." As he spoke, I finally got up the nerve to look him in the eyes. Just a second after I did, he looked away. His ears drooped flat against his head. The air was pregnant with things unspoken.

I grit my teeth. I've never felt I was the most assertive person, but I had to be the one to say it. Especially after what happened last time we were face to face. I had to be the one to take the first step, so I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and opened my mouth to say it.

"I'm sorry." Teri's words were an arrow, piercing the thick silence between us.

I sputtered, blinking in reflex. He'd beaten me to the punch. "W-what?" Caught off guard for a second time, I spoke without thinking. I nearly bit my tongue in blurting out the first thing on my mind. Just a second later, I regretted it. I've gotten better about how I speak since going to college, but I still stutter when I'm nervous or caught off guard. Just the sound of that stutter

reminds me of times in my life where I was much less comfortable in my own skin. It's not a happy time to be reminded of. But it's hard not to stutter unless I'm focused on what I'm doing.

Teri pressed his paws to his chest, clutching the fuchsia fabric of his shirt. "I said such terrible things about you and your family. It came from a place of jealousy, and I can't ever take back what I said. I was drunk, but that's almost the exact opposite of an excuse. I'm sorry, and I knew I had to apologize about it if we were going to be living together."

I raised an eyebrow. "U-um, well, not that I don't appreciate the apology, but it feels like I should be the one saying sorry here. I *did* punch you."

The tiger shook his head, making the brown hair combed back down his shoulders bounce. "Oh no no no no no! I'm not worried about that. I mean, I deserved it, didn't I?"

I reached forward, and tried to take his paw. It was happily surprising that he allowed it. Taking a step closer to Teri, I frowned. "No! No, you really didn't! That's what I was going to apologize about?"

Teri's response was to tilt his head against his right shoulder and frown. "But I said some really horrible stuff. I mean, when you look at it objectively, I made you hit me. If I hadn't said all that stuff, you wouldn't have done it."

My left paw smacked against my forehead and I grit my teeth. "T-that is not how it works!" I thrust my arms forward. "The correct response to drunken insults isn't violence! It should never BE violence!" I glared into his eyes. "You're talking like a battered housewife!"

Teri's eyes narrowed as his gaze trickled down my body. A sly smile crossed the feline's lips. "If we're fighting like an old married couple, does that mean I'm getting makeup sex afterwards?"

"W-what?!?" I stuttered, my eyes wide. My cock twitched against my the fabric of my jeans, painfully erect. When I'd moved my paws away from my lap, I'd put my meat on full display for a hungry tiger. "Where did that come from?"

A slight titter escaped Teri's lips. "I should ask you the same question." He traced a finger up in the air, drawing a line of the outlined bulge in my pants. My face was hot as I watched him. "Seems like someone certainly missed me."

I looked away, trying to think about anything other than the tiger sliding his fingers along my stiff, slick shaft. "You h-have that e-effect on me!" I spat out. Nothing was helping take my mind off the giggling feline.

"And that's the exact problem." Any softness in Teri's expression was gone. And just a moment ago, he'd been joking and teasing like he always did. His smile plummeted into a frown, as he

glared straight into my eyes. "Here's my concern: I don't want to get together with you, Kristoph. I've become convinced that I'm not a good experience for you. I don't want to hurt you again, and I'm not nearly as stable a person as I'd like to be. I'm not sure a relationship of any sort would be good for me right now, and..." He trailed off. "I guess it's just that it feels like you're too good for me." He folded his arms and looked away. "I'm getting over a lot of stuff. I've done some things I'm not proud of, and I can't not be the tiger who's done that stuff. And meanwhile, you're this nice, innocent, relatively naive college boy-"

"I'm actually older than you." I interjected.

He snarled. "-And if age was the point of this conversation, I'd concede the point!" Teri's tail thrashed against the carpet like a writhing serpent. "My point being, at the very least I'd be a bad influence on you as a lover. And at worst, I'd hurt you again." He closed his eyes. "I don't ever want to hurt you Kristoph. You're too wonderful for that."

I wanted to snarl at him. I wanted to argue back. I wanted to ask him if he thought my feelings should matter. I wanted to ask him why he was so convinced he wasn't worth taking a chance on. I wanted to tell him his reasoning was ridiculous. I wanted to grab him, pin him down, kiss him firmly, and make him glad he was a man. I wanted to show him exactly how much I wanted him.

But I didn't.

Because any of those options would have led to a fight at some point, and I didn't want a fight. I'd actually expected this. Xavier told me that Teri tended to try to run from things he didn't want to have to deal with. And I'd known the tiger long enough to agree with that assessment. If I pushed the issue I wanted to push now, I'd just escalate things. So I held my tongue.

"So I want to clear the air before we finalize this arrangement." Teri held out a hand for me. "We're friends, alright? Nothing more. We are not going to be dating. We are not going to be getting involved with each other. And we aren't going to be having sex. Just friends, like two regular guys who hadn't spent past nights of torrid passion with each other. Agree?"

I snorted, reaching out to take his paw. "Alright, agreed." We shook on a deal I had no intention of sticking to, and Teri smiled, happy that I saw things from his perspective.

I really am a terrible liar, but I grew up with a little sister who was quite adept at weaseling her way out of things. Somewhere along the way, I've learned sometimes all you have to do is smile, nod, and let people convince themselves.