

Coming Out On Top, Part 1

By Terinas

You want to know how it happened for me? Well, it's a bit of a long story...

I awoke in a cold sweat, jerking up to a sitting position. The abrupt movement was enough to cause Teri, the tiger I'm not quite dating, but more than 'just friends' with, to stir. Yawning, he looked up at me, eyes half open. My eyes glanced towards the green numbers on my digital clock. 5:26 am. Teri snorted. 'Go bak t'sleep...' he slurred, closing his eyes and rolling over away from me. I sat there in the dark, listening to him breathe. My name is Kristoph. Today is Family Day, an event at the college I go to. My family is coming to visit.

And today is the day I tell them I'm gay.

I pushed myself out of bed and pulled some pants up over my butt. Maybe it was the dead silence of morning, or the particular day that it was, but something made me think about how it had come to this. Even though it had only been a few weeks since I accepted that I liked other men, it felt like something I should have done years ago. I'd been repressing myself for years, unable to express my desires save through pornographic websites and magazines. I silently padded across the olive green carpet of my bedroom floor and carefully shut the door behind me. Exercise always helped me focus, and I wanted to think. So I walked across the cold linoleum of the kitchen and into the living room, where I laid down in front of the couch and used it as a brace to begin doing situps. When I had started first going to high school, I wondered why it seemed like every other guy chased girl after girl. I never saw the point to it. The only girl I attempted to court broke up with me after two dates because I wasn't interested in kissing. Looking back, that was probably a sign. At first I had told myself I just needed the right woman. Later, I told myself I could just live the rest of my life celibate. I resigned myself to loneliness.

Then he showed up in my life.. A glittering, fabulous walking stereotype, the embodiment of everything I feared I'd become if I acknowledged my appetite for my own gender. How could I not stop and stare at him? I grunted and panted a bit. I was up to fifty sit-ups and I was still a bit sore from the night before. Teri caught my eye and then I caught his in turn. At the time, I thought of him as nothing more than my own antithesis. Yet perversely I wanted to understand him and why he was the way he was. Teri used my interest to strong arm his way into my life. At a hundred sit-ups I stopped, putting my hands back along the living room's teal carpet and breathing deeply. Teri pushed me farther than I thought I was ready to go, and that scared me. I drove him off, but he came back, this time meekly and seeking to make amends.

That was the moment when he stopped being a stereotype, and I started to truly understand him.

I had believed Teri to be a hedonist, a superficial pervert only interested in physical pleasure. Our first encounter didn't do much to dissuade me of that opinion. When I chased him off I never expected to see him again. But he came back. Not to try to seduce me, but because he wanted to apologize. He took an interest in me. The more time I spent with him, the more proof I found. Teri is studying psychology to become a therapist. He goes out of his way to listen to people's problems. I've yet to see him say no to someone who came to him for help. He wasn't the self-interested party boy I thought he was.

Which left me wondering where that conclusion I had drawn before I even spoke with him even came from. If that perception I drew was wrong, what else might I have been wrong about? Where did my

conclusions about homosexuals come from? And what other beliefs did I carry that were erroneous? I stopped at the peak of my one hundred and twenty third situp and thought about that. I had never mused on why I had carried a bias against homosexuality before Teri waltzed into my life. It had just been this monster that I had fled from without ever considering its source. I began to wonder if my parents also carried beliefs and biases without knowing where they came from.

Once I came out, how would they see me?

I felt a paw on my shoulder. When I turned my head and looked up, the tiger was there, clad in nothing more than a pair of sky blue woman's panties and rubbing his left eye. "I told you to go back to sleep, pup." He grumbled as he tossed his hair, trying to get it to lay flat. It didn't work. After fussing with the curling tips of his pelt, he sighed and gave up. "You know, you don't have to do this."

"That still confuses me." I raised an eyebrow. "I can't believe that you of all people would be advocating hiding what I am from my parents." I bent back down, pushing away from his paw, and resumed my third set of fifty sit-ups.

His arm snaked its way back over to his side, paw resting on his hips as he swayed them. "Only because it's none of your parents' dang business who you want to cuddle." He growled a bit, tail twitching.

I pulled my chest up to meet with my legs. "They raised me and they took care of me. And they're important to me. They deserve to be involved in my life. I don't want to hide who I am from them." I bit my lip. "Isn't that how you felt when you came out to your parents?"

Teri's response, if you could really call it that, was to lean in and nibble at my ear. And then put his paws on my shoulders and rub them. I'll mention now that I've noticed Teri doesn't discuss his family. At the time I meant to press him on it further, but before I began to speak his paw had found its way to caressing my left nipple. Right then and there, libido won out over asking him anything. I'm learning that sex is intoxicating. This has become more evident to me the longer I've allowed myself to share it with another. The feeling of Teri's breath against the back of my neck, for example, as he traced his paws along my bare chest, was incredible. It made it nearly impossible for me to focus on anything else. I was sitting. His captive audience as he reached down and...

Ah, do you really want me to continue? It's just that this is a bit personal and... you do?!? Um, well then...

His left paw reached down past my chest and squirmed underneath the hem of my pants. His head pressed against mine. "Feels like we've got a bit of morning wood to take care of..." His words ended with a giggle, and then a tongue pressing into my right ear. His fingers traced up and down my cock, kneading the stiffening flesh like dough. It was too much. Even after several encounters with Teri he was still finding new ways to make me moan. I arched my head back and let out a low howl as his fingers rubbed against the tip of my cock, smearing some of my precum around and between them, and began to stroke.

Teri pulled his head a bit away from mine. "Sing for me, puppy." he whispered into my ear, as he started to purr and his fingers danced along my shaft. His fingers drew circles on my flesh, once after another after another, bouncing down and up in a rhythmic pattern. Sensations like that meant I wasn't about to stop making noises anytime soon. I started to thrust against my pants, the bulge within them

fighting against the denim encasing it. Teri licked his lips as I let out another yowl. “A sweeter song I have yet to hear.” He purred as his fingers begin moving faster up and down the full length of my cock, circling my knot and then bobbing up towards its peak.

It was at that point that I felt Teri's right paw brushing up against the base of my tail. Fingers pushed my pants out as he shoved his hand in, moving down to below my tail. I had just enough control over myself to gasp. I knew exactly where he was going with this. During our time together, I had taken him several times. However, we had never quite tried things the other way around. I felt a finger pressing between my two cheeks for the very first time ever. And in the mood I was in, I kinda liked it.

My loins were on fire. I stopped moaning as I panted, thrusting up and down until I lost control, spurting out into my jeans. Teri chuckled and pulled his paw back to lick at the mess on it. A few moments passed as I panted. Then I pushed away from him, and stood up. “Incubus!” I swatted his rear with an expression that was a mix between a smirk and a snarl. “Now I need a fresh pair of pants.”

Teri looked down and saw a dark spot on my pants. “Oh my god you were going commando!” He began to laugh. It probably would have seemed less funny if we both weren't running on five-ish hours of sleep.

I glared at him, ears flat against the back of my head. “Sssh! We've already given the people in the neighboring apartments enough cause for a noise complaint!”

Teri yawned. “Some thin walls you got around here, then!” He traced a finger along my bare chest from pec to shoulder as he sauntered past me. “Well, I don't know about you, but I'm still tired. I'm heading back to bed. You gonna join me?”

I thought about it for a moment. “I don't know if I can go back to sleep now. I'm nervous.”

Teri snorted. “Suit yourself. But if it were me confronting family, I'd rather face them well rested than groggy and grumpy.” he walked over towards the door to my room, putting a paw on it, and then craned his neck to turn back at me. “Also, studies have shown that holding a warm, fuzzy body tends to help with those nerves of yours. Just food for thought.” He walked into my bedroom.

After a few moment's hesitation, I joined him.

Every year the campus hosts a Family Weekend where they arrange a lot of events to encourage relatives of their students to come, see their children and their siblings, and spend money. Like most events, participation isn't mandatory. Usually, you tend to see mostly local kids and their families participating, since people from out of state would have to rent a motel room and come all the way out here just for a day of seeing their son or daughter. However, my uncle Seymour works as a Biology professor here. This year he was letting my parents crash at his place free of charge, so they decided to come all the way from Virginia to visit me. I planned out a lot of ways that the weekend could go. I considered what I knew of my parents, and when would be the best time to drop this bomb upon them. By the time their arrival came, I was confident that I had everything about how and when my parents would learn I was gay planned out to the last detail. My parents liked to sleep in and never visited without calling first, so I expected a call from them roughly between nine-thirty and ten am. Plenty of time to send Teri back to his dorms, get myself dressed and prepped, and be ready to face the day.

Which is part of why I was so surprised when I heard someone knocking at my apartment door at about 7:54 am. I rose up to a sitting position, as the knocking continued, in an irregular beat of some sort. For a second, I thought about just letting it go and hoping it would go away. My parents would have called and let me know about their plans. But there were the only people I was expecting. What if they were trying to surprise me? Teri rolled over, putting his paws up over his ears and growling. “Ugh... is someone using your door for bongos or something?” he frowned. “s your place, Kristoph. Make it go away. Need my beauty sleep.” he mumbled, staring up at me.

I hissed at him. “Stay here!” I bolted up out of bed, pulled on some pants and one of my old t-shirts, and matted down my fur so I looked almost-sorta-not quite presentable, then raced towards the front door. I didn't think it was my parents. There was no way it was them. But if it was, against all odds, I was ruined. I tried to plot out their behavior in my mind as I shut my bedroom door nice and tight. They'd want to see the apartment, and they'd see my room and ask why there was a mostly-naked man in it. And I couldn't think of any way to answer that gracefully. I finally reached the front door, the seconds walking down my front hall feeling like minutes walking towards an execution. Meanwhile, the person on the other side of my front door had changed the previous pattern of knocks and moved onto attempting to perform the beat of some song. I grabbed the doorknob, twisted, and turned.

“Aw... I was almost finished banging out some killer Daft Punk there!”

The person standing in the hallway of my apartment complex had an airy, lilting voice. She stood a foot shorter than myself and was about half as wide from shoulder to shoulder. Her eye color, a deep, muddy brown, matched my own shade exactly. She was wearing a grayscale Van Halen t-shirt depicting a tour they performed before she was even born, along with tight khaki shorts. Since I last met her, she'd apparently gotten permission, or more likely sought forgiveness, for dying her pale gray fur a light blue. From head to toe she was that color, save for the hair hanging down off of her head, which was a bright scarlet red.

My sister leaned in and hugged me tightly. “I missed you, you big fussbucket!”

So yes, even before I met Teri, I was used to nicknames. “Alex, how did you even get here?” I looked down at her. After a moment of surprise I returned her hug, ruffling her blue fur a bit.

“Uh, it's not like it was hard.” Alex pushed away from me and let her arms fall to her sides. “You gave our parents the address of your new apartment when you moved. Mom and Dad were being old and sleeping in, so I used my phone's GPS and walked. You live like ten minutes away from Uncle Seymour.”

She turned around, taking in the living area of the apartment. “Neat as always, bro. How do you find time to be a neat freak? Are you just not taking enough classwork?”

“Ok. I misspoke.” I stared at the back of her shirt. “WHY are you here, Alex?”

She spun around on one foot and put her hands on her hips. “I chose to tag along since we haven't seen each other since Christmas.” After a moment, she added to her reasoning “Besides, band practice got canceled this weekend.” She gave me a glare, a smirk on her face. “Is my presence that unwelcome?”

It wasn't unwelcome, it was unplanned for. Alex was a variable that threatened to unbalance both sides of the equation. I had no idea how my little sister being here would affect things. But I had no idea how

to say that without hinting at it, and I wasn't sure I wanted her to know yet. Instead, I gave her a scowl. "I don't know whose presence I would find welcome at my door before 9 am on a Saturday."

"Oh deal with it, Kristoph." Alex walked past me and rolled her eyes (I wasn't able to see her face at that point, but somehow I just knew) and walked down my hall. "Come on. Give your sister the tour! Afterwards, we can hit up one of the restaurants around here and I'll buy you breakfast." She stopped at my room's shut door. "This your bedroom? It's got that license plate you used to put on your door at home..." Her paw reached towards my doorknob.

Panic gripped my gut as she twisted the doorknob. "No, that's ok, don't-"

She froze and looked at me. "The part time wage-slave is offering you a free meal and you're turning it down?"

I walked towards her. "No, I mean, my room's really messy, and I haven't gotten a chance to clean up, so I'd rather grab breakfast now and give you the tour later-"

"Messy? The guy who organizes his socks in the drawer has a messy room?" She laughed. "This I gotta see."

Teri had pulled himself up to a sitting position, the covers pulled just high enough on the bed to cover his waist, just before the door opened on him. His paw was midway through rubbing his right eye. The two of them stared at each other. A moment of silence passed, and Alex pointed at him. "THAT... is either a really flat lady-friend, or the girliest guy I've ever laid eyes on."

My paws were covering my face, as I tried to pinpoint exactly when my life had become a cheesy sitcom.

Teri looked up from the bed at Alex, and quickly broke into a smirk. "I'm glad to see all my efforts are being noticed!" His ears perked up as my spirits sunk down. "So you're his little sister, huh? Dang, what are the odds that a family'd have two gems?"

Teri's smirk was evidently contagious, and spread to my sister's face as she gazed back up at me. "Dang, you had a GUY over? Do mom and dad know, bro?"

I stumbled for words. My whole beautiful plan for the weekend had been shattered, and I was all I could do to watch the pieces rain down to earth around me. "I... er... ah..."

Alex bounced excitedly. "This is so cool! How long have you two been dating? Where did you meet? How old is he? Hey, this means I won that bet with Patricia... She swore up and down that you were gonna end up a lonely Ace..."

Teri stood up off the bed, wearing one of my bedsheets like some kind of robe. "You think that...? Oh no no no, dear..." He sauntered over and put a paw on my sister's shoulder. "Kristoph and I are just friends. I couldn't stand the noises my dormmate and his companion were making last night, so I came over here to impose. Kristoph, albeit reluctantly, was a kind enough friend to let me use his bed while he slept on the couch."

I blinked. As lies go, it was a pretty good one. I felt conflicted, letting Teri deceive my sister, but I

didn't speak up or protest.

Alex, to her credit, wasn't buying it. She narrowed her eyes and glared at me, trying to get my body language to tell her what she already suspected. "Kristoph..." she said, waiting for me to confirm or deny what he was saying.

Teri patted Alex's shoulder. "Hey kiddo, come on. You know your big brother better than I do, don't you? Do you really think he'd be the sort to have a playmate over on the night before his family came to visit him?" I was and I had, but I hadn't been like that before college. I was getting sloppy at keeping secrets.

She looked back up at Teri. "That... doesn't really seem like him, no." The light fell from Alex's eyes. "Aw... so you guys aren't gay?"

Teri's tail swished excitedly. "Oh, we're both very happy, all things considered." For a moment my sister directed her glare at him. "But homosexual? You properly identified me, but your brother might not be. Or might be. That's his business."

I nodded. "You, ah, s-shouldn't just jump to conclusions, Alex..."

She sighed. "Whatevs. Hey, I'm gonna hit the restroom. Be back in a bit."

As I watched my sister's tail vanish into the bathroom, I turned and hissed at Teri. "*What was that about? Why'd you lie to her?*" I kept my voice low so she couldn't hear me. I hoped she couldn't hear me.

He rose his hand to stare at his claws, with a sedate smile plastered on his face. "*Would you have preferred she followed that line of inquiry? I may not care if your family knows you dig dudes, but I know you care.*" His smile fell away, and he stared at me intensely. "*No one deserves to be outed before they're ready, puppy.*" He turned around to start putting his shorts on. "*As lies go, it only buys you time anyway. She knows, puppy. She knows, even if she doesn't know she knows.*"

I had one last fleeting glimpse of his behind as he covered his panties up with the frayed denim shorts he had been wearing last night. Then he spun around on one foot and nodded at me. "*Now I take it I have a class to attend to? Early morning on the weekend, while the professors are all doing family day fundertainment?*"

I nodded. "*Er... yeah. If you would be so kind.*" Teri grinned and put his top on, meandering into what I called the living room of my apartment (although it was also a kitchen). A few minutes passed, which Teri used to critique my décor for about the seventh time.

Midway through an uninteresting discussion about the color of my apartment's couch, my bathroom door opened and Alex walked out, shaking her head. "Man, no one deserves to use bathrooms that clean. It felt like spitting in a cathedral or something." She walked up to us and stood next to me, looking over Teri's wardrobe. "Heey... a bit frou-frou, but you're rocking that look!"

Teri swayed his hips. "Why thank you, good and clearly insightful young lady!" He chuckled. "I'm sorry I can't stay and exchange embarrassing Kristoph stories, but I have to go dig into my own studies. Early cat gets the bird and all that."

Alex shrugged. "Fair 'nuff. Hope to see you again, even if you aren't almost family."

Teri turned and sauntered out the door, gently closing it behind him. A moment of silence passed between us both. I looked down at her. "Soo..."

She sighed. "Nice butt on that one. Isn't it sad how all the good ones are gay? Maybe he's only SORTA gay... you think I might have a chance?"

And it was at that point that I was subjected to mental images so horrifying I won't go into any detail about them.

I wasn't there for this part, but I heard about it later... and it's important for the story that you hear about it too.

The path back to the dorms from Kristoph's apartment had been getting easier to walk each time Teri had done it. He wondered if the fourth time would be easier than the third. Standing outside the front doors to the dorms, he swiped his ID card and pulled the doors open, swaying his hips slightly as he trotted inside.

Opening the door to his room, he thrust his arms inside the room. "I have arrived! You can resume your loving adoration of me now, Prison Wardrobe!"

His roommate, Xavier, looked up at him. "Oh, so my nickname is Prison Wardrobe today?" The skunk raised an eyebrow up at Teri from his biology text book. "I don't quite get it."

Teri giggled. "You know... white and black bars? Your black fur with white stripes? Come on, it fits."

Xavier sighed. "I'm pretty sure the most fashionable prisoners wear orange these days, Teri."

The tiger's response was to stick out his tongue. "Aw, shut up. They can't all be gems." He walked over to his bed and plopped down. "So did you have a good time staying in while I was having a good time going out?"

Xavier curled his tail, looking back at his text book. "A quiet time, anyway." He turned the page. "Somehow I managed to get some studying done, even with all the noise in the dorms."

Teri crossed his legs as he leaned back against the wall. "Yeah, it seems like everyone's being extra noisy with Family Weekend. I hear the faculty is told not to assign any homework due on Monday. I know I didn't get any. Makes sense why people would be partying. Heck, I saw Zeke in the next room over sneaking in a ton of beer."

Xavier sighed. "Don't tell me that. This is a dry campus. I'm gonna have to report to our RA about that."

Folding his arms, Teri huffed. "Hey, I LIKE Zeke. If you rat him out, I'll make sure to distract you for the rest of the weekend, Prison Wardrobe."

The skunk bent his head down towards his book. "Ugh, fine. Whatever. Even if you did, I bet it'd still

be easier to focus than that time you wanted to use me as a practice dummy for your massage technique.”

Teri stuck out his tongue. “I maintain that had you let me practice, I'd have skills to seduce even you, Prison Wardrobe.”

“Still straight, by the way.” Xavier pushed his head further into his book, blushing.

Teri grinned. “Just keep telling yourself that, Xavier. Just keep telling yourself that.”

Anyway, getting back to what Alex and I were up to...

“I called mum and dad. They're gonna meet us here in a few minutes.” Alex pushed her phone back into her purse and picked up a menu. I stared at its backside, the cutesy logo of a cartoon fried egg and what I'd always assumed was an anthropomorphic bowl of pancake batter, complete with arms, legs, and a dripping spoon poking out of its head-ish region. The characters on the menu bobbed up and down as Alex unfolded it. I was trying to think of ways to tell her about Teri and I before our parents got here.

Her oak-hued eyes lit up. “Hey! Isn't it cool how they've got an Eggsy and Batterby around your college?” She looked back down at her meal options. “Do you still come to this place every Sunday for brunch?”

I hadn't responded yet, as lost in thought as I was, so she scowled at me. “Helloooooooo? Big brother? Still alive, right?” Her hand was waving across my range of vision. “Do I need to use the smacking test?”

By that she meant smacking me in the shoulder until I told her to stop. I shook my head. “Uh, no! That's fine, sis.” I looked up at her, making eye contact to establish that I wasn't going to require any smacking. “I do come here sometimes, yeah. But I'm pretty poor these days, Alex. It's not like mom and dad pay for my Sunday brunch at the old breakfast nook anymore.”

Alex frowned. “Aw. I'm not looking forward to losing my ability to mooch off of our dear parents. That must be the only sucky thing about going to college.” Her frown rose into a smirk. “Unless my dear brother who can always confide in me would care to share some other, greater sucky moments to better prepare his beautiful baby sister for the big bad world of almost-adulthood?” She tossed her red headfur back, pushing her bangs away from her face.

That was probably as close to “How has your life been going?” as Alex would ever get to asking. “Well...” I looked down at my menu while I thought, having already resolved to just order the hash browns and toast plate like I always do. “College has its shit to deal with, Alex. I mean, it's not just the homework and papers. All the things mom and dad did that we take for granted, all of a sudden were little things I had to do on my own.” I folded my arms. “Picking up after my own messes. Cooking my own food...sometimes. Even cleaning dirty laundry.” And while we were at it, I had some dirty laundry I needed to air out. “Hey, Alex...” I swallowed, trying to focus on keeping my ears from showing off how nervous I was. “Y-you seemed pretty excited to find out I was gay before. Is that really what you think about... you know... me?” I folded my paws, letting them rest on my thighs clasped together.

Alex rolled her eyes and threw up her arms. “Oh my god, are you really uncomfortable that I thought

you were gay?" She narrowed her eyes and gazed at me. "Gawd, sorry or whatever. It wasn't like I thought it was a bad thing or anything. Heck, in some bizarro-universe somewhere we could've teamed up to do some guy-watching at the mall back home."

"That would never happen." I said, quicker than I would have liked.

"Pfft." Alex waved a paw at me. "Fine, be no fun. Look, it's not like it's that hard an assumption to draw. You weren't exactly considered a bad catch back at high school, you know." She leaned forward, her face breaking out into a wide smile as she rested it on her paws, looking up at me. "After you started pumping iron, like half of my friends leaned on me at least once for tips on how to get you to look their way. Remember Chrissy? At my birthday pool party she wasn't prancing around in a red polka-dot string bikini because she wanted to get some extra sun, you know."

I blinked and my ears pricked up. "Wait, Chrissy was flirting with me at your pool party?" The image of the cheerful young calico cat in cherry colored polka-dots popped into my head. "I thought she was just really friendly."

Alex chuckled. "Only with guys. Trust me on that one." As a waitress came up to take our order, her ears perked up. "I think I'm gonna order the cookie dough morning milkshake. What about you?"

"You're not going to have anything to eat?" I raised an eyebrow at her.

"The milkshake's a breakfast and a half right there." She reached over and pointed it out on my menu, her arm pushing my own menu down. "See?"

I scowled. "Stop that." As I pulled my menu back. "Well, don't start mooching off of my plate once everyone's eating. If you're under-ordering again you know you're just gonna get hungry later."

Alex grinned. "Nope, that'd never happen."

I rolled my eyes. "Would this be the fifth or sixth time you've said that?"

The bell at the front door jingled, and Alex shot up from the relaxed slouch her body had been in. "There's mom and dad!" She pointed and I turned around.

Dad walked in first, his old gray leather sports jacket flapping back and forth along his sides. Mom's nagged him to replace that thing for years, but even with a busted zipper he wears it everywhere. He held the door open for Mom, wearing her favorite lilac sundress. She walked in past him, turning her head to scan through the restaurant. Her eyes lit up as her gaze fell on us and she walked over towards us at a brisk pace. I knew what was coming, so I stood up just before she wrapped her arms around me. "My baby! I missed my little puppy!" Mom is as tall as I am and apparently built out of the same stuff; she's only slightly thinner and doesn't mind at all that her hugs often choke the life out of the recipients. "I was so worried when I didn't receive a letter from you last month!"

Yes, I still write physical letters in this day and age. Shut up. I usually send my family one every month...

I fought for breath until she let go. "It's good to see you too, mom." I reached up to rub my back. "Ah... I just forgot to write. My life's been sorta turned upside down lately and it slipped my mind." Teri's face

flashed in my mind. It was hardly his fault, but he was the trigger for all the “distractions” I had been having lately.

Alex had laid down on the cushions of the restaurant booth and was looking up at us. “He’s been having guys over at his apartment! Writing home probably has become a secondary concern.”

I shot her a glare as my mother looked at me, obviously perplexed. “I’ve had friends over a lot lately, yeah. Just hanging out, stuff like that.”

Mom pushed the brim of her bamboo-weave sunhat up. “Aw... I’m glad my puppy’s finally making friends. You were so quiet in high school, I didn’t think you ever spent any time with anyone.” She ran some fingers through her hair.

I grumbled and folded my arms. “I had friends in high school!”

“Not ones we ever saw.” Alex stuck her tongue out at me. “You brought like, zero people over to the house. I almost thought you were ashamed of us.”

I tried not to look at her, rolling my eyes. “At least I’m not ashamed of my own pelt.” My little sister had changed her fur color, to my knowledge, at least eight times in the past seven months. She seemed determined to dye her fur until no one alive remembered that it started out snow white.

Alex growled at me. “I can express myself however I want, you dick!”

Mom huffed at us both. “Cubs, stop that! I raised you better than to bicker with each other over such trifles.” Her expression softened. “Kristoph, Alex just means that we’re both a bit surprised that you’re being so social. I’m so proud of you!”

“Yeah. Give him a year or two more and maybe he’ll get laid, too.” Alex giggled as mom and I both glared at her.

“You look good, son.” Dad gazed up at me.

People always joke that we’re not related once they see dad and I in the same place. For one thing, neither Alex nor I inherited dad’s copper-brown fur color. My fur is slightly grayer than the dirty snow color of mom’s. I’m also taller than he is; dad is about five foot ten and I’m at least six foot three. This meant he had to look up at me whenever he wanted to make eye contact, as he was doing right now. My father has got these deep green eyes, and staring into them always felt a bit intense for me. Dad rarely speaks, but whenever he does he expects people to listen.

This was one of those times. He was gazing right into my eyes, his paws clutched around the oak cane he’s been bringing everywhere he’s went in the last few years. “I was worried that college would cause you to neglect your physical training. I’m pleased to see I was wrong.”

I reached my arm back behind my head, grinning. “Ah, it’s something to do. So how’s the home team doing?” Dad got me into baseball, and our conversations about our favorite team had been known to dominate dinner table conversation.

Dad shook his head. “Eh, the new shortstop can’t hold a candle to our last one. Got butterfingers, that

one does. Halfway decent hitter though.”

We chatted a bit as we walked over towards the booth Dad and I followed behind Mom and Alex, who were having their own conversation. I slid down onto the cushion on our seat. Mom slid in next to me, with Alex and Dad staring over at us from across the booth. I was silent as I listened to my family making small talk. I needed a second to think.

When I first met Teri, it had felt like this vast precipice I couldn't dare cross. On one end I stood, and on the other, what I thought would make me happy. Sex. Intimacy. The ability to connect with someone romantically. The things I'd denied myself, separate from me by a small, jagged gap created by my own fears. One step, and I could have made it across. But the vast depths of oblivion rested between the two edges, jagged and sure to shatter me if I were to misstep. And Teri had, whether he wanted to or not, shoved me across.

I felt myself standing at another such precipice now. My family was on the other end. What happened once I crossed it? Would they welcome me with open arms, or shove me back over the brink? I'd made plans. I wanted to come out to them once they had been here for a while. Once I had reminded them of how nice it was for all of us to be together. But that was before my sister had come along. Before she started talking about me having guys over at my apartment. She seemed pretty alright with the idea of me being attracted to guys, but that was just as bad in some ways. What if she mentioned that the friend I had over was gay? What else might she do that could cause unplanned variables? I grit my teeth, and clenched my fists. It was time to take a step forward and find out if I reached the other side, or fell into the abyss.

“Mom... Dad... Alex... I'm gay.”

My family stared at me. There was silence for what felt like forever. Dad was glaring at me, his eyes narrow. Mom was taking a sip of water when I spoke, and placed the glass back down next to her bare plate. Then, Alex broke the silence as she coughed, looked up at me, and grinned. “Fucking called it.”

Mother turned and glared at her. “Alexandra! You watch your language!”

Alex rolled her eyes and threw up her arms. “Oh my gawd mom. Everyone swears these days.”

“We are not everyone, young lady!” Mom snarled. “Those words are over used, and demean the whole language merely by people relying on them as a linguistic crutch. I expect my pups to be more creative than resorting to such plebeian curse words.”

I felt dizzy. “But... I just told all of you that... don't you guys care?”

Dad cleared his throat, speaking in a low growl. “Son, I think-” Only to be cut short when mom put a finger to his lips.

My mother looked at him. “A moment, Ivan.” She turned her head and looked at me, narrowing her eyes. “You're sure?”

I thought back to my first night with Teri. I still couldn't think about some of the things we did without getting uncomfortably stiff down below. “...pretty sure. All the empirical evidence indicates it, anyway.”

She bared her fangs and locked eyes with me. "And you used, and will continue to use protection, will you not?" Her right hand reached over to rest on my shoulder.

I felt a shiver run down my spine. "Um, yes..." I was staring death in the eyes.

Suddenly I felt her fingers digging into my shoulder, threatening to cut off circulation. "And you are still going to get me grandpups one way or another, won't you?" I saw Alex open her mouth, almost say something, and then clamp her mouth shut again. She and I both knew not to interrupt mom when she was like this.

I whimpered, my face flinching. "Eventually?" I grinned tightly, hoping she'd let go.

My mother let go, and gave me a wide, fanged grin that was not as reassuring as I guessed she thought it would be. "Then we're all very happy that you've discovered this about yourself, dear."

Dad held up a finger. "Anastasia, I want to--"

Mom turned her grin at him. "We'll discuss it later, Ivan." Dad shut up as she let go of my shoulder and pulled her hand back to rest at her side. I felt as if an immense burden was lifted off of me. The rest of the meal went fairly smoothly. Mom and Alex and I talked about mostly trivial things. Dad kept staring at me, his face blank, and only spoke when he was spoken to first. I had no idea what he was thinking. But it worried me. Dad was never the most talkative person at the best of times, but now he was practically mute. Was he angry at me? Disappointed? I couldn't imagine any other reason why he'd be so deliberately silent. I wanted to ask him about it, but I was worried I might just be freaking out about nothing.

My parents paid the bill as the four of us walked out. Mom looked over towards Alex. "I'm going to use the facilities. Care to join me, Alexandra?" Alex nodded and followed after her.

My father and I watched Mom and Alex walking off. Once they were no longer in view he coughed and turned to look up at me. "Now. With both of them distracted, I thought we could have a word together, as men."

I stiffened. Dad only used the expression "as men" when he wanted to have a conversation he expected me to remember, I wasn't really looking forward to it, so I stalled for time. "W-well, I don't mind talking, but maybe we should wait until after Parent's weekend? I mean, Mom and Alex could come back, and if you want to talk uninterrupted..."

"Kristoph." Dad seemed intent on continuing in spite of my attempts to delay him. "I want you to tell me why you hid your feelings on this..." he paused, making a fist. "...this 'gay' business from us for so long."

I found myself staring directly at his eyes. He'd narrowed them. Was he angry at me? It felt like it, but I couldn't figure out why. "Dad, I just figured it out myself a few weeks ago. I spent several years trying to decide if it meant there was something, well, wrong with me." I looked away, frowning. This conversation was calling back to mind memories and feelings I hated revisiting. At the moment, I would have loved to be anywhere but where I was.

"Yeah, but you could've come to us. Your mom and I aren't exactly pups when it comes to the world and its complexities, Kristoph. We coulda helped you figure it out."

I closed my eyes just so I didn't have to stare into his. I allowed a light sigh to escape my lips. Then I spoke, making an effort not to stutter. Not to let myself seem nervous. "Because I didn't want to change who I was to you."

Dad folded his arms. "What?"

"Because I didn't want to stop being 'your son Kristoph' and start being 'your gay son Kristoph.' I thought about some of the horror stories I'd heard growing up about other kids coming out. Because the second I started talking like I might be attracted to other guys, suddenly it becomes the only thing people see." My ears fell flat against my head. "I didn't want you to start treating me different, like trying to toughen me up."

My dad rolled his eyes. "You're built like your mother and I've seen her lift furniture one-handed. How much tougher do you need to be?"

"That's not the point!" I threw my arms out in front of myself. "Growing up I heard plenty of horror stories about what happens when teens come out. The p-phrase 'just confused' or 'just need to meet the right person' tend to be used in the BEST of cases. A lot of stories can get pretty ugly." I turned away and thrust my arms up into the air. "What if mom had tried to arrange dates with girls for me? Or you tried to beat it out of me?"

Dad folded his arms and snarled. "You really think I'd have hit you, kid?"

"I didn't know! I had no way of knowing how you'd react!" I growled. "It wasn't easy to even do this here. Where you have to leave eventually if it did get ugly." I stopped to take a breath. All that had just poured out of me all of a sudden.

At some point my dad had turned his back to me. I had been about to continue my rant when he interrupted me. "You know for the past several years you have made your mother worry quite a bit."

"You and mom worried about me?"

"Your mom worries quite a bit about her pups, kiddo. But this was a special worry." He sighed. "You went into ninth grade and went from a happy adjusted NORMAL kid to having these melancholy fits every so often. For a while she thought you were depressed. I didn't think it was that simple, myself." He folded his arms. "You're like me, kid. You keep to yourself even when it ain't the smart thing to do. It's a bad habit for both of us." he started to growl. "But you're a worrier too. You get that from her. And you thought it was a good idea to keep this to yourself and worry yourself into a complex instead of just speaking up and maybe getting some help, REAL help, sorting yourself out. All because you worried you couldn't trust the people who raised you from the moment you were born. That hurts, kid."

"D-dad, I..."

"The girls are coming back." He snorted and turned away from me. "Good luck carrying the weight of the whole wide world on your shoulders, Atlas."

Dad turned to walk up to Alex and Mom, leaving me to stew in my own mixed feelings.

And that was it. I mean, it was only the beginning of Family Day, certainly. There were all sorts of events set up around the school for parents to spend their money in an attempt to bond with their kids. Not to mention that Alex was pretty much insufferable the whole time after finding out I was gay. But most of the stuff about cakewalks and my sister trying to goad me into conversations about guy's butts isn't interesting, is it? It's just family, doing family things. I'm sure you want to know what happened when Teri and I met again that evening.

And how he almost died.

To be continued in Part 2!