

Home, is where...

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Some peoples' lives are worthy of a soap opera. Seemingly I was one of those people, at least until I encountered my Aunt Julia. I wasn't even aware of her existence until she arrived to help with the funeral arrangements after my mother opted for an overdose rather than another day. But all that is in the past. There was a month in rehab and weekly sessions with a therapist long after that, but that's also in the past. Back then, I took refuge in Julia's condo and eventually started dealing with my father in a real way, and all of that before my 18th birthday.

I'd been out of high school for a year already but only four months out of rehab when I enrolled at the local junior college at the start of the second semester. I knew I had to do well after sleepwalking through my last two years of high school, so I limited myself to two classes, but one was a five-unit Chemistry class with lab. The instructor was tough as nails but really knew his stuff and obviously liked his job. My lab partner was totally smart and equally handsome. Greg was always cooperative during lab, but there was something weird between us that I couldn't quite figure out. After almost 17 years of full-on, soap opera drama, that little blip was like nothing. And the fact that I was attracted to anyone made me think that perhaps I had finally emerged from the fog.

I was determined to get closer to Greg somehow; the midterm exam seemed like a good ruse. A week before the test I spoke up as we were finishing a lab. "Hey Greg. You've been so great helping with all this stuff. I mean, I get it most of the time, but it's definitely a challenge," I said with a small smile. "Well, that's the positive way of saying, I'm barely staying afloat, while you seem to know as much as Mr. Johnson." Greg shyly smiled at the compliment but kept staring at me almost like there was a big fat zit on the end of my nose or something. "Would you be willing to help me study for the midterm exam?"

Greg shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah, sure. Why not?" he said as we moved toward the exit.

That could hardly be considered an enthusiastic response, but he hadn't said no. We met twice during the following week. I was happy to realize I wasn't totally in the dark, but the study sessions really helped me, so I was feeling fairly confident when I closed my blue test booklet. Of course Greg finished long before me and had left the classroom, so I had to wait until the next class session to thank him, offering to treat him to pizza or whatever, for his help. "I've got another test this week. Can I take a rain check?" He replied to my offer as we agreed on a future place and time.

He was sitting on a bench outside the pizza joint when I walked up. "You got a haircut!" he said smiling as I approached.

Anticipating his next comment I said. “Yeah, and this is my natural color,” by way of explaining the light blond hair, which had replaced the mousy brown color I had been sporting. The dull brown was a color I never would have chosen, but was the result of failing to keep up with the demands of coloring my hair. I’d been busy with school and until now hadn’t felt the need to concern myself with impressing anyone. Feeling exposed and vulnerable I ushered Greg into the restaurant and found us a booth in a distant corner.

“I guess that explains why your eyebrows didn’t match your hair,” he said with a chuckle.

“Didn’t think anyone actually noticed,” I said. “But is that why you keep looking at me like I have a third eye or something?”

His naturally tan face reddened a bit. “I hope I haven’t been...I didn’t mean to stare or be rude,” he said slightly embarrassed. “But it’s not that. I don’t know, it’s like I know you from somewhere, but I can’t figure it out.”

I liked the implication that he knew me, unless it was from my last two years of high school. “It’s funny that you say that, cuz I’ve had similar thoughts. Did you go to Grant High School?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too, but I was blonde then, and I skipped the final semester of senior year. Go figure! I changed schools umpteen times; skipped fifth grade altogether but still had enough credits to graduate early. But I don’t think I ever saw you at Grant.” But if not there, where else might I have seen him? “I mean, I’m sure I would have remembered your face; especially since your eyes are...they’re just...so amazing.” The fact of the matter is, he could have been in every one of my classes and I probably wouldn’t have even noticed through the haze of prescription drugs.

We were both blushing. “Thanks,” he said quietly. “My mom is half Japanese, so she gets most of the credit.”

That explains his beautiful skin and that shock of black hair, I thought to myself. “I thought that all Japanese had dark eyes?”

“That’s dad’s contribution,” he said with a grin, before we returned to demolishing a humongous pizza, an order of onion rings and our sodas.

Eventually our conversation turned to school and I learned that he was focused on biology and chemistry, as he was considering becoming a doctor and I declared a rather vague interest in engineering. I was happy that Greg agreed to join me for a movie before we parted that day. I think I smiled the entire way home.

Greg was a very serious student, with 17 units, so it was infrequent that he was able to spend time with me outside of lab for anything more than a quick soda or a shared table in the library. Still curious to know how it was that we shared a sense of *déjà vu*, on one such occasion, I asked where he lived.

“I grew up in a development called Peppertree, but...”

“Really? That’s where I lived!” I interrupted in surprise. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt but that’s kinda weird, huh?”

“Yeah, it is, but you don’t need to apologize. I was just saying I grew up there. I delivered papers, mowed lawns and did babysitting or whatever, until we moved out a couple years ago,” he said with a matter-of-fact tone. “But my folks sort of lucked out and sold during a real estate frenzy and were able to make a deal on a work/live condo closer to the civic center.”

“Did you wear a black stocking cap when you cut the grass?”

“Yeah?” he answered suspiciously. I didn’t know what to with my hair since it seemed to stick straight up. Why do you ask?”

“Then it had to be you! Too freaking weird. You cut the grass at my mom’s house!”

“You sure? Where did you live?”

“The cul de sac at Medford Court.”

“Not that humongous house that occupied three lots?”

“That’s the one, supposedly the contractor’s dream house. Although I didn’t live there all the time you were cutting the grass; I’m sure I, like, saw you at least a couple of times sweating your ass off, while wearing a hat.” I said laughing.

“What do you mean you didn’t live there all the time?”

“Well, mom and dad got divorced about the time I turned five and I became a living, breathing tennis ball after that,” I said with a tepid laugh.

“Sorry about that.”

“Hey, not a problem. I mean, it certainly wasn’t your fault and I mostly didn’t mind until the last time I moved north.”

“Oh. How’s that?”

“How much time do you have Greg? Cuz this is worthy of a TV mini-series!” I said with a chuckle. His eyes went wide. “Well, maybe just a made-for-television movie,” I conceded. “Sorry, but I’m a little bit prone towards drama,” I said apologetically. He smiled in return. His smile was beautiful.

“Now you’ve got me interested.”

“Unfortunately it’s not *that* interesting, so just tell me to shut up when I start boring you.”

His face suggested that he was surprised by my brashness. “Okay,” he responded somewhat nervously.

“I’m told that I was the first successful pregnancy, after two miscarriages, so even though I was born a month early, my mother was like, crazy happy. I mean, there used to be an entire wall at the house completely covered with framed photos of me with family and friends to document how amazing those first years were. Too bad I was too young to remember most of it,” I said with a snicker. “But before my fifth birthday, dad was bored and he split. Strangely enough, mom eventually got bored too, I guess, so by the time I hit third grade, she shipped me off to live with dad, who had remarried.” I paused and shrugged my shoulders as if to say whatever.

“Anyway mom #2 was a complete fashion whore. She probably thought it would be fun to dress up a kid, like some life-size Barbie, well, I guess in my case, it would be a Ken doll.” I smiled at my commentary. “But I didn’t really mind cuz she was really fun, in a silly sort of way; I mean she was more like some teenage party girl than a mom. She was drawn to the more colorful designers like Gucci, Versace or Dolce and Gabbana, so it was like walking through a giant coloring book when she’d take us shopping. I mean, I thought it was so cool and I had some pretty rad outfits during third and fourth grade! School was easy and I readily made friends, so it wasn’t very traumatic to leave mom behind and move in with dad. However, Sonia’s infatuation with me and my dad didn’t last long and she soon found herself a more suitable partner. They got divorced and I was sent back to live with mom for a couple more years until she sent me back to be with dad at the start of eighth grade.” I looked at Greg and he appeared to be spellbound or maybe just bemused, so I continued.

“Mary, mom #3 was Sonia’s polar opposite. She was a neo-Republican through and through, and she made Laura Bush look like a fashionista. I guess she was, like, almost the perfect executive wife cuz she could whip up an awesome cocktail or dinner party. Other than that, I have no idea how my dad hooked up with her. I mean, he’s quite the catch: he looks like a blonde JFK Jr., has brains like Einstein and is extremely successful in his work, so he makes good money. He’s like, the total package, Right? So anyway, Nancy, I like to call her Nancy, a la Nancy Reagan, had already determined before I even arrived, that I’d be attending the old-guard standby, military/prep school.” I glanced at Greg and he seemed to be following.

“I’m like, whatever. I mean the biggest difference was that I had to wear khakis and a white shirt and tie, and all my classmates were guys. I mean, it was just an over-priced, private boys school; we didn’t actually have to march around and salute and fire guns and stuff. That *definitely* would have been a problem.” I said rolling my eyes. “Though I’m sure Nancy would have loved that!”

I hesitated before I continued. The next part of the story required that I come out to Greg and I was conflicted about that. I mean, we were just getting to know each other as friends and that could easily run him off, but on the other hand, since I was sort of thinking of him as a potential boyfriend, it could just as easily help me to find out if Greg even liked guys. I closed my eyes for a moment and opened them to see that Greg was patiently and attentively waiting for me to continue.

“So, everything’s cool until the end of sophomore year. There was a teacher in-service or something going on, so school let out early that Friday. I invited my friend, Justin over to the house. We had a great afternoon in and out of the pool, until Nancy caught us making out behind the pool house. I didn’t even know she had come home, but she screamed like Satan himself had appeared in the backyard. I was embarrassed like you wouldn’t believe; I mean, who wouldn’t be? Right? But poor Justin was traumatized. She screamed the most vicious and hateful things and blamed him for perverting me! I mean I was a year younger, but she was like I was some innocent child he had seduced. I mean we still had our trunks on and everything, though she might have seen that we were both hard. Eventually Justin ran away and I started to cry and she was yelling, ‘Get into the house but I don’t want to see you until your father gets home!’” Greg’s eyes were a bit wider, but he didn’t say anything.

“To make a long story a bit shorter, I never went back to school and never saw Justin again. Apparently Nancy and dad were able to pull some strings, so I ended up taking finals three weeks early and then was transported in a hired sedan, to my mother’s house. I don’t know if you were still mowing the lawn then or not.” I sighed, a bit wearied by my own saga. Greg shrugged his shoulders to suggest he wasn’t sure either.

“Justin wouldn’t answer my calls or even respond to email. I mean, email is pretty safe, right? There’s no voice inflection to betray yourself *and* you get to read and edit it before you send it. I didn’t know if he was mad at me or just afraid of Mary. *I was completely miserable!*” I paused for a moment; after all this time I still occasionally thought about Justin and where he was and what he was doing. “Mom didn’t bug me and since I had no way of knowing that she was surviving on a steady diet of prescription drugs, I didn’t resist when she got her doctor to prescribe something to ‘lift my spirits’ as she said. Boy, was that a mistake! She was totally correct about me, like, not being miserable anymore. But I wasn’t happy either; just sort of comfortably numb. And she made sure the meds were always there.”

“But what about your dad?”

“What about him? Being totally out of it, I didn’t know I was in trouble, so I obviously didn’t say anything, and he just ignored me, like he usually did when I lived with mom. He was always kind of off and on that way. I mean, he actually sent me a graduation card with a check, but it was just signed Mark; not dad, or mom and dad, or Mary and Mark, just Mark.”

“I was talking about the gay thing and your father.”

“Oh. I think he’s pretty much okay about it now. Even back then he was pretty tame compared to Mary. He didn’t argue with her nor did he defend me. Mostly he just said things like he was disappointed and couldn’t understand how I could be so inconsiderate of her, and like that. He never even mentioned my gayness or anything. Weird.” I shook my head. “Yeah, it really was weird, but I guess it could have been a lot worse. Anyway, he actually came to the funeral. Um, did I mention my mom OD’d last summer?” Greg shook his head. “Well she did and dad came to the funeral like I said. Of course I was still in my drug-induced stupor so it was easy to talk with him, probably because I really didn’t give a shit, though he was plenty uncomfortable. He actually apologized and admitted that he had overreacted to Mary’s tirade. She did that whole religious bullshit thing, which only proved what a stupid bitch she really was. I mean, it did make me happy when he told me he divorced her less than a year after they sent me away.” I gave Greg sort of a wicked smile.

“So is that why didn’t you go live with him after your mom...died?”

“Maybe, I don’t know... I wasn’t doing much thinking in those days, and he didn’t seem to be trying very hard, I guess. I mean, when he mentioned that one good thing about mom’s death was that he only had one monthly alimony payment rather than two, I felt like he was trying to connect with me, but what was *that*? I mean, it was all so awkward. I don’t think he intended to be cruel, I think he really wanted to say he was sorry that he hadn’t been around to help her and that he was sorry for me, since she was my mom and all. Still, it was weird, you know?” I shook my head, since I still didn’t get it. “Sometimes I think I should go live with him, but even when I did, I didn’t see him all that much, since he was always working. Still, it’s been pretty weird around here. I didn’t know this before, but, like, there’s some money on my mom’s side of the family and all these relatives I never even knew existed, showed up wanting their share. They’re all still fighting about it. None of them seem to care about me, except my aunt. I’m sort of like an orphan or something, though dad pays the bills and checks up on me all the time and stuff.”

“Wow, that *is* a pretty strange story.” Greg said

“Yeah, but to answer your question about moving back to my dad’s, at the time I was pretty out of it. And any kind of a change just seemed like a hassle. Who needs that? And my aunt was cool so I just hung out here. Aunt Julia is the one that finally figured out what was going on. She’s my mom’s youngest sister and she probably would have, like, killed my mom herself, if she wasn’t already dead.” I smiled at the ridiculous idea. “We sort of think mom kept me drugged so I wouldn’t leave her but also so I wouldn’t bother her. Kinda sick, but it

worked.” I sighed. “Anyway she and dad put me in a clinic and got me cleaned up. So when she offered, he agreed to let me stay with her. I mean, she’s only 12 years older than me; it’s like having a big sister. I like that, she’s lots of fun. She got a job transfer and is renting her place there, to offset the cost of a condo down here. And that’s where I live; it’s actually pretty cool, though it probably won’t last too much longer. I mean, she’s getting kinda serious about this guy she met.” Greg had sort of a dazed look on his face. “Can you top that?” I asked teasingly.

“I wouldn’t even know...No I can’t,” he said, shaking his head.

“Sorry, for all the drama Greg. I’ve been going on and on; I wasn’t planning to do anything like that. But thanks for listening. It felt good to tell someone, like, a real person, instead of my therapist. Sorry,” I said, giving him a weak smile.

“No it’s okay. I thought stuff like that only happened on television,” he said with a nervous chuckle. “So, do you use any of that stuff in your writing class?”

“No. I guess I’m like, saving it up for when I write my memoirs,” I said with a nervous laugh. Greg laughed in return.

“Sure, I get it,” he said. “But seriously I better get going. Thanks for the company.”

“No, thank you!” I said and fearing that I had totally freaked him out, I hastily added, “I’m still gonna need help with the final, you know.”

“For sure,” Greg said as we parted.

God, what kind of a sick and stupid retard am I for dumping on Greg like that? I asked myself as we parted. He’s got to think I’m some sort of total basket case! And why shouldn’t he? That’s practically the reality of my situation. My feet felt leaden as I walked home that day.

It was probably just my paranoia, but Greg seemed to treat me with kid gloves for the next couple of weeks, not that you could blame him. But somehow after that, we became even better friends. He never had much time for just hanging out and having fun, but we did study together more frequently, resulting in better grades on my assignments and tests. Occasionally I’d drag him to the movies or to grab a pizza or play a video game in the student lounge. I think he enjoyed himself once I was able to get him away from school and his books; I mean, he seemed almost guilty to be having fun rather than studying. I appreciated his dedication, but we were just teens and should have at least a little fun, right?

We both registered for the summer session, though we were in different classes, so we didn’t see each other on a regular basis. The first time I saw him after my grades had arrived I ran over and hugged him to show my appreciation. “I got an A on my final exam and a B

for the course! Thanks Greg,” I gleefully said and kissed him. He kissed me back. I was stunned; pleased but stunned. Did that really happen? “Are you...you...?” I stuttered, feeling like a second grader asking the most ridiculous question.

“Gay?” he said, filling in the blank. “Sorry to give you the bad news, but yeah,” he added and started to pull away.

“C’mere,” I said and pulled him off to the side, away from the crowd, where we made out for almost a minute. I wasn’t embarrassed or ashamed about being gay or kissing guys, but even I got a bit tweaked when *any* couple started getting it on in public. And I certainly didn’t want to put on a show in the middle of the quad. “God, you’re so...” I began while catching my breath. “But maybe I should ask another question first. Are we like boyfriends or anything?” I asked, praying that I wasn’t setting myself up for rejection.

“Do you want us to be?”

“Yes, of course Greg!” I said trying not to sound desperate and yet wanting to sound suitably enthusiastic.

“Okay. Good,” he replied in his typically economic style of speaking. Then he gave me another kiss.

“Really? You’re serious?” I was almost in a panic. It had been three years since Justin, and I hadn’t had a boyfriend since.

“Yeah. You’re so cute and too funny. You should see yourself right now.” He smiled broadly and I felt my face turn red. I was also shaking a bit with nervous excitement, until he pulled me into a hug and we kissed again.

“Hmmm,” was all that came out of me. I was completely at a loss for words. Greg noticed that I was tongue-tied, but just smiled at me. I’ll say it again; his smile is beautiful! That brief interlude changed my life.

“I’ve got to get to class,” he said with the tiniest of smiles. I smiled back and gave him space as he stepped towards the quad. I couldn’t move, so I just stood and watched him walk away. He turned back, “See ya later,” he said, then turned about face and headed to his class.

What just happened? I asked myself. I touched my face and my mouth; I could sense every place his lips had touched me. It had taken us six months to get to this point but I felt convinced that it was worth the wait. We certainly weren’t an obvious match, I mean, he’s very serious and reserved, had a much more traditional childhood, is almost a year and a half older, and like a normal teen, actually has his driver’s license. I mean, let’s face it. I’m a lot less mature, a bit of a drama queen and rather boisterous, especially today, because suddenly, I had a boyfriend!

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Superficially, becoming a couple didn't change things greatly, but Greg now followed more willingly when I led him off to play. Greg wasn't out to his parents and I didn't want to overstep Julia's hospitality by inviting Greg over all the time, so it wasn't like we had a place of our own. Words frequently felt inadequate for our new kind of friendship so we often expressed it with a look, hugs and kisses or just holding hands. We didn't actually get around to sex until many weeks later, though I never thought to miss it. I mean, just being with Greg was so awesome; I loved watching him, especially when I could make him smile. He was still reserved, but more readily opened up to me.

I guess love shows because Julia commented more than once that something was different with me and I noticed that even my performance at school had improved. I mean, even I noticed that I smiled more frequently than in the past. It also encouraged me to reach out to my father. I called more regularly but we remained in the awkward stage for a long time; it wasn't because of any specific friction between us, it's just that I had grown up without ever getting to know him. Our conversations were usually brief, but it was a start.

As it turned out, both Greg and I planned to complete two years at community college in order to save money (in my case, it was to bolster a rather lackluster GPA and hopefully have my mom's estate settled) before transferring to the UC system. Greg's parents had planned to provide some financial support and I was working on my dad; I'm not squeamish about playing the only child and guilt cards if necessary. I didn't consider it to be manipulative, though some might; rather I viewed it as, like, a chance for dad to do the right thing for a change. If you think I'm a bitch, that's your problem.

Summer session was nearly over and we were each doing our own thing; I was sitting under a tree reading, when Greg called and asked me to meet him. We met at a burger place near campus. "Order something to go and let's get out of here," Greg suggested. With my bagged meal, I followed Greg into the shade of some trees on campus. With Greg, food and cover from the hot August sun, I had everything I could possibly want. Greg gave me a quick kiss, which immediately told me that something was different.

I kissed him long and hard before I asked, "What's up, sexy?"

He visibly squirmed before he said. "Tyler, the plan has changed." His eyes seemed to look everywhere except at me. "I'm sorry..." he sniffled a bit before he continued. "I'm moving to Los Angeles; I'm starting at UCLA next month. I... I just found out. I'm sorry." He finally looked directly at me and said. "I really do love you Tyler..." then he leaned into me and started to cry.

For the moment I forgot myself and held him and rubbed his back. "Greg, that's great news!" I lied. "But please don't cry, okay?" I said as I kissed his head. I was being completely honest. I'd never seen him cry; I didn't like it. "But how did this all happen?" I wondered aloud.

“I...I just got the letter,” he managed to get out between sobs and lifted his head. “Dad suggested I apply early, thinking that...that an early acceptance might improve my chances of eventually getting into...into medical school.” He sniffled and wiped his eyes and nose with his hands before he continued. “I was wait-listed and...and I just got the letter that space... has come available for me.”

His face was wet, but he was mostly silent. I brushed the hair away from his eyes. “How great is that? I mean, it’s perfect, Greg! I’ll just have to work harder so UCLA can’t possibly refuse me next year.” I said with false enthusiasm.

“Yeah, maybe.” He said, sounding defeated and dropped his head onto my shoulder again. “But we were supposed to be together.” His voice was muffled, but I heard those last words clearly. I almost started to cry. Instead I held him, rubbed his back and played with his hair. After some time, he seemed to settle.

I should have been content that he had finally calmed down, but something was nagging me. “But Greg,” I finally ventured, “I always thought you wanted to go to Berkeley?”

“I did until...Kevin...” Who’s Kevin, could it be his *real* boyfriend? I wondered. “Oh, Tyler, I’m so sorry. This is so fucked up... I never intended to... mislead you, but the truth is...I have...I had...a brother...” He started crying again.

I scolded myself for asking the question but there was nothing I could do but hold him. I felt less than useless. “Whatever it is, it’s okay Greg. I mean, you’ve listened to plenty of my stories, so don’t be afraid to tell me, whatever it is,” I said, while continuing to stroke his back and hair. I surprised myself that I could be so rational in such an emotional situation. When he finally lifted his head, I was startled to see someone I’d never seen before: Greg looked like a sad, lost boy.

“Tyler?” he said weakly. I nodded in response. “I never told you because I didn’t think it mattered, but...”

“It’s okay. You don’t have to tell me anything. I already know that you love me and I love you; the rest is probably superfluous.” Then I kissed him.

“No. I think it’s important Tyler.” He sniffled a bit before he continued. “I never really thought about it relative to us, but it’s more about us, than just Berkeley. See, I used to have an older brother, Kevin. He was my best friend; I loved him more than anything.” Greg’s wet face had the smallest hint of a smile. I could tell he really had loved his brother. “Not like I love you, but...you know.” His crooked bit of a smile grew slightly as he looked directly at my face.

I gave him a nod. “I never had a brother, but I think I know what you mean.”

“You’ll have to trust me on this one, Tyler.” He reached over and took my hand in his. “Kevin was the best! He was a freshman at Berkeley the year I started 10th grade, which is originally why I wanted to go there; even at 15, I still wanted to be just like my brother. When he came home for Christmas break, I told him I was gay. He was the first person I ever told and he was just as cool as I knew he’d be!” That sad smile had appeared on Greg’s face again. I nodded and smiled in return. “Yeah! We even made a plan for him to come back after the school year ended so he could be help me tell our parents. But during spring break my brother was killed in an auto accident on Coast Highway; apparently someone crossed the double yellow to pass. Five cars were involved, and several people were hospitalized, and two others, including his girlfriend died.” He looked sad but didn’t cry. His other hand had joined the first and his grip tightened as he spoke until I thought he would break my hand

“I’m so sorry,” I said, as several tears rolled down my face. “I love you, Greg.”

“I know,” he said as he used his thumbs to wipe away my tears. “And I love you, Tyler. That’s why I told you that story. You’re the first person I’ve loved, or even allowed to get close, since his death. You’re that special.” He smiled. I smiled. We kissed.

We were lying on the ground; sorrow seemingly turned into passion as he pressed his body into mine. Except for several layers of cotton, our hard cocks were pressed together. Our tongues slid into the other’s mouth as we spoke our own language. I slid my hand down to his fly and opened his jeans; at that moment, I didn’t care who might walk by and see us. Almost immediately, I was rewarded with a fist full of Greg’s slimy load. With a huge grin on my face, I swallowed a mouthful of his cream and wiped the remainder on the grass before we resumed kissing.

“Forget your last class. You’re coming with me!” With almost no argument, I convinced Greg to skip his afternoon class. We arrived at the multiplex and decided on a silly comedy; we laughed our heads off all the while holding hands. I took him to Julia’s condo and eventually we ordered in Chinese take-out. I suggested he call his parents since he would be staying the night. It was the first time we’d ever been able to spend the night together. Just cuddling together, naked in my bed was the best; his kisses and the warm skin on skin, were pure heaven. I finally fell asleep with a smile on my face. The next morning I awakened Greg with my mouth on his cock, which he soon reciprocated. We cuddled and fell asleep again. Once we were awake we made out for what seemed like hours before we moved into a 69 position and got our nut for the second time. Eventually we crawled out of bed and showered together, another new experience for me. I mean, I shot a load between our bellies just from kissing, though I gladly got on my knees to help Greg drop load #3. I was giddy with love and lust. All of this was new since most of the time, our lovemaking took place in Greg’s car, satisfactory but hardly sensual or romantic. This was like a honeymoon! And how perfect was it that this happened to be the weekend Julia was spending in Monterey?

I offered Greg anything in my closet, as we got dressed. He's a confirmed boxer-wearer, while I own a variety of briefs. He selected what appeared to be an innocuous pale blue pair, but on Greg, they became three-dimensional pornography. I started to bone up again.

"They're too small," he complained.

"No. It's just that you're so big and so damn sexy!" I teased. Greg smiled but also blushed. At that moment I loved him even more. In reality, we were of similar size but Greg was sufficiently bigger than me, so that the briefs actually were too small for him. I of course, wanted to look at him all day dressed in that single garment. "Well, if you behave yourself, I guess it would be okay if you went commando for the day," I said with a crooked smile. He nodded and slowly lowered the briefs before donning his own shorts and one of my shirts; his boxers remained on the floor where they had been discarded the previous evening. The entire display was beyond erotic and I was completely hard inside my clothes.

I fixed breakfast for the two of us and we watched the last of Saturday morning cartoons on TV. While I was cleaning up the breakfast dishes, Greg surprised me by suggesting he'd stay the night if I would let him study for a few hours. I eagerly agreed. Who wouldn't, right? Later we jumped in his car and drove to his house, so he could get his books, laptop and a change of clothing. It wasn't until we were dressing Sunday morning that I noticed he hadn't bothered to bring a clean pair of boxers.

Saturday evening was more or less a repeat of the previous night, but better! For dinner we picked up food from an Italian place that Greg knew about; it provided several opportunities to lick sauce from each other's face and fingers. After cleaning up, we watched a couple of videos, while sitting naked in my bed. I'll probably have to watch the second movie again as I was seriously distracted much of the time by Greg's hands and mouth. Okay, so he wasn't the only one fooling around.

It was past noon on Sunday, before we headed downstairs for breakfast. After helping to clean up the kitchen, Greg gathered his things in preparation for his departure. It wasn't until he was standing near the front door that I realized that this incredible weekend was the beginning of our good bye. Greg would be moving to Los Angeles much too soon. I tried to be brave, but tears began to run down my face as we kissed, at least they were silent tears.

"See you tomorrow?" he said quietly as he moved through the door opening.

"For sure," I answered, trying to be upbeat, as I wiped my eyes. My tears embarrassed me. I felt certain that Greg felt just as I did but his eyes remained dry.

The remaining weeks of summer session passed quickly. We spent as much time together as we could but already things had changed; our infinite horizon now had a definite sunset. I didn't see Greg the day he drove south to Los Angeles. I wondered, yet doubted he had ever told his parents about us. It wasn't long before we were back in school: Greg as a sophomore transfer student at one of the nation's best public universities, while I was

anticipating my 18th birthday, while striving to excel at city college. I was determined to keep our relationship going until I could join him in Los Angeles the following year. We enjoyed a loving reunion during the winter recess, but school, work and distance kept chipping away at our budding relationship.

Occasionally, life makes a decision for you; more frequently it tosses out a challenge or more choices. When the rejection notice arrived from UCLA, I felt as though my death sentence had been ordered. It made no sense; every other school had accepted me! I cried for a long time before I found the courage to finally call Greg. He was supremely supportive and very understanding, but somehow, I got the impression that Greg was actually relieved that I wouldn't be following him to Los Angeles; perhaps he worried that I would be too much of a distraction. And maybe I would have been, I mean, I would have only been content to merely look at him for just so long before I'd want to do something to him or with him. It was a moot point, so I never discussed it with Greg. I transferred to Berkeley, and studied year-round, completing my degree early; I was hoping to beat the crush of new graduates that would flood the market in June. Greg and I graduated with honors from our respective schools. I accepted a desirable position with an established firm in San Francisco and Greg was accepted into medical school in San Diego.

* * * * *

My new life in the city was nearly perfect. I liked my job, they liked me and it wasn't difficult to find a date any night of the week. I really concentrated on my work and played the field, mostly on the weekends. Just before my six-month review, I received a minor promotion, and inspired by that, I really put my nose to the proverbial grindstone. There were a few interesting and interested guys at the office but I chose not to mix business with pleasure, and besides, there were plenty of hot guys that couldn't care less about engineering, once I left the office.

After 18 months, my supervisor/mentor suggested that I should consider graduate school. He said the firm was very enthusiastic about my performance to date, but that if I really wanted to excel, an advanced degree was imperative. It was during an evening class that I met Josh; he was obviously everyone's dream guy, but during the third week it became clear that he had been holding out for someone like me. We became friends and then lovers, in a matter of weeks. At the time, it was more expedient to keep our respective apartments, though many nights we slept together at his place or mine. Josh's mouth was sublime, however he chose to use it. And his ass really seemed to appreciate my cock, which had grown considerably since my days with Greg. Out of bed we shared an interest in art, design and clothing; an obvious holdover on my part, from my first stepmother. As we approached the one-year anniversary of our first date, the discussion of combining households became more intense. I was stoked, as part of me had wanted to play house since I was in grade school. I had given notice at my apartment and was anticipating a sex-filled evening with Josh. We were cleaning up after dinner and I moved in behind him and wrapped my arms around him. His smell was amazing and his small waist emphasized his

strong shoulders, something that had always appealed to me. I was leaning in to kiss his neck, when he shied away from me.

“Stop it Tyler!” he said sounding displeased. I was shocked enough that my hug loosened. “Let go,” he said while pushing my arms away and turning from the sink. “Get off me!” he almost growled as he broke away from me.

“But, Josh, what’s wrong? What did I...”

“Just go away! Leave me alone!” he shouted as he ran to the bedroom, *our* bedroom and locked the door. “I don’t... love you... anymore.” Those were the last words I heard; they were slightly muffled by the closed door but the message was clear.

I sat at the table and pondered the situation for several minutes. Josh had been unusually quiet that evening, but nothing to suggest that anything like what had just transpired was eminent. Finally I rose and knocked on the door, softly at first, then louder, but I surrendered before I began pounding with my fist. I tossed my key on the table as I left his apartment. The next morning I stopped by the manager’s apartment in an attempt to rescind my intention to vacate. The older woman seemed relieved and I announced that the locks would be changed at my expense. She just nodded her agreement before I left for the office. Months later I heard that Josh had been with another guy for a while, which probably explains the strange evening. It would have been so much easier if he had just told me.

There wasn’t much time to think about Josh as I spent most of the next year in Galveston, Texas, coordinating the efforts of numerous contractors working on a big project in the Gulf. Fortunately I was able to continue my studies on-line as I was traveling between the two cities more often than I thought physically possible. I met Hank, an extremely handsome construction foreman, who became my fuck buddy when I was in Texas, though we made it clear from the onset that our relationship would probably not outlast the project. Hank had been raised on a ranch, but rode a big pick up truck rather than a horse these days. He helped me with my driving skills, all the while giving me shit. Driving in Texas is its own special experience.

I deleted the family details and told him my birthday didn’t coincide with my high school driver training. “I was too young, and my mom wasn’t too helpful so it just never happened. I never seemed to need one so I didn’t bother with it until I was told I’d be coming down here.” In fact I was 23 when I got my first license.

“I can’t believe a city boy doesn’t know how to drive! Can you ride a horse?”

It was always something like that; he’d laugh every time and frequently used the occasion to segue into *teaching* me how to ride something other than a horse. His humor and laid-back manner were infinitely appealing. And despite our being different from the other in almost every way, Hank and I were a nearly perfect match; I actually regretted the day that we

parted for the last time. The project was nowhere near completion, but my firm wanted me back in the office to head up another project.

Being back in the city was great. After almost six years in the Bay area, San Francisco was definitely feeling like home. I was able to continue my studies in the company of other people rather than in front of my laptop, while the firm kept me busier than I would have preferred. My new project was to be in collaboration with a French firm on a project in Dubai. It was suggested that I surrender my apartment and put my belongings in storage, but I managed to find a co-worker who would sublet, so I didn't have to lose my rent-controlled apartment. After nine months in the city, the tan I had acquired in Texas had faded, so my fair skin and blonde hair definitely stood out when I arrived in Dubai. The workload was daunting and my studies lagged. I spent a small amount of time in Paris, made several brief trips to the States, but mostly lived and worked in Dubai. Nearly two years later, I was headed back home. My first day in the city, it was socked in with fog; I never thought I'd actually enjoy that cold, damp feeling, but on that particular day I purposely ate lunch outside just to take it in.

There was still follow-up for the Dubai project, which forestalled my being assigned to a new project, which in turn gave me time to finish my degree. I scheduled some vacation time to immediately follow completion of both. Seth, who had been subletting the apartment, became my first room mate since college, when I offered to let him stay on while he and his girlfriend waited out a lengthy escrow for their first home, a loft near the baseball stadium. Of course, he slept on the sofa bed, but with our respective schedules we were seldom home, anyway. I wasn't dating anyone at the time and Seth proved to be very amicable. It was great for us to just hang out with a beer and a movie every now and again and occasionally Jackie would join us for an evening in, or out on the town. As we became better friends, I noticed that I was a bit jealous of their relationship, which encouraged me to work on creating one of my own.

* * * * *

My two-week vacation was near perfect. Without a set itinerary, I leisurely wandered up the coast on Highway 1 through Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino and on into Humboldt County as far as Redwood State Park, and was free to hike, read or just stare at the surf. After camping overnight in the redwoods, I turned around and headed south on 101, planning to eventually enjoy several days in the wine country before returning to the city. I had booked rooms at B and Bs in Calistoga and Yountville for my three final nights on the road. Before splurging on a half-day mineral spa experience in Calistoga, I noticed a handsome, auburn-haired man in one of the shops near where I was renting a bike. The bike ride was enjoyable but the afternoon at the spa, dinner at an excellent restaurant, and my room at the bed and breakfast were a sybarite's delight. I joined a winery tour late the next morning and spotted the tall, handsome, auburn-haired man in the crowd. I smiled at the coincidence, but he seemed to disappear as soon as I noticed him. A latte and pastry sufficed for lunch as I wandered through the small town before heading south to Yountville.

It was with guarded optimism that I sat in the bar waiting for a table at one of the best restaurants in town on a Friday night; it was one of those times when being ‘loose’ seldom paid off. The host was so handsome, I would have sucked him off right there in front of the dining room if I thought it would make any difference, but we both knew it wouldn’t change anything; nonetheless, he agreed to try to get me a table. The wine I was drinking was exquisite, but a single glass cost almost as much as I normally spent on a rather decent bottle. I had just about resigned myself to purchasing a second glass of the delectable red and then invite the host back to my room, when I spotted the auburn-haired man. The signals were so blatant that Helen Keller could have seen them: he was reading a book and the place setting had been removed from the other side of his two-person table. He was obviously dining *alone*. I took another sip of my wine and glanced at the host, thinking of him as a back up if my plan failed. I approached the handsome stranger and invaded his space.

“Excuse me,” I said, *sotto voce*.

His face looked annoyed when he first looked up from his text, but smiled back at my timid smile. “Yes?”

“This is terribly presumptuous of me, but I was foolish enough not to make a reservation and it appears like you might be dining alone. Would you consider sharing your table, since it doesn’t seem likely that I’ll get a table tonight otherwise?” I gave him what I assumed to be my most ingratiating smile.

“Oh,” he said, glancing around the restaurant as if seeking rescue from his present situation. “I guess...certainly. Please be seated.” His hesitancy troubled me.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to intrude. I just thought...”

“No, I’m happy to share my table,” he said flashing an amazing smile. Apparently the host had been paying attention as a busboy soon arrived to set a place for me and the host followed immediately with a menu.

Looking directly into my eyes he said. “I’ll send your waiter over immediately.” His expression told me that he admired my ballsy move.

Regardless, Tony and I connected immediately. Before our salads were set before us, it was clear that we would spend the night in the same bed. The restaurant had a reputation to maintain, and the meal and service did not disappoint. However, neither Tony nor I knew of the other’s credentials. We kissed and groped along the short distance to his room, so we were primed and ready as we crossed the threshold. We didn’t leave his bed until well past noon the next day. Apparently Tony is a bit more anal than myself as we dined the following evening at a different restaurant where he had a reservation. That night I took him to my

room. It might have been a case of 48-hour love, sort of like a bout with a flu bug, but I was hooked. We exchanged information and I was ecstatic to learn that he also lived in the city.

The next couple of months were the best of my life. Tony and I seemed to be made for each other and we spent as much time together as was permissible. As if the fates were smiling on us, my next project involved our office in Los Angeles; I liked the project but loved the fact that it was a mere 50-minute flight between the two cities. It was quite simple for Tony to fly south, or for me to fly north for a quick overnight or a languorous weekend.

While in L.A., an extremely handsome brunette caught my attention. The brunette in question was a headhunter; I told her I wasn't interested, but she insisted I take her card. To be expedient and polite I agreed and shoved her card into my coat pocket. Several months later, I was searching desperately for her card.

What the fuck is wrong with me? Am I doomed to follow in my father's footsteps, by changing partners every few years? Josh and Tony had both obviously found greener pastures and I certainly couldn't move to Texas to be with Hank, who by now had probably roped himself a fine man.

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Stephanie was glad to get my call and assured me that she had several prospects in Southern California that would suit my needs, challenge my abilities and surpass my salary requirements. Wow! If only it were true... And that easy! I thought, smiling to myself. Despite some reservations, I followed up on several of her leads, without raising any flags at the office. After meeting with several of her clients, a small firm in San Diego proffered a very attractive deal. During my third meeting with them, I accepted the negotiated offer, with the provision that I would be able to gracefully break with my current employer. I hated to leave San Francisco and my friends, but something had to change. And if I didn't exactly know how to change myself, then a change of location would have to suffice. I had also done some research and had learned that Greg was in his second year of residency in San Diego.

I didn't know what to expect as I waited in a restaurant in San Diego's Gaslight district. I wasn't even sure I'd recognize him, let alone he'd want to spend time with me.

"Tyler. It's so good to see you. It was really good to hear from you after all this time."

I looked up from the tablet to see Dr. Gregory Hunt. He looked a little tired but he also looked more handsome than I could possibly have imagined. "Hey, Greg. Please...have a seat," I said gesturing to the open space in the booth. "You...you look...great!" I managed to say as we shook hands and he settled in.

"Thanks. You're looking rather handsome yourself. I'm really glad you called, but I'm afraid I didn't quite understand why it is that you're in town. It was some business thing, right?" His face evidenced the caring interest I might have expected.

“Yeah, I’m here investigating a job situation, but what’s been going on with you? It’s been a long time and I’ve sort of fallen off the radar; I apologize for that. You’re about done with your residency, is that right?” I truly wanted to hear about Greg, and didn’t really want to talk about myself.

We shared a bottle of wine with dinner, and enjoyed the food, the conversation and the other’s company. Neither of us was particularly interested in dessert, though Greg definitely wanted some coffee; we agreed to split a dessert, which our waiter delivered. “So Greg, what’s your schedule like the next couple of days?” I casually asked.

“Well it’s as crazy as ever, but I have some time available if you want to get together again,” he said cheerfully.

“Great!” I said. “But I’m in town mostly to look at houses and I’d like you to join me.”

“Yeah, sure Tyler. But what do you want from me?”

“Well, whatever property I choose is going to be your home too, so I thought you should at least take a look.” I said with a small smile, hoping that he’d be able to decipher my somewhat obtuse proposal.

“Huh?” Was the only response from Greg.

We looked at each other for what seemed to be an interminable length of time, before I closed my eyes and tried to regroup. How is it I was in this situation to begin with? Was it hubris or just plain stupidity? My head and heart both knew that Greg had always been the only man for me, but my stomach was suggesting that he didn’t feel the same way. I felt sick and willed my stomach not to retch, while tears threatened to spill out from behind my lowered lids. I considered declaring my love in a more direct manner, but that seemed like a desperate move. *Hell, if he felt the same way, he would understand, right?* I decided to apologize to Greg and leave the restaurant, when I felt warm breath on my face and an arm on my shoulder; I imagined it was one of the restaurant staff preparing to ask me to leave. The arm tightened around me and the warm breath was replaced by warm lips, my eyes fluttered open to discover that Greg was sitting by my side wrapping me in his arms and kissing my face.

“Greg, I love...” I said, before his mouth overwhelmed mine with a kiss.

He pulled back and said, “I know. I love you too... Always have.” We were smiling.

I wrapped my arms around him as well and we kissed deeply. At that moment, I truly didn’t care who saw us. It felt a bit like that day on campus, when he kissed me for the first time. Now his kiss confirmed that my head and heart and not my stomach had been correct about

Greg's true feelings. "How did I ever let you get away?" I asked the question that had gone unasked for so many years.

"Well...I was sort of pushing from my end," Greg admitted.

"Huh?"

"Tyler, I meant what I said when I said I've always loved you, but when I transferred to UCLA, it was like college had started in earnest. And for some reason I felt like I had to be the very best I could be in order to prove myself to Kevin, even though he wasn't around." He half smiled. "Pretty silly to be competing with a dead brother. But honestly, you were so cute and I was afraid of failure, and I didn't want you around to blame if I did fail. You certainly didn't deserve that! As it turned out, I created a self-fulfilling prophecy, all my relationships failed, and rather quickly. All *two* of them," he snickered. "Now that I have successfully completed under grad, med school and most of my residency, having you so near makes me wonder if having you around wouldn't have made the whole experience that much easier." I smiled at the implied compliment, though was concerned that Greg was still hung up on his brother.

"Please don't take this the wrong way, but have you and your brother come to any conclusions or some sort of agreement?" I didn't want to be rude, but I also didn't want to start a threesome with Greg and his deceased brother.

"Yeah," he admitted rather sheepishly, but also with a sense of relief. "I guess it's one of the good things about med school; I just got too damn tired to compete with Kevin." He snickered. "One day I woke up and remembered that he loved me and could never have wished that for me." He paused and I noticed the sparkle in his eyes, as he brought his second hand up to grasp mine. "You want to know something else?"

"Sure," I said even though that was not what I was feeling at that exact moment.

"Tyler, I may have been better in chemistry, but you're definitely smarter and infinitely braver when it comes to life. By coming here to find me, you've made me happier than perhaps I've ever been." His face beamed with one of his most beautiful smiles and all I could do was to smile in return. "I've thought of you often, but never had the courage to follow through."

"It's selfish on my part, but I'm so glad I found you and that you still like me," I said still smiling.

"No, Tyler, I don't like you; I love you!" He corrected me.

From the restaurant, Greg followed in his car to my hotel. In bed we kissed and cuddled before falling asleep in the other's embrace; we both knew that the long-postponed, incredible sex would happen soon enough. During the night, I awoke and was momentarily

confused by the setting and situation. Upon realizing that it was Greg lying next to me, I snuggled even closer and drifted once again towards sleep. Despite being in a strange bed in a new city, I felt as though, finally, I was home.