



# SOMEBODY NICE!

BY RAINE O'TIERNEY

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## SOMEBODY NICE!

**By Raine O'Tierney**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

### What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance by writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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# SOMEBODY NICE!

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## Photo Description

A man stares at the camera, a hint of a smirk on his lips. His stubble-covered chin is tilted slightly down, and he has intense brown eyes. His black, gray, and white checkered shirt is open revealing his collarbone and a bit of chest. He wears a fisherman's cap, hiding his hair. Only his ears peek out. Freckles cover his brow, cheeks, and chest. There's an old scar on his left cheek.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

### NewYorkDating.com Profile

**Name:** Danny

**Age:** 35

**Location:** New York City

**Sexuality:** Male seeking Male

**Looking for:** a nice person! Who loves dogs! And children!

### **About Me**

This is Danny, he is a very nice person and he is very funny, but I think he is lonely. He helped me when my mom wanted to sell me to a reality show and now I live with him and I wanted to do something back for him so I want to find someone for him, because he has only me and Bunny, that's his dog, who is really big. And I'm 7 years old and Danny is 35, which is really old, but that doesn't matter he looks younger. Miss Portwood, my teacher said I need to say what Danny likes to do and he likes to walk with Bunny and work out and play football with me and Bunny and he works also, I think he is a police officer or something, he has a really cool car! And he has a ring in his nipple, which I think is really ouch, but he says people like it. I don't understand why but Danny says I need to be older but I'm already 7.

Hugs, Melissa

*Sincerely,*

*Vera*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** coming out, family, first time, law enforcement, librarians, men with children, men with pets, virgins

**Word Count:** 19,016

# **SOMEBODY NICE!**

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## Chapter 1

"I'm not going to let her go!" Melissa pleaded, her blue eyes shimmering. "I'll hold on tight and she won't get away from me, I promise, Danny!"

"No way," Danny said. "She's twice your weight, kiddo. If she gets excited and tries to run, she'd take your arms off."

Melissa's pout came out in full force, and she met his eyes in the rearview mirror, throwing her arms around Bunny's thick, fuzzy neck. "I *never* get to walk her."

"Yeah, life's hard."

Melissa put her face into the Rottweiler's black fur, mumbling and muttering—probably about how unfair and awful Danny was. He gave her a full two minutes to voluntarily emerge from the pout before he bribed:

"Wipe the dog fur off your lip and you can pick what we buy at the Treat Bar."

She immediately lifted her head off of Bunny's back, and she giggled as the dog gave her a sloppy kiss.

"Can we get all green bones?"

"If you think Bunny would like all green bones."

In the end, Danny held the leash as Melissa led the charge into the pet store. She skipped ahead of him, giggling and twirling, nearly running headlong into the door. He caught her at the last second, and pulled her away from a concussion. Unfazed, she ran ahead toward the long row of clear plastic bins, filled with gourmet dog treats. Above them, a sign read *Treat Bar* and it was covered in multicolored paw prints.

Bunny whimpered, anxious for a treat. She snuffled at one lid, knocking it ajar with her nose. Danny watched Melissa eyeing each set of treats, deciding with the seriousness of an appellate court judge what Bunny would like best. He was not, however, so attentive to the little girl that he missed the intense stare being directed at him.

Danny glanced out of the corner of his eye, and a grin quirked his lips.

Young, dark-haired Milo Swaisbrick half-hid behind the endcap of Aisle Four, his hands shoved deep into the pockets of his tweed jacket. He tossed his head to the side, beckoning Danny to follow.



“Hey, Melissa? I’m going to look at something on the next aisle, all right?”

She nodded, stepping over to the next bin.

“You want me to hold Bunny while you’re looking?”

“Nice try, kiddo.”

He found Milo standing in between the rows of dog bones and the leashes. He grinned sheepishly as Danny approached with Bunny.

“Hiding?”

“It’s just... *Melissa*,” he whispered. And then, so adorable that Danny almost couldn’t stand it, he stood on his tiptoes and planted a hurried, off-center kiss on Danny’s lips, withdrawing quickly before Danny could reciprocate. The movement piqued Bunny’s interest, and the dog butted her head against Milo’s legs, eager for her own attention. The younger man bent down and scratched behind her ears, much to the pleasure of the Rottweiler.

“We could get together for more than five minutes at a time if you would just come out and meet the kid. I could introduce you?”

Milo’s eyes went wide behind his black-rimmed glasses and he quickly shook his head. “I already know Melissa.”

“You work at her *school*, it’s not the same as knowing her.” Danny teased and tempted with a wink. “I’ll even call you my ‘boyfriend’.”

“We... we haven’t moved there yet.”

“I know,” Danny said, unperturbed, “but have you ever tried to explain ‘just dating’ to a seven-year-old? C’mon, I swear it won’t hurt.”

But Milo looked like he might literally run away, and Danny supposed it was a miracle that the school librarian, ten years his junior, had even responded to the text inviting him for a ‘quick meet-up’ at the pet store.

“Well, will you at least say ‘hi’ as my friend?”

“It might be weird at school,” Milo said quickly. “And...”

Danny sighed and reached out for Milo’s hand. Hesitantly, the other man took it and when Danny tugged him forward, Milo stumbled into him. He breathed in, savoring the scent of his secret not-quite-boyfriend.

“You’re trouble, you know that?”

“I know,” Milo murmured.

"I want to be able to spend more than five minutes with you here and there."

"Me too," he agreed.

"I still don't get it," Danny pressed, "your mom knows, your friends know, even a couple of the teachers know, but you're scared of coming out to a seven-year-old?"

Milo frowned. "I just..."

"Need time."

"I'll..." Milo started hesitantly, "I'll say 'hi' to Melissa as the librarian."

A warmth spread through Danny at the nervous man's tiny—*miniscule* even—baby step toward coming out to Danny's little girl.

Melissa looked up as the men rounded the corner with the energetic Rottweiler in tow. She had filled one of the bags so full of treats that she couldn't even get it closed with the nearby ribbons.

"I think Bunny will like these, Danny!" And then her smile spread and she cried, "Mr. Swaisbrick? What are you doing here?"

"I'm... buying cat food."

"You have a cat?" Melissa asked. "We have a dog. This is our dog—her name is Bunny. Can I give her one of the treats now, Danny?"

Bunny pawed at the bag Melissa held, looking back over her doggie-shoulder so that the whites of her eyes showed. It was one of her most adorable begs, but Danny wasn't falling for it.

"Not until we've paid for them."

"How come you aren't at the library?" she asked, putting a hand on her hip as if she was offended to see her school's librarian anywhere except the library.

"It's Sunday," he reminded her quietly, as awkward as she was impatient.

Her mouth formed a little 'O' and then she said brightly, "Danny, this is Mr. Swaisbrick and he works in the library at our school and he's really nice and he checks out our books for us."

Milo smiled shyly. It was the perfect moment to tell her that Milo was someone who would be in their lives. Instead, he shook Milo's hand, teasing the skin of Milo's knuckles with his thumb. When Melissa informed them she was going to get another bag, Danny seized his opportunity.

“See. You guys exchanged words and,” his voice dropped low and he leaned in so that his mouth was only an inch away from Milo’s ear, “she has no clue that you and I’ve been...” He trailed off, loving the way Milo’s cheeks turned a brighter shade of red.

\*\*\*\*\*

“What do you think about Mr. Swaisbrick?” Danny asked when they were in the car with two thirty-pound bags of fancy-ass dog food for the spoiled Rottie and three small baggies filled with dog treats—all green. He imagined what Milo would do if he were in the car to hear the question. He’d probably slap both hands over Danny’s mouth. He’d be so afraid that Melissa might *figure it out* that he’d panic. For a school librarian, the guy was damn uncertain around kids.

Or maybe just Melissa.

Melissa was smiling and sticking her tongue out at Bunny. The dog tried to lick it before she pulled back. She glanced at Danny and shrugged. “He’s really nice. But I like Miss Portwood better.”

Danny’s lips quirked and he glanced over his shoulder as he maneuvered the car out of the parking spot. It was still early enough that city traffic wouldn’t be too bad.

“Yeah, but librarians are cool, right?”

“I do like the library,” Melissa agreed after a minute. “What do you think about Mr. Swaisbrick, Danny?”

Fuck. He’d promised. He never should have promised. But there was that first date and that first breathless kiss in the alley next to the restaurant, when he’d asked Milo if he wanted to go back to his apartment for coffee. Milo had blushed and begged, “*But Melissa... Promise you won’t tell her yet.*”

Damn delicious lips tricking him into making promises he only wanted to break.

“I think he’s cool,” Danny told her. *Think he’s cool, think he’s sexy, think he’s so cute I want to pounce on him every time I see him. Can’t wait to get him alone so we can finally—*

“Danny, I think you need a girlfriend.”

That came completely out of left field, as was the way of the always-thinking seven-year-old. Danny frowned.

“What?”

“Don't you want a girlfriend, Danny?” Melissa shrugged dramatically, lifting both shoulders all the way up to her ears, and Bunny chose that moment to sigh loudly in the child's lap. They were a pair.

“Why would I want a girlfriend?”

He'd dated a couple of women since Melissa had come to live with him, but it had been a while.

“So you're not lonely.” Seven-year-old wisdom. *Lonely? Really?*

“I'm not lonely, kiddo. We've got each other, right? That's good enough.”

He caught her attempt to raise an eyebrow in the rearview mirror.

\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 2

Things were finally quiet for the day. Milo Swaisbrick had sorted three carts of books at the desk, but he'd had no time to shelve them. He'd given database classes to the fifth graders that morning and then facilitated a standardized test in the afternoon, which not only meant he had to rove, making certain no one was cheating, but also that he couldn't roll the squeaky carts around putting up books.

Then there was a rash of kids right before the bell rang, all wanting to check out books, and—almost as if they'd planned it—all needing help finding special titles, or having blocked accounts, or wanting assistance with research questions.

Now he was walking the shelves, replacing books, straightening and ordering the general chaos that came with working in a school library. He liked it, though. Putting order to chaos. It was a form of meditation for him.

He switched around some George Washington biographies that had been pulled off the shelves by eager hands and filed back incorrectly. He was scheduled to work a Saturday next month—maybe he could do an inventory and find books the catalog said were missing. He'd once found a small paperback that was supposedly lost in 1997, pushed back between two shelves. In a public library, the records would have eventually been deleted. At St. Vincent's Academy, they had notes about fines from the sixties.

If only the head librarian, Mrs. Anderson, would retire...

The woman was obsessed with saving every book. *This can be re-bound, Milo!* she insisted. Yeah, it could, but it was called *Will the U.S.A. Ever Go to the Moon?* Binding was the least of its issues. Milo had plans for the head librarian position, which, he knew, was cocky. But he was banking on getting it. And when he did, the first thing he would do would be to weed the reference section.

"Excuse me. I need your help, please."

Milo turned his head, straightening from where he'd crouched in front of the biographies. His smile froze in place. Melissa Goode—the little girl Danny was fostering—stood in front of him in her gold and purple St. Vincent's uniform. Her hair was parted into two braids, though curls had come loose, and it seemed

like she'd lost one of her ribbons, replacing it instead with a rubber band. Milo imagined Danny fixing her hair in the morning, the act so sweet and paternal that he flushed at the thought.

"M-Melissa." Damn. He hadn't meant to stutter.

Her face brightened and she smiled at him. "You remember my name!" This seemed to delight the child to her core, and it eased some of the tension inside his heart.

"Are you looking for a book?" Small favors that he managed to keep his voice level.

"I need your assistance getting on the Internet." He was surprised by how well-spoken she was relative to her grade. She flashed him a brilliant smile and said, "I'm in Miss Portwood's Advanced Group on Tuesdays and Thursdays and we have permission to get on and look at *Amazing Animals of the World* and *MUZZY Online* and *National Geographic Kids* during class. But I'm not supposed to go to any other sites alone. Danny says and Miss Portwood says."

"Well, what site are you wanting to go to?" He guided her toward the front desk, expecting that she needed to know the exports of Belize or what language they spoke in Zimbabwe. His brain was full of elementary school information.

"New York Dating dot com." She smiled radiantly as she said this, trotting along. He'd just come around the desk when he stopped.

Milo spent his days helping kids find books. Some kids were shy and had to be coaxed out of their shells, some wanted to talk his ear off, some were smart-asses, and some were precocious. All day, every day, he heard things that made him cock an eyebrow, but this was a first. She didn't seem to be teasing, either. In fact, she looked earnest. He couldn't help it, he laughed.

Immediately, her sunny smile faded. She looked upset, and he regretted making her frown.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's just... What? *Why?* Why do you need to get on a dating website?"

"It's for Danny."

"Danny."

"Danny's my friend—do you remember? I live with him. And I think he's lonely because he only has me and Bunny—you met her at the store. Danny said she could be mine, too, after I had to stop living with my mom when I was

four. And I heard Miss Portwood telling Mrs. Snyder that she was thinking about going on New York Dating dot com because she's really lonely."

Well, there was one thing for certain, the kid knew how to talk.

"And I asked Miss Portwood what it was and she said that it's for people to meet other people, but you have to say what you like to do and other things about yourself. So I wrote this."

She dropped her purple and pink backpack to the ground and started digging through it for a crumpled sheet of loose-leaf paper which—when she found it—she thrust triumphantly in the air.

"Here it is! I wrote this during free time!" She smiled very proudly as she stood and smoothed it out against the clear top of the desk. Graphite smeared across the page, but she didn't seem to care. "These are all the things I want Danny's new friend to know about him."

Milo read through the list as best he could. Despite being in Miss Portwood's advanced class, Melissa wasn't the best speller.

*Danny is a nice person. Danny is very funny and I like him a lot! I'm 7 years old and my name is Melissa. He is very old. Danny is 35 years old. He doesn't look like he is too old so don't worry. Danny likes football. Sometimes we play football in Central Park. And Danny has a big big dog. She is a rottweiler and she can knock me down but she is not mean. Danny and me like Bunny a lot. Danny is a police officer and sometimes I can ride in his police car and it is awesome! I like his car a lot. Danny helped me out when I was little and my Mom tried to sell me to a reality TV show. Now I live with him.*

"Your Mom tried to sell you to a reality show?" Milo asked slowly. He and Danny had talked about Melissa on one of their few dates. He'd told Milo how he was Melissa's guardian and how he'd been in the process of adopting her for several years, but there always seemed to be setbacks. He'd never said *anything* about Melissa's biological mother trying to sell her to a reality TV show. Who would do that? And *how*?

Melissa shrugged and nodded as if it weren't a big deal at all.

*Danny's new friend has to:*

*Be somebody nice!*

*Like dogs!*

*AND KIDS!!!*

“Look,” she flipped the paper over. “I don’t know if his new friend needs to know what he looks like, but I drew a picture of him.”

Milo blinked at the picture. She’d drawn Danny as a really tall man (relative to the size of the small, pig-tailed girl standing beside him) with muscled arms and an... *eight pack*? Each chiseled dent of his abdomen looked like an oval stacked on the next one. He also had large pecs with what seemed like a nipple ring. Milo flushed slightly.

Melissa watched Milo looking at the picture before she said, “I like art a lot! Danny says I should practice all the time if I want to end up in a museum. Do you think my picture is good?”

“Danny looks like he works out.”

“He loves to exercise! He rides his bike all the time, and he runs, and he walks Bunny, and he’s always moving. He can do, like, a thousand million push-ups. So, will you help me get online, please?”

The picture of Danny smiled up at Milo—his mouth a red ‘U’, his eyes brown dots, no nose, and short little spikes of orange hair. Melissa shifted impatiently from foot to foot.

From the beginning of their awkward dating relationship, Danny had wanted to tell Melissa the truth. It was Milo that held back. Looking down at the personal ad the little girl had crafted—a personal ad designed to get Danny a *girlfriend*—Milo thought he’d made the right decision in asking Danny not to tell her.

“Um... Melissa. It’s really late. The bell already rang. Isn’t your ride here?”

Melissa’s eyes went wide and she slapped her forehead comically. “Oh my gosh, I forgot! Mrs. Palmer is taking me home today!” She grabbed her bag off the floor, not even bothering to zip it up. “She’s my babysitter,” Melissa explained hurriedly and then, out of nowhere. “She smells like shrimp scampi but Danny says not to tell her that. Can we get on the Internet tomorrow?” She charged toward the door, only remembering to cry at the last minute, “Please?”

Instinctively, he called, “Don’t run!”

After Melissa had gone, and the library returned to its deep, familiar silence, Milo sat unmoving in his swivel chair. He wasn’t worried about coming out to



Melissa for himself; he was worried for Danny. The little girl was his world and she adored him. Milo didn't want to be the reason the loving look in her eyes changed. But part of him selfishly wished...

He imagined the three of them playing a game together, Melissa chattering about her day in fantastic third-grade *non sequitur*, Danny rubbing Milo's foot secretly under the table, the big Rottweiler, Bunny, begging for scraps he'd slip her from his plate. It was all so *domestic*.

Milo stared at the bumps and ridges in the ceiling tiles and daydreamed. He and Danny needed to talk.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Chapter 3

“That the best you got?” Hammer taunted him. “Bring it, McCrea!”

Danny threw his weight into the punch, pummeling the training mitt his partner wore. All the frustration of the long day—the criminals strolling out of the station after their twenty-four hour holds were up, being taunted by fourteen-year-old gang members who were meant for more, being forced to arrest both an abusive fuck and his wife who finally fought back—he poured into his fists.

“Melissa hits harder than this! Throwin’ her little girl punches!”

Danny fell back, bouncing on the balls of his feet, sweat dripping down his face. Hammer grinned at him with a wide, wicked grin. His partner was a born shit-talker.

“You want to do this thing for real? We can, old man.”

“Oh-ho! The kid thinks he can take on the Hammer. Step up your game first, and then we’ll talk.”

Danny threw himself back into his punches, delivering them hard and fast: jab, jab, jab, uppercut, feint, right hook. Hammer grunted, leaning into the barrage and Danny knew if they’d been fighting for real, he’d have knocked his partner on his ass.

Hammer nodded his approval.

“Think you’ve got it, kid.”

They hit the showers. Thick steam lingered as other officers, desperate to hit their numbers for the upcoming fitness review, washed away the sweat and grime of their workouts. Danny wasn’t worried. He never stopped training. He grabbed a free shower, turned the water up as hot as it would go, and let the pelting spray work on his tense muscles.

“Good workout there, Danny,” Hammer said, taking the stall next to him. “I give you hell, but your form is great.”

“Never doubted it for a second.”

“Smart-ass.”

“Aren’t you sweet?”

"I push 'cause I love," Hammer teased.

"You push 'cause you want me to join the department rugby team."

"Hell yes, I do. We might have a chance with some young blood."

Danny grinned and put his face into the spray, testing how long he could hold his breath. He wanted to stay under the showerhead until the water ran cold, which would be the next side of never. And he wanted every bastard out of the showers so he could rub one out in peace.

He finally cut the stream when Hammer—who'd barely stayed in long enough to get wet—called, "You going to primp in there all day, princess?"

"You're a jackass, Hammer," Danny told him later at the lockers, as he tossed his sweaty gym clothes into a bag and changed back into his uniform.

"Yeah," Hammer said proudly, puffing out his chest just a little. The man prided himself on it. He'd been around longer than most. Where other men aimed for higher positions, Hammer enjoyed working patrols. He'd had a lot of partners—lost most of them to the climb, some to the stress of the job, one to the streets. He never stopped telling Danny how he didn't measure up to the men who'd come before him, a fact that had pissed Danny off to no end in the beginning. But little by little, he'd earned Hammer's respect. "Hey, you see my new pictures of Elle and the kids?" His whole demeanor shifted, and the man, who hadn't bothered to change out of his towel, grabbed his pants and tossed his wallet to Danny. He flipped it open and saw Hammer's beautiful wife and twins—son and daughter.

"Damn, Hammer, when did they get so big?"

"Dunno, kid. I blinked and they were already driving."

"Melissa isn't ever going to drive."

"Oh? You going to lock her in her room?" He barked with laughter. "Good luck with that."

"Nah, I'm just not going to let her grow up. She's going to stay seven forever."

"Think you'd have a better chance lockin' her up. Better enjoy this age. Pretty soon she'll be a teenager and then you're going to regret takin' her into your home."

"Don't say shit like that," Danny said stiffly.

Hammer snorted. "The first time I wished I'd never had kids, I felt like shit about myself. 'God, I'm the scum of the earth.' All that stuff. But you wait, McCrea. One day she comes home with her belly button pierced or some new idiot boyfriend and she's shrieking at you that you don't understand and you'll get over the guilt *real* quick."

"You know what I like about you, Hammer?"

"What's that?"

"Your fucking optimism."

Hammer snorted.

Danny's phone buzzed. He looked down—new message from the Lieutenant.

*My office. ASAP.*

"As lovely as your company is, partner, I've got more important people calling my name." He tossed the wallet back to Hammer and headed for the elevator.

\*\*\*\*

"Hey, Lieut, you wanted to see me?"

"Come on in, McCrea. Take a seat."

There wasn't really a seat to take. Both chairs were stacked high with boxes of files. He'd have moved one, except there were files on the floor as well and, knowing the lieutenant, there was definitely a method to all that madness. Behind his desk was a large whiteboard with the names of every officer on his watch shift. Danny's had been starred.

Danny straightened.

"I'll stand, Sir."

Lieutenant John Greenley was a giant of a man, a good six foot five when he stood, with hands that seemed like they could crush watermelons. As he sat at his desk, reading reports, with his glasses perched on the end of his nose, he came across as quiet and reserved. When an officer was made to bear the full weight of Greenley's gray gaze, though, 'reserved' was the last thought on one's mind. In the time Danny had been with the Lieutenant's office, he'd seen more than one man leave the department with his shoulders hunched, eyes

turned to the floor, as if they'd been whipped. Bullies and bastards alike—their Lieut felled them all.

Now, Greenley sat back in his chair, glasses on a stack of memos in front of him. He didn't glare at Danny, *per se*, but his expression was stern.

"Look, McCrea—you know I don't have time for bullshit, so let's have at it."

The asterisk beside Danny's name—was this a reprimand?

"What are your plans for the future?"

Jesus. Fuck. Was it *worse* than a reprimand?

"Give my all to the NYPD, sir."

"You see yourself doing patrol for the rest of your life?"

No. Actually, he didn't. He wasn't a lifer like Hammer. But he wasn't one to bitch and moan, either. They all had to do their stint. Just because his stint seemed to be running longer than he'd planned...

"If I put in my time, do good work, someone's bound to notice."

"Well, someone's noticed," Greenley said gruffly. "And that someone is curious how seriously interested you might be in climbing the ladder. Look, McCrea. You're smart and you're one of the hardest working boys we have in here. I know you're itchin' for more of a challenge, and better pay is always nice."

"Yessir."

"But here's the thing. With the budget cuts, there aren't enough opportunities for good men to advance in the department. You show promise, McCrea. And I want to see you succeed."

"Yessir."

"You've never expressed interest in making detective, though."

"No, sir."

"That's what I thought." Greenley cleared his throat. "I want to recommend you for a position at the RTCC."

"The RTCC?" Danny repeated, confused. The Real Time Crime Center.

"You work your ass off, you could make a name for yourself there."

“But—”

“I’m not going to shit you. You’d be starting at the bottom again. Only a step or two above the *very* bottom. It would be a lot of hard work. But you’re dedicated, Danny, and I see an opportunity for advancement there that I don’t see for you here.”

“Yessir.”

As the lieutenant waved him out of his office, he said, “Think it over. Just don’t take too long.”

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## Chapter 4

“You seem distracted,” Milo’s mother said as she set dinner down on the table. Another casserole. He looked from the bubbling pile of cheese and broccoli up at her face. When his father was still alive, she made every meal an event. Salads to start, then the main course, followed up with a homemade dessert. Now, she expertly cut their large casserole into squares with a spatula. “Everything okay?”

*Everything okay with you?* He wanted to ask. But of course it wasn’t. That’s why he’d moved home after school, because she’d seemed so sad and small.

“Sure,” he told her.

“How was school?”

She’d never stopped asking. From his first day of kindergarten to now, as a librarian at St. Vincent’s Academy. *How was school?*

“Something weird happened, actually,” Milo said, grateful to have a story to tell. “You remember Melissa Goode—”

“Your boyfriend’s daughter,” his mother agreed cheerfully. He laughed, remembering Danny saying that it would be hard to explain ‘just dating’ to a seven-year-old. It was even harder to tell his mother that he and Danny weren’t really boyfriends. Yet. She seemed so happy about it. Her son finally had a boyfriend. “What about her?”

“She came in with this, I dunno, essay that she’d written about Danny. She wanted me to put it up on New York Dating dot com.”

His mother cracked a smile as she scooped a helping of casserole onto his plate. He thanked her.

“So, you’re being replaced?” she teased.

“Ma, you know she doesn’t know.”

Her eyes were kind as she studied her son, but when she spoke, she was direct and firm. “Milo, if I remember right, Danny wants to tell her?”

“Yeah, but—”

“And she’s his daughter.”

“Yes, but—”

“And you’re pretty much dictating what he can and cannot tell his own daughter.”

“Ma, it’s not like that,” Milo argued. He looked down at his casserole and then back up to her. “It’s not like that.”

“Then tell me what it’s like. Make me understand. Why are you scared to come out to her? You were so good with me.”

Milo grimaced as he remembered. “Ma, I wasn’t good at all. I think I shouted, ‘I like boys, okay?!’ when you asked me if I thought some girl on the TV was cute.”

“And then you ran upstairs,” she grinned. “But I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about afterwards, when I knocked on your door and you hugged me and asked me not to stop loving you and I said—”

“That you’d never stop loving me.”

“That I’d never stop loving you.”

“And then you and Dad bought me a cake.”

“We had to celebrate.”

He chuckled despite himself. The cake had said *Happy Birthday*, but his mother had scraped the ‘Birth’ part off with her finger and added letters in frosting, so that it said *Happy Comingoutday*. She’d had to squeeze it all together to make it fit.

“I don’t think Melissa’s going to make Danny a cake.”

“Is that what you’re worried about? Danny?”

“Of course, Danny.”

“I just thought, because of St. Vincent’s...”

Neither one of them had touched their food. He was too worked up to eat and she was, as always, waiting for him. Milo furrowed his brow. “Ma, I don’t know what would happen if they found out at the school. But it’s not that. It’s Danny. What if it upsets Melissa? What if she thinks differently of him? What if they find out at *his* work? I might get fired, but he’d get it a *lot* worse.”

“Milo, your dinner?”

He scooped a bite onto his fork, put it into his mouth, didn’t taste it.

“What would happen to him if they found out at the station?”



“Well, honey,” she said, finally picking up her own fork. “I don’t know. But don’t you think that’s up to Danny whether or not he wants to face it?”

“I just—”

“And as for Melissa. She’s obviously a bright, happy girl. You think finding out her guardian is in a relationship with a man is going to *ruin* her life?”

Put that way, it sounded so stupid.

“So what did you do?”

“Huh?”

“When she gave you the essay. For New York Dating?”

“Nothing. I mean, she went home for the day. I’ve still got the essay. I don’t actually know what I’m going to do.”

“Seems like a good opportunity for a talk.”

“I guess.”

The truth was, he’d been thinking about that piece of paper ever since she’d left. He’d read it several times, looking at the picture on the back, thinking about the Danny he was getting to know and the Danny who—to that seven-year-old at St. Vincent’s Academy, at least—was the greatest guy on the planet.

“Can you help me get a picture onto Facebook?” his mother asked suddenly. “My profile is just this little gray person with no face. And I know there’s a way to make my picture be on there, I just can’t figure it out.”

“Huh?”

“Facebook, I need—Oh, I’m sorry sweetie, did you want to keep talking about Melissa?” To her the answer was so simple that there was nothing more to say about it.

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Milo went to bed that night thinking about Danny. He’d seen him many times, dropping Melissa off in the mornings as Milo rode his bike to the school, and he’d always noticed the tall, handsome man. No ring. No woman with him. But to say Milo was shy was an understatement beyond understatements. He couldn’t even manage a ‘hello’ until that day about a month ago.

The weather had finally changed, and the icy chill of winter was replaced with the cool breeze of spring. It was probably still a bit chilly to be eating

lunch outside, but Milo was desperate for sunlight after a whole season spent taking his lunch in the windowless staff breakroom.

That day he stretched out on the steps, devouring a ham and cheese sandwich. The wind played with the tiny new leaves that were just emerging on the trees. Finally, some green to accent the dull, gray street. Cars drove past the school, and he could hear the shouts of children on the playground behind the building. The sky was vast and blue, and it just *felt* like a good day.

Milo was thinking about getting up and going back inside, when the man he had been secretly crushing on all year pulled up in front of the school, parking in a no-parking zone. Milo watched him emerge from the car, a half-grin on his face.

“Hello,” Milo muttered, long before the other man could hear him. He dropped his eyes, stared hard at the last few bites of sandwich. They were alone, outside the school, on this perfect day. And the father was going to walk right past him and when would there ever be another chance like this? In all of time and space, when would he ever get another opportunity?

“Hello!” His second greeting was too loud, too gregarious, and, idiotically, aimed at the ground. Milo lifted his head and looked at the man who had stopped next to him on the step.

“Do you work here?”

Instinctively, Milo raised the photo ID around his neck.

“I work in the library,” Milo told him, realizing that the man might be worried he was some weirdo hanging out in front of the school, waiting for the kids. “Do you have kids here?”

“Yup,” he replied. “Second grader, Melissa Goode. I’m getting her for a dentist’s appointment. Thanks for asking.”

Thinking that was a weird thing to say, Milo cocked his head.

“It’s not going to keep someone from lying, of course, but the more people that are vigilant, the safer the kids will be.”

Milo’s face burned. He hadn’t asked out of vigilance—he just wanted to talk to the man. Putting the rest of his food away, Milo stood and wiped his hands on his pants.

“My name is Milo Swaisbrick.”

“Danny McCrea.”

Danny turned to go inside, and Milo let his eyes follow the man who was dressed casually in jeans and a flannel shirt. He had wide shoulders, a long, broad back that met a trim waist and... Milo swallowed. An exceptionally nice ass. He flushed, hardly believing he had looked.

"Hey, uh..." *Be bold, Milo. Be bold!* If only he'd had a *little* practice at this sort of thing. "Do you have a girlfriend?"

Danny stopped on the top step, raising a dark eyebrow curiously. "Has someone come around saying she's my girlfriend?"

"No." Milo quickly shook his head. "Not at all. I just... wondered if you had a girlfriend or..." He cleared his throat hard, unable to believe he was actually about to ask what he was about to ask. He looked down at his hands. "A boyfriend?" Dammit. Milo flushed, glancing up. He was so bad at flirting!

A smile spread across Danny's face—an easy, confident smile. It made the already perfectly delicious angles of his face even more attractive.

"You asking for yourself?"

If the heat in his face was any indication, Milo was about six shades of red. His instinct was to say 'no', to play it off. *Be bold, be bold...* "Maybe." It was a miracle he'd managed even that one word.

"Not right now. Neither girlfriend nor boyfriend."

"Really?" Milo smiled and bounced one leg nervously. God, he was going to say it, wasn't he? He wasn't able to stop himself.

"I don't either. Have anyone. But if I did, it'd be a boyfriend." Milo finally managed. He cleared his throat, feeling certain that the second he let the information fall, Danny McCrea was either going to roll down the stairs in hysterics, or be totally disgusted. Forcing himself to meet the older man's eye, he opted for full disclosure, "I haven't actually ever gone out on a date before. So, definitely no boyfriend."

"You're young," Danny said, without missing a beat. "There's still time."

They looked at each other for a while, Milo uncertain how to end the conversation. He opened his mouth to say, "*You better get Melissa or you're going to be late...*" when Danny pressed:

"So, are you asking me out?"

Milo blinked, his nerve-endings on fire.

"I... well..."

"Or do you want me to ask you?"

Here it was. The moment he'd been waiting for the last twenty-four years. It was way more awkward and uncomfortable than he'd imagined it would be. He said, "Would you like to go on a date with me?"

Danny studied him for a long moment before he said with a smile that knotted Milo's recently unknotted stomach, "Sure. Tomorrow night? Seventy-three?"

Milo nodded eagerly, unable to control his smile. He felt tremendous relief at not having been shot down.

"Yes."

"Give me your address. I'll pick you up. But let's get one thing straight."

As quickly as the relief had come, it evaporated.

"Even if you beg, I'm *not* putting on the sirens."

"Sirens?"

"I'm a cop," Danny grinned.

Milo laughed. As easy as that, he had a date.

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## Chapter 5

“May I speak with you, Danny?” Melissa’s babysitter, Mrs. Palmer asked that evening as Melissa darted in front of her and into the apartment. Danny looked down at the small Englishwoman, expecting her to ask for another raise. Even though he knew that her apartment was rent-controlled, she was constantly complaining about the price of *everything*, haggling with him for a five-cent raise here, a ten-cent raise there.

“Danny!” Melissa butted in loudly. “Do you want to see what I can do?” She slid wildly across the hardwood floors in her knee-socks, her arms out. “I’m skating! Isn’t that great?”

He glanced back at Mrs. Palmer who looked very displeased.

“Sure, Mrs. Palmer.”

“No!” Melissa cried, almost frantically. “I... I’m sorry. I’ll tell you the truth!”

Mrs. Palmer looked grumpy and let a little chuff escape her lips. It wasn’t the first time Melissa had gotten in trouble while staying at her babysitter’s.

“What’s going on?” Danny asked. It had been a long day, he had a lot to think about, and if he had to pay for another broken Union Jack lamp he was probably going to lose it. Bunny whined on the floor near Melissa, rolling over on her back and showing her belly. The dog always got a treat when Melissa got home, and it had been a full two minutes and no one had given her one of the green biscuits she so loved. “Well, one of you’d better start telling it.”

“Melissa and the school librarian—” Mrs. Palmer started, but Melissa quickly interrupted her. She declared in one single breath:

“I went to the library today because I needed to get on the Internet and you said don’t ever get on the Internet by myself and Mr. Swaisbrick is very helpful and I knew he could help me and I asked him if he’d help me get onto a website and he said yes and we’re going to get on the website tomorrow. And I wasn’t going to tell because it was going to be a surprise and then I accidentally told Mrs. Palmer and I really, really, *really* wish I hadn’t.”

“What website?”

Melissa was silent, her eyes wide, her bottom lip trembling. Next would come the tears. The girl was tenderhearted, yes, but she also knew he was weak against her tears. He turned to the babysitter.

“*What* website?”

“Some *dating* site.” Mrs. Palmer puffed up as she spoke, triumphantly delivering the news.

“Melissa?” he asked levelly. It was his police officer voice. The one he used with little kids caught in the middle of domestic disputes. It was firm, but kind. A *let me get you out of this situation* type voice. It was the voice he’d used on Melissa the first time he’d met her, when her mother—strung out and raving—had tried to barter the child for drugs. “Do you want to tell me what happened?”

She shook her head quickly, the tears starting to fall.

“I’m... I’m... sorry!”

And she bolted for her bedroom. Bunny hopped up and trotted along after her, the dog loving few things more than wet, salty faces.

“This has got to be a joke.”

“If you ask me,” Mrs. Palmer said loftily, adjusting her glasses. “This librarian must be a pervert. And you’d do well to arrest him. Immediately.”

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## Chapter 6

He arrived in uniform.

It wasn't the first time that Milo had seen him in uniform, but it was so unexpected that he straightened involuntarily. There was something about the dark navy blue and the crisp lines of the fabric that made Milo feel like he was in trouble. In trouble *and* aroused. Even though Danny wasn't smiling as he strode up to the desk, Milo's heart skipped a beat. Danny was there to see him.

When he was doing the practicum for his Master's in Library Science, Milo had no less than three cops come in and try to strong-arm him into giving up customer information without a warrant. It had been scary, but exhilarating, to tell them all to come back with the proper paperwork. He'd even quoted the American Library Association on multiple occasions. But *this* officer in his crisp navy blue uniform, badge polished and gleaming, gun holstered at his hip, was more than a welcome sight. After a night spent thinking about Danny, his dreams had been... heated.

St. Vincent's ancient secretary followed after Danny.

"Milo!" she called to him, a little too loudly. Her hearing aid was out again. "Milo, dear, this officer is here to see you! I couldn't get the damn intercom to work, so I'm announcing him to you directly."

"Thank you, Ms. Reynolds."

"Eh?"

He waved at her and smiled.

"You." Danny faux-scowled. The old, faded scar on his cheek almost made him look mean when his mouth turned down at the corners. Milo tried not to grin.

"How can I help you today, Officer? We have a fine selection of juvenile fiction books."

"You and I need to have a talk. Where's your office?"

He didn't really have one—another reason he longed for that head librarian position—but there was the small breakroom. Almost a closet, really. Milo locked his computer and then the cash drawer, yanking out the key and putting it into his pocket.

“Follow me.”

They'd barely gotten a step through the door when Danny grabbed him around the waist and swept him into a deep kiss. Milo wrapped his arms around Danny's neck and snuggled into him tightly, relieved he was there.

“You got my text last night?” Danny murmured against his lips.

“Yes.”

“Does that door lock?”

“No.”

“Damn.”

“You wanna see your personal ad?”

Milo turned, thrusting his hip just a little bit and reveled in the feeling of Danny slowly slipping his hand inside the pocket. He closed his eyes, wishing Danny would dig deeper. Instead, he found the note Melissa had written. Milo hung onto Danny as he read it.

“I'm especially fond of the big bulky muscles and the nipple ring.”

The muscles, at least, were true to life. The officer's biceps strained against the short sleeves of his uniform.

Danny snorted at something he read on the page, shaking his head.

“She obviously thinks you're pretty great.”

“Yeah, well,” Danny said, looking up at Milo. He brushed the pad of his thumb over Milo's lips, following the gesture with a lingering kiss. Goddamn, he wished the door locked. “So...” Danny teased, lightly shaking the piece of paper. “You worried my little girl's going to hook me up with some woman on the Internet?”

“Maybe,” Milo admitted.

“Just a little?”

“I may have had a very long talk with my mother about it last night.”

“So...” Danny tried again. “Would you say that you're worried enough about it to meet Melissa?”

“I've met Melissa, Danny, I—”

“You know what I mean. Can I finally introduce you as my boyfriend?”



Instead of answering, Milo asked quietly, "There's one thing I've been curious about. Did Melissa's mother *really* try to sell her daughter to reality television?"

"That's what I told Melissa," Danny said tracing the line of Milo's chin, sending a chill up his spine. "She actually tried to sell her to her dealer. God knows what he would have done to her. He won't do anything now, I made sure of that."

"You... *killed*... him?" Milo groaned as Danny nipped at his earlobe. He could feel hot breath on his cheek and the sensation was making him way too hard.

"I love that you think being an officer is just like it is on police procedurals." Danny's tone was light, and teasing. "I *arrested* him. And I arrested the mother. They won't be getting out until Melissa's in college, at the earliest."

"Are you ever going to tell her the truth?"

"If she asks," Danny murmured into Milo's ear. "So far she seems content with the reality TV thing."

A sharp knock at the door interrupted their conversation, and Milo practically leapt away from Danny, running the back of his hand over his mouth. Danny, who never seemed flustered, opened the door. The head librarian and the principal stood there. Both women looked in suspiciously.

"Is everything all right here, officer?" the principal asked. The librarian, Mrs. Anderson, scowled at Milo. That was nothing new. She was always scowling. He was pretty sure he wouldn't recognize her if she didn't scowl. He looked from Danny to the women. Did they know what they'd been up to? Could they hear through the door? For a moment, his dreams of being head librarian and getting his chance to weed the reference section flashed before his eyes.

"Of course," Danny said amiably. Completely different from the seductive man he'd been minutes before. "Just stopped by to see if the library might want to host a children's safety program. Something the NYPD likes to do from time to time. Since my little girl goes here—"

"Oh," both women said together.

"Well, Officer, these sorts of matters usually go through me or Mrs. Anderson—as she's the head of the library."

“That’s what your librarian here told me. Sorry about that.” And he flashed them both a smile that would have melted ice.

Milo’s hand twitched and he fought back a wild impulse. The impulse to take Danny’s hand and tell both of the severe-looking women, “*This is my boyfriend.*” But that would probably be the end of his career in the religious private school. Instead, as they walked away, Milo looked at Danny and said:

“Tell Melissa about me.”

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## Chapter 7

"I had a talk with Mr. Swaisbrick today," Danny told Melissa as she climbed into the back seat of his patrol car. She liked to pretend she was a 'bad guy' and that he had arrested her for her horrible crimes. They usually involved stealing pies from windowsills. It didn't matter that the kid had never seen anyone in New York City leave a pie out on the windowsill; that was her crime of choice.

"Am I in trouble?" Melissa asked, sniffing hard. She was giving him her most dramatic *I'm sorry!* look—the one with the wide blue eyes and the painful pout. She'd cried so hard the night before, he hadn't gotten more than three words out of her in an hour.

"No," Danny said after an unbearable minute of her pitiful expression. Damn kid knew how to get right at the heart of him. Always had. "But you've got to be more careful about stuff like that, kiddo."

"I didn't get on the Internet by myself!" she pointed out. "I was just getting help. And Mr. Swaisbrick is really nice and you always said that someone is a stranger until you've met him, but you met Mr. Swaisbrick at the pet store. Remember, Danny? So he isn't a stranger."

"Yeah, and that's good, I guess." *Fine line.* "But, you could have gotten him and yourself into a lot of trouble."

"I'm sorry, Danny. I just wanted you to have a girlfriend."

"Well, let's just cool it on the trying to help Danny find a 'girlfriend', okay? I'm okay, kiddo. I don't need you going on the Internet to find anyone for me."

She mumbled something he couldn't hear.

"What was that?"

"You haven't had a girlfriend come over in a really, really, really, really, really long time. You never have anybody. Not even a friend."

"What're ya talking about, kiddo? Branden comes over all the time."

She didn't look convinced.

"Branden isn't a *girl* and he isn't even your *friend*. When you play cards, you always yell and use bad words."

He chuckled. That was true. The building's maintenance man, Branden, stopped by sometimes for a hand of rummy. It usually got heated.

"Sorry about that. Shouldn't curse around you."

She nodded emphatically—the potty-mouth police of apartment 7B.

"Danny, the website isn't for *that* kind of friend anyway." Melissa was conspiratorial as she said this. Danny wondered if she thought he didn't know what NewYorkDating.com was all about. "I think it's for getting married."

"Married, huh? You want me to get married?"

"You could have a girlfriend who likes dogs and kids and she could take me shopping and we could play and—"

"Are we getting this girlfriend for me?" he teased. "Or are we getting a friend for *you*?"

"Both?" she asked hopefully, smiling brightly. She twisted one of her ponytails in her hand.

Maybe it was time to be honest with her.

"What if I told you I am seeing someone?"

Her eyes went as wide as saucers and she hugged herself with dramatic expectation. He tried not to laugh. "*Do you* have a girlfriend, Danny?"

"No. But... I'm going on a date with someone."

"Oh my gosh..." she whispered. "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh! Who is it? Does she have blonde hair? Did you meet her on the website? Did she see my picture I drew of you? Do you think she'll like me? Does she like dogs? Are you bringing her over here? Is she—?"

Usually Melissa ran out of questions after a minute, but she was so wound up about his mystery date that she simply started over, repeating questions she'd already asked. She hardly breathed as she charged through the list again.

"I bet she has blonde hair! Does she have blonde hair?"

"Nope," Danny finally cut in, ready to reveal everything. "*He* has black hair."

Danny and his young charge had run the gamut of conversations during their three years together. Sometimes he thought that there wasn't anything else

they could possibly talk about, and then Melissa would come home from school and ask him why more spiders weren't purple or what would happen if there were *two* Presidents at the same time, and they'd talk until she finally fell asleep. Melissa had a brain with no off-switch and a mouth without a mute button. But despite *all* the conversations they'd had, they'd never talked about his sexuality. She'd taken it for granted that he only liked girls, and he'd had no reason to correct her on it until now.

Danny waited for her to process the fact that his date was a man. She stared at him, cocking her head just a little, her brow furrowed in thought and then she said:

"I like blonde hair."

And that was it. Danny liked both girls and boys and Melissa wasn't at all concerned about it, except that she'd envisioned a blonde for him. He snorted.

"What is his name?" she asked.

"Actually, it's Mr. Swaisbrick."

She thought about this for a long time and then, too smart for her own good, she said, "I guess it's really bad that I asked him to help you find a girlfriend, huh? Because if he likes you then he might be sad if you had a girlfriend."

"Yeah, I think he'd be pretty sad about it, kiddo."

"So... can I come on your date?"

"No."

"Why not? Are you going to kiss?"

"I don't know."

"Then why can't I come?"

"Because it's a grown-up date."

"Why?"

"Because he's a grown-up and I'm a grown-up."

"But what if I'm really, really, really quiet?" As if that would ever be a possibility.

"If you come, I'll be distracted and want to talk to you all night," he argued. "And then he'll feel really left out."

That almost got her. *Almost*. But then she hit back hard.

“But if I don't come, how will I know if he really, really likes me or not?”

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## Chapter 8

It wasn't their first date, of course. Not even their second or third. But all their others had been short meet-ups. Coffee shops, delis, a quick bite and hurried conversation, and stolen kisses that were far too public to go deeper, more intimate. They chatted through text messages, but it wasn't the same as sitting face to face together. All because Milo had been so scared of Melissa finding out.

Tonight felt like more of a first date than ever, all crackling anticipation and nerves. Except, instead of trying to impress Danny, Milo was trying to impress the little girl who stared at him curiously and sipped her soda. He worked with children all day, every day, and yet tonight, he could hardly think of anything to ask her.

The three of them sat at the very back of a small restaurant called *Italiano!* There was a checkered tablecloth and candles, and after a moment of silence, Melissa pointed out that it was just exactly like *Lady and the Tramp* and that if they'd brought Bunny and had another dog, they could have seen if two dogs really would kiss over a spaghetti noodle.

"I'd meant to ask you," Danny said quietly, reaching across the table for Milo's hand. Milo eyed it suspiciously and kept his fingers locked together under the tablecloth. They were in front of Melissa! "How is it that you got to be twenty-four years old without ever going on a date?"

Melissa blinked at him owlishly.

"Not for lack of want or trying," Milo answered into his glass of wine. "I'm pretty much the shyest person on the face of the planet."

"My friend Dawn is really, really shy," Melissa said helpfully. "She gets red every time Mrs. Campbell calls on her to answer a question and she does this." Melissa sank down in her chair so far that only the top of her head showed above the table. "And then she mumbles."

"Sounds about right," Milo agreed, feeling his own cheeks going red. "I... uh... I was always shy. And when I was thirteen, I knew I was... *like that...*"

"Like what?" Melissa asked.

Danny smiled encouragingly and nodded his head a little at Melissa as if to say, *go ahead, tell her.*

“Well... I like boys.”

His flush grew hotter.

“Danny likes boys *and* girls.”

“He told me that,” Milo said quietly. “And... you’re okay with that, Melissa?”

Melissa stared at him like she didn’t understand the question. Maybe she didn’t. Maybe the concept of *not* being okay with it was so foreign she just didn’t know how to respond. He was suddenly charmed by her.

“I was scared to ask out any of the boys in my class, so I tried asking out a few girls.”

“Didn’t go well?” Danny guessed.

“Yeah, no,” Milo chuckled. “And then in college I had no practice at all with dating, so I just sort of shrank into the shadows. I even got asked out—by a guy—and I totally froze up. Stared at him until he walked away. Jeez.”

He laughed. He’d *never* been able to laugh about that, but sitting here with Mr. Police Officer and his little girl, Milo was finally able to laugh.

“But you asked me out.”

“Well, technically you helped.”

“I did,” Danny grinned.

“Hey, do you guys want to see what I can do with this spoon?” Melissa asked, oblivious to what was growing into a very warm moment. She put her soup spoon on the end of her nose where it promptly slid off and clattered to the floor.

“Got to breathe on it, kiddo,” Danny said as Melissa dove to the floor after her lost silverware. While she searched the carpet, Milo finally gave Danny his hand and smiled as the other man planted a kiss on his knuckles. “Glad we could work out this whole date thing, Milo the Librarian.”

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“Are you going to kiss him goodnight?” Melissa asked, drowsily from the backseat. Most kids fought to stay up an extra hour or more every night, but Melissa was good with her bedtime. She was up with the birds, of course, but she always went to bed on time and their date had kept her from that tonight. She’d chattered the whole evening, even more than usual. It was a miracle the



kid didn't run out of breath or things to say. "I think you should kiss him goodnight. Will you?"

Danny grinned and looked over at the handsome younger man in his passenger seat. Milo was looking back at him.

"I dunno, kiddo. I guess it depends on whether Milo wants me to or not."

They passed under a streetlight. Color flushed Milo's cheeks.

It wasn't really a question. Mostly, he just wanted to tease his date. But Milo nodded, just a quick jerk of his head. Yes. Yes, he'd take that goodnight kiss.

"I'm sleepy," Melissa informed them.

"We'll be home soon," Danny promised.

"I'm going to wear my princess pajamas to bed tonight."

"Sounds good, kiddo."

"So, Danny..." Milo started quietly. "You said at dinner that you're up for a promotion?"

"More like a demotion," Danny laughed. "With the possibility of a future promotion. Yeah, with the RTCC. I told my Lieutenant to give me the rec."

They spoke in low tones, Danny hoping Melissa would be asleep by the time they got home. He reached across the center console, laying his hand, palm up, near Milo's. Milo intertwined his fingers with Danny's.

"Sounds like a good opportunity."

"I'm suddenly flush with good opportunities," he murmured, tracing the back of Milo's hand with his thumb.

"What's that mean?" Melissa asked from the back seat, perking up just a little. Dammit. Danny squeezed Milo's hand and then pulled his fingers loose, gripping the steering wheel.

"What's what mean, kiddo?"

"Flush with good opportunities?"

"Means I've got a great little girl and a great potential job and—"

"And a great new boyfriend?" she asked happily. "Milo. I liked our date. Are we going to have another one?"

Danny chuckled.

## Chapter 9

“She asleep?” Milo asked, pulling himself to the edge of the couch.

“Yup,” Danny said. “She needed two chapters tonight. And a glass of water. And two kisses. And I promised I’d give Bunny a kiss, too. She’s excited you’re here.”

Milo grinned.

“Can I get you something?”

“Well, since you’re handing out kisses...” As soon as the words had left the younger man’s lips, he was flushing. “I, uh, we just talked about goodnight kisses before.”

Danny raised an eyebrow. Bold. He liked it. “You ready to go home then?”

“Not... really.”

“Well, we could get that kiss out of the way now,” Danny agreed with a grin. He was excited about it. Excited to finally take his time with Milo’s mouth. All their encounters had been so rushed.

Danny had always been attracted to men, to the way their bodies differed from a woman’s. All hard lines and strength. Handsome. But he’d never been with one. Circumstance. Nothing more. He sat down next to the entrancing man.

Danny reached out, caught Milo under the chin, and turned his face so they were looking at each other.

“What do you think?” he pressed.

He wanted to hear Milo say it. *Yes. Kiss me.* He wanted to watch Milo’s lips form the words, curve over them, and then he wanted to pull their bodies together and satisfy a longing that had been growing in him all night.

Milo blushed and flustered, “I... mean, yeah. But...”

“But?” Danny asked. He’d started to stroke his fingers along Milo’s jaw. Feather-light touches that traced the skin there.

Bunny huffed on the floor, knocking Danny hard in the leg. His fingers stilled and he looked down. His Rottweiler stared back at him indignantly.

She'd been waiting, didn't he know? *Patiently* even. He grinned, and lifted his legs so that she could crawl beneath his feet. She loved playing footrest.

"Dogs, right? What're you gonna—" He didn't get the 'do' out because as he turned back to Milo, he found that the younger man had moved, was right next to him, kissing him with delightful inexperience. The kiss was misplaced. It hit the corner of Danny's lips. He grinned.

"All right, then," he said, and moved his mouth so that he and Milo were kissing properly. His lips teased and gave and sought, and Milo—wonderful, warm, giving, Milo—molded into the kiss. Quickly, he figured out how to give more with his mouth. They kissed like that for a long time. Hard, passionate kisses, closed mouths.

When they mutually broke for breath, both men grinned. They were moving through the stages of kissing together. The awkward—misplaced—playground kiss. The frantic, but closed-mouthed kissing—suitable for a middle school dance. But Danny wanted more, and from Milo's high color and glazed eyes, he thought the other man did too. It was time for a full-on high school make out.

"You okay?" Danny stopped to check.

Milo nodded. "Hell yes."

He started slow with the next kiss, working Milo's lips, teasing them, torturing them lightly with his teeth, running the tip of his tongue along the seam. He was about to give instructions, but Milo's mouth came open on a delighted sigh. The kiss went deeper, lips moving, tongues touching, wrestling. Danny pulled Milo against him, practically on top of him.

In that moment, he forgot everything.

Forgot Melissa was asleep in the next room.

Forgot he had work in the morning.

Definitely forgot they weren't technically boyfriends yet.

In that moment, there was only Milo. Milo's mouth, Milo's tongue, Milo's heat, and his scent filling Danny's nostrils.

"Jesus," he gasped as they broke again.

"Glad..." Milo swallowed, slightly wobbly. "Glad we got that out of the way."

"Yeah," Danny nodded. "Yeah, it's good, right?"

"We should... uh... do something."

Hell yes, he wanted to do something. He wanted to do multiple somethings. He wanted to do something all night long.

"Checkers."

Danny chuckled. "Checkers?"

"It's the only thing I can think of," Milo admitted. "'Something' to do."

"Oh, I can definitely think of other things." But he wasn't sure Milo was ready for that yet. The more space Danny put between them, the more he remembered that everything that was happening was a first for Milo. But, goddamn, he wanted to take the handsome young man to bed.

"No checkers, but we could play cards. Talk a little more. Or... are you ready to go home?"

"Cards," Milo agreed, letting out a shaky breath.

"Want something to drink?"

"Sure."

"All right, there's a deck in that little bin by the table. Set up a game, I'll go pour us some drinks." *And stick my head under the tap.*

\*\*\*\*

"So now that she knows..." Danny said quietly, after he pulled up in front of Milo's brownstone. He wanted to talk all night, but Melissa was asleep at home and he had to get back to her quickly.

Milo grinned and looked at him. "And the world didn't end or anything."

"When do I get to see you again? We don't have to steal dates while she's at gymnastics anymore. We can do it anytime."

*Do it.*

It hung there between them and even though it wasn't what Danny had meant exactly, he didn't try to correct it. He'd been thinking about getting Milo Swaisbrick into his bed since their first date. After tonight's delicious kisses, his need was more desperate than ever.

"So I didn't screw up the making out too bad?" Milo joked. God. Remembering it made Danny hard.

“Definitely not.”

“Okay then. Yes. Absolutely. Tomorrow?”

Danny’s lips quirked.

“Oh crap, that wasn’t cool was it? Am I supposed to be chill about it?” he adjusted his glasses uncomfortably. “Let me try again. Uh, sure, maybe. Let me check my calendar.”

“Come here.” Danny tugged on Milo’s jacket, pulling him the small distance over the gear shift and stealing a not-so-chaste kiss. “I want to see you every damned night this week. What do you think about that?”

“Yes.”

“Tomorrow at seven o’clock? Movies at my place?”

“Yes.”

“And when Melissa goes to bed—?”

“More kissing,” Milo promised against Danny’s mouth.

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## Chapter 10

'Tomorrow' turned into the next day and the next day and the next until, like Danny had said, they'd seen each other every night that week. Milo was sure if movies and TV were anything to go by, they weren't doing this dating thing right. They were moving too fast. But he didn't care, when he was with Danny and Melissa and Bunny, he felt whole and happy. And when he went to work in the mornings, he practically danced across the floor, humming as he pulled books off shelves, grinning to himself and browsing the Internet for family-friendly date ideas.

They made dinners together and watched movies and played board games. Melissa taught him how to do tricks with Bunny. And on Saturday morning, after a Friday night date and some delicious kissing and touching, Milo woke up to a text message from Danny.

*Wanna go with me and the kid and the dog to Central Park?*

Two hours later, they were there.

Melissa insisted that she was definitely big enough now to handle Bunny's leash, but every time someone jogged past with their own dog in tow, Bunny whined and jerked against her harness, trying to get at her new 'friend'.

"She's too damn friendly for her own good."

"Swears!" Melissa chided Danny with a severe scowl.

It was a fantastic morning, warm enough for short sleeves, but still cool enough that they could play. Milo sat on a bench, Bunny between his knees, patting her head as Danny and Melissa threw a football to one another. Danny had great form. When he pulled back to throw, Milo trailed his eyes over the taut muscles in Danny's forearms. Wished he could see more of his biceps. He looked great in the blue and white button-down shirt. Casual. Sexy. But the sleeves covered way too much of his arms.

Danny let the ball fly, and Melissa leapt after it, shouting with glee.

He must have played ball in school. Maybe he still did in some neighborhood league. Quarterback, maybe.

Bunny whimpered below him, and Milo looked down at her. She wanted to play football, too. Truth was, so did Milo, but someone had to watch the dog,

and besides, it was a little early in the relationship to show Danny just how uncoordinated and unathletic he really was. He was still nervous about what would happen when he took off his shirt for the first time.

Hot color seared his cheeks, and Milo scratched the dog's head.

Danny had been cool about waiting, though he hadn't been shy with his interest. The kissing was hot. More than hot, even. And Milo was definitely interested. But it would be his first time and... well, it was a little nerve-racking.

"You think we're ready for that, Bunny?" Milo asked the dog who quirked her little tan eyebrows at him and yawned. "I was almost ready last night. I think. Maybe. If he'd asked, I would have said yes."

"Asked what?"

Milo startled upright to see that Danny and Melissa had come to stand near him.

"Who won?" Milo asked, pretending he wasn't flushing.

"Kiddo, of course."

"You looked good out there. You could be a starter for the Jets if you keep at it," Milo teased.

Melissa crinkled her nose and stuck her tongue out.

"We're Giants fans in this household," Danny told him levelly and Milo laughed. He patted the bench with his free hand and Melissa clucked at Bunny to get her up and moving.

"If you guys want to be alone to kiss," Melissa giggled, "I'll take Bunny for a walk."

"Or," Danny reasoned, "Milo can hold the leash and you can play with her. We can still kiss."

She harrumphed and planted herself in the grass where Bunny came to try and stand in her lap. Two huge licks to the face, and Melissa was all smiles again.

"So," Danny murmured. He took Milo's free hand in his, intertwining their fingers. Warmth spread through Milo's palm, up his arm, filling his whole body. He could feel the steady pulse of Danny's heart between their two hands. "So, what was it that I was supposed to ask?"

"If..." Milo swallowed. "If I'm... *ready*."

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"I'm nervous," Milo whispered. The innocent sound of his words made Danny hard. He licked at his lips. "What if Melissa hears? Wakes up?"

"Door's locked. We'll be quiet. Besides, kiddo can sleep through a bomb going off."

"What if I'm no good?" That was the real question, the real fear. Danny pulled him close, kissing him with gentle passion, teasing his lips. The feel of Milo near him set Danny's whole body on fire.

"We'll learn together."

"You've never...?" Milo asked, drunk on kisses and lust.

They'd started out slow, just kissing and touching. But it wasn't long before the kisses deepened, before the seeking hands moved up under clothing, before their bodies were pressed together, need moving them ever closer so that they moaned and rubbed against one another.

"I've always been attracted to—" Danny sucked in breath between his teeth as Milo ran the tip of his tongue over Danny's ear. "*Milo*," he groaned, trying to shake the haze out of his brain. "Attracted to *both*," he groaned. "Girls. Guys. But I've only ever dated women. Only ever been with women. Wasn't a thing I planned. Just how it worked out."

Danny pulled his shirt off over his head, and Milo let out a deeply appreciative, "*Oh*."

"What?"

"The muscles... and the..." Gently Milo nudged the ring that pierced Danny's left nipple, the one he'd gotten in college when he was drunk. "Melissa's picture wasn't a lie."

"You like?"

Milo definitely seemed pleased, if the way he lunged at Danny was any indication, his mouth full against Danny's, his tongue seeking, his hands wild on him. Eager virgin. God, the things Danny wanted to do to Milo's body.

"We're going to learn all this together," Danny promised, tugging at Milo's clothing, undressing him with the excitement of a first-timer. Every inch of bare flesh made Danny more and more delirious.



Milo clung to Danny, embarrassed as Danny helped him out of his shirt.

"Can we turn off the lamp? I... I don't want to disappoint you and—"

"Are you fucking kidding me?" he growled lustily, knocking Milo's hands away from the lamp. Didn't want to disappoint? Honestly? Danny placed hungry kisses on Milo's collarbone, his neck, his ear, the side of his face.

"You're phenomenal. Don't cover yourself up like that."

"Says the muscled god."

"Shut up and let me show you what I think of you."

Each deep kiss made Milo more desperate and less inhibited until the lamp was obviously forgotten and he was pulling Danny down with him, running inexpert hands over his body, pressing up against him, trying to move closer.

"I've got something for you, Milo." Danny's voice was thick, foreign to his own ears.

It took the officer a full minute to untangle himself from Milo's desperate hands and a very real part of him didn't want to stop. But he *had* to give the other man the choice. He reached into the drawer next to the bed, pulling out an envelope and a box of condoms. Placing both on Milo's bare chest was enough to still the younger man in his desperate pawing.

"What's this?" Milo murmured, his lips swollen, his eyes glassy. It was an awkward stop to what was shaping up to be excellent lovemaking. Danny was silent, letting Milo take in the paper that he'd awkwardly pulled out of the envelope.

"Test results?"

"Thought I'd be responsible. I'm clean. Wanted you to see. I wanted to be able to tell you I'm clean. It doesn't mean we have to—I just wanted to give you the option."

"Option?" Milo repeated.

"To use a condom or not."

Milo's grin was deliciously sweet as he picked up the box and paperwork and then, very deliberately, set both items far away on the side table. "Is it okay?" he asked.

Yes. God. Yes, it was more than okay.

Danny swallowed and nodded.

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## Chapter 11

Danny was running late after a rough morning.

He'd woken up alone in his bed with painful morning wood and only the lingering memory of having been inside Milo. He regretted letting the other man leave the night before. He should have insisted that Milo stay. Every morning for years, Danny had woken up alone, but today, this morning, the cold side of his bed pissed him off.

Melissa didn't make the morning any better. She was being stubborn about getting out of bed, hiding her head under the pillow, lazing long after she should have been awake. When she did finally get up, she dragged herself around, stopping to play with Bunny instead of jumping in the shower, and organizing her dolls after he'd told her to get her shoes on. Once he'd finally gotten her out of the house and to school—just before the bell—he realized he'd left his wallet at home and had to turn around and head back.

By the time he reached Hammer's house, his partner was more than pissed. If glares could murder...

"You realize it doesn't matter which of us is driving the damned carpool, we're both going to get it for showing up late."

"I'm sorry," Danny grunted. "Crap morning."

"All those late nights. You been on the prowl?"

On the prowl? No. Staying up late watching movies? Laughing? Cuddling? *Kissing*? Definitely. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. Some of those thoughts must have showed on his face, because the Hammer came down hard and he didn't let up all the way to work, grilling Danny like he was a witness to the crime of the century.

They parked and reported for duty. Only three minutes late, but the two of them had an almost perfect attendance record for the time they'd been partners and the three minutes would be noted. Their morning briefing had already started, too, and Sergeant Miller—the dick head—made a point of calling them out as they slipped into the back of the conference room.

He doubted being out on patrol was going to help matters. He needed to run laps. Punch something. Jack off.

The lieutenant popped out of his office and pointed at Danny. His gut clenched. Greenley looked like someone had pissed in his coffee. Danny slapped Hammer on the shoulder and followed the lieutenant into his office.

“Where the hell have you been?!” Greenley roared before Danny even had a chance to close the door. Some of the guys out near the coffee pot turned and looked at them. “I told you yesterday to be here an hour early. Did it fall out of your brain?”

Shit.

Right.

“The interview.”

“Damn straight, the interview!” The man ran a frustrated hand over his balding head. “I sing your praises this, that, and every which way to the head of HR at the RTCC and you don’t even bother to fucking show up?”

“I’m sorry,” Danny said as respectfully as he could manage. He’d meant to write it down or put it in his phone and then he got to thinking about Milo and... Goddammit, every thought went out of his head when Milo was in there. And after last night? Jesus. Interview? *What interview?* There was only Milo Swaisbrick.

“I’ve pulled a lot of strings for you, McCrea. You told me you were ready for this. That you wanted it. But shit like this makes me wonder.”

“I’m sorry, sir.” Danny swallowed hard, keeping his eyes focused straight ahead while his supervisor railed against him. “I do. I want it.”

“You’re going to have to work double hard now if you want that job. I can reschedule—*maybe*—but the guy you’re interviewing with, Jones, he’s a hard son-of-a-bitch and he’s riled you missed your interview.”

“I understand.”

“I want an assurance from you, McCrea.”

Danny nodded sharply. Any damned thing Greenley needed, he was prepared to give.

“Pull your head out of your ass and make a decision: is this your priority?”

“Yessir.”

“‘Yessir’ it’s your priority?”

He thought about the opportunity being presented to him. The lieutenant was right, it would mean a lot of hard work, a lot of late nights, and starting almost at the bottom again after years on patrol. But it also meant better pay, better chance for advancement, and it meant being safer for Melissa.

Sometimes, when he tucked her in at night, she asked him off-the-wall things. Things she shouldn't have to think about.

*Did you shoot anybody today, Danny?*

*Did anybody shoot at you?*

And once, just once: *If you die, Danny, where am I going to go?*

He knew his priorities. *Melissa* was his priority. And that meant he had to get his head in the game. But what did that mean for him and Milo?

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*Can't make it tonight.*

Milo looked down at his phone, disappointed. He'd been thinking about Danny all day. He'd never been a daydreamer, but he found himself losing track of time as he thought about their night together. He was looking forward to more of that. Plus more of the other, sweeter stuff. Looking forward to sitting close to Danny, cuddling into his shoulder while they watched a movie with Melissa, cooking together, cleaning up, doing dishes side by side. The ridiculously domestic stuff. And the sexy stuff.

It had become so easy and familiar so fast. When he was dealing with an irate parent on the phone, yelling at him that *their* child couldn't *possibly* have lost a *library book!* he would think about Danny's deep voice murmuring in his ear. His sweet kisses. The safety of his arms.

But it was just one cancellation. Nothing to freak out about. Just because it came right after they'd had sex... That didn't mean anything. Milo could catch up on some reading, see some friends, grab a movie maybe.

*It's cool :) Next time?*

For a long time there was no reply and Milo thought that was that. He'd put a question mark at the end of his text, but it wasn't really a question, was it? Then his phone buzzed.

*Sometimes I think I like you too much.*

Milo grinned at the message.

*Why?*

He definitely thought he liked Danny too much, as well. He just wasn't concerned about it.

*Work. Promotion. Melissa. My life is just full right now. You're in my head all the time.*

Playfully, he typed out:

*Is that a bad thing?*

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## Chapter 12

“Do you think that you might stay over at Danny’s house tonight?” His mother seemed more curious than usual. Milo flushed.

“Ma!”

“Well, you are dating, right?”

His first instinct was to agree that they were, but then he thought about his phone. It had been over a week since he’d written that last message. *Is that a bad thing?* And there had been no reply. No text, no phone call, nothing. He’d tried to be chill about it, because he still didn’t quite know what was ‘normal’ for dating. But that didn’t work. He and Danny had never been normal. From the beginning. Danny helping Milo ask him out, the weird, secret hour-or-less dates, hell, meeting in a pet store to steal a kiss. And then once Melissa knew, the week of intense family-time and first-time gay sex for the both of them. Danny suddenly not calling or writing or communicating with him in any way...? Something was off.

Maybe he’d been dumped and he was too damned naïve to tell.

“I don’t know if we’re dating anymore.”

For a moment, emotions conflicted on her lovely face. Concern and... something else. Concern won out and she came to sit beside him, laying an arm over his shoulders.

“What happened?”

Milo shrugged. “I dunno. Honestly. It was going really well. I think he’s just... got other priorities.”

She tucked a strand of hair behind his ear. Twenty-four years old and she was still treating him like he was five. But in that moment, Milo didn’t care. He laid his head on his mother’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry you’re hurting, Milo.”

He sighed, long and low. “I’m trying not to,” he told her reasonably. “Maybe it’s nothing. I don’t know. I’m a little scared to find out.”

She pressed her lips together. The look of concern was still there, but that something else he’d seen before crept back into her eyes.

“What?” he asked.

“What-what?”

“What’s that look?”

She grinned uncomfortably and squeezed his shoulders. “What I’m about to say has no bearing on my sympathy.”

“O... kay.”

“But do you think maybe you could go out tonight anyway? Not with Danny, if you guys are having problems, but with another friend possibly?”

Milo lifted his head and saw that his mother was actually flushing, just a little in one cheek.

“It’s just that I’m... having... a friend over for dinner.”

“A friend?” Milo repeated, pulling back so he could look at her. She was always having friends over and she’d never kicked him out before.

“A... a... male friend.”

Oh. *Oh!* “Ma, you’ve got a date?”

She smiled nervously and fidgeted, finally shrugging like a little kid who had been caught in a lie. “Yes?”

“That’s...”

“It’s okay if you’re upset. It’s... it’s very sudden.”

It wasn’t sudden, though. Dad had been gone for almost two years. But who was this guy? He needed to know. He began to grill her, forgetting to assure her that he wasn’t upset.

“Who is he?”

“His name is Paul.”

“Do I know him? Where did you meet him?”

“You don’t know him. I... well... actually,” she tittered. “New York Dating dot com.”

Milo blinked. The dating site? And how in the world did she get on there? His mother who couldn’t figure out how to put her profile picture on Facebook had met someone on NewYorkDating.com!

“Show me.” The words were out before he could consider how childish they sounded. But his mother rose from the couch without hesitation, leading him to the old computer she used to play Solitaire and balance her checkbook. She had the page bookmarked, along with hundreds of recipes she hadn't used in years.

*Paul Hewett.* He was sixty-two years old, from Teaneck, NJ. A data-analyst who worked in NYC. Grown daughters, the loves of his life. A widower. He was handsome enough, silver-haired, a bit of extra weight on him.

“We've been talking on the phone,” his mother admitted.

“How long?”

“Well, just since you mentioned the website.”

“That's only been like two weeks ago.”

She turned and looked at him, concern gone, something more peaceful in her eyes.

“I'm not marrying the man, honey. I'm just having a friend over.”

Milo studied his mother for a long time. The silvery wisps in her auburn hair, the tired lines beneath vibrant blue eyes, the trace of a smile about her lips. She'd been sad for so long. She deserved to be happy.

“What are you fixing?” Milo finally asked.

“Well, I thought we'd have a garden salad with those cherry tomatoes that Lisa from down the street brought me yesterday, and then Chicken Parmesan with baby carrots, and I've got a cobbler ready to go into the oven.”

Not a casserole. She was making a *real* meal again.

“I'll call somebody,” he promised her without hesitation. “I'll definitely make sure I have plans tonight.”

\*\*\*\*

He wasn't supposed to have his cell phone out while he was on the circulation desk. Mrs. Anderson said it set a bad example for all the students. But he couldn't help sneaking glances at the screen. Maybe Danny hadn't even received his message. Maybe he thought Milo was ignoring him. But Danny could have called... *You could call too, y'know*, the reasonable side of Milo argued back.

Milo suddenly realized there was a heavy gaze on his face and he looked up, expecting to find a grade-schooler with a pile of books. Instead, Melissa Goode



stood in front of him, her braids pushed back behind her shoulders, her hands on her hips. There was a fierce little scowl on her face, and her bottom lip protruded in a small pout. She actually stamped her foot.

“Melissa?” Milo asked dumbly. He didn’t know why he hadn’t expected to see the little girl again. Just because he and her guardian had maybe-possibly broken up didn’t mean she wouldn’t use the school library. He smiled weakly at her. Her expression did not change.

“Why haven’t you come over to play?”

She did not whisper.

Kids at the study tables looked up, and he tried to get her to drop her voice by dropping his.

“Melissa, not so loud, please.”

“No!”

She was usually so sweet and rule-abiding. But the little girl who stood before him now in her knee-socks and pleated, plaid skirt looked as sassy and petulant as a teenager.

“You and Danny were supposed to take me to the movies last Sunday.”

Jesus. They were, weren’t they? That new Disney movie was out. It had been in his phone, color-coded green. All his plans with Danny and Melissa were in green. But it wasn’t like he could just swing by their apartment and pick her up if he and Danny weren’t together. He’d counted on Danny to handle this—to explain it to her.

“Danny...” he said, his voice barely a whisper, “and I aren’t seeing each other right now.”

Her brown eyes narrowed.

“*Why?*”

What was he supposed to say? Because Danny didn’t want to see him? Because Danny’s life was too busy for him? Because maybe Danny felt like he couldn’t balance both a relationship with Melissa and a relationship with Milo? Jesus, or because Milo had been shit in bed? Or given it up too easily? Or maybe... because... probably... Danny was scared.

“I don’t know.”

“Milo!” She finally dropped her voice, though it was a stage whisper. “You’re my *friend*. And you’re *Danny’s* friend. And Bunny misses you too! Please...” Her eyes welled with tears, and he was struck by how immediately he was affected by them. “Please don’t fight with Danny anymore.”

“I’m sorry, honey.”

She screwed up her face and let an angry huff of air out through her nostrils.

“I’m coming back tomorrow,” she told him defiantly.

“Melissa...”

“I’m *coming back*,” she said.

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The next day she returned, marching straight up to the checkout desk, her eyes serious, her mouth set in a straight little line. She placed a white envelope on the counter, nodded once, and then walked away without a word.

In her distinct handwriting, Melissa had written:

*To: Mylow*

*From: Danny*

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## Chapter 13

Fuck.

It had been over a week. Too damned long to casually reply now and yet the text stayed there at the top of his messages where he'd starred it. The lieutenant had called Danny into his office and delivered the good news personally. Things had piled up quickly after that. He'd gotten the job at the RTCC. That meant three separate after-hours celebrations with the guys, dinner at Hammer's one night, Melissa's gymnastics, paperwork, double shifts, and all the shit he'd been putting off to spend time with Milo, came back on him hard. There hadn't been time to think. To breathe. He was lucky when Bunny got her daily walk and Melissa made it to school with her hair in braids. The text message... He hadn't forgotten, he just hadn't wanted to answer that dangling message with an emoticon. It deserved a real, face-to-face conversation

*Is that a bad thing?*

No. Of course not. It was the exact fucking opposite of a bad thing. It was an amazing thing. Milo Swaisbrick was in Danny's bloodstream. He wanted him in his house, on his couch, at his table, in his bed. He wanted to go on more dates: him, Milo, Melissa, and Bunny.

A bad thing?

It was the best goddamned thing that had happened to Danny in a long time.

He'd always been crap at dating. Every relationship he'd ever had always ended when he'd done something, or, more often, *not* done something. Like not showing up for dates. Not returning calls. Putting work before his lover. And there was Melissa to consider, too.

Except that was crap, wasn't it?

Because before, the women in his life had been frightened of Melissa. The cute, precocious, super-smart kiddo. Melissa ran the show and his girlfriends had known that fact and they were apprehensive. But Milo had never tried to get between him and his little girl—in fact, Milo encouraged family time. He seemed content to wait for kissing until Melissa had gone to bed, thought up things they could do together with her, spoke to her like she was an adult, and never tried to push her into the background.

Danny smirked and rubbed at the knot of tension that was forming in his neck.

Hell, if anything, Milo could stand to be a little more selfish.

It wasn't Melissa that was the problem.

And it wasn't work. Danny would have to put in the time at the RTCC, but he wouldn't be on call. He'd have a regular shift—he'd have set times off. Time he could spend with Milo.

“What's the matter, princess? Girlfriend neglecting you?”

Hammer.

Danny looked up, his lips quirking. “Last time you're gonna get to call me that, Hammer.”

“Don't remind me. I'm heartbroken.” He clutched at his chest, stumbling dramatically. But Danny knew better. Hammer's wife had confided to Danny, during one of his celebratory meals, “*He's really going to miss you.*”

“Chance for you to break in another rookie.”

“Do like breakin' rookies.”

For a moment the older man was silent and then, clearing his throat, he thrust his hand out toward Danny. Danny took his partner's hand and shook it.

“This is going to be good for you and Melissa.”

“Yeah.”

“Not going to have to worry so much about getting shot.”

“It'll definitely put her mind at ease.”

“Melissa? Nah, I was talking about you. I'm sure you cry yourself to sleep every damned night. Maybe they'll give me a partner with some real experience this time.”

Danny couldn't help himself. He laughed.

“And don't worry about that girlfriend, kid. Whatever you did to screw it up, flowers'll make it better.”

“And you know this from twenty years married to Elle?”

“Nah, I saw it in a movie once.”

"Hammer?" Danny laughed. "The girlfriend's a boyfriend."

"Christ, kid. You're waitin' 'til now to tell me?"

"Wasn't anything to tell until now."

Might still not be anything to tell. Jesus. He hoped it wasn't too late.

"Well, try the flowers anyway."

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"C'mon!" Melissa cried, dragging Danny up the hall by his hand. She'd met him in the inside hallway of their apartment complex when he got home. Before he'd had a chance to even say 'hello', she was tugging on him, begging him to follow her *faster*. "I've got something to show you! I brought something home from school!"

"Okay," Danny said, trying not to be terse with her. His head was so consumed with thoughts of Milo that he could barely get any rest, and Melissa's exuberant personality was wearing him down. Flowers. Shit, a phone call might be a better start.

Melissa threw open their front door, skirted around Bunny who had come to welcome whatever intruders might be breaking into the apartment, and threw her arms wide, shouting, "Ta-da! This is an in-ter-vention!"

Danny stepped over the threshold, closed the door, and stopped. Mrs. Palmer was in one chair and Milo Swaisbrick was sitting on the couch looking as miserable and run-down as Danny felt. Miserable and run-down, but beautiful.

"Milo?"

Goddamn, how he'd wanted to see him.

"Got your letter."

Milo held up a sheet of notebook paper, the edges all crinkled from having been torn out of a spiral. Even from that distance, Danny could see Melissa's labored handwriting. Milo smiled at him sadly, "You said to come 'very, very, very soon'. I figured three 'very's meant it had to be important."

"Can I see *my* letter?" Danny asked, reaching across the coffee table. Melissa tried to grab it out of Milo's hand, but Danny caught it and swung it up in an arc away from her. She hopped around him like Bunny when someone had a treat for her. "Settle," he told Melissa, though she ignored him.

“You don’t need to read it!” she begged.

*Dear Mylow,*

*Please come to my house. I am sorry for being mean to you. Melissa is sad. She wants to see you. And I want to see you. And Bunny wants to see you. Because I think we should be boy friends again. Please come to my house very, very, very soon.*

*Your friend,*

*Danny*

“You can see why I couldn’t stay away,” Milo said quietly.

Danny looked down at Melissa who had stopped jumping. She hung her head, knowing she was about to get in trouble. Instead he just tousled her hair and took a seat next to her babysitter, Mrs. Palmer.

“So... an intervention, huh? How do you even know what that means, kiddo?”

“Me and Mrs. Palmer watch *Intervention* at her house all the time.”

“Mrs. Palmer and I, chickee,” she corrected in her loftiest accent. “And I’ll have you know that’s untrue, Mr. McCrea.”

Danny raised an eyebrow at the babysitter.

She worried the beaded purse in her lap and adjusted her kitschy cat-eyed glasses.

“Maybe *I* watch it, but Melissa knows she’s not allowed.”

“You can’t fight with Milo anymore, Danny!” Melissa cried, saving Mrs. Palmer from further scrutiny. She came to kneel right in front of Danny, grabbing his hand and squeezing it.

“We’re not fighting,” Danny promised, looking up at Milo who smiled weakly back at him. How could Danny have been so stupid? Leaving the text for as long as he did? “I just...”

“Don’t you like him anymore, Danny?” God, she had no tact. “Because *I* like him! He’s really fun and he likes Bunny. He’s nice and he likes kids! And I think he likes you too. Don’t you, Milo?”

Milo nodded slowly. “I do.”

“I like you, too,” Danny admitted. “But—”

"I figured I'd come hear it from you," Milo said with a quiet smile. "Since you never answered my text. I figured you're not the kind of guy who just 'forgets' to break up with someone so... if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. But... shouldn't we at least *see*, y'know, if it's going to work out?"

Danny looked around the room, at Mrs. Palmer's stern expression, at Melissa's hopeful gaze, at Bunny who quirked her doggie eyebrows at him, and at Milo who stared with nothing but warmth in his eyes. As his smile crept out, Danny's heart melted. He walked slowly over to Milo and reached for his hands, taking them both in his own and squeezing them.

"I wanted to look you in the eyes when I told you. It's not a bad thing that I like you too much. Not at all."

"What are you saying?" Melissa cried. "I can't hear you, Danny."

"Cause I'm talking to Milo now, kiddo, not you."

Milo looked around Danny's legs and promised the little girl, "We're good, Melissa."

"Friends again?" she asked excited.

"Friends again."

Danny stroked the backs of Milo's hands and looked down at him. "I've 'frigged' up every relationship I've ever had," he warned Milo. "I mean, totally, royally 'frigged' it. And I didn't really care before, because I had my job and I had Melissa, but with you—"

"You don't want to mess it up," the librarian said, astutely. "Well, I'm pretty much exactly the opposite. I've never had a relationship *to mess up*. I don't even know what I'm doing."

"You're wonderful," Danny assured him.

"I've missed you. I wanted to call, but I figured you didn't want me—"

"I was an ass."

"Danny!" Melissa chided harshly and stuck her thumb toward the swear jar on the entryway table. Unconsciously, he dug in his pocket and tossed her a quarter.

"I was a... *jerk*," he corrected. "I should have called, should have talked to you about it. Time just got away from me and I really wanted to say it to your face—"

If Danny ever thought that Milo was a shy wallflower, he'd only have to remember this moment to know how wrong the sentiment was.

"I like being with you. I like talking. I like spending time with you and Melissa. I... like kissing," Milo said very quietly, but not so quiet that Melissa didn't hear him.

"Are you guys going to kiss *again*?" she nearly squealed, running back over from the jar. "You can't kiss if you're not going to be boyfriend and boyfriend!"

Danny wondered where the child got these rules about love and dating.

"And I kinda like *you*," Milo finished quietly. "A lot. You've got a stressful job. I get that. You ever try being a librarian? Three hundred tiny, very demanding readers coming at you all day long?"

"So I guess we're doing this." Danny pulled Milo off the couch. "We can't kiss unless we're boyfriends. So...?"

"Not 'just dating'," Milo agreed. "*Boyfriends*."

"I approve!" Melissa cried in such an adorably adult voice that neither man could hide his grin.

"I guess you want to weigh in on this too, Mrs. Palmer?"

"Only to say that if you're wanting Melissa at my house tonight, I'll be charging the evening rates."

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## Chapter 14

Their first time had been so hurried. Tongues and hands and a desperate need. Danny had barely slowed down enough to ease himself inside of Milo so that he didn't hurt him. And then their bodies had writhed against each other, rocking, pounding, swelling to the point where they both broke over that edge and came. Hard and fast. And it was over and then Milo had gone home.

Now, Melissa was gone for the night. They could be as loud as they wanted, go as long and hard as they wanted. They could do it anywhere they felt like. He could carry Milo buckass naked into the living room and have him on the couch or the kitchen table or in front of the ornamental fireplace. He could learn how to give head, teach Milo how he liked it. They could play with each other, experiment, luxuriate in one another. And they could do it as many times as they wanted. The anticipation of it went straight to Danny's cock.

But there was more.

As they undressed one another, pulling clothing off over their heads, tossing shirts, unbuckling pants, feeling the delicious lines of each other's bodies, memorizing the muscles, the skin, the freckles, the moles, the hair, caressing one another, there was something more. As wild as they made their second sexual encounter, after it was all over, Milo was staying the night. He'd curl up into Danny's side and fall asleep, and Danny would hold him, and in the morning, he'd wake up to that gorgeous sight in his bed. It was almost enough for Danny to say screw the sex and pull Milo down for an early bedtime.

Almost.

Milo moved close to Danny, shuttering out the last little light between them. He stretched up, twining bare arms around Danny's neck and when he kissed him, it was open mouthed and hungry. He felt Milo's hard member pressing against him. Brave, bold Milo.

"Condoms?" Danny murmured.

"You never have to ask," Milo said.

Danny's brain was shorting out on him. All he wanted was to feel Milo, to grind his stiff cock against, and then into, the other man, but something flickered at the back of his brain. Something that he needed to clarify.

"You're my boyfriend," he said.

"I know," Milo murmured. *Shut up, Danny*, Milo's kiss demanded.

"No, I want you to know," he pulled his mouth away from the tantalizing kiss and the intoxicating taste of Milo Swaisbrick. "When I'm with someone, I'm *with* them."

Milo smiled. "I sort of took that for granted. I guess I'm still dumb about all this dating stuff."

"Don't worry," Danny promised, kissing the pulse at Milo's temple, the soft flesh of his earlobe, the delicious expanse of neck, his collarbone, and then up again, over his chin, back to those swollen lips. "We'll figure out all those details together."

They moved to the bed, Milo pushing Danny back against the cool mattress. Danny grinned up at his lover, liking the way he took charge. He bent his knees, his manhood rigid and waiting. "Come here," he said. He wanted Milo on top of him, wanted to be able to dig his fingers into Milo's hips and control the rhythm.

Milo was shy as he climbed on top of Danny, bending over him to kiss him. He straddled the other man, his knees digging into Danny's hips.

"How do I...?" Milo's voice came out low and raspy. He tilted his hips just enough so that his backside rubbed against Danny's quivering cock. Danny longed to fill Milo, and he was just cognizant enough to know he needed to loosen the other up first. He molded and stroked and teased Milo's penis until the younger man's dark brows furrowed and he groaned in pleasure and need. With his free hand, Danny reached up and played around Milo's mouth, working two fingers between his lips, glorying in the way Milo began to suck at them.

"Uhn!" Danny groaned, each slurp making him harder, more desperate for Milo. Liquid beaded on the head of Danny's cock, and he reluctantly pulled his wet fingers free, reaching around Milo until he found that waiting hole. Gently at first, he worked one finger inside, coaxed and probed until Milo was moving up and down on it. Then the second finger followed the first. He went to the second knuckle and teased that spot inside of Milo that made the other man cry out in pleasure.

"More?" Danny asked. "Deeper?"

"Yes," Milo begged. "Please, God, yes, Danny!"

He pushed his fingers inside until they physically wouldn't go any further and still Milo seemed desperate for him, desperate to be filled.

“You’re beautiful, Milo Swaisbrick,” Danny whispered, gently pulling his fingers in and out. He could easily make Milo come just from those fingers and the way he stroked and played with his cock. “I thought you were beautiful the first time I saw you. I wanted you the first time I saw you.”

“More,” Milo breathed, his eyes glazed over, his cheeks flushed. “Please—! Please—!”

Danny was happy to oblige. He replaced his fingers with his aching member, shoving hard inside of Milo, whose entrance stretched and gripped him. Words disappeared. Thoughts disappeared. There was only the place where they were joined, there was only the rhythmic act, and the groans and the sweat and the building pressure in his balls. There was only them and this moment and this lust and—

Milo came first, grinding down hard against Danny’s cock, hot liquid squirting out between his fingers and splattering Danny’s chest. The gripping pulse of his hole sent Danny splurting over the edge. He grabbed the back of Milo’s head and pulled him down into a desperate kiss as he filled his lover.

When the pleasure ebbed away and all that was left was the delicious sensation of floating, Milo collapsed next to Danny, pressing against his side. In that moment, neither man cared about the mess.

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## Chapter 15

They heard Melissa bounding up the hall the next morning. Her footfalls were hard on the floor, and she chattered loudly to Mrs. Palmer who shushed her almost as loudly as Melissa spoke.

“Child, it’s not gone nine o’clock! Behave yourself.”

Danny was there to scoop Melissa into a hug when she ran through the front door.

“Did you have a good sleepover?” she asked happily, and then peered around him into the small kitchen where Milo was eating breakfast in one of Danny’s robes. “Milo! Did you have a good sleepover?”

Danny turned to see the blush on his boyfriend’s face. *Boyfriend*. It sounded good in his head. *Trying* sounded good. As for the sleepover? Best one of his life. Followed by a delicious good-morning quickie.

After he’d paid Mrs. Palmer and sent the Englishwoman on her way, Danny joined Melissa and Milo in the kitchen. Melissa had helped herself to a biscuit and two pieces of bacon. She sat in the chair, kicking her legs, and chattering happily.

“Where are we going today?” she asked, munching on the burnt end of the bacon.

“Are we going somewhere?” Danny teased, looking at Milo and smiling. “What if Milo already has plans?”

Melissa frowned deeply. “You guys got to have a sleepover last night. Today we’re going to play! Milo’s my friend too, Danny. You have to learn to share.”

“Well, the kid’s spoken.”

“How about Central Park?” Milo asked.

Melissa broke into the widest grin. “Can I walk Bunny?”

The dog’s little nub of a tail wagged wildly when she heard her name.

“No,” Danny said firmly.

“What if we walk her together?” Milo suggested and Melissa looked triumphantly at Danny. He could tell that the pair of them were going to be trouble.

His life had just expanded in new and impossible ways. It was going to be a challenge. But as Milo Swaisbrick smiled up at him, his eyes glimmering with mischief from behind his glasses, Danny knew it was a challenge he was excited to take on.

“I get to walk you, Bunny!” Melissa cried, abandoning her barely-touched food, and tossing herself onto the floor with Bunny. Both of them rolled onto their backs together.

Danny leaned over their breakfast and lingered on the first of a million kisses to come.

**The End**

## Author Bio

*Raine O'Tierney is an always-writing, boundlessly enthusiastic, exclamation point addict! (!!!) She is known for declaring every day “the best day EVER!” and everything her “all-time FAVORITE!” Despite this (obnoxious?) exuberance, she still somehow manages to have a wonderfully encouraging husband (who also writes M/M rom!) and an amazing group of friends and colleagues who continue to support (read: put up with) her. Raine spends her days working as a library lady, fighting the good fight for intellectual freedom.*

*Raine tumbled headlong into the world of M/M romance after discovering yaoi back in 2004. A new passion was immediately born and her writing life became dedicated to men who love men! Raine frequently changes genres, but she always tries to imbue her stories with what she calls “The Sweetness” of which there are five Fs (first loves, first times, fidelity, forever-type endings, and... friskiness?).*

*After twenty-plus years of writing and dreaming, a decade spent working on M/M, and a year of being a lionheart, Raine is so pleased to finally be able to tell people, “I’m a published author!”*

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