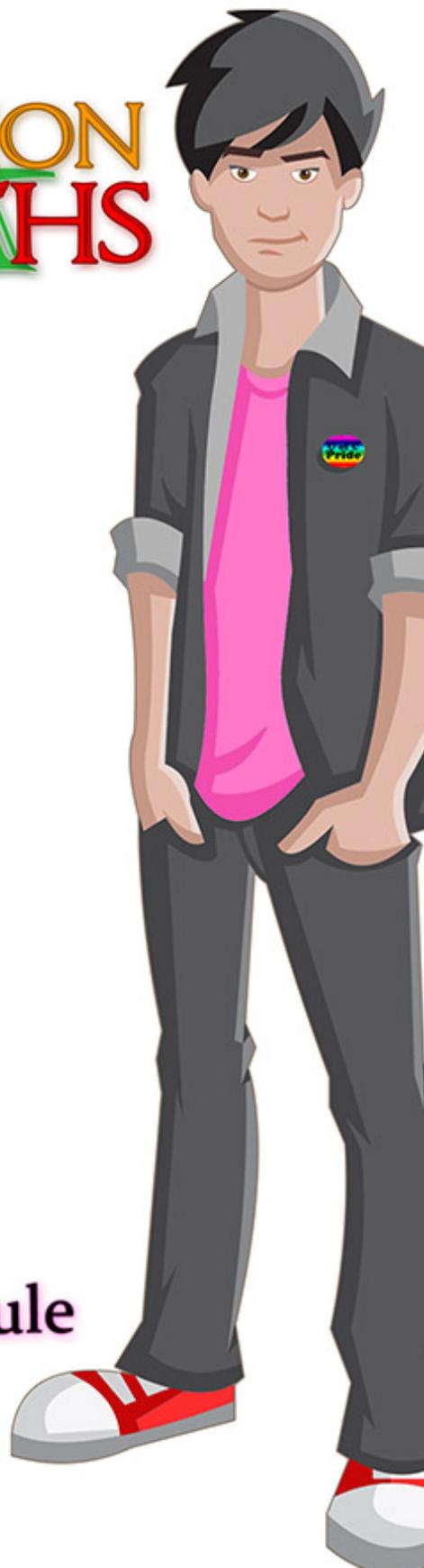


# MILLION TRUTHS



MC Houle

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## A MILLION TRUTHS

**By MC Houle**

### 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 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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## Photo Description

Two brunet men on a bed. The younger one is on his knee, eyes closed. He looks content to let the other man kiss his belly.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*I was always considered a geek in high school, luckily my best friend older brother always looked out for me and I was never afraid. This is why when I pick a collage I picked his. But this summer before starting school I came out to my family and best friend, and everyone rejected me. Now I am scared that the guy that I looked up to and felt safe with all my life will also reject me when I get to collage. Please tell me what happens when I get to school, and how this scene happened.*

*While I like a slow burn, I enjoy it getting very hot a one point. I also like HEA.*

*Sincerely,*

*Nadine*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** coming out, homophobia, college students, athlete, geeks/nerds, friends to lovers

**Word Count:** 9,738

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# **A MILLION TRUTHS**

**By MC Houle**

## Chapter 1

I flexed my knee at the correct angle on my skateboard, when I noticed Ryan Beaulieu stretching in his front yard. His white T-shirt with the large red-and-yellow dinosaur from the University of Calgary's team logo moulded the form of his every muscle. My feet knocked on each other, and I crashed to the street. Of course, he looked up at that exact moment. He flashed his now brace-free teeth at me as if I hadn't just made a fool of myself. I jumped back on my skateboard. I wanted to prove I wasn't a dork, but as I attempted my jump again, he stretched back. His T-shirt slid up and gave me a sweet view of his belly. My eyes lingered at the dark happy trail, and I missed my jump again. This time, I landed on my feet, my board knocking on the sideway at Ryan's house. I jogged to it, embarrassed.

Ryan leaned on his elbows and watched me approach. He had to know I had done those jumps a million times. He stood as I got there, stretching his arms in the air, giving me a closer look at his belly. *Damn his lower ab muscles were defined.*

"Aaron."

The way he said my name, low and sweet. I forced my eyes away.

"I wouldn't mind the company," he said.

"I'm not really a runner." *Lame.*

"Too bad."

*Say something, damn it.* "I can always skate."

He smiled at me. As he jogged away from his house, I followed suit.

"I didn't know you ran."

"Not my favourite activity, but I gotta stay in shape for next season."

"As if you could ever not be in shape," I blurted. *I was such a dork!*

"Well, thanks. But the Dinos' coach is intense and the program is competitive. If I can't compete with the new players, I'll end up on the bench which means losing a big part of my scholarship."

"But you had a great first season, right?"

"You watched?"

“Sometimes.” *Every. Fucking. Game.* “It’s a shame you lost that last game against the Golden Bears.”

“Didn’t your stepfather play for them?”

“Don’t tell him I wanted the Dinos to win.”

*Would he ever think of me as anything other than his little brother’s best friend?*

“Your secret is safe with me.”

Everything of mine was safe with Ryan Beaulieu. I still remember the first time I really talked to the guy. Grade seven. Tall and thin with a geeky side, I was the bullies’ favourite victim. And then came Ryan Beaulieu, grade nine hotshot to the rescue. Last time I was ever bullied. After a while, we let the discussion draw out, but even in the silence, something about Ryan made me feel good about myself.

After some kilometers of jogging and skating on Main, we went back to his front yard. He had rounds of sweat under his arms and on his back; he shouldn’t be this sexy in such a state. His muscles contracted when he removed his shirt and wiped his face with it. I needed a lot of self-control not to reach and touch. Couldn’t force my eyes away.

“I’m going to take a shower. It was good seeing you again.”

I ran to the house next door. My stepfather and mother were at the table eating toast. They asked if I wanted some, but I told them I wanted to shower first. The erection I was sporting wasn’t conducive to breakfast with the folks.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was still too early for any of my friends to be awake yet, but Geoff was most likely connected to *Blood Arrows*. I made sure my door was closed and my parents gone for work, and I turned on the Xbox.

Geoff was the only person who knew I was gay. We’d met through the game, where his handle of SuperGayF647 outed him. I had gotten the brief courage to ask for a private game, and we became fast friends. Eventually I told him I thought I was gay, even though I knew I was at the time. He had been one of the only people who really knew me, and with whom I could really be myself. It was a pleasant novelty.

“He’s back,” I said, as the ranger elf I played shot an arrow into an orc’s eye.

“You’re gonna have to be clearer on who’s back.”

“Ryan Beaulieu.”

One more arrow.

“That’s your lifelong crush, right?” Geoff’s sorcerer created a hole in the ground to separate most of the orcs from us.

“Yeah. I didn’t think he could get sexier. I almost couldn’t stop drooling when we talked this morning.”

“But you did talk. It’s better than nothing.”

And one more arrow through an orc.

“Made a fool of myself, for sure.”

“You think he’s gay?”

An orc was getting closer to the sorcerer.

“Never.”

I shot.

“You asked?”

“No.”

The orc fell down.

“Then you don’t know for sure,” Geoff said as he bewitched the fallen orc.

“Owen keeps talking about how many girls Ryan’s banging at Uni. He’s straight, or I would’ve heard of it.”

We passed some time with comments, mostly about the game, until the last orc fell. “Have you given it more thought?”

“I can’t think of anything else. I’m going to do it, but I just need to figure out how.”

“The hardest part.”

“How did you do it?”

“I didn’t. My father caught me making out with Thom. I can tell you, that is the worst fucking way. My father came to accept it with time, but he still can’t look my boyfriend in the eyes. But I guess it would have been the same if Thom had been a she.”

“That’s awful.”

“If I can give you any advice, do it if and when you are ready. Otherwise, you’ll regret it.”

“Don’t I know that? I just don’t want to get to the university and get stuck pretending still.”

We stole from the dead orcs and played some more until Geoff had to leave. We said our good-byes, and from wherever he was in their apartment, Thom yelled his good-byes too.

I was light-headed after the honesty of the discussion. I wished I could feel like this every day.

Owen texted me about a sick party to celebrate our friend turning eighteen, and the weight of lying came back to haunt me.

I still texted him I would be there. Maybe tonight I would be able to get it over with.

\*\*\*\*\*

I stumbled outside the bar. The fresh air cleared my mind a bit. India followed me outside.

“Are you okay?”

I closed my eyes, her sweet voice scorching my hearing, the memory of her kiss mixing with the one too many beers. I felt the urge to throw up.

“I’m fine. Tell the others I’m going home.”

She made a step toward me, pressed her palm on my chest. “You sure you don’t want something else?”

I stepped back.

“You don’t have to look so disgusted.” she said, and I knew I hurt her.

“It’s nothing against you. Just drank too much, you know?” I moved away from her without waiting for an answer. I thought she would follow, but she didn’t.

Coming out to Owen hadn’t gone exactly like I thought it would. At first, he was surprisingly accepting, until we got to the club and he thrust all the girls my way. To fix me, he said. Even used the term faggot. I shivered at the thought.

I wasn't expecting a "happy coming-out party", but he was the one person I thought would still be my friend. Obviously, I was wrong.

I've always been on his side, even when no one else was.

I was walking home when I heard footsteps behind me. I turned to see Owen running after me. He looked a lot like his brother, but I had never felt an attraction to him. At the moment, anger was making him uglier.

"What are you doing?"

"Going home."

"India was all over you. You could have tapped that."

"You do know the meaning of gay, right?" *Twice I'd said the word today; it was easier every time.*

"Oh come on, stop with that old joke."

"You don't believe me."

"I would know if you were like them. We wouldn't be friends if you were."

"Then I guess we're not."

I walked away, shaking. He grabbed my shoulder and turned me to him. His fist moved as if to hit me. I moved away again.

"You don't want a fag for a friend, well I'm one. Pretty self-explanatory."

"Come on, dude!" he screamed as I got away. "You are not gay!"

"Next time you say shit like that, I'm Frenching you!"

I wouldn't have, but it did shut him up. When I turned to see what he was doing, he was walking back to the bar. Tears burned my eyes, but I refused to let them fall. I sent a text to Geoff knowing he wouldn't see it until I was well in bed. I could call my mother so she'd get me, but then I'd have to explain to her what I was doing so far from the club. Which would bring out more questions I didn't want to answer. Besides, it wasn't like my house was all that far.

When I finally got to my street, Ryan was leaving the house, keys in hand. He looked surprised to see me.

"You're not with O?"

"I left early."

“You could have called. I would have driven you home, even without O. Anyway, I’ll be jogging tomorrow same time, if you’re awake and... Well, you’re invited.”

“Thanks.”

He got into his car, and I went into my house. All the lights were off, and I went to bed without waking anyone up.

I didn’t fall asleep quickly, bothered by what had happened. No doubt Ryan’s invitation would be revoked once Owen told him about me. I woke up too late to know for sure, but come on, a jock like him wouldn’t be taking too nicely to having a guy fantasizing about him.

Instead of going outside, I connected to the game and found Geoff. I told him what had happened. He assured me not everyone would react that way and distracted me. Thom even joined in the talk.

My phone sang Owen’s ringtone, but I ignored it. Instead, Geoff, Thom, and I joined our forces to break into a castle and save the princess and her treasures. When my mother screamed lunch was ready, my troubles came back to mind.

“I think I’m going to wait before coming out to my parents.”

“Like I said, do it when you’re ready.”

“Listen to him. You want to be able to look your future in-laws in the eyes.”

I laughed and disconnected.

A plate of pasta was waiting for me in the kitchen.

“What are you planning to do this summer now that the Davises are selling the farm?” My stepfather asked at dinner.

I had worked there since I was thirteen. “I don’t know yet. I sent out some resumes.”

“Well, my business needs some interns for a new project. I could give out your name, if you wanted.”

“Yeah, sure.” I needed the money for next year. “What would I be doing?”

“Filing, cleaning, that sort of thing. Those might give you advantages when you graduate. It isn’t as if you’ll find a job quickly with an art degree. Plus, you can never be wrong with seeing the world.”

“Seeing the world?” I ignored his other comment about the “useless” art degree I was pursuing. He’d made it clear he didn’t believe in my choice of degree, and it was not a fight I wanted to have again.

“The project is linked to the expansion of the company in London. You’ll even have time to sightsee in your days off.”

“Wow, that would be—” *Actually, it would be perfect.* “You gotta give my name.”

My stepfather nodded, but my mother interjected, “I’m not sure. My baby alone overseas...”

“Oh come on, Mom. I’ll be moving away from home at the end of the summer anyway.”

“Exactly. You don’t need to leave home so soon.”

“It’ll be lots of experience.” *Thanks, Steppy.*

“Yes, and otherwise I’ll just veg at home.”

She was about to give in. “We’ll talk about it later.” It was practically a yes.

As soon as I was done with lunch, I kissed my mother on the cheek as a last attempt to get her to say yes and went back to my game.

Geoff and Thom were still battling the enemy in the general game. I jumped to help them, trigger happy with my crossbow, and we destroyed them in record time. As soon as we were free, we headed for the private game; we had a castle to explore.

I was still excited about the prospect of the UK, and it was not because of the job. “What would you guys say if we were to meet for real?”

As our characters turned left, we faced a skeleton rushing to us.

“You are not planning on running away are you?” Geoff said

“Of course not,” I said as I shot to slow it down. “But my stepfather works for this business, and they could send me there for a job for the summer.”

We had Skyped on a regular basis, especially when I was still figuring things out, so I knew they were really who they claimed they were.

Thom’s rogue ran to the skeleton with his poisonous dagger. “Well, you know you are always welcome on our couch,” he said.

“Great. It’s nothing official yet, but I’ll give you the news as I get it.”

We mostly played the game after that, but I kept thinking how being so far from home would be great. There was no one to hide from in London. It would give me some distance from the whole thing with Owen, and maybe I could get

Ryan out of my head. That last one probably wouldn't happen. I hadn't gotten over him in the last two years he hadn't been home, but a new setting would be fun.

\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 2

I watched around the airport for my mother or stepfather. I had been right, and the summer away had been great. I had pretty much moved out of the hotel into Geoff's guest room by the second week. His apartment was even closer to the company, so that was great.

I had never been so free to be myself. I was still drunk from the freedom. I knew now I didn't want to stay in the closet anymore. Seeing Geoff and Thom together was so natural and beautiful. It showed me exactly what kind of relationship I wanted for myself.

I texted my parents to see if they were coming, and my mother texted me they were ten minutes away. I waited outside. While I waited, I looked through the pictures in my cell phone. Some of them were of the three of us goofing off, sometimes with some of their friends. Others were of me and another intern, Elton, with whom I had had a thing. I smiled at a picture of us kissing. If that wasn't proof enough.

On our drive back, my mother kept asking questions about my summer. Some she already knew from Skyping, but some she had never asked. It was Steppy who found the perfect opening for me.

"So, did you meet any girls over there?"

I didn't feel so brave anymore, but I drew from memories of long make-out sessions on Geoff's couch.

"No, but I met a boy."

I saw him smile in the rearview mirror. "No, I meant—"

"I-I know what you meant, and I meant what I said." My voice had gotten more and more confident as I talked.

My stepfather parked the car on the side of the highway, and my mother turned on her seat to face me.

"What are you telling us?"

"I-I'm gay, Mom."

She gave a look at my stepfather, and gestured at him to move the car. "We'll talk about this at home." They didn't say a word the whole way there.

Two hours of silence and awkwardness. My timing wasn't as good as I had hoped. Now all I could do was worry about the whole thing.

When we finally got home, my stepfather took my luggage while my mother hurried me to my room. "Stepfather and I will talk. Wait for us in your room."

I swallowed, looked away, but did what she asked.

I was tempted to listen at the door, but I didn't think it was a great idea. Instead, I texted Thom.

*Another awkward way to come out: five minutes into a two-hour drive.*

The jet lag was intense, and I dozed off before they came to talk to me. My mother woke me up before dinner and sat me down. The pasta on my desk smelled deliciously of home.

"I know this is a confusing time for you."

"I'm not confused." I was ready for this. I was, right?

"Honey, just let me talk. I know it's confusing. You are leaving for Uni, and it's okay to be confused when big events happen in your life. But your stepfather and I, we won't have this under our roof, you understand. If you want to experiment in Calgary, go for it, but I expect you to be over this when you come home the next time."

"You are kicking me out?" I could not believe it.

"I've already called the school, and there is no problem with you getting there three weeks early. I want you to take this time apart to think about what you want from your life."

"It's not about what I want, it's who I am."

"We are leaving tomorrow, so you should eat and sleep. It's going to be a long day tomorrow."

It was only after she closed the door behind her and I was alone with a bowl of spaghetti that it dawned on me.

My own mother was rejecting me. She would probably refuse to pay for Uni if my biological father wasn't already paying for it. At least the asshole was good for something. My stomach was grumbling, but I couldn't bring myself to eat anything. I was shaking on my bed.

The summer had been so good to me, but in less than an hour, my world was crashing around me.

\*\*\*\*

Without a word, my stepfather brought the last box to my bedroom in Rundle Hall. Mom was still asleep when we left, and Steppy hadn't said a word to me since then. Two and a half tedious hours.

He half nodded a good-bye, and I was left alone with packed boxes. There were so many boxes, and so little space.

I kept the door of the room open to unpack. I noticed a few additional boxes, with things I wouldn't have brought with me, like my collection of rare comics. They weren't even properly packed. Looking at the box at this moment was just a reminder my mother didn't want me in her house unless I was straight. But after two months with no closet at all, even thinking about getting back into one was painful.

And would only get me rejected again in the future.

*Tock. Tock.* I turned to see a tall blond guy standing in my doorway.

"I came to Rundle Hall as soon as I was told a new student was coming. I'm Philip."

"Aaron."

"Want some help unpacking?"

"I'm gay," I blurted out. "Fuck that's awkward."

Philip jumped from one foot to the other. "Hum, okay." Silence crept between us. "I'm sorry; I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say to that."

"I don't know either. But it's the best response I've gotten so far. I'm sorry I just blurted it out like that. I wouldn't mind the help, though, if you are still offering."

Instead, he pointed at the comic book box. "Oh my God! Is it what I think it is? That's sick."

"You know obscure comics?"

"Know them? I live by them. I'm studying art because I want to be creating my own."

"No shit? Me too. Not that the awful comics I wrote in junior school were any indication of talent." And it wasn't just because of Owen's cheeky script.

With the two of us, it was easy to unpack everything in record time and have fun doing it. Philip was on his second year, so he showed me around.

Later in the evening, he came by my room. A cute redheaded woman was with him with her arm around his back. She was wearing a short black skirt and a tight black T-shirt with the bloody face of a zombie on the front.

“This is Aaron; I talked to you about him. Aaron, this is my girlfriend Victoria.”

“Nice meeting you. We were heading out for a movie. You want to come?”

I hesitated, but Philip had joined his hands in a begging gesture. “You don’t want me to sit through a romantic comedy, do you?”

Next to him, Victoria rolled her eyes.

I laughed. “Who says I’m not the one who’d want a romantic comedy?”

Victoria pointed at me. “I like this one. Now, if we aren’t leaving soon, we’ll miss the trailers.”

I grabbed the light vest on my bed, and we headed out to the complex.

“So, what are we going to watch?”

“We were pretty much decided on the new *Death by Star* movie.”

We took the bus to the cinema complex, and as we waited in line, Victoria elbowed me. “So tell me? Is a cute guy like you single?”

“Don’t tell her, or she’ll set you up with every guy she knows.”

They sounded a lot like Geoff and Thom.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Only the interesting ones.”

I laughed.

“Single. But I don’t need help finding a boyfriend.” *Bullshit. Without Geoff, I would never have had the courage to say anything to Elton.*

“Three tickets for *Death by Star*, please.” Victoria said to the teenager behind the counter.

I wanted to say I was going to pay for my ticket, but she was already giving him her debit card.

Philip winked at me. “The advantages of having a rich girlfriend.”

Victoria must have heard him despite the whisper, because she elbowed him hard in the stomach. She was still smiling, though. "Shut up or you won't get your allocation."

I was laughing hard while he begged her on one knee. "Oh, please, my beautiful Mistress, I beg of you not to cut me off."

She laughed too, grabbed his collar and brought him to her lips. She whispered something into his ear, and it made Philip smile. She then left us behind to get into the theatre.

"I'm so getting laid tonight," he told me when she was out of earshot.

"Well, good for you." I tapped his back and followed Victoria.

The movie was full of spaceship explosions and mindless action scenes, aka a really fun movie. Philip and Victoria were glued to each other but not in a sexually charged way. Just being comfortable together.

After the movie, we stopped for a late dinner, and they brought me back to my dorm. I was optimistic about the year.

\*\*\*\*

I found a job in the first week, and for the next two weeks, I shared my time between the job and Philip and Victoria. Even after the first new students showed up in the hall, I would pass a lot of my time in Philip's apartment in Yamnuska Hall.

When my first classes started, I had a nice routine figured out. I had no news from my parents, but the novelty of university life didn't leave me a lot of time to think about it. I was having the warm feeling I had had in London living with the guys.

Classes were fun and creative, and good god, I hadn't seen Ryan Beaulieu yet. Why I even wanted to go to the same school was a mystery to me. And then in my first week of school, I saw him in the cafeteria. He was hanging out with the other members of the hockey team, if I believed their Dinos jerseys. I changed direction with my tray, surprising Victoria who was following me.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Oh, come on," she said putting her tray in front of mine. "There was a great table next to the bunch of cute Dinos jocks."

“I just didn’t feel like sitting next to a group of jocks.”

“I didn’t know you had prejudices.”

“I don’t.”

She poured her chocolate milk into a glass. “What’s the problem then? I promise I won’t tell.”

“What won’t you tell?” Philip said as he sat next to me.

“Which Dino Aaron has a crush on.”

“Vicki!”

“Fine. I won’t press.”

*Damn it.* “Beaulieu. Number forty-six”

I swear she was about to say something, but she and Philip shared a look and she closed her mouth.

“I’m sure there’s someone out there for you,” Philip said.

Suspicious, but he was right. Crushing on Mr. Straight Guy wasn’t good for my health. May as well forget about him.

It did not stop me from glancing over at the Dinos table. He was laughing at something another player said, and I was back in high school admiring him from afar.

Later in class, I kept thinking about what Philip had said. I did need to move on. And wasn’t there a saying about the best way to get over someone was to get under someone else? It worked well enough in London. I had barely thought about Ryan overseas, too busy making out with Elton.

But then how could I meet someone for a date? Maybe Victoria would have an idea. I checked my calendar for her schedule. She had nothing for the rest of the day, so I texted her. Turned out she was waiting for me after my class.

“I need a boyfriend.”

“I know just the place.”

That was easy.

She brought me to the Students’ Union in the MacEwan Student Centre and we followed the direction to the QCentre. We were welcomed by a young person with long blond hair. A sticker on her white-yellow-and-green shirt

indicated her name—their name—was Maya and they preferred the pronouns They/Them/Their. It was new to me, but if they wanted it, I was going to do it.

Victoria took care of the introductions as she already knew Maya.

“We directed a workshop together last year,” Victoria told me.

I nodded, then let Maya show me around the centre, and introduce me to the other volunteers.

I promised them I would be back later. Half an hour in the QCenter and I was already feeling at home.

\*\*\*\*

Because I couldn't avoid Ryan forever, I met him in the halls of the MacEwan Student Centre.

Ryan did a double take. “A? I didn't know you were coming to U of C.”

“Hm yep.”

He was sporting light stubble, and a tight black T-shirt. *Is this guy ever not sexy? It was ridiculous.*

“Your mother told me you went to Europe.”

*He had asked my mother about me?*

“You could have said good-bye, you know.”

“It kind of happened fast.” *'Cause I couldn't wait to get away from home.*

“I bet you had a lot of fun. We should totally hang out. I want to hear about it.”

My lips were dry. “Yeah, sure.”

A whole evening where I would be alone with him. Maybe I could invite Philip and Victoria along.

I was tempted to follow him into whatever organization he was involved in at MacEwan Student Centre. I left the building instead; Victoria was waiting for me.

“I saw you talked to Beaulieu.”

“Yeah. And I made a fool of myself again. Doesn't seem like his brother told him I'm gay.”

“Good, then you can tell him yourself.”

“Are you crazy?”

“He’s going to figure it out some time, you know.”

“Yeah, the later the better.”

She linked her arm with mine. “You have the worst sense of observation in the world, you know that.” She shook her head. “We gotta go if you don’t want to be late for your next class.”

When we got to my class, Philip was leaving the classroom, so he and Victoria went on their way, and I took my place in the front.

Two hours later, my head was swimming with my new knowledge of contemporary Canadian art. Ryan Beaulieu leaned on the wall with his Dinos sport bag hanging from his shoulder.

“I hope you don’t mind,” he said “Vicki told me where you’d be.”

“She did, eh.” *Bitch.*

“She can be a bit much, I know, but you can’t have a better friend.”

“I didn’t know you knew each other.” Victoria hadn’t said anything to me.

“We have a couple of classes together.”

Naturally, we walked side by side. Ryan knew a lot of people, waving around and smiling at friends. He always had that way with people, even in high school. Always making people feel good no matter who they were. The anti-bully. If only I knew for sure he wouldn’t reject me.

After a while, though, I noticed his hands clinched next to his body.

“Let’s get this over with.”

I stopped. Felt the sweat on my hands. Owen had talked to him, and it was Ryan’s time to tell me to back off. I braced myself for the upcoming desertion.

“Look, I probably have no right to ask you this, but you can’t tell Owen.”

Eh what? He must have realised I wasn’t understanding because he moved his bag toward me.

It was getting more confused by the second.

“Dude, I think your brother knows you play for the Dinos.”

Ryan pointed just above the Dinos logo. And there lay a small rainbow pin.

“You can’t tell Owen I’m gay.”

I stood there speechless.

“Please. He wouldn’t understand.”

“No, he wouldn’t.”

I saw the realisation appear on his face. “I’m sorry.”

I shrugged. I didn’t want to show that Owen’s rejection had affected me, even after the summer. I changed the subject.

“You still want to hear about London?”

From the corner of my eyes, I saw some guy waving at us. Ryan smiled at him and waved back.

“Actually I need to go now, but give me your number and I’ll text you later.”

We swapped our cell phones back and forth, then he joined his friend. I couldn’t stop smiling when I turned away. An uncontrollable need for laughter bubbled up, but when I turned one last time to see him, Ryan and the guy looked more than friendly to each other. Of course, someone like Ryan wouldn’t be single.

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### Chapter 3

Victoria and Philip found me lying on her bed.

“I hope you don’t mind. Your roommate let me in.”

After discovering Ryan was gay but taken, I had needed some time alone, which wasn’t really possible with my roommate. Victoria’s second-year residence allowed her an actual apartment instead of a dorm room. I could have gone to Philip’s too, but I doubted he wanted to hear me complain about the man of my dreams. Even open-minded straight guys had their limits.

I didn’t remember ever not being attracted to Ryan. Even before I knew about attraction and sex, Ryan had been the hero I’d looked up to. It sounded a little girly, but I just knew he was perfect for me.

Victoria sat next to me, forcing me to move and sit up. Philip took the chair at her desk.

“Are you still pining after Beaulieu? Because he is gay.”

“I know. He told me. But it doesn’t really matter as he is not exactly single either.”

“Shit. If I’d known, I wouldn’t have told him where you were.”

“At least now I know, I guess.”

Victoria hugged me while Philip was still looking on his cell phone. I was almost surprised when he said, “Let him breathe, Vi.”

She moved slightly away. “You got an idea?”

And there they went again with the silent communication.

“I’ve got everything under control,” he said, before kissing her and gesturing for me to follow him. “You’re coming with me.”

I raised my eyebrow in a questioning look.

“Go with him.”

Philip’s apartment was on the same level as Victoria’s. We passed one of his roommates in the communal area and headed for his bedroom. I had never actually been in his bedroom before, but it was what I was expecting and totally the opposite at the same time. It was a mess, with more clothes on the ground

than in the drawers. He had a Dinos logo glued next to his bed, and behind his computer on the desk, there was a hockey poster from the Vancouver Canucks.

He went to his closet and opened the door. I yelped in surprise at what I saw glued to the inside of the door and looked away. It could not be unseen. It was a big drawing of Victoria wearing nothing but an opened leather vest and really tight black leather panties. Her pose was sexual, and she was holding a whip with both hands. Atop her was the stylized text "Bow to your Queen!"

He noticed I kept looking back at the poster. "Sorry." He delicately unglued the poster and put it face down on his bed. As he moved away from the closet, I saw that he had his own leather clothing.

He didn't offer any explanations; he didn't need to. I wasn't blind to the dynamic between them.

Philip then went through the nonleather part of his closet. Stopping at some T-shirt, looking at me, then going back to the closet.

"Phil?" I asked finally, "What are we doing?"

He didn't say anything; instead, he grabbed a pink T-shirt and threw it at me.

"You do know it'll never fit me, right?"

I had a good inch on him, and his body shape was different from mine.

"Just try it for fuck's sake. If we don't find anything, we always have some time to go shopping."

"Are you going to tell me what we are doing?"

"Can't you see it? We are getting ready for going out tonight."

I offered a judgement-free statement. "I don't think we're into the same kind of clubs."

"That's why we ain't going to my club, but yours."

"A gay bar?" I said, surprised. I could see Victoria wanting to come, but straight-boy Philip in a gay bar?

"I even found the perfect place for you. It'll be so full of single hot gay guys you'll forget everything about Beaulieu. The best way to forget about someone—"

"Is to get under someone else."

“Yeah, but no. It’s to have a guy’s night out with your best friend. Now try the damn shirt.”

The shirt fit surprisingly well. It was tighter than I was used to but not uncomfortably so. The pink fabric was stretching on the few muscles I had. The V-neck felt somewhat strange, but it did look good.

“Are we really going to a gay bar?”

“It’s called *The Puck*. It opened last year, and their website advertises it as a queer version of The Garage Sports Bar. And if you don’t laugh at any of my possible discomforts, I promise not to force you to a BDSM club with me.”

I laughed. *Why the hell not?*

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My feet knocked on each other, and I saw the street coming up really fast, but Philip helped me upright despite his own drunkenness. I had never allowed myself to be this drunk with Owen, afraid I would say or do something to clue him in. I laughed for no reason at all.

“Wow, you guys are really drunk.”

Victoria had picked us up after *The Puck* had closed, and she was now witnessing our drunken state. I laughed even harder. She helped us into Philip’s apartment. I fell on his bed, and he fell half on me. It was his turn to laugh. Victoria rolled her eyes at us. Philip pushed me to the wall. I saw him grab Victoria’s face between his hands and kiss her.

“I love you.”

She smiled at him and helped him under his covers. “I love you, too.”

I pulled my body above Philip. “Ahhhh.”

In answer, she pushed me back onto the bed. “Good night, boys.”

I woke up the next morning with a headache from hell and Philip moaning Victoria’s name in his sleep. His morning erection dug into my thigh. I moved away from him, careful not to wake him up. He moved around and moaned but didn’t wake up.

Two glasses of water and four pills waited for us on the desk. I took mine, silently thanking Victoria for everything.

Going into Rundle Hall with a hangover was like a walk of shame, without the sex. All I wanted was a shower and a good breakfast. My roommate was sitting on his bed, listening to music and reading a book for his class.

He lowered his ear buds. "Some jock came in last night. Ryan... something French."

"Beaulieu?"

"Yes, something like that."

I nodded and took my stuff and headed to the showers.

I wondered what he wanted, and even though my imagination was heading into all sorts of romantic and sexual venues, I knew he probably wanted to know what England was like. As if he could ever really be interested in me, his little brother's friend.

It didn't change the fact that closing my eyes, I could imagine him coming into the shower area. He would open the curtain, already naked. His tall erection pointed at me. I would back off to let him in the shower. He would smile at me like I was his entire world. With my back to the wall, he would lean in. I imagined the smell of my soap was actually his cologne, giving me vertigo. I would close my eyes the second his lips touched mine. The kiss would consume me, and his hand would brush my body, circling around my painfully hard cock.

The sound of the door opening jerked me out of the fantasy. *Damn it!* I didn't move or breathe for a while. I didn't want whoever was there to know what I was doing.

"Aaron?"

My heart missed a beat. *Ryan?*

"Your roommate told me you are here. Is it a bad time?"

*A bad time? My cock was ready to explode; his voice didn't help the matter.*

"What am I saying; of course it's a bad time. I can come back lat—"

"NO! I mean, wait, I'm almost done."

I cut the hot water dry, avoiding a yelp last minute. The shock helped somewhat, but I was still worried it would come back. I closed everything, dried quickly and jumped into my jeans and T-shirt.

My hair was still dripping on my shirt when I got into my room. Ryan was waiting uneasily on my bed.

My roommate looked between the two of us as we stood in silence. "Damn," he said, "I totally forgot about that meeting for that... hm... thing."

*Subtle dude, subtle.*

But then, my standing there in silence wasn't the suavest move on my part. *And the award for the most awkward goes to—"How's the Dinos?"—Aaron Lonheart, ladies and gentlemen.*

"Good, good. How's—fuck. I saw you running naked in my backyard, it shouldn't be this awkward."

If it were a movie, I would have heard the crickets in the background. *Maybe they should give him the award instead.*

"Do you, hm, do you still want to see my pictures of London?" *Anything to tone down the awkwardness.*

I grabbed my PC and sat next to him. Damn it was hard not to feel the hair on my skin rise to be so close to him. I could barely concentrate on the subject at hand: my summer in London.

He was so close, yet I didn't dare move. I kept thinking, *He has a boyfriend.* But all I wanted was to reach out and touch his skin, feel the muscles moving under my hands and my lips. I shifted on the bed to hide my erection.

He leaned back on his arm a little. If I were to move just a little to the left, I could lean into him, feel his arms around me. I quivered.

"A?"

I changed the picture. "Hm?"

"Would it be weird if I were to kiss you?"

I looked in his eyes unsure if he were serious or not. He was biting his lips. How come someone could look so strong and vulnerable at the same time?

"No," I whispered, "it wouldn't be weird at all."

I bent to put the computer on my desk, and when I sat up, he was even closer than before. I smiled and swallowed. I had dreamt of this moment, and it was finally coming true. But Ryan didn't move to kiss me, so I reached for his shoulder and pulled him to my lips. The kiss was hesitant at first, and I pulled him above me, moving so I could rest my head on my pillow. My arms slid from his shoulders to his back, and I pulled him closer. I just loved the way his weight felt on me. If the world had stopped spinning at that moment, I wouldn't have been surprised.

My legs locked around his lower back, my straining erection pushing into him. Our tongues twined together, and I moaned against him.

*Oh yes.* I felt his erection growing against my own. My hands reached for his T-shirt and pulled it up. I wanted to feel his skin so much.

He moved back to help me with the T-shirt, and I used the time to do the same thing with mine. The two shirts landed on my roommate's bed, but we went right back to making out. His touch inflamed me, making me shake and want for more. Lust took over my body. His kisses moved to my neck and he accidentally licked an erogenous zone I didn't know existed. I whimpered in his arms, so he did it again and again until I was begging.

I pulled his hair to bring our lips together again. I reached for his jeans, and I was almost there when something metallic fell on the ground and I heard a "Fuck."

Ryan scrambled for his shirt, and I was ready to yell at my roommate when I realised it wasn't him. My father was standing with his back to us, a hand in front of his eyes.

"Dad? What are you doing here?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt with your... hum boyfriend. I was going to wait until you were installed, but the school billing said you had come almost three weeks early, so I—I'll leave you to it. Call me back when you have some time, okay?"

By the time he was done talking, we were dressed again, the passion extinguished.

"Wait!" I said before I could think about it.

Ryan nodded to me. He kissed me, even though my father was back to looking at us. "I've got a practise anyway. I'll call you later for a rematch."

I smiled and reached for him again for a French kiss. He wanted to do this again, and I wanted to give him a preview of what he could expect. I was even able not to blush when I noticed my father watching us.

Ryan had to pass next to my father, and I admired the way he nodded at him as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

My father nodded back. "Nice to see you again, Owen."

"Ryan. And the same for me."

With Ryan gone, I was left alone with my father. I had only seen the man a handful of times since he had left Mom, and every time it had turned into a disaster.

“Your mother said you were confused. I was worried.”

“I’m not confused.” If there was one thing I was sure of, it was this one.

“I didn’t have the impression you were.”

There was a moment of silence.

“I know you said you never wanted to see me again, but I thought since we both live in the same city, we could... reconnect.”

“Even if I’m gay?”

It took him aback.

“Of course. Why... Why would that change anything? You’re my son!”

“It mattered to Mom!” I hadn’t realised I was angry at her until then.

“Is that why you came to school early?”

I nodded. “She wants no pervert in her home.”

He looked right at me. Intentionally. “I don’t see any pervert.”

All of my emotions bubbled to the surface. Anger, pain, joy. They threatened to get out all at once. Years, I had hated my father for leaving us. In my mind, all faults had been on him. How dare he make a new family in Calgary? Yet he was the only one who still had my back.

Next thing I knew, he was pulling me into his arms. I was uncomfortable at first, my hands on each side of my body, tears on my cheeks and my estranged father patting my back and telling me it was going to be okay.

Pride stopped me from showing him exactly how grateful I was, so I just patted his back twice and moved away.

“I came here to issue an official invitation for a good homemade meal with Millie and the kids next Friday, at seven. You should bring your Ryan. They’ll be happy to meet him.” I knew he was honest when he didn’t pause before inviting Ryan along.

Honest enough that I didn’t know how to tell him I didn’t think Ryan was mine. Once I promised my dad I would be there, I didn’t wait for Ryan to call me. I grabbed my light jacket from the hook behind the door and left for the ice rink in the Olympic Oval.

The team was training already when I got there. The coach was yelling orders to the players. I found Ryan, and it was as if he was floating on the ice. I

didn't care about the other players, to me Ryan was the best, and he sure deserved a place in the NHL.

I sat on the bleachers and watched. I was surprised when Ryan waved at me. He even stopped in the side of the bleachers to ask me how I was, but left when his coach called him on it. Once the practise was over, the players exited the ice one by one, with Ryan the second before last.

"I'm all yours as soon as I shower," he said, pulling off his helmet. He even leaned in to kiss me under the cat calls of the guy behind him. It was more like a peck on the lips, but I was so surprised he would do this at this particular moment with all of the witnesses.

The guy behind him threw his arm around Ryan's neck and forced him away from the rink. "You can see your boyfriend later, Don Juan."

And then I was alone in the bleachers.

I waited for Ryan at the Oval's entrance with growing impatience. Players went, paying no attention to me, as if I belonged. Some stopped to tell me Ryan would be out soon.

As soon as he got out, Ryan threw his arm around my shoulders even though anyone could have seen us. *If he were dating that other guy, he wouldn't be so obvious, right?*

"So? How did it go with your father?"

"Well enough. He invited the two of us to dinner. You don't need to accept."

"Do you want me there?"

*Could it be that easy?*

"If you want to come."

*Now we were just turning in circles.*

"It's your father, and I know how you feel about him. I remember when he left." Ryan squeezed my shoulder. "And he didn't know you were gay until this afternoon. I'll be more than happy to come if you want me there."

We reached Cascade Hall without making a decision on the matter. Somewhere along the way, his arm had slid from my shoulders, and we got to his apartment holding hands. As soon as he closed his bedroom door behind me, I leaned in to kiss him. Right off, he pushed me against the door and

intensified the kiss. I answered back, but he backed off before I had enough of my senses back to reach for his jeans.

“We should talk first.”

“I think I’m done talking,” I said as I reached for my own jeans and pulled them down.

His eyes glanced over my package. “Damn. Later, then.”

He moved toward the bed, and I followed him. We kissed again, and this time I reached for his jeans and opened them just enough to be able to reach in his underwear. His cock in my hand was bigger than I had imagined, and fuck if it wasn’t hotter than the fantasy. He closed his eyes and grabbed the headboard. With my free hand on his lower back, I helped him stand.

“Oh God. This is so much better than I imagined.”

“Oh it is, eh?” I said, as I smeared the cum at the tip of his cock with my thumb.

His legs shook under him, and I was surprised with my own self-control.

“All damned summer.”

*Hell, wasn't that a thought.*

“Me too.”

“Liar.” He may have wanted to say something else, but he yelped after I jerked him.

“You’re right. I’ve been imagining it since that last summer at the lake.”

“Shit, A.”

The way he moaned my name almost got me beyond the edge, so I kissed him hard. Some quick flicks of my wrist and he came all over my hand.

I moved a little to the side, and Ryan fell on the bed. He watched me standing above him. I brought my hand to my mouth, but before I could taste him, he was pulling me to him.

I was on my knees on the bed. He was half lying there. He raised my T-shirt above my head and kissed me just above my briefs. My head bent backwards as his lips drew kisses up my belly until I was shaking from desire.

He lowered his body on the bed and placed me above him so that I was almost in his face. I watched him lowering my briefs until my cock popped out.

The first lick was like electricity rushing all over my body. After watching Ryan come and being so close to the edge, it didn't take much of that image of Ryan sucking me to get me off.

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After we cleaned my hand and the headboard I had held on to, we lay under the covers completely naked. We made out some more, dozed off, and then made out again. We heard the sound of people talking and could smell the food being cooked in the common area. Ryan's stomach growled under my ear.

"Sorry. I usually eat instead of having sex after a practise."

"Then maybe you should eat."

"I don't want to." And instead he kissed me.

But then someone knocked on the door.

"We're busy."

"I cooked. There's enough for you and KC if you guys want some."

KC. The name brought a sense of cold. I was going to be sick. Must be the other guy. I left the bed and scrambled to find my clothes. I was stupid. Of course, he really did have a boyfriend. Painful tears threatened to fall.

I bent to get my underwear, and Ryan called my name to stop me.

"I know how it sounds," he said once I looked at him. "I'm sure you are aware of the principle of fuck buddies."

It hit me like a ton of bricks. Not a boyfriend. But it didn't really reassure me.

"I don't want a fuck friend." I didn't mean to blurt it out.

I wanted a boyfriend. I wanted what Geoff and Thom had. And Philip and Victoria.

"Neither do I. Look. Let's get dressed, and we can talk about it with lunch."

I nodded.

Once we were dressed, he brought some of the lunch his roommate made into the bedroom.

"I'm not out at home," he said, "and it makes me a little paranoid. When you didn't come for a run, I thought maybe you noticed the way I was looking at you and were avoiding me. Then your mother told me you went to work in

England for the summer. I was sure I had missed my chance. And then you were here, in the same school as I and... Is it weird if I hoped you chose U of C because of me?"

"I did."

"Really?"

"Did I say that out loud?"

Ryan smiled at me. "Yeah, yeah you did." He reached for my hand and squeezed. "You don't even have to say anything. I won't see KC or anyone else as long as you'll have me. I don't need fuck buddies when I've got a boyfriend."

I loved the sound of this. "Is it what we are? Boyfriends?"

"If it's what you want."

Of course, I wanted this. We kissed to seal the deal, the food between us crashing on the ground.

He laughed against my lips. "This is terrible."

I laughed too. We kept kissing. We had all the time in the world to clean up this mess.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*MC Houle hasn't always wanted to be a writer, but characters lived swirling into her mind since early childhood. After years of acting out those characters with her sisters and friends, she wrote down her stories first in fanfiction then through fiction writing.*

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