

*Lost* TIME  
PARKER WILLIAMS



# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## LOST TIME

**By Parker Williams**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the Love Has No Boundaries promotion sponsored by the Goodreads M/M Romance Group and is published as a free gift to you.

### What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

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 they 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 Has No Boundaries.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, 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

The black and white photograph shows a bed, from directly above, with two young men all the way over to the right side, visible from the waist up. Their torsos are bare. They lie facing one another, and their embrace is tender and loving more than it is passionate.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*I was hoping you could tell me the story of these two beautiful men?*

*They have known each other for many years. They were close friends for a long time, but life just got in the way and their competitive careers and busy lives meant they somehow fell out of touch. They never forgot about each other, and they have both been waiting for this moment for years.*

*I'd like to see an emotional reunion, maybe a hint of hurt/comfort in there somewhere if you can fit it in, but most of all just a whole lot of love (I'm a hopeless romantic!).*

*Please, no paranormal elements (I'd like a contemporary romance) and preferably no BDSM either, and I would really appreciate a wonderful HEA. If nothing else, please just give me a happy ending. :D I know I'm requesting an emotional story, but I'd like it not to be too angsty, if possible.*

*Sincerely,*

*Lauren*

*<3*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** friendstolovers,firsttime, restaurant owner, teacher, hurt/comfort, HEA

**Wordcount:**16,722

# LOST TIME

**By Parker Williams**

Kurt Danvers was born three days before me. We grew up in the same neighborhood, went to the same schools, enjoyed the same things. We became fast friends, and our parents often remarked how well we seemed to fit together. There were sleepovers, there were play dates. We were closer than best friends, even closer than brothers. It was almost to the point where we couldn't exist without the other being nearby. Kurt spent a lot of time at my house, just like I did at his. Our folks eventually gave up trying to separate us, realizing it wasn't worth the effort. When his parents wanted to take him on a trip, he cried so hard he got sick, because he wasn't going to be with me. When I had to go to the hospital to have my tonsils taken out, they had to bend the rules to allow Kurt to be near me because I threw a tantrum of epic proportions.

While we were in grade school, Kurt assumed the role of my protector. Anyone who had something to say to me had to go through him first. It was something he took very seriously. It wasn't that he was bigger than I was, but he had a personality that just screamed he was in charge and people respected that. Kurt was a very demonstrative friend. He'd have no problems with displays of affection. He'd put his arm over my shoulder while we walked or hug me in front of other people. He never cared what people would think. The only opinion that mattered to him was mine.

\*\*\*\*

Junior high school, everything started going to hell. It started to dawn on me that I was different. While other guys constantly talked about girls, what they'd do with them, what they liked about them, about how much they wished they could actually *be* with them, I stayed quiet. I never had those feelings. I mean, I had a couple of friends who were girls, but never a girlfriend. My parents told me I was probably a "late bloomer", but I didn't think that was it at all. I was happy with what I had. When Kurt was around, I

didn't need anyone else. Hell, I didn't want to be with anyone else. If we went out with friends, I always found myself wishing they weren't there.

A bunch of us went to the beach one day. The weather was amazing. Everyone was splashing in the surf, hanging out together. Except me. I sat on a log just taking it all in. Kurt tried to get me to come with him to join in the fun, but I begged off, saying I was fine where I was. He smiled at me and sat down on the log, his shoulders touching mine. I told him he should go have fun, because I wasn't really in a fun mood. He bumped shoulders with me and said, "You're such an idiot. I came here to be with you, so where you are is where the fun is." I got a funny feeling in my stomach when he said that. I also kind of got hard, but there was no way a guy wanted to say that to his friend.

Kurt was always quick with a comment, a smile, or a laugh. People were drawn to him like metal shavings to a magnet. He would get invited to parties or over to other people's houses. Hell, some girls even worked up the nerve to ask him out. When he'd get asked over he would ask me if I wanted to come along. I was at the point in my life where I started becoming an introvert. Groups made me nervous so I'd tell him to go ahead and I would see him the next day. Without fail, he'd show up at my house, ready for a night of watching television or just hanging out. When I asked him why, he would give me this look where he'd arch an eyebrow and glare at me like I had just asked the stupidest question known to man. I guess that was what he thought doubled as an answer. It wasn't long before I stopped asking why and just relished having him near me. Whenever he was, I'd always get a fluttery stomach and a goofy grin. I wasn't sure why, but it made me feel good.

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By the time we started high school, it was fairly obvious I was never going to be a part of the "in-crowd". I had neither the money nor the jock reputation. Kurt could have easily been part of that group, but he chose to stay close to me. He and I had so much in common—we both loved *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, the cartoon, not the lame movie, we enjoyed the same music, but most of all, we really just enjoyed spending time together. We were the best of friends. There wasn't a time you wouldn't find us doing something. It didn't



matter if it was exciting or mundane; all that we cared about was the fact that we were doing it together. I cherished every moment I had with him, every glance, every smile. Even his ridiculous braying laugh was precious to me. I kept them all in my memory because they sustained me in the odd moments when he wasn't around. We shared everything together, except for the one thing I knew he would never understand.

I was hopelessly in love with my best friend.

Throughout high school, Kurt was my rock. Never once had he given up his role as my white knight. When my parents divorced, he was the one I turned to. When my dog, Patches, died, Kurt was the one who comforted me, holding me while I cried myself to sleep. He never judged me, never made me feel less than important in his eyes. When our prom came, Kurt asked me to double-date with him and the Delaney twins. It was weird because he didn't leave my side the whole night. Jessica and Janice never once said anything about it. Even the few times we all went to dance, it was almost like he was glued to my hip. That night we dropped the girls off at their house and went back to mine, where Kurt spent the night. When I asked him why he hadn't gotten a hotel room for him and Jess, he smacked me in the back of the head and told me not to ask such stupid questions.

Anyone who couldn't see his beauty was obviously blind. I knew Kurt was destined for great things and I could only hope I'd be there when they happened.

As you're growing up, you start to think things will never be different. The people in your life will always be there for you. It's a hard lesson to learn that growth means change. When it came time to go to college, I got accepted to Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, where I was going to study special education. Kurt got accepted to Michigan State University, to study restaurant management. He had high hopes of eventually opening his own place. The day came for us to head off on our own paths, and it was a tearful goodbye for us both.

"God, Alex, I can't believe this is it," he mumbled into my neck. I pulled him tighter against me, not wanting to break the connection. His warm breath

just below my ear caused my skin to pebble. We had hugged each other often over the years, but never like this. Not one where we knew that once we let go, we would no longer have each other to fall back on.

“I don’t want to lose touch. Please tell me that’s not going to happen,” I begged him, stepping back to look into his sweet chocolate eyes.

“Naw, man. We’re good. We’ll e-mail, text, call, whatever it takes we’ll stay in touch. You’re my best friend. Losing you would be like losing a part of myself. I don’t think I could live without you. You know that, right?”

I nodded, still unwilling to let go. Kurt’s mother’s voice broke us apart, though. “Come on, Kurt. Time to go.”

He pulled away from me, giving me an intense look before he leaned forward and put his hand on my face. I resisted the urge to nestle my face in his palm. “Don’t let anyone ever sell you short, Alex. I will always have your back.” With those words he leaned in and kissed my cheek, then ran off to the car where his mom waited for him. I watched as they drove away, my cheek tingling where his lips had pressed against it.

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My freshman year was tough. The course work left little time for me to do anything outside of academics. I was determined to buckle down and graduate with honors. I wanted everyone to be proud of my accomplishment. Well, mostly I wanted Kurt to be proud of me. His opinion was always the one that mattered the most.

True to his word, we kept in constant contact. Not a single day went by when I wouldn’t find a text message on my phone sending me encouragement or praise, or even just a smiley face. Something to let me know that he was thinking about me. It didn’t matter how crappy life got, he always had my back, just like he promised.

I can’t point to the first day when I didn’t hear from him. I was so busy with finals, I’m not sure I even noticed. I sent him a couple of messages before I finally heard back. He was in the same boat I was. College was a lot more difficult than high school and it required a lot more attention to stay on top.

We agreed we wouldn't panic if we didn't hear from each other for a while, knowing that our courses were tough and the professors demanding.

Over the next six months the messages came with less frequency. There would be one every few days. Then a week or so would go by before either of us had the chance. Toward the end it would be one, maybe two a month. Then they stopped coming altogether. We'd drifted apart, pulled in different directions by our careers and the lives we'd chosen to lead. When classes weren't in session, I attended lectures, took labs, whatever I could do to keep my grade point average high. This left me no time for socializing, but not a day went by that I didn't think about Kurt, remembering all the things that made him special to me. Not a moment went by that I didn't regret not taking the time to give him a call. Before I realized it, graduation was upon me. I was excited, receiving my bachelor's degree at the top of my class, and I wanted to share the news with my best friend. I pulled out my phone and dialed his number.

"Hello?"

"Kurt? It's me, Alex."

"I'm sorry. I think you have the wrong number."

I repeated the number back, praying I had dialed wrong.

"Yeah, that's this number, but there isn't anyone here named Kurt. Sorry."

The man on the other end disconnected and I was left staring at my phone. I could feel the warmth of the tears streaming down my cheeks and I realized that with everything I gained, what I had lost was so much more valuable to me.

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I gave thought to staying in school to earn my Master's degree, but decided it wasn't worth the extra money. What I really wanted to do was find a school that I could teach in. The odd thing was, as eager as I had been to leave home, I really wanted to get back there. Even though both my parents had moved to different states, Evanston, Illinois would always be my home.

After moving back, I contacted a few grade schools in the area and found one that had a position available. I interviewed and was told they would contact me. Three weeks before the start of the school year I got the call. The job was mine. It wasn't an easy job, but working with children that have learning disabilities was rewarding in its own way. To see the smiles on their faces when they succeeded made everything worthwhile. Well, almost.

About eight months into the school year, I had called in a parent for a conference one day. His son's grades had begun to slip and I needed support from his family. Jake Tanner was a big man, broad shoulders, misty blue eyes and a voice that could seriously melt butter.

"Mr. Tanner, thank you for coming. I'm Alex Jeffers, Logan's teacher. I know it's difficult finding the time to come see me."

He leaned his lanky frame forward in the chair, a bright smile creasing his lips. "I appreciate your time, Mr. Jeffers. I know Logan is a handful."

"Alex, please. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Tanner—"

He held up a hand, "I'll call you Alex, but I need you to call me Jake."

I grinned and gave him a quick nod. "I was wondering if you might know what caused this sudden change in Logan's behavior? He's always been such a bright boy."

Jake scrunched his face a bit, his pert nose wrinkling. "His mama and I got divorced about five months ago. Life at home has been rough for us this past year. When she finally moved out, she didn't want to take Logan with her. It's just been me and the boy since then."

"Yeah, I can see how that would be hard. It also goes a long way toward explaining the way Logan's been acting out. I think we can probably work together to give him the guidance he needs right now. If you're free any time this week we could get together to talk further."

Jake stood. "How about some dinner? Logan's with my mama tonight, so if you're available...."

I looked Jake over, trying to figure out if he was flirting with me. He was sexy as all hell, but he just didn't do it for me. I must have been quiet for a bit too long, because his eyebrow arched.

Jake's face flushed. "Oh geez, I'm sorry. That didn't come out the way it sounded. Just friends. Promise. Nothing against you, but I'm honestly not looking for anything else."

Decision made, I grabbed my jacket. "Let's go."

We took Jake's car, chatting as we drove. He told me about the breakup with his wife, how the stresses of raising Logan got to be too much for her to handle. While I was in school, I had done a project about the pressures on the family of special needs students and understood what he was saying.

"Shannon, my ex, had these big dreams of a perfect family. When Logan was born those went up in smoke. She came to resent him, and I couldn't have that. My son was too important to let her hurt his self-esteem, so she had a choice. Therapy or divorce. She chose the divorce."

We drove the rest of the way in silence. I had nothing I could say, but it wasn't awkward between us. When we got to the restaurant, Jake led the way. The host approached us, acknowledged Jake by name, and directed us to a table in a walled-off section toward the back of the room, handing us the blue leather-bound menus.

"I take it you come here quite often?" I gave a chuckle.

"We *used* to come here a lot. It was Logan's favorite restaurant, but since the divorce he refuses to eat here."

After we ordered our meals, Jake and I focused on Logan's needs. We had gotten the basic outline of a plan, when I heard something that my mind told me couldn't be true. After I heard it again, my head popped up like a freaking jack-in-the-box. A loud, braying laugh filled the room. I scanned the people until I saw him. I rubbed my eyes, certain that I was seeing things, but I wasn't. Across the room stood the man that I hadn't seen in years. My former best friend, Kurt Danvers.

"Alex? Are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

I slumped back down into the chair. I couldn't breathe. My heart was hammering a staccato beat, thumping hard against my chest. I heard my wheezing breath. Jake grabbed my arm and shook me firmly, bringing me back to my senses. I reached into my pocket and pulled out my wallet. Throwing sixty dollars on the table, I apologized and told him I had to leave. Before he could reply, I stood and fled the restaurant. I heard Jake call my name, but all I could think of doing was getting out of there. I jumped into a cab and had it take me back to school where my car waited.

Returning home, I paced my apartment, trying to decide if I'd made the right choice. I could have easily gone up to Kurt and demanded to know what happened. Why he had abandoned me without so much as a call. Why he threw me away. I knew it wasn't logical, the hurt and pain that I felt. I was just as much to blame for our loss of contact, but he never even had enough respect to tell me that we weren't friends anymore. I undressed for bed, pulled the blanket up, and as the memories of our friendship played through my mind, I sobbed myself to sleep.

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For most of the next day, I was a zombie in class. Having gotten almost no sleep, I was barely surviving on caffeine. It took an inner strength not to snap at my kids. They were a lively bunch and I loved them all, but my mind was elsewhere. When Logan came into class that afternoon, he handed me a long, white envelope.

"It's from my dad," he informed me.

I opened it, prepared to be cussed out at the very least, but what was in the letter surprised me.

*Alex,*

*I'm not sure why you left so suddenly last night. I certainly hope it was nothing I did. The owner of the restaurant came over to ensure that everything was okay. He said he knew you and asked if we were on a date. I laughed and told him no, that you were my son's teacher and he smiled,*

*said thank you and told me that our dinner was complimentary. I'll try to get in touch with you soon so we can discuss our plan for Logan.*

*Thank you,*

*Jake*

Kurt had asked about me? Why would he care? He was the one who'd left me. I thanked Logan and pushed the envelope into my pants pocket. I had a class to teach and no time to worry about Kurt. Though I admit, the thought did occupy a corner in the back of my mind and might have made me smile. Just a little.

Three o'clock couldn't come quickly enough. I needed some time to sort out how I was feeling. After the last student left the room, I grabbed my bag and papers, intent on heading for the door. When I turned around, I had to catch my breath. There stood Kurt, looking every bit as handsome as the last time I'd seen him nearly five years ago. His smile radiated through me and all I could feel was warmth. Damn him.

"Sorry about your dinner," he said. "I brought you back your money. You shouldn't have to pay for a meal you didn't eat."

He took a couple steps toward me; the look on his face seemed to be one of amusement. How *dare* he smirk at me like that. And how dare my body respond. He reached for me, forcing me to duck under his arms.

I didn't want to talk to him now. I needed some time to figure out my feelings and I couldn't do that with him being so close to me. "What do you want, Kurt? What are you doing here?"

The smirk fell from his face. "What happened, Alex? Why did you cut me out of your life?"

My jaw fell open and I sputtered, "Me? Cut *you* out? I called you and found someone else had your number. Not a message from you. Not an e-mail. Nothing."

He dropped his eyes. “I thought you wanted it that way. After two months of you not answering my messages, I just assumed you were done with me. I can’t tell you how much it hurt to think that—”

My stomach heaved. “No, you can’t pull that on me. You could have found me. I’m on Facebook. It’s not like I went into hiding. You didn’t even try,” I replied sadly.

He took another step toward me. He never once raised his voice. He asked quietly, “And *you* did? Can you look me in the eye and tell me you tried to find me?”

He was right. I knew he was. My damned ego wouldn’t let it go, though. I’d hurt for years thinking he had done this to me on purpose, and there was no way I could just let it go.

I wanted to throw my arms around him, beg him to forgive me for my stupidity, but I didn’t. Instead, I made things worse. “You said you came here to give me back my money. Thanks. You can give it to me and go now. It was good to see you. Maybe we can do it again in another five years.” I wanted my voice to sound firm, but I knew it was quivering.

He shook his head and regarded me with that cocky grin again. “No, I don’t think so. When I saw you yesterday, all those years melted away. It was like I’d never been apart from you. You will always be my best friend. Despite what happened between us, you and I aren’t done. We’re going to be together again. You can count on it.” Long, thick fingers pushed an envelope across the desk in front of me. “I’ll be seeing you, Alex.”

When he walked out the door, I exhaled loudly. What I couldn’t tell him was seeing him at the restaurant brought all those old feelings back in a tidal wave of emotion. I still yearned to love him. Every guy I tried to go out with, not one of them could match up to Kurt. Not one could cause my hands to sweat and my stomach to get butterflies with just a quirk of an eyebrow or a grin aimed at me. I picked up the envelope and thrust it into my pocket. Walking through the door I caught a whiff of his cologne and groaned. Regardless of what my mind tried to tell me, my body still wanted him. I knew this wasn’t going to end well. No matter what, at some point he was going to



pick up on my attraction to him and that would probably end our friendship, despite what he said.

I approached my car, a beat-up Toyota Camry, popped the lock and was about to slide into the driver's seat when I noticed a small package on the hood. It was wrapped in white tissue paper and had a note held on by a thin blue ribbon. I snatched it off, pulled the note from under the ribbon and opened it.

*I didn't forget.*

My hands trembled slightly as I unwrapped it. I cursed myself for being so nervous. When I had the last of the paper stripped away my heart did a small skip. In my hand was a package of Teaberry gum, something I used to love when I was a kid, but hadn't seen in years. My shoulders slumped and I heaved a deep sigh, as a sweet memory washed over me. Almost subconsciously, I pulled a stick of gum from the pack and slid it into my mouth, relishing the vaguely wintergreen flavor. I chewed it for a moment, remembering how Kurt had given me my first taste of it. He'd found a pack at the store when we were about twelve and he convinced his mother to buy it. He was chewing a piece when he got to my house, the sweet scent wafting on his breath, and asked if I'd ever had it. I told him no. He pulled it out of his mouth and popped it into mine. I should have been grossed out, but the truth was, I was overwhelmed by it. The act was almost like him giving me a kiss and I treasured it.

I didn't sleep well that night. Memories of my childhood that I'd tucked away came back to haunt me. I remembered every look, every touch, with vivid clarity. Each flash of skin in gym class. Fantasies I had long locked away bubbled up to the surface, taunting me. Forcing me to remember every detail of Kurt's lithe body. How his dark hair shaded his eyes. How the corner of his mouth drew up when he smiled at me. How hollow I felt when I realized I'd lost him. I finally gave up trying to sleep, instead moving into the living room, sitting in the overstuffed armchair and thumbing through some old photo albums my mom gave me before she moved. I spent a good while tracing my fingers over pictures of Kurt from our childhood, trying to will away the ache

in my heart. If I was being truthful, I wanted him back in my life, but admitting it just seemed wrong, because I didn't think I'd be able to stand that pain again if we split apart. I barely made it through the first time. I knew I couldn't go through it again, so it was best to just keep him away. I'd finally settled on my plan, but even knowing that, my heart still hurt.

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I pulled into the parking lot at school and found a small crowd gathered near the door, pointing at something on the ground. I strode from my parking spot and neared the assembled group. Sally Lemke, one of the first grade teachers, turned and gave me a wide smile. She stepped aside so I could approach. Taped to the door was a cardboard panorama, with several small teddy bears dressed in tuxes and dresses. A note hanging from the layout told me exactly what it was.

*Alex,*

*Best. Night. Ever.*

*Do you remember what I said?*

I pulled the scene down from the doors, balanced it on top of my briefcase, and carried it back to my car and stuffed it in the trunk before I began my march back to my classroom. Each step of the way I remembered a bit of prom night. Did I remember what Kurt said? I wasn't sure what he was talking about, but I knew what *my* best memory was:

*“Hey Kurt, Jess and Jan headed to the bathroom. Seriously, what do girls do in there that they need to go together? I think it's a conspiracy. They're in there plotting the downfall of men.”*

*I laughed and rolled my eyes. Kurt stepped closer, putting his hand on my elbow.*

*“Wanna dance with me?” he whispered into my ear. “I'll let you lead, if you want.”*

*I shoved him away with another laugh. “No, dude, I'm not dancing with you. That's just...creepy.”*

*God, how I wanted him to take me in his arms and move around the dance floor. My head would rest on his shoulder perfectly, since he was a few inches taller than I was. The thought of being wrapped in his warmth, my face pressed to his chest as he held me, had me quivering with excitement.*

*“Why do you care so much what other people think? We’re just two friends having a good time. I’d so dance with you. C’mon, what do you say?”*

*I shook my head, fiercely interested, but completely scared. “No way, you’re not my type.”*

*“That’s fine. Just remember, I asked,” he murmured. “I’ll always dance with you, but the next time you’re gonna have to ask me.”*

I shook my head in a vain attempt to push the memories out. Between the two of us, Kurt had always been the strongest. I was always deathly afraid of someone finding out I was gay. My heart would race every time Kurt would do something demonstrative. He never had problems touching other people, hugging some of our friends, or just being friendly. I’d stutter, and my face would heat viciously if someone tried to put their hands on me. I always wished I could be as self-confident as Kurt. It’s one of the many things I tried to instill in the kids. Be proud of who you are. It took me years to figure that lesson out.

About an hour before the end of class, there was a knock on the door. I stepped into the hall to find a delivery driver in a crisp brown uniform, with two large boxes.

“Mr. Jeffers?”

“Yes, that’s me. Can I help you with something?”

“I’ve got a delivery for you.” He handed me an electronic pad. “If you could use the stylus or your finger and write your name on the bottom, I’d appreciate it.”

I tried to think. I never had stuff delivered to the school and I wasn’t expecting any supplies. Even if I was, those would go through the office.

“I don’t think you’ve got the right person. I didn’t order anything.”

He gave me a small smile. “The order was placed this morning. The gentleman was insistent that it be delivered promptly at two pm. If you could just sign for me?”

I did as he asked and handed him back the pad. In exchange he gave me two plain brown boxes, one of which had a white envelope taped to it.

“What is this?” I asked the man. He just smiled and gave a small wave before moving off down the hallway. I took the boxes into the class, my students eyeing me eagerly. I placed them on my desk and opened the envelope.

*If it means anything, one of my favorite memories was you, me, and Patches near the pond.*

I pulled open the boxes and found a dozen black and white dog-faced cupcakes in each one. Another note simply said to share them with the class. They were giddy when I handed each of them one of the treats. While they nibbled on their chocolate goodies I sat at the desk, staring at mine.

*Kurt and I were about fifteen. Summer vacation. It was a warm afternoon. Patches was really old by this time. He was chasing a duck around the pond with no hope of ever catching him. Kurt lay out next to me on the blanket. His weightlifting was paying serious dividends. He was toned and fit. Not overly muscled, but he looked amazing. Many times I embarrassed myself when he hugged me. Fortunately no one ever noticed.*

*“Do you ever think about having kids?” Kurt asked, his voice dreamy as he lazed by the water’s edge.*

*“No, I don’t think I want kids,” I replied.*

It wasn’t the truth. I did want kids. I mourned the fact that being gay meant I’d never have children of my own. I knew I’d be a disappointment to my parents when they found out they’d never have grandkids.

*“I think you’d make an awesome dad,” Kurt said softly. He sat up and turned to me, “I think we’d each make great dads.”*

I remember smiling at him and turning to a puddle of goo when he smiled back. He nestled in close and fell asleep with his head on my arm. I think it was probably the most perfect afternoon of my life.

“Mr. Jeffers?”

My head popped up. “Yes, Logan?”

“The bell rang. Can we go?”

I looked at the clock. It was nearly five after three. I was so deep into remembering I hadn’t even noticed.

“Yes, class dismissed. Remember on Monday we’re going to be talking about family. Bring something that means a lot to you that relates to your family.”

The kids filed out of the room, leaving the cupcake wrappers and crumbs all over the place. I smiled and started clearing the mess.

“They really tore them up, didn’t they?”

I got a chill through me as I spun toward the door. Kurt lounged against it, wearing a black T-shirt that stretched across his chest so tight, you could see his nipples beneath the fabric. He stepped into the room and began to clean up.

“What are you doing here, Kurt?” I asked, a touch of exasperation in my voice.

“I helped to make the mess; it’s only fair I should help to clean it up.”

I shook my head. This was definitely perfect Kurt logic. “That’s not what I meant. Why can’t we just go our separate ways? We were fine for five years.”

He glared at me through his long lashes. “It might have been fine for *you*, but it was never that way for me.”

He put his armful of garbage into the bin before moving to where I was. He reached for me. I tried to step back, but he grabbed my sleeves and held me in place.

“I’m coming back next week, Alex. I have something I need you to understand about why I didn’t look you up. Now isn’t the time, though. I’ll be

back sometime in the afternoon on Monday. Before I go, I want you to think on one thing. I need you to remember Steve Jensen, okay? Do that for me, please?”

Without another word he turned and hurried out the door, leaving me confused as to what had just happened.

\*\*\*\*

I sat in my living room going over my lesson plan. An untouched glass of merlot sat on the desk beside me. Why would Kurt want me to think about Steve? I hadn't given him a thought in years. I tried to concentrate on what I was doing, but my thoughts kept drifting to the kid who made it his mission to make my life miserable.

Steve Jensen was a complete ass when I was in high school. He'd been the one who thought he was the big, tough, macho guy. He didn't need a reason to dislike you other than who *he* thought you were. I was sixteen at the time, just starting to put the gay label to myself, realizing that I never thought about girls the way I thought about Kurt. Steve must have picked up on this, because he made it his business to harass me at every turn. He always took great joy in finding me alone, where he'd be able to push me around while no one was watching. One Friday afternoon, the coach had me putting some stuff away after gym class and I got to the lockers late. I threw off my clothes and hit the shower, wanting to smell nice when I was around Kurt. I washed quickly, knowing that I should be meeting Kurt in a few minutes. I hurried to my locker, but I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings and that was a mistake. A hand shoved into my back, knocking me against the lockers and dazing me. I fell to the floor, trying to get my bearings, when I felt a hand grip my hair and pull my head back.

*“Well, if it's not the class faggot,” Steve hissed.*

*I tried to struggle, to get away from him, but he jerked my head against the locker.*

*“Sit still,” he demanded.*

*I struggled to get out of his grip. He practically dragged me into the bathroom, closing the door behind us.*

*“Please, don’t hurt me,” I pleaded.*

*He moved within inches of me, his face hovering near mine. His breath stank of cigarettes and he smelled like he hadn’t showered. “God, you’re such a freaking pansy,” he snapped, throwing me against the wall.*

*Tears streaked my cheeks and I couldn’t stop whimpering. His hand flashed out and smacked against my face, the sound reverberating against the walls.*

*“I don’t get you faggots. Why do you need to suck a dick when there’s all this pussy around?” he goaded me.*

*He pressed me against the wall, holding me there with one hand. His other hand balled into a fist and he thrust it into my stomach, causing the air to explode out of my lungs. I sank to my knees. My stomach heaved.*

*“Yeah, I figured you wanted to be on your knees in front of me. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” he snarled. “Get back up. I got no interest in nothing like that from you.” He gripped my hair again, and I cried out as he pulled me up to a standing position.*

*“I wonder if I could beat the fag out of you?” he mused.*

*I saw him raise his hand again and squeezed my eyes shut, bracing for another hit. Suddenly, his hands were off me and I dropped to the floor. I looked up and saw Kurt, nostrils flaring and eyes wide. He had Steve’s jersey clenched in his hands, his knuckles white. He twisted around and shoved Steve against the stall door, which banged loudly against the wall.*

*“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” he snarled.*

*“Just havin’ a bit of fun,” Steve said, a nasty grin spreading across his face.*

*Kurt got up close and said through gritted teeth, “Alex, go get changed. I need you to leave now.”*

*I sat on the floor, too stunned to move.*

*“Now, Alex!” Kurt shouted.*

*I scrambled to the door, preparing to flee when I heard Kurt’s voice, dangerous and low.*

*“He’s mine, do you understand? If you ever come near him again, I swear to God, I will kill you. Do I make myself clear?”*

I never got to hear Steve’s answer. I hurried to my locker and started trying to put my clothes back on, intent on hurrying home. I kept fumbling with my shirt, the frustration growing with each passing second. I couldn’t make anything work right. I slammed my hands into the locker over and over. The pain was intense, but I didn’t care. Kurt caught me and pulled me into his arms, pressing my head against his chest.

*“I’m so sorry. I’m so very sorry,” he kept murmuring, holding me close to him. Having Kurt near me, thinking on what might have happened, I broke down and sobbed into his shoulder. He helped me finish getting dressed and all but carried me out to his car. He took me back to his house and called my folks, letting them know I’d be staying with him for the night. He put me in his bed and ran his hand over my back, mumbling apologies for some phantom transgression. I spent the weekend at Kurt’s house. By Saturday, I had calmed down, but Kurt’s eyes still blazed every time he looked at me. I thought I had done something wrong and he was angry with me, but he assured me that wasn’t the case at all. He would say he was sorry, but when I asked why, he wouldn’t tell me.*

*Monday, when I returned to school, Steve had a huge black eye, and he avoided me like the plague. I had a sizable bruise on my stomach, but the mark on my face had faded. When I saw Steve in the gym, I made every effort to avoid him, but I swear he was trembling when I got anywhere near him. Kurt would never tell me what happened that day. When I asked, he would get this pained look on his face and say it was best if I just let it go. After a while, I stopped asking.*

*For a couple of weeks, my relationship with Kurt was strained. He wouldn’t open up and talk to me, and I didn’t know what I could do. After*



*a while he slowly returned to normal, but there was always an edge there that I could feel, even if I wasn't able to define it.*

\*\*\*\*

I spent the weekend talking with Jake and finalizing our plans on how we'd help Logan. When we'd finished, Jake asked me about Kurt, and I grudgingly told him things I had never told anyone else. It felt good to get it off my chest, thinking that since he didn't have any particular allegiance he might have a different perspective. He listened politely, and when I finished he was quiet for a moment.

"You're an idiot, you know that, right?" he finally said.

"And how's that?" I demanded.

"Seriously? You don't get it?" He paused for a few seconds. "Look, Alex, I know we don't know each other that well, and I don't know Kurt at all, but you don't throw away almost twenty-five years of friendship over hurt feelings. If he's really your friend, you'll find a way to get past it. I'm thinking if you get your head out of your ass, you might actually be able to open your eyes. I really think there are things you need to see. Look, I have to go. I'm taking Logan to the zoo today. Just...don't give up, okay?"

We disconnected, and I was left to ponder what he meant.

\*\*\*\*

Monday morning started out in the worst possible way. It was storming, with lots of thunder and lightning. I never liked those kinds of days. I ran to the car only to find I'd left the driver's side window open and the seats were soaked. I ran back to the house and grabbed a garbage bag to put over the seat so I could get to work. Days like this always made the kids antsy. If it kept up, there wouldn't be any recess and all that energy would have to be channeled elsewhere. Then there was the fact that Kurt had said he was coming to see me today, and I still wasn't sure what to make of it. A litany of emotions swirled in my head, giving me the start of a tension headache. Nothing good would come of this day, I knew it.

As I expected, the day was rough. We made it through our talks about family, and most of the kids remembered to bring something to talk about. A couple of kids had the sniffles, which meant they were not only hyper but probably coming down with something. Between wiping runny noses, dealing with bored kids, and trying to get them to pay attention to the lessons, I was ready to go home by lunchtime.

After lunch the kids filed back into the room, a little more subdued now that they had something in their bellies. I was just beginning the afternoon lesson, when the door swung open. I groaned when a gorilla with a boom box and a shopping bag walked in. The kids squealed with laughter as the costumed man wandered through, ruffling hair and waving at each kid. I marched over to him and crossed my arms.

“I don’t know how much he paid you, but please, just go,” I said harshly.

The gorilla shook his head and made his way to the front of the classroom. He placed the boom box on my desk and removed several long, ripe bananas from the bag. He flicked the switch and the room filled with a somewhat funky beat. The gorilla started dancing. The kids went...well, they went ape. He moved over to me and tried to get me to dance, but I refused. Instead he went to each kid and gave them a little shuffle. He then made his way back to the desk. He grabbed a banana and shimmied over to me. He handed me the deep-yellow fruit and started moving back to the desk. I looked at the banana and saw it had writing on it in black marker.

*I*

Glancing back toward the gorilla I saw he had picked up a second banana and was sliding back in my direction. The kids were obviously enjoying themselves, dancing around the room with the gorilla. He handed me the next piece of fruit and waved at me. Grabbing up one of the kids, he did a few quick steps, before putting her down and snatching up the next piece of fruit. I quickly looked at the one in my hand.

*Want*

The song on the tape changed, the music smoothing out into a light jazz.

The gorilla twirled toward me, doing a poor imitation of a salsa dance. He handed me another banana, teased a few of the kids—which set them to shrieking with laughter—and cha-cha’ed back to the desk. I stole a glance at the banana.

*You*

This was getting weird, and very distracting. The next few trips brought back several more bananas. Each had a word written across it.

*To*

*Know*

*I*

The gorilla seemed to hesitate. He paused next to the desk, eyes down. Finally his back straightened and he picked up the remainder of the bananas. The music changed again. This time to soft strings and piano. Definitely not something to dance to. He tentatively reached out with the next banana before handing each to me in turn.

*Love*

*You*

*A*

*Bunch*

I glared at the gorilla. Why would Kurt do this? How could he embarrass me like this? I turned away from the class, trying not to show my tears. All these years I’d loved him and now he was going to mock me? The gorilla tapped me on the shoulder, insisting that I look at him. I figured he expected a tip or something. When I was finally able to turn and face him, I found him standing there, arms open. I had no idea what he wanted. He took my hands and placed one on his hip, and the other he held out. He pulled me along in a strange waltz. I resisted at first, but then lost myself in the moment. When the song ended, the gorilla leaned in and whispered in my ear.

“I’ve wanted to dance with you for so long, Alex. Thank you for making my dream come true.”

He then picked up the boom box, waved at the kids and went out the door, while I stood in stunned silence.

\*\*\*\*

The kids were in high spirits the rest of the day. A dancing gorilla isn't something one sees every day, apparently. It was very difficult to keep them focused on lessons, which was fine because I had a hard time focusing as well. I had no idea what to make of Kurt's declaration. I had an even harder time understanding what the whole thing meant. Did Kurt know my feelings for him? Was he trying to let me know that he knew I was gay? My stomach did a slow roll thinking about it.

By the end of the day, my nerves were on edge. I wasn't sure what to do next. I had so many thoughts running through my head. So much, in fact, that in the time it took me to get to my car, I didn't even notice Kurt standing there, waiting for me.

"What the hell was that little display?" I demanded.

"I'm pretty sure I made it clear if you were reading my bananas." He chuckled. "Okay, I know how that sounds, but I stand by what I said."

I lowered my voice, hoping to keep the tremor out of it. "So, what? Now you know I'm gay and you're going to do what about it?"

He smirked and scrubbed a hand over his face. "Yeah, still the same old Alex. Always about you. I've always known you were gay. Why do you think I worked so hard to protect you?"

I gave him a blank look.

"You don't get it, do you?" he asked sadly. "Come have dinner with me. I think it's time we clear the air about a lot of things."

He held out his hand to me, just like old times. I felt safe when he gripped my hand tight. "Where are we going?" I muttered.

"You'll see. Maybe when you get there, things will finally start to sink into your head."

We got into his truck, a sleek, black Ford pick-up. After we'd buckled in, he reached over and took my hand, seemingly unwilling to let go. While he drove, he kept the conversation light, asking questions about the kids, my job, the weather. I finally noticed we were heading the same way Jake had gone when we went to eat previously.

"So you finally got your dream, huh? Opened your own place. Guess it must be pretty popular."

He shrugged. "I do okay. You'd have known that if you stayed for dinner the last time." A smirk danced across his lips.

We pulled into the parking lot. He let go of my hand, got out and moved over to the passenger's side, opening the door and taking my fingers in his. I gazed at him as we walked through the lot. He hadn't really changed much. His dark hair and broad chest contrasted against my slender build and blond hair. His eyes, though... They shone bright with such intensity that I could get lost in them.

"I missed you," he said quietly. "I never stopped thinking about you."

I pulled my fingers from his. "How can you say that? We haven't seen each other for years. I'm supposed to believe you thought about me?"

He spun to face me. "I thought about you every goddamn day, Alex. Look!" He turned and pointed to the restaurant.

It took me several moments to understand what he was pointing at. When I finally realized it, my heart split in two. I hadn't noticed the sign outside the building my first time there. Now I wanted to break down and weep. When Jake had told me to open my eyes and look, I hadn't understood what he meant. Until this very moment. The sign outside the restaurant, *Kurt's* restaurant, held the truth in his words. I stared in awe as I noticed the name of the place for the first time: *AJ's*.

"You...you named your restaurant AJ's?" I cast a look in his direction. He face was flushed and he was trembling. He nodded slowly. "Why?"

“Because I needed you and you weren’t there,” he replied, his voice soft. “I’ve always needed you. When you stopped...when we lost touch, I thought you didn’t need me. I thought you’d moved on and left me behind.”

It only took a moment to understand what he was saying to me. In that split second, everything I thought I knew went out the window.

“I always thought if you knew how I felt it would mean the end of our friendship. I’ve loved you for the longest time. I always thought you might care for me in return, but I didn’t want to risk what we had in order to find out. After we lost touch, I pulled myself along, trying to hold onto something, so I bought this building and made AJ’s.”

My heart melted. So much time had passed and now I knew he felt the same way I did. I blamed him for leaving me behind because I thought he no longer needed *me*. He was popular. He was social. I was awkward and didn’t fit in anywhere. I just thought he’d finally realized it and had outgrown me. It took me a long time to come to terms with that. To build up enough of a shell so that people wouldn’t hurt me again. So I’d be able to go out with the few friends I had. To find out he was hurting every bit as much as me made me realize how unfair I’d been. To both of us. I admitted to myself I hadn’t looked for Kurt because I was afraid to be hurt again.

“I don’t understand something—” I began.

“Only one thing?” Kurt chuckled, wiping away a tear from his eye.

“I’m going to ignore that. I have things I need to know,” I replied, trying not to smile at the ease with which the banter started flowing again.

“Can we go in and eat? I hear they have great food, and the owner is an awesome guy once you get to know him again.”

I wasn’t sure whether to laugh or cry. I had been so stupid. Ego, pride, fear or whatever the hell it was, had cost us both. Kurt put his hand on the small of my back and led me toward the door. When we stepped inside, the host immediately came to us.

“Good evening, Mr. Danvers. Your table is ready, sir,” he said. His tone was very professional, but I could feel him looking at me. I stepped closer to

Kurt and he wrapped his arm around me protectively. It was such a natural thing and I found myself relaxing against him.

“Thank you, Paul. Is everything set?”

Paul beamed. “Yes, sir. Everything is set to your exact specifications.”

I whispered to Kurt, “What’s he talking about? What’s going on?”

He looked down at me, a grin creasing his lips. “You’ll see. Come with me.”

Kurt moved effortlessly through the busy restaurant, pulling me along with him. My stomach fluttered, excitement coursing through me. He directed me to a room in the back and opened the door. Lamps were set up in the corners of the room, providing subdued lighting. Soft classical music was playing from speakers placed throughout. In the middle was a small table, covered with a red cloth. Candlelight warmed the surface. Kurt walked me to the table, pulled out a small wooden chair, and waited until I sat.

“What is all this?” I asked, trying to keep my voice from squeaking.

“Our first date, like I always wanted it to be. This is the one I’ve been dreaming about since we were in junior high. Well, except now I can afford to have it.” He chuckled and took his seat. A tuxedoed waiter stepped into the room and waited at the door until Kurt summoned him over.

“Alex, this is Victor. He’s going to be our waiter for this evening. If you need anything, please ask him.”

Victor gave me a nod. “A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Jeffers. I hope you’ll enjoy the evening we’ve got planned for you.” With that he turned and left the room, pulling the doors closed behind him.

“Kurt, I—”

He waved his hand. “Can we not talk about anything right now, please? I just want to sit here and enjoy your company. I promise afterward we can discuss anything you want. Would that be okay?”

I opened my mouth to protest, but closed it. He’d done this for me. I wasn’t going to ruin it. The candlelight danced in his eyes, which seemed misty.

“Are you okay?” I whispered.

He nodded. “I am now.” He reached out and our fingers twined together. He just sat smiling at me.

Victor returned a few minutes later with a bottle of wine and two long-stemmed goblets. He placed a glass in front of each of us and presented the bottle to Kurt, who turned the bottle over a few times, before nodding to Victor. Victor cut through the seal and uncorked the wine and handed it to Kurt. Kurt gave it a gentle sniff and nodded to Victor. He poured a small bit in Kurt’s glass. Kurt swirled it gently, took a whiff and sipped it.

“This is perfect, Victor. Thank you.”

Victor poured us each a glass before placing the bottle on the table. He gave Kurt a small bow and strode from the room. I peeked at the label on the bottle as I took a sip and almost choked.

“Where did you get a bottle of Chateau Le Pin Pomerol?” I enjoyed my wines, but this was an elite bottle. I’d seen them for sale online for nearly a grand each.

Kurt smirked. “I know people who know people,” he informed me.

I’d known Kurt for years, but for some reason I found myself tongue-tied around him right now. I never thought we’d be having a date. I wouldn’t have believed he would even have feelings for me. I glanced up, and for just a moment I hated Kurt. He had the most infuriating smile on his face, his eyes crinkled in the corners creating the scene of someone perfectly at ease. How I envied him.

“You look good, Alex.” He took another sip of his wine and filled our glasses again. After putting the bottle down, he reached out and took my hand. “Have you been...seeing anyone?” he asked cautiously.

I shook my head. How could I explain to him why I didn’t date? “I’ve gone out with a few people, but never more than as friends.”

His smile broadened and his fingers tightened briefly around mine. Victor opened the door and rolled in a tiered serving cart. He stopped near the table,



placed some warm rolls and butter in the corner and silently began to assemble a Caesar salad, brushing the bottom of a wooden bowl with a freshly cracked egg. I looked to Kurt. “Um...you know I’m a vegan, right?” I asked.

His expression grew grim. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize—”

“I’m kidding,” I snickered. “This looks delicious, Victor. Thank you.” I gave a quick glance to our server who looked like he was having a hard time suppressing a smile.

Kurt glared at me. “Yeah, okay, you got me on that one. I’ll get even, don’t worry,” he chuckled.

After Victor left, we began eating. The salad was delightful. I’d never had better. The flavors burst on my tongue.

“This is so good,” I said, covering my mouth so I wouldn’t spit my food.

“I’m glad you like it. Our Caesars are one of our most popular dishes. People enjoy the extra attention and the tableside show.”

“I can see why. Where’d you come up with the idea for this place?”

He began to speak about his vision for the restaurant. How he wanted a place where the food was outstanding and the people who worked there were highly skilled, but still warm and friendly.

“I wanted a place where everyone was welcome. Families, friends,” he paused for a moment, “lovers.”

I could feel those familiar butterflies again as he regarded me with such tenderness. I wanted him to push the table aside, have him pull me against him and hold me in his arms. Fortunately, I was saved by Victor’s return. He quietly removed the dishes and announced the main course. He clapped his hands and three other servers entered the room carrying a variety of dishes. Victor pulled plates from a stack and began to arrange them about the table.

“I wasn’t sure what you’d want, so I asked Chef Mateo to make us a bit of his specialties.”

There was so much food. I’d never seen a spread like this before. Roasted chicken served with dumplings, spaetzle with cubes of spicy sausage, pasta

and cheese with a crumb top, and a host of others that I couldn't identify. Each was flavorful, enticing, and melt-in-your-mouth delicious.

"I might have to eat here again," I said solemnly.

"Count on it," Kurt said. "I'm hoping you'll be having meals here a lot from now on."

We ate in relative silence. My moans over the taste of the food were pretty much the only sounds—other than Kurt's chuckles every time I found I was unable to stop from making a fool of myself. By the time we'd finished, I was stuffed. I couldn't eat another bite. Victor removed the dishes and asked Kurt, "Are you ready for the dessert, sir?" Kurt nodded and Victor left, only to return a few minutes later.

"I can't. I'm going to burst," I complained.

"Michelle, our pastry chef, will be hurt and disappointed if you don't try her turtle profiteroles." Kurt smiled and gestured to Victor.

Victor placed the plate down in front of me. Cream puff shells had been stuffed with French vanilla ice cream, covered in caramel and chocolate sauces, sprinkled with nuts and a decadent amount of thick whipped cream. I told myself I could suffer through a bite. The next thing I knew, I was scraping the plate clean, trying to get every last bit.

"Alex, do you remember how I said I was going to get back at you for your teasing earlier?"

I looked up from my plate, and was greeted with a spoonful of whipped cream splatted against my face.

"And it's not vegan whipped cream either," he said with a big laugh.

I reached over to his plate and grabbed a handful of whipped cream and chocolate and flicked it at him, catching him square on the chest. By the time we were finished, we were covered in goo, but both laughing so hard it was difficult to breathe. Kurt stood and walked over to me. He looked down at me and I trembled when he put his sticky fingers on the side of my face. He didn't speak, just lowered his head and caught my lips. He squeezed me tighter and

our kiss went deeper. I opened my mouth, trembling as his tongue licked inside my lips. I could taste the flavors of chocolate, caramel and Kurt dancing on my tongue. When he broke away, I whispered to him, “I want you.”

He looked at me with passion in his eyes, but shook his head. “No. We need to get to know each other again. I don’t want to rush this in any way. I want us to both be comfortable with each other again before we move ahead. Is that okay?”

In that moment I knew he was protecting me again. I got up and walked over to the middle of the room before I stopped, turned and stood looking at him. “You lied to me, you know.”

He cocked his head. “How so?”

“When you asked me to dance with you at prom you told me that you wanted to dance with me, but the next time I had to ask. You did it at the school.”

He shook his head. “No, you danced with a gorilla. And I hope someone took pictures, by the way.”

I held out my hand. “Either way, you didn’t wait for me to ask. So I’m asking now. Will you dance with me?”

He moved quickly to my side. I wrapped my arms around him and put my head onto his chest.

“We’re a mess. Are you sure you don’t want to wait to get cleaned up?”

I shook my head. “No, this night has been wonderful, and I’m happy right where I am.”

Kurt wrapped me in his arms and rested his head atop mine. “I’m happy, too.”

We didn’t need to speak anymore. Our dance said it all.

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By the time we were ready to call it a night, all the other staff had left. Kurt told me not to worry, he had already covered it with the cleaners, and by

tomorrow the room would be spotless. Since we had a few drinks after dinner, I was in no shape to drive. Kurt called a cab to take me home, telling me he'd swing by in the morning to take me to work. As the driver pulled up, Kurt pulled me in close and gave me a quick peck.

"I had the most amazing night. Thank you. It couldn't have gone any better."

The look on his face made my toes tingle. In my entire life I'd never had anyone look at me the way Kurt did. Adoration, want, love. All these emotions held my gaze tight. He fixed the collar on my shirt, leaned forward and murmured in my ear, "I can't wait to see you again." He gave my ear a lick, which drew a sharp moan from me, and sent me home.

Kurt made it a point to talk with me every day after that. Usually he'd call me in the evening, after I got home from work. Even if it was busy at the restaurant, he'd find a few minutes to check in and ask me about my day. We rediscovered our friendship, and more, but hadn't taken the final step. I wasn't sure why he wanted to wait, but I respected that he did.

Kurt really knew how to make me feel special. Wanted. I'd leave for work in the morning and find a small note, "Just thinking about you. I hope you have a great day" taped to my window, or someone from the restaurant would bring me a meal for lunch with a card attached, "I figure if you're anything like I remember, you probably forgot your food again today". One night I got a call, "Hey, we're really busy tonight, but could you turn on the radio? WQWM. Gotta go. Have a good night." When I found the station I heard, "To Alex, I'm glad you're back in my life. I missed you. Yours, Kurt", and the sounds of Herb Alpert crooning "This Guy's in Love with You" enveloped me, making me smile, but also causing tears of joy to roll down my cheek. When the song finally finished, the DJ came back on, "That was Herb Alpert for Alex from Kurt. Sleep well, my friend." I pulled the pillow to my chest and fell asleep to the most beautiful dreams of the most amazing man.

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We'd been seeing each other for about a month when Kurt showed up one Saturday morning, well before any normal person would be awake. He seemed pensive, almost to the point of being nervous.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

I stepped back, allowing him to come into my apartment.

"Sorry if I woke you up," he started. "I was hoping you'd come with me today. I want to take you a few places and we're going to be gone most of the day. I had Chef Mateo put together a picnic lunch for us, so we won't starve to death."

"Thanks. That's really nice."

"Well, I figured even if you didn't want to be with me, you might still tag along for the food." He snickered.

I put my arms around his waist and gave a light squeeze. "I'm happy to go anywhere with you."

Kurt ran his hands over my back, staying just above the belt line. He kissed my neck, causing me goose bumps. "Come on, let's get moving. We have a lot of ground to cover today."

He walked me out to the truck, opened the door, and allowed me to get seated before he closed it. Then ran around to his side and got in. Putting the truck into gear, we backed out into traffic and headed toward the freeway.

"Where are we going?" I wondered aloud.

"Do you trust me?"

"Of course, but—"

"I'm going to ask you to just come along with me without questions. Those answers you were looking for? Today I'm going to do my best to give them to you. I'm really nervous about this, so I'd appreciate it if you promise you're not going to freak out on me."

I stared at him for a moment. Now *I* was nervous. I did trust him, though, so I agreed. He smiled and I relaxed a bit. We drove for about twenty minutes

before we pulled up outside a small split level house. It was a cute cottage-type home, faux-wood stained siding, a pretty flower bed bursting with a variety of annuals, and a mailbox that looked like a miniature version of the house itself.

“Who lives here?” I asked Kurt.

“Jess Delaney,” was the only answer I received. I couldn’t imagine why we were at the house of Kurt’s prom date. I had weird images of Kurt together with Jessica and felt sick to my stomach. I suddenly had the urge to run away, but Kurt reached out and took my hand, giving it a quick squeeze. We got out of the truck and stepped up to the front door. Kurt used the brass knocker to announce our arrival. A moment later, Jessica answered.

“Hi, Kurt. Hey, Alex. Good to see you. Come on in. Jan’s in the kitchen with a fresh pot of coffee, if you’re interested.”

We walked through the front door. The house was charming. A hutch stood in the corner of the room that had an assortment of wildlife knickknacks, cute little critters with big eyes. Jess gestured toward the sofa before disappearing into the next room. Kurt sat down on one end, I sat on the other end, which drew a frown from Kurt. A few moments later, the sisters came back in carrying four cups of coffee. I looked them over. They still looked similar, but Jess had cut her hair very short, with longer bangs. It definitely highlighted her face. Jan’s hair was still long, the dark tresses just past her shoulders. They each took a seat in one of the armchairs.

“It’s good to see you, Alex,” Jan said, giving me a polite smile.

“Nice to see you, too. It’s been a while.”

Kurt scratched his cheek. “Alex, I called Jess and Jan because I wanted to come clean with you about everything. I decided I would start here.” He gave a nod to Jess. “Can you explain to Alex why we’re here?”

Jess took a deep breath. “We know Kurt talked you into asking us to go to prom with you guys. The thing is, he talked to us first. It was really you he wanted to go to prom with, but he figured you would be uncomfortable going as his date. He asked us if we’d be willing, and we said yes.”

I sat in stunned silence for a minute or two. My mind was trying hard to grasp what Jess had just told me. I turned to Kurt and he refused to meet my gaze.

“Why, Kurt?” It was the only thing I could think of to ask.

He looked at his shaking hands. “I didn’t want you going with anyone else. I was always afraid of losing you to another person.”

I stood up and saw Kurt flinch. “I need to know. Why did you agree to go with us to the prom if you knew he wanted to go with me?”

The twins looked to each other. Jan nodded and Jess turned back to me. “We thought it was romantic. That night, we saw the way he looked at you and that’s how we wanted someone to see us. We thought he’d give you the world if he could.”

“I still will,” Kurt murmured.

We visited for a little longer. Jan told us she had been married for two years and Jess said she was engaged herself. Before we left, Kurt gave them his business card and asked them to stop in for dinner one night. As we were getting in the truck, I asked Kurt why he’d kept in contact with our former prom dates.

“Why Alex Jeffers, are you jealous?” he asked sweetly, fluttering his eyes at me.

“No, of course not,” I huffed.

He reached out and rubbed my cheeks. “You are! That’s just so adorable.”

I grumbled loudly as Kurt started the truck.

“I didn’t keep in touch with them. You wanted answers and I needed you to have them, so I looked them up and called to ask them to talk with you.”

I felt warmth throughout my body. Kurt wasn’t just going to explain, he was going to show me the answers.

Our next stop was the old pond where we went with Patches that summer day. Kurt unloaded the picnic basket, took my hand and led me to the trees

where we used to lay. The pond wasn't there anymore. In its place was a playground. Kids climbed over the equipment, laughing and having a good time. I felt a pang in my chest, knowing that we'd talked about children here. Kurt laid out a checkered blanket, sat down and tugged me down next to him. He unpacked the lunch of potato salad, roasted vegetable hoagies, and lemonade. It was delicious. I lay back, looking up at the sky.

"That day we came here with Patches I asked you a question. Do you remember what it was?" he whispered.

"You asked me if I ever thought about having kids. I told you no, but that wasn't the truth. I just didn't think it was going to happen because of me being gay. It's part of the reason I wanted to teach. Now it's like I have kids, but every day they go home to someone else. The last time I talked with Jake, he said he was going to take Logan to the zoo. I felt a twinge because it was something I'd never have."

"That's the thing. I want that, too. With you. I've always wanted a family, but I wanted you to be a part of it. I've always had plans for my life, Alex. Every one of those plans had you as part of it. When we drifted apart, so did my plans. I had never considered any plans that didn't have you in them, so I was lost." He rolled over on his side to face me. "I need you in my life. Not just now, but always."

I listened as he was talking, but instead of calm I found myself getting irritated with him. "And you were going to inform me of these plans when? You never once said a word about any of this to me."

"I *tried*. Why do you think I took you to those places? Asked you those questions? I would ask you things that I hoped would lead you into a conversation, but you kept pushing it away and I wasn't sure how to bring it up to you."

I sat up and threw my hands in the air. "Oh, I don't know. How about 'Hey, Alex, I'm gay and I want to have a family with you.' I think that would have been pretty self-explanatory."



Kurt pushed to his feet. “And what if you didn’t feel the same? What if you laughed in my face? What if…” He got quiet for a minute. “What if it split us up? I had plans that would have worked with us being friends. It wouldn’t have been easy on me, but as long as I was with you, I was happy. Like I said, I didn’t have any plans that didn’t involve you. I was selfish, though. I wanted it all.”

I kicked at the grass. I knew I should have been happy to know Kurt had the same feelings and doubts as me, but I was angry over the lost time because we didn’t communicate with each other.

“I always thought we told each other everything,” I said sadly. “Is there anything else you’re not telling me that I need to know?”

“Yes,” he said, his voice barely audible. He sighed and held out his hand. “Let’s go. We’ve got one more stop to make.”

He pulled me up onto my feet, and packed the dirty dishes and blanket back into the basket, then walked silently back to the truck. I wanted to say something, but I was still fuming over the fact that he’d kept secrets from me. The thing was, I didn’t know if I was angry at him or myself, since I had committed the same sin.

Neither of us spoke as we drove. I could feel the tension rolling off Kurt, and it made me nervous. We pulled into the parking lot of the high school. He put his arm in mine and walked to the doors.

“When I told you to think about Steve Jensen, what came to mind?” he inquired.

“The time he hit me in the gym. The one where you pulled him off me.”

“You always wanted to know what happened, but I wouldn’t say. This is my final secret. I’m going to let you know what I did, why I did it, and how it impacted our lives. After that, if you prefer we go our separate ways…” He took a deep breath and hissed it out. “I’ll abide by your wishes.”

The look on his face broke my heart. For years I wondered what happened, but now I wasn’t sure I wanted to know. If the memory caused him this much

pain, was it really worth it? I reached out to touch him, but he shrugged off my hand.

“I need to say this, okay? Just let me get through it,” he begged.

I took a step back. Right now I wanted to be anywhere other than here. I never wanted to be the cause of the look on his face.

“The coach was heading to his office that day. When I passed him I asked if he knew where you were. He told me you were just finishing up. I figured I’d go wait for you, and, maybe, check you out in the shower.”

I watched the blush creep up his face. I grinned when I thought about him watching me as my geeky teenage self and still liking me.

“I stepped into the locker room and I heard voices. At first I wasn’t sure what it was. When I got closer I heard Steve say something about you wanting to be on your knees in front of him. I got angry at you. For just a moment I pictured you and Steve—” He stopped. His chest was heaving and I needed so badly to comfort him.

“Kurt?” I took a step toward him and he spun away.

“Don’t you get it?” he shouted. “I thought you were doing something with him! I almost ran out of the locker room. I almost left you there with him. He would have hurt you and it would have been all my fault. When I heard you scream? That’s when I went running for the bathroom. I pushed open the door and found him ready to hit you. I lost it. In that moment I hated myself so much, but I hated him more. I wanted to hurt him so badly. I grabbed him, pulled him off you and asked what he was doing. He gave me that cocky grin like I should have known what he was doing and I told him you were mine and that if he ever touched you again I’d kill him. I meant it, too. At that moment, I wanted you more than anything in my life.”

I couldn’t move as tears streamed down Kurt’s face. I had no idea what to say.

“After you left the bathroom, I pushed him up against the wall and told him in graphic detail what I’d do if I ever saw him so much as look at you funny. He said that you were just a faggot and demanded to know why I cared. I

punched him in the face. His head bounced off the wall with a heavy crack and he fell down to the floor. I grabbed him by the hair and yanked his head back. I told him it was because I loved you. You were mine to have. Mine to protect. Mine to love. Only mine. I staked my claim that day. When I came to find you and saw you crying by your locker, I lost it. I realized what would have happened if I hadn't shown up. What he could have done to you if I had left. It was my fault. All of it. I almost walked away and left you there with him because for a second, I hated you. And I'm so very sorry."

Kurt looked up at me. His eyes wet and bloodshot. He sank to his knees in front of me, choking back the tears. I knelt next to him and wrapped him in my arms. I finally understood what happened that day. Why he was so distant with me. He sat back, sniffled and wiped his face with his hands.

"So now you know. I almost failed you. I swore I'd never do it again, that I would keep you safe. Then we fell out of touch and I failed you a second time. The day I saw you in the restaurant, I knew I finally had a chance to fix things. To make them right between us. It's why I held back with you. I wanted you so bad, but I needed you to know I wouldn't fail you again. I had to be sure you still wanted me." He peered into my eyes, a look of sheer desperation on his face. "Do you, Alex?"

Memories flashed through my mind. I recalled with startling clarity my lifetime of moments with Kurt. Every time he was there for me. Each hug that warmed me. All the smiles that held my heart together when I was sure it was going to fly apart. I looked back into his eyes and I knew love. "I've never wanted anything more," I swore to him. There on the school grounds I kissed him, laying my own claim to his heart.

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Kurt drove me back to his house. Like the man, it was sturdy and masculine. A sprawling A-frame style home with an outdoor fireplace on a large open air porch, picture windows that showed every beautiful detail of the home. Lit at night, the place was beautiful. I could see Kurt living here, at ease in his surroundings. He took me into the living room. A sunken floor with rugged log furniture dominated the area. A high-definition television adorned

one of the walls, surrounded by floor to ceiling walnut bookcases. Kurt enjoyed darker colors, the furniture coverings were done in a deep brown. The paint was a silky gray.

He pressed me down onto the couch, hovering over me, kissing my face, my neck. I reached up and started unbuttoning his shirt. When my hands finally touched his bare skin he hissed.

“Clothes off. Now.” He stood and began stripping. I sat a few moments, taking in the sights of the body I had dreamed of since I first saw it. I wanted nothing more than to touch, caress, and taste every inch of the man. As he unbuckled his belt he cocked his head. “Are you waiting for an engraved invitation? Or do you want me to just tear them off of you?”

I shuddered at the thought of him taking me that way, but stood and slowly started to remove my clothes. As the last piece hit the floor, he grabbed my hand and dragged me along with him to the bathroom. A huge glass-enclosed shower stall with six shower heads was the centerpiece of the room. He turned the water on, waiting for it to warm, then turned and buried his face in my neck. He nipped at my throat, drawing moans from me. His fingers traced the muscles in my back, working their way down and grabbing at my ass.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispered in my ear. “You taste amazing. Every inch of you is mine.”

I trembled at his words. “Yes, yours,” was all I could manage to gasp before he took my mouth in a scorching kiss.

The shower door opened, the warm, damp air swirling around us. He drew me into the shower with him, grabbed a loofah and some citrusy bath gel, and started drawing it over my skin. He took great care in washing me. He was tender and gentle, but insistent. Nudging my legs apart so he could wash between them, sliding the loofah over my butt cheeks and crack. It was incredibly erotic. My cock bobbed in front of me like a pointer. Kurt knelt down to wash my legs and placed a reverent kiss on the head of my dick. “I’ll get back to you later,” he promised, peppering kisses along my legs.

I closed my eyes and put my hands on his shoulders to steady myself. He kept his fingers moving, touching everywhere within reach. Lightly stroking, teasing spots that elicited moans from me. Then, for an instant, he stilled. I looked down at him and he smiled for a moment before he took me into his mouth. I cried out from the feeling of the heat on me. His heat. He worked the shaft of my cock for several minutes before I attempted to pull away. He clamped his hands on my legs and held me in place. I grunted, trying to draw away, wanting to make it last. When his finger tapped lightly against my hole I lost control and started shooting. He kept sucking while my essence sprayed into his mouth. When I could stand no longer, I collapsed on one of the benches in the shower. He grinned up at me and licked at his lips.

“I was right. You *do* taste amazing.”

I patted the bench and he sat down next to me. I reached over and gripped his hardness. He pushed into my hand and his eyes rolled back into his head. “Please,” he whimpered. I got on my knees in front of him, placing my hands on his hips. I leaned forward and let his silky skin slip into my mouth. Kurt’s fingers clamped on my shoulders and he let loose a deep moan. I sucked him as best as I could, his hands encouraging me to take him deeper. I felt his body begin to shake and I backed off. He glared at me until I stood and tugged his hand. “Bedroom?” I asked. He smiled and quickly shut off the shower. We dried each other off and he directed me into the master suite. He lifted me onto the high mattress and pushed me back against the cool pillows.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked. “I don’t want to do anything to hurt you.”

“You won’t. I know it.”

He reached into the nightstand and drew out a small tube and a condom. I lowered my eyes. “I haven’t...”

He put his finger under my chin and drew it up. “I know. I haven’t either. I wanted to. I tried. Each time, though, they were all missing one thing. They weren’t you. In all my life, you’re the only person I’ve ever wanted. I didn’t think it was fair to give something to someone else that I had promised myself you would have first.”

I looked him in the eye. “In my heart, my wish was that one day we’d be together again. You had always been everything to me. I wanted you to be the only person who I would be with.”

His smile became shy. “I’ll wear the condom if you want. I don’t want you to be unsure—”

I shook my head. “Today you told me everything because you didn’t want anything between us. I want that now. Just you, nothing else.”

He tossed the condom onto the bedspread and kissed my stomach. “Thank you for this gift,” he said quietly. “I swear I’ll always make sure I deserve it.”

He stretched out beside me, letting his fingertips ghost over my skin. I arched, trying to get more of his touch. He drove me near crazy with the feather touch. He tantalized and teased me for what seemed to be an eternity, grinning all the while.

“Bastard,” I hissed, clutching his hand. I pushed it down between my legs. “If you’re going to do it, get it right,” I grumbled.

He gave me an evil grin and leaned down, popping one of my balls into his mouth. I clutched at his head, gasping for breath. He reached down with a finger and began to run it on the skin under my sac. I moaned heavily. My head was overloading with sensations. I felt a buzz throughout my body. When I felt the tongue moving lower I moaned and spread my legs. He lifted them up and tickled my crack before plunging into my hole. I tugged on his hair, eliciting a grunt from him. He didn’t stop, though. Not until I was begging him for more.

He lowered my legs and I watched as he twisted the cap on the lube, running a generous amount over his fingers. He stroked his shaft until it was glistening. My eyes grew wide as he ran a finger over my pucker. He stared slack-jawed as his finger started sliding in. “That is so hot,” he murmured. He bent down and gave my shaft a lick as he pressed his finger inside of me. My groan must have startled him because he pulled the finger away and his expression changed. “I’m sorry. Are you okay?”

“I won’t be if you don’t put that finger back!” I groused. “It felt...different, but it was a good feeling.”

Kurt moved his hand back and slid the finger back into me, slowly pushing deeper. I opened my eyes and caught him watching me. I gave him a smile to show him everything was good. In return he started moving his finger, sliding in slowly, then pulling back gently. Kurt chuckled when my hips started lifting, wanting him deeper.

“More,” I heard a husky voice cry out. I winced inwardly when I realized it was me.

When I felt the second finger probing I didn’t tense, I just let him take the lead. When he started wiggling his fingers, my breath started coming in gasps. I’d never felt like this before. I needed Kurt inside me. I had to have that connection with him. “Kurt, please...” I begged.

“Relax, Alex,” he soothed. “It’s going to be soon.”

Kurt slowly added a third finger. Never in my life had I felt so full, but still it wasn’t enough. I knew he was bigger than three fingers, and I needed that. I needed him. Just when I thought I’d go out of my mind, he removed his hand. I whimpered from the loss, but when I felt him kneel on the bed I realized why. I opened my eyes and saw him adding more lube to his hard length.

“Do you want to maybe roll over?” he asked timidly. “It might be easier.”

I shook my head. “I’d like to see your eyes. Is that okay?”

He nodded and gave me a gentle smile. “I’d like to see yours, too.”

I pulled my knees back and he moved in between them. I felt the blunt head pushing against my hole and I tightened a bit, still feeling nervous. He looked at me so patiently.

“We don’t have to do this,” he said in a hushed voice.

“I want to, really. Just...go slow, please.”

He dipped his head and positioned himself again. When he first pushed in, the pain shot through my system. I could feel tears pricking at my eyes. Kurt

rubbed a hand over my stomach. “We don’t have to do this,” he said again. “We can lie together. I just want to be near you.”

“No. Just give me a minute.”

To his credit, Kurt didn’t move at all. When the pain dulled, I shifted a bit and I saw him bite his lower lip as he groaned my name. I rubbed my hands down his arms as he started pushing again. The bite was still there, but it had dulled into a pleasant fullness.

“Oh my God,” Kurt sighed, as he finally sank all the way in. “I never dreamed...it’s so hot. You’re so incredibly tight around me. Are you okay? Because if I don’t move soon I think I’ll die.”

I bit back a laugh at the expression on his face. “Go ahead.” As he started rocking in and out, I pulled my legs back more, giving him better access. It was awkward at first. Kurt would slip out and we’d have to reposition ourselves, but eventually he found his rhythm and started pushing deeper and faster. I threw my head back at the new sensations. He reached up and started rubbing the head of my cock, twirling his lubed fingers, making me gasp.

“I’ve dreamed of this, you know?” he panted. “Being with you. In you. I never thought it would be like this.”

I smiled at him and drew my legs around him, encouraging him. He was making this so amazing for me and I wanted to do what I could to make it every bit as good for him. Kurt put his arms on the sides of my head, and began pumping in earnest. It was hard and deep, and I loved every thrust. I threw my head back and murmured encouragement to him, begging him for more.

All too soon he started breathing heavily. Grunting as he drove into me. “Touch yourself, Alex. I want us to do this together, please.” I wrapped my hand around my aching cock, knowing it wouldn’t take long. Kurt started chanting my name as the thrusts came faster. He cried out in a long moan as he started shooting inside of me and that brought me to a climax as well, spraying out on my stomach and chest. I pulled him down on top of me, not wanting to break the connection. He kissed the sides of my face and neck before he



slowly pulled out. He collapsed on his side and drew me to him, his lips blowing softly on my neck. I curled my arm around his head and pulled his face closer to mine.

“I love you, Alex. For me, you’ve always been the one. I want that plan. The one where you and I raise a family together. I need you to be here with me. I’d like you to make this your home, too. With me. I’d like us to have a surrogate give us your child. I know you need some time to think, but I wanted you to know how I felt. I’m not going anywhere. And I won’t ever give you up again. Will you think about it? Will you be mine?”

In my head I saw every problem, every potential for heartbreak, each day that I spent knowing I’d lost him and would never have him back. To find myself at this point, right now, the answer was obvious, even to me. “God, yes. But just so you know, I have plans of my own.”

“Of course. Anything you want. I’ll be there by your side every step of the way.”

“What we just did? I expect a lot more of that. At least a couple times a day. We’ve got a lot to make up for.”

He pulled back a moment, holding me in his arms, and gazed into my eyes. “Oh yes, I promise you, I fully intend to make up for every moment of lost time.” He gave me a waggle of his eyebrows.

With that he pulled me back to his chest and we held on, a sticky mess, until we drifted off to sleep in each other’s arms, knowing it was the dawning of a new day for us. One where best friends had finally admitted they were so much more. Where two halves finally found what was needed to make them whole.

**THE END**

## **Author Bio**

*Parker Williams is the pen name for adult m/m stories of Will Parkinson. Parker's first story, 500 Miles, was recently picked up by MLR Press to be included in their Mixed Tape anthology.*

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