

A black and white photograph of various occult and historical items. In the foreground, an open book with text in a Gothic script is visible. A large, dark, oval-shaped stone or gemstone is placed on the book. A chain with a cross-shaped pendant hangs from the book. In the background, there is a wooden box with a white flower-shaped ornament on top, a small cross-shaped object, and a swastika symbol on a piece of fabric. A hammer is also visible on the right side. The overall scene suggests a collection of esoteric or historical artifacts.

MORE

Than He Can See

Nicole Forcine

Table of Contents

Love’s Landscapes.....3
More Than He Can See – Information.....5
More Than He Can See.....6
Author Bio26

Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

MORE THAN HE CAN SEE

By Nicole Forcine

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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MORE THAN HE CAN SEE

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Photo Description

I look at this picture and I see baggy, tired eyes, thick brows, some shyness in the pose. I find this man adorable (because yum redheads), but I can see the plainness too. He sits, most of his body in shadow, looking over his freckled shoulder at the camera. There is no smile on his face, and the rest of his body sits at a profile.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Hi there. I met the man of my dreams the other day. He had these adorable red curls (and I'm just a sucker for redheads, and curly hair, so put those two together and oh boy, droooooooooool) and the most beautiful smile I've ever seen. He's not gorgeous or anything, in fact, most people would say he was plain. But then, so am I. I don't even have the smile or the hair, or anything like that.

Can you find a way for me to meet him, and maybe even get him to smile at me?

Sincerely,

Kathleen

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: redhead, disability, twink, sweet, short top, shop owner, New Age, student

Word Count: 8,087

MORE THAN HE CAN SEE

By Nicole Forcine

Talon arrived at Sacred Grounds, opening the door and enjoying the warm familiar scent of incense and the sound of wind chimes and New Age music. The past two weeks away had been nice, but nothing beat this place. Working here was as easy as breathing.

“Tal, you’re back!” Tam shrieked and ran around the counter, hugging him around the neck, like she was seven instead of world-weary fifteen. “How was Puerto Rico?”

“Hot, humid, but... fun.” Talon squeezed his baby sister around the waist.

“Did you bring me anything?”

And now she was fifteen again. “I’ll bring it to the house tonight.”

Talon went around the counter as Tam checked the inventory and rattled on about all the things he had missed in the store, at their parents’ house, her school, perhaps the entire Earth. It was hard to comprehend spoken at Mach five. One thing that didn’t change was the location of his step stool. With it, he was able to not only reach the modified iPad they now used as a till, he could almost look a customer in the eye.

He checked the cash safe stashed next to the stool. With a few twists, it opened, revealing a fresh cash drawer, which he placed on the counter.

Tam motioned to the back of the shop with a toss of dyed-pink dreadlocks. “Beginners Meditation. It’s almost over. And Momma Yzma’s coming by to pick Calliope up, if you haven’t seen her yet.”

“She was hard to miss.” Talon licked a thumb and started counting. “I told her I could take a taxi from the airport, but you know her.”

Momma Yzma hated wasting money, and she was great with stretching it out as far as humanly possible, much to the delight of their three kids and her more capricious wife, Calliope. With her money sense, Sacred Grounds had grown into a profitable Seaside staple for as long as Tam had been alive.

Tam snorted, but her comment was interrupted by the sound of applause coming from the back meeting room. “Looks like Mom’s done!”

A cluster of people, flushed and happy, walked down the hallway into the main shop. Talon knew most of the faces; those of regulars who came to purchase metaphysical supplies or local handcrafts or the latest book about the paranormal. A few were younger, probably college students doing summer semester like his and Tam's brother Thorn.

One made Talon's throat go dry at the very first glance.

Dark red curls ran riot on his head down to his ears. Young, definitely, pale with approximately ten billion freckles on his arms and shoulders. Talon decided the second he got home, he was going to pray to whoever invented tank tops, because they were doing the kid all kinds of favors.

Calliope was at his side, arm on his shoulder, speaking quietly. He stood about a head taller than she did. Talon started making a mental list of why he shouldn't be staring. For starters, it was rude. Also, the young man was probably around eighteen, and that was ten years too young for Talon to be looking. Not that his dance card had ever been full; few guys went for someone who needed a step stool to see clearly over most counters.

Talon's full grown height was four foot three. When his mothers adopted him at the age of three, they did their best to make their world as accommodating as possible for him and, some years later, both of his average-sized siblings. Hell, living with a pair of dedicated, in love, open-minded, hippy lesbians was like hitting the jackpot. They didn't bat an eye when he came out, or when Tam started dying her hair strange colors and asked for a vibrator, or when Thorn wanted a nose ring and dated a girl who was as pale as he was black. They picked their battles and only wanted the best for their children.

The outside world, on the other hand, was less than kind. Buying clothes, getting his car refurbished, even using the john was a pain in the ass. And forget dating. After spending his college years trying his luck, he would either get the creeps who wanted him to pretend he was a kid or jack squat. He had porn, he had toys of his own, he had the love and support of his family, and he didn't need a man.

And then the curly-haired boy smiled at something Calliope said, and Talon forgot about the whole "not needing a man" thing. He wasn't sporting the model-grade looks of some of the men Talon peered at on his vacation; far from it. There was a touch of acne on his chin. His nose was a little too much for his face, and it was pretty obvious that he didn't get much sleep with the little bags under those dark brown eyes. But that smile was so sweet and earnest and exactly perfect on his face.

“Oh Talon!” Calliope’s voice broke the spell, and he had to move quickly off the stool before she knocked him over in her delight. Her wavy brown hair covered his face like a mask as he was hugged tightly. “Yzma told me you were looking pretty good! I love the tan!”

She pulled away and examined one of Talon’s arms. “Did you get to hit the beach? Were there a lot of handsome men? I hear Latino men are hot as...”

“Calliope, not now.” Talon pulled his arm free and held both hands up to stop. “I’ll tell you the same thing I told Momma Yzma. I’ll show you pictures and everything later, all right?”

His mother gave him an eyeroll that would put anything Tam tried with her eyes to shame. “Fine. Could you ring up Cale? Tam, go grab *At One with Yourself*. And give him the student discount.”

Cale. An Irish name. Figures. Talon got back on the stool and managed to look professional, smiling up at the redhead. “Nice name.”

Cale’s dark eyes darted away from Talon’s, and he simply nodded.

Okaaaay. “Do you know what it means?”

Cale’s thin fingers tapped on the counter, and Talon swore he could see that pale neck was getting a little red. Obviously being asked nosy questions by a little dude was making him uncomfortable. It happened sometimes with new customers. Best to get the sale done quickly. At least he wasn’t getting the “Lollipop Guild”, “oh aren’t you so cute” nonsense.

Normally he could sweep subtle rejection by strangers under the rug and move on, but watching Cale bail out of the store after swiping his card felt like the young man was taking some part of Talon with him.

At least he managed to scope a last name from the card. “Cale Blake”.

His family lived on fifteen acres of mostly woods with one big family house, and the one house where Talon lived. One summer five years ago, everyone got together to build his place ten acres away, because he wanted both the privacy now that he was an adult, and the ability to get to the big house in no time if he was needed. The family was only a quick trip in a four-by-four away, which was great when Talon was tired from closing the shop and not in the mood to make his own supper. Both his mothers were demons in the kitchen.

It was around the dinner table where Talon showed off pictures of his vacation on his phone and gave away souvenirs. Tam was thrilled to get a hand-dyed sundress that managed to match her hair. Thorn took the carved statue with thanks and a weird question.

“Hey, Calliope, did Cale make it to your class today? He’s not answering my texts.”

Talon nearly choked on a roll at the question. Thorn knew him? Well, he supposed it made sense, since Thorn was a sophomore at college. Guess he was older than Talon thought.

“Yep, he was on time and everything. We had a very intense class today, so he’s probably resting. We don’t have to be constantly attached to our electronics, you know.”

Talon snorted. “Says the woman who is still thumbing through my phone for pictures.”

Momma Yzma took the device out of her wife’s hand and set it back in front of Talon. “He has a point. You can look as hard as you want, but if Talon met someone special, you know he’d tell us.”

Tell them? He’d hire a marching band and a sky writer if such a thing ever happened. Besides, he was more than pleased with the eye candy he managed to shoot. Now if he got a picture of Cale, his spank bank would be complete forever.

During dessert, he got a more detailed update on what everyone was up to. Tam was designing a ritual for the next meeting of her youth coven; Thorn was two weeks shy of finishing the tiny house on wheels in the backyard. It would be all ready for him to move in before summer was out, and after graduation, he would be taking it for his own vacation of sorts. Calliope and Momma Yzma managed to get new solar panels delivered, and Talon immediately volunteered to help put them up with the others that nearly covered their roof.

Thorn showed him the progress on his house before Talon went to his own for the night, which gave Talon an opening. “Cale’s a friend of yours?”

Thorn did a double take. “You met him?”

“Yeah.” Why was that so surprising? “I rang up his book. He was... quiet.”

“Oh.”

“Oh?”

“Cale’s quiet. We’re taking the same labs this summer. He’s an okay guy, just quiet.”

“Okay” could mean so much coming out of a twenty-year-old. Talon had seen his “okay” in action. He wasn’t even sure why he brought up the topic. Talon was *not* in the running, not even sure if the kid was gay, and from that afternoon’s near-silent treatment, there was no point in him thinking about it.

It didn’t stop Cale and his earnest little smile from visiting his dreams that night.

Talon quickly got back into the swing of things, the familiar rhythm of mornings of meditation and exercise, afternoons and evenings of taking over the shop from his moms, six days a week. His siblings assisted when they could between Thorn’s classes and Tam’s summer volunteer work. Seeing familiar faces in town and at work made him remember just why leaving Seaside for two weeks had made him both excited and scared. Everything was comfortable here. Everyone knew him and unlike the strangers during his vacation, couldn’t give less of a shit about his height. He missed that most of all.

Beginners Meditation was two classes a week, and Cale was there on Thursday, still quiet, still skittish. Would it be weird if Talon asked Thorn for more information about him?

More importantly, why was he still stuck on this kid?

Monday rolled back around, and Thorn was working by the time he got in to the shop, right in the middle of Calliope’s meditation class. He kept the question of Cale to himself as they bantered about classes and inventory, and that weird crunchy guy with the matted hair who always smelled like weed.

“We’ve been telling that guy for years that we don’t sell water pipes, and he keeps coming back.” Thorn chuckled, handing Talon an opened box of scrying crystals. “He even showed up while you were gone and, like, ordered me to find the ‘imp’ and see if you’d pull them out of your ass or something.”

Talon groaned, set down his step stool next to the display of scrying crystals dangling on branches in the shop window, unfolded it, and climbed on. “Imp? Was he on a Game of Thrones kick?”

“Congrats, he’s mistaken you for Peter Dinklage.”

“If that’s the worst thing he can call me, I’ll take it,” Talon chuckled and started hanging the new crystals on the branches of the display. He ran a hand through his dark blond hair and smirked at his brother. “How high was he?”

Thorn bit his lip, but couldn’t stop the laughter. “Blazed, man. He was so fucking blazed.”

Applause rang from the back room, signifying the end of the class. Thorn rushed to the counter, ready to ring up anything the students wanted to buy—Calliope was an upselling genius. Thank fuck Talon was facing away from the door, and had something to occupy himself with.

He could focus on arranging and adding price tags to the shiny things as Thorn loudly greeted Cale. “Hey, man! Did you like the book?”

It took a second for Cale to respond. “It... was... pret-ty... good.”

Talon nearly turned around. Cale’s voice had a bass to it that he wasn’t expecting, but the words came out slowly, in a dragging cadence.

Thorn kept talking, as if that was completely normal. “Awesome! Look, Calliope’s always saying that eating well is key to mindfulness, and no one cooks like she does.”

“She... t-taught... you, right?”

Talon smiled. Calliope and Momma Yzma made it a point to teach their children how to cook healthy, cheap, and vegetarian meals, because as Momma Yzma put it when Talon was learning the ropes: “None of my children are going to go within five feet of a package of fucking ramen noodles.” Give either brother access to a dorm kitchen, and they could make what looked like miracles to the rest of their floor.

“Yeah! You wanna come over tonight? It’s Momma Yzma’s turn in the kitchen.”

The pause made Talon look up into the window, straining to see Thorn and Cale’s reflection as his heart pounded. The thought of having Cale that close, near his home, in his family home, made his hands tremble just a little as he waited for a response.

Cale’s voice dropped to a slow whisper, “W-w-would... he... mind?”

Ouch. Talon’s entire body stiffened, and the crystal in his hand clanged against one already hung.

Thorn laughed. "Are you kidding? No one misses dinner in our house!"

And just like that, Talon had no way of backing out without having to explain shit to his fucking idiot brother. At least there would be wine.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

The big house was supposed to be a place where Talon could find some peace. He was among his kin. This was his home!

And yet, he sat in the living room and held up rune stones from a bag for Tam while Thorn, Cale, and Momma Yzma were in the kitchen putting the finishing touches on dinner. He wanted to climb out of his skin and leave it there like a weird placeholder while the rest of him ran back to his place.

"*Kenaz*. Translation: beacon or torch. Divination meaning: vision, passion, the power to create your own reality. Reversed: instability, exposure, nakedness," Tam recited, her eyes aimed to the ceiling.

In the kitchen, Talon could hear Cale. "One... or... two... cups?"

It took him a moment to notice his sister smiling at him hopefully. He pulled himself out of his own brain long enough to check the rune himself, and nodded reassuringly. "You got it."

"Yes!" Her fist shot up in the air in celebration.

Back in the kitchen, this time Momma Yzma, "Cale, you're a natural."

"Earth to Tal..." Tam bounced the bottom of the felt bag of runes he held. "Show me another one, will ya?"

Focus, Talon thought to himself before he reached into the bag, felt for the carved side to make sure it was facing Tam, and then held it up.

Cale and Talon had barely exchanged glances since he arrived at the big house. Up that close, even across the room or knowing he was in the kitchen, the boy was too much of a temptation, and Talon feared standing half the time, lest he popped a boner. So, helping his sister drill runes was the best distraction.

At least, until Cale and Thorn came into the living room while whatever they were making cooked.

Talon stood up; ready to escape to the study or the craft room that was once his old bedroom or anywhere else. Hell, Cale looked more uncomfortable than he felt, if that was possible.

“Hey, Cale, do you know how to read runes?” Tam took the velvet bag from Talon’s hand and frowned at him. “Where you going, Tal? I want to show off my amazing divination skills, and you’re the only one in the room who can check me!”

Talon glanced at Cale, who was devoted to checking out the minute detail of his own socked feet. Talon could either leave for his own comfort, or appease Tam and be encouraging like a good big bro.

Family obligation beats personal crisis every time.

Tam clapped and shoved the open bag at Cale. “Pick one and I’ll guess what it means, and Tal can tell us if I got it wrong.”

Thorn snorted. “You know, it’s more than just knowing what the runes mean, right?”

She stuck out her tongue. “I know that, doofus. It’s only the first step, but I have to know them, front and back and upside down, if I want to get as good as Momma Yzma is with her tarot cards.”

A quick glance to Talon, and Cale shook his head. And that was all Talon could take. Being silent around him was one thing. Refusing his baby sis because he was around was something else.

“What’s your fucking problem?!” His own voice sounded wrong in his ears, a whip crack that earned him silence and openmouthed stares all around.

“Talon Aran May!” Calliope roared from the doorway of the kitchen. She and Momma Yzma stood there, equally appalled faces staring back at him.

Great. His fingers, tense and shaking, curled into fists, and he was ready to tear into the guest for being rude to his family with the silent treatment, if only to defend himself. No one should be allowed to treat him this way; not here, never here.

Cale was red faced, standing stock still except for his mouth. Choked sounds bubbled from his throat, forming sounds. “S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-sor...”

Thorn was at his side, hand on Cale’s shoulder, shaking him, but the sounds just got worse, his face was a shocking shade of red, and even his curls shook from the force of trying to get the word out.

Get the word out.

Fuck.

Talon's spine snapped straight, and before he could stop himself, he was out the door, on the four-by-four and roaring towards his own place. If he was going to stick his foot in his mouth any further, best to do it in private.

Talon slammed the front door so hard that if it broke, it wouldn't have surprised him. Anger and embarrassment warred in his stomach, unwanted, nasty energy that needed to go. Maybe then, he would be able to return and apologize for royally fucking up.

As he paced in front of his couch and tried to decide between lifting weights or meditating, the front door burst open. All right, looked like he had to answer for himself first.

"What the fuck was that about?" Thorn roared, slamming the door behind him.

Deep inhale, count to five, deep exhale. "Pretty obvious, don't you think?" Damn, his voice was as tight as the rest of him.

Thorn crossed his arms over his chest and waited.

"You want to tell me why you invited this guy, huh? For fuck's sake, Thorn, he even asked you at the shop if I would 'mind'. MIND?" Deep inhale, count to five, deep exhale, don't punch a wall. "You think of all the places I go, my own damn home would be one of the spots where I don't have to 'mind' some asshole not being comfortable around me."

That earned him exactly two blinks. "*This* is your own damn home."

Deep inhale, count to five, deep exhale, don't punch your brother in the dick. "That's not the point and you know it."

"Talon, I'm gonna need you to hear me out, because what I'm about to say is gonna go in one ear and right out the other otherwise." Thorn did his own inhale/hold/exhale thing. "Cale isn't 'uncomfortable' around you. At least, not in the way you're thinking."

Talon thought about the past half hour, then the entire evening, and then the whole two weeks he'd been back. Just like Thorn had said, hearing that the boy was anything but freaked out by him and his height was pretty freaking hard to hear.

"So, what's his deal?"

“You saw his deal.”

“Thorn...”

“The stuttering? The slow talking?”

“...then why won't he fucking look at me?”

Thorn threw his hands up in the air. “What is with you? If he were anyone else, you'd barely blink. Fuck, we joke about the ignorant shit people say about you, about me, about our moms, everything. What's the difference?”

The difference, Talon wanted to tell him, was that he was so drawn to Cale that the mere thought of being rejected for something he couldn't change hurt like a bastard. Call him a “midget”, say that he and Thorn were lying when they said they were brothers, call their mothers hippie dykes who gave all their kids stupid names, and Thorn was right, Talon would have just ignored the insults and kept on with his life. He and his family had nothing to prove to anyone—until Cale.

That mere thought almost kept him from hearing the next thing Thorn said. “I mean, I'd been working on getting him to come over since you got back. The guy's ass-over-teakettle for you. It's hard enough for him to talk, but when you're around, well...”

“Whoa, wait, back up.” Talon needed to sit down. Good thing the couch was just the right size for him to collapse on. “Did you just say ‘ass-over-teakettle’?”

“Talon!”

Put it that way and Talon could see what Thorn was talking about. All that clamming up, the avoidance, and the blushing. That charming-as-hell blushing. Talon groaned, and covered his face with both hands. He was a fucking idiot.

“He's got a stutter,” Talon said without question.

“Yup. He's okay if he slows down, but startle him, and well, you see what you get.”

“I just met him two weeks ago.”

“He saw our family vacay picture at the shop while you were gone, the one next to the register. Hasn't stopped mooning over you since.”

Another groan. “I'm the biggest jackass alive. Where is he?”

Thorn snickered. "On that, we can agree. Calliope got him calmed down and drove him home. The rest of us drew straws to pick who was coming over here to tear you a new asshole. You're lucky you didn't get Momma Yzma."

Thursday came around, and Talon had his apology all ready. He only hoped that he hadn't blown it completely.

And Cale didn't show. He wasn't there the next Monday either. Calliope and Momma Yzma had forgiven him the transgression of ruining dinner after he explained himself, but that didn't stop Calliope from tut-tutting the boy's absence.

"You know," she suggested after Thursday's class, "you could use that phone of yours for more than vacation pictures. Call him."

Oh yeah, he could imagine how that would work. If Cale didn't immediately hang up, Talon was pretty sure he'd hear the world's longest "fuck off" that he damn well deserved.

"Seriously," Tam piped up from the back room, where she was straightening up. "You mope any longer and I'm putting your picture up on Grindr."

It wouldn't be healthy for his nor Calliope's blood pressure to ask the teen how she'd even heard of Grindr. "Fine, I'll ask Thorn for his number. But I'm gonna text him. No need to freak him out, right?"

Suddenly his phone rang in his back pocket. For a brief hopeful moment, he imagined it was Cale, who had gotten his number from his brother and was relieving him of the pressure of making first contact.

Alas, it was only Tam. She had forwarded him a text from Thorn with Cale's number. "There you go. Don't thank me, just talk to him already!"

And since Calliope was still there near the counter, he did the dutiful thing and pecked out a text:

Hey, I'm sorry about dinner last week. Let me make it up to you. Please.

The response came a half hour later, when Talon was ready to jump out of his own skin with the feeling that he was being ignored.

Forget it. I don't do pity dates.

The boy had pride. Who knew that was such a turn on?

Neither do I. When can I pick you up?

His response was much faster this time.

Thorn says you have Saturday off?

Talon owed his brother big time. Hell, he owed his entire family big time.

By the time Saturday rolled around, he was reconsidering that debt to his family.

“This works for a hike.” He stood in his bedroom, unwittingly modeling for the trio of ladies piled on his bed. It was one of the few things in the house he insisted be average-sized (stoves were hard to find that he could use without a step stool, unless they were made of wood or plastic and had fake food); the four-post monstrosity was ridiculously comfortable.

“You could go for a tighter T-shirt,” Tam suggested. “You work out; show it off.”

“Tam O’Shanter May,” Calliope tsked. “Didn’t we leave you at the house?”

“You also gave me my own four-by-four.”

Momma Yzma motioned to Talon. “Ladies, focus. Talon can’t fuck this up again.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.” Talon snorted, opening his shirt drawer again. “Jeans and a tee are what I wore when we hiked in the same place. I look like a douche in khakis, and no, I am not packing a suit for dinner later.” Hell, he wanted to banish the word “dinner” from his mind forever.

He did take Tam’s advice, and wore a tighter purple shirt. As he was shooing them down the stairs and out the front door so he could get to the state park on time, Momma Yzma turned to him. “Have a good time, and try to take it slow, alright?”

Calliope snorted, hugging her wife around the waist. “Oh please, Yeezy. We were in bed before the first date and look at us now.”

Tam made a face that Talon was sure he was mirroring. “Hey bro, you got a Q-tip I could use to stab the last five seconds out of my mind?”

“Yeah, upstairs bathroom. Bring one for me too.” Even the most open-minded of souls had limits.

Cale was waiting for Talon as he pulled up. Their eyes met, and he wanted to smack himself for earning that wary glance. Other than that, the redhead looked edible in a black tank that outlined his long torso, and jeans tucked into tan boots, a satchel on his back. He'd volunteered to bring water and trail mix.

Talon got out of the car and pulled out a walking staff, an apology on his lips when Cale held up a finger, his lips trembling as he spoke. “We... s-start... over. Hey... I'm... I'm... C-cale.”

He extended that hand for Talon to shake, and he took it, a weight lifting off his shoulders. “Nice to meet you. I'm Talon. The trail here is nice. Wanna go for a walk?”

Since that was what they'd planned on doing anyway, Cale smiled, a little laugh bursting out of his lips like a similar weight had been lifted. Talon hoped that Tam's attempt at reading runes for him that morning, when she plucked “kenaz” out of her bag, meant this was his chance to recreate some reality of his own, one where this date would be successful.

The day was warm and got warmer still as they walked. Cale had never tried this trail before, so Talon kept them to a lighter walk. If anything, he could pay better attention to his companion and not, say, trip over his own two feet. The sun really brought out what he found so damned cute about Cale—those freckles, the auburn highlights in his hair, the shine of his teeth.

Talon pointed out his favorite spots on the trail, some of the plant life and what few animals crossed their path. “You have to be careful if you walk through here looking for herbs or mushrooms. You pick the wrong thing and you'll have to explain to the rangers why you have a rash all over your hands.”

“W-what about t-those?” Cale pointed to a cluster of little white mushrooms at the base of a broken tree stump.

Talon squatted down to where he was pointing for a closer look, then nodded. “Perfectly edible, but it's safer to not eat them raw. Besides, you brought trail mix, right?”

Cale rolled his eyes and smiled as he swung the satchel off his back and crouched next to Talon. He pulled out a plastic grocery bag, and used it to

gather the mushrooms without touching them directly. Noticing Talon's curious gaze, Cale turned red and stammered. "A g-g-g-gift for y-yu-y-yooooour..."

He was turning even redder as the next word refused to come out of his mouth. Talon knew what he was getting at. "I know, my..."

Dark brown eyes glared him quiet as Cale tried again, his face contorting with the effort to finish his sentence. Talon wisely shut the hell up until finally, "Mumumumum-moms!"

The determination in Cale's face got Talon's neck warm in a way the sun couldn't touch. It was a kind of kinship; Cale could damn well speak, if Talon was willing to listen. And with that voice of his, Talon could listen for days. "Awesome. They'll love you forever for it."

They walked for another hour, stopping at a cliff with a beautiful view of the rest of the forest, the trees stretching out like a carpet of dark green for miles and miles. The only thing marking the cliff as anything special was a huge flat rock, about two feet high. Talon remembered this was the spot where the family photo that graced the till was taken. He had climbed up on the rock and, while he still wasn't as tall as Thorn, it was enough to peer over the heads of everyone else.

He gave climbing up the rock another go, using the walking staff as leverage. Thankfully, Cale seemed to have learned the same lesson he had taught Talon about when to help and stayed back. He was dusty all over his nice shirt and jeans, but he had made it.

When he turned around to crow his triumph over gravity, Cale was blushing again, this time with eyes full of mischief. So that was why he didn't try to help Talon up.

"Were you staring at my ass?" Talon teased, and was pleasantly surprised when Cale bit his lips and nodded slowly.

Desire flushed hot in his belly so quickly he had to suck in a breath. The innocent walk had turned into something much more in the space of a tease. If he had any more questions about whether or not Cale found him hot, they were answered with teeth on lips and those smoldering dark eyes. He beckoned the younger man over with two fingers, grabbed his chin the moment Cale was close enough and pulled him in for a kiss.

Shy or not, Cale gave as good as he got, aggressive and rough. Talon grabbed a handful of tank top with his free hand to draw him closer, moving the

other from his chin to all that hair. Cale's hands cupping his ass felt like they belonged there. They could have been doing this weeks ago, he thought regretfully for a moment before distracting himself with Cale's bottom lip between his teeth.

"F-fuck, Talon." Cale's moan sounded like sex, and made Talon's entire body throb with the need to lose these clothes and lose himself in every possible way with Cale.

"Is that a request?" he panted against Cale's neck, inhaling sweat and sunshine off his skin.

He felt Cale swallow, and kissed at his bobbing Adam's apple. "Yeah."

"Then help me down and let's get out of here."

Cale was evil incarnate.

It was the only thing Talon could think about as he raced over the connecting driveway on the family land. Cale, unwilling to risk them crashing by touching Talon, had lain back in his seat and teased Talon with fingers on his own chest, a hand in his open pants, and moans straight out of the best porn ever.

"Just you wait," Talon warned darkly, taking the right at the split. Just a few more feet and he could stop the car, they could go inside, and he would be able to touch all that tempting skin.

"P-promises, p-p-p-promises."

Talon managed to get them inside before shoving Cale against the door and yanking those jeans down to his knees, taking the briefs with them. Cale's cock popped free, and by every deities that ever existed, it was as long and lanky as he was, wet and right in front of Talon's face, the perfect height. His mouth watered as he bent his head down to stuff as much as he could fit in it.

Cale moaned, his hips hitching and hands gripping Talon's hair as Talon used his mouth to exact revenge for the teasing in the car. He was going to make the boy come, then drag him upstairs to roll around in his bed. Then maybe, just maybe, they'd do it again. And again.

His plans were interrupted by the sound of someone trying to open the door. Not caring who it was, he threw the lock, and banged his fist against the wood.

“Talon, we’re just checking on you, and you’re not answering your phone,” Calliope’s voice called from the other side as Cale froze up. “How did the date go?”

Talon ripped his mouth away from his treat and snarled. “It was going great until a second ago.”

“Oh. *Oh!*” Her next words were a few feet further. “Well, as you were. Take care, boys!”

Cale laughed, banging the back of his head on the door as his entire body shook.

“What’s so funny?” Talon asked, resting his head on Cale’s hip, unable to keep from chuckling himself. “My family is nosy as hell.”

“They c-care about y-y-you. I l-like them.”

“Well, good, because I think if this didn’t work out the way it is now, they would have disowned me and adopted you.”

They took their time getting back in the mood. Cale insisted on getting naked right at the door, which got Talon back on the redhead’s dick pretty damned quick, his hands running all over the bare freckled skin until Cale shouted to the ceiling and shot his seed down Talon’s hungry throat. He moaned with the delight of swallowing come and holding a thrashing body still while it fought his grasp for the first time in years.

As Cale recovered, Talon took that moment to undress, tossing his things and Cale’s over to the couch. Cale’s eyes raked over his compact body, tracing every single muscle on his frame and lingered on his cock.

He allowed Talon to lead him up the stairs, stopping long enough to pull a short strip of foil wrapped packets from his pocket with another flush. Just knowing Cale had prepared for this date to go as well as it had made Talon’s face hurt from his smile.

They reached the bedroom, and as he started to climb up the built-in carpeted steps, Cale drew his arms around Talon’s chest and threw him on the bed, covering Talon’s body with his own and kissing the back of his neck.

“Eager?” Talon panted, rocking his ass against Cale’s renewed erection. He had thought about topping this time around, but if Cale wanted him like this, no way he was going to object.

“Y-y-yeah. Your ass. I-i-i-t’s p-p-perfect.” Cale pressed his hips down. “But I... want you... to f-f-fuck me. Won’t... last if I... do you.”

Cute, smart, funny, and versatile? Holy shit. “Get on your knees, hands on the headboard, and hang on.”

Cale wasted no time in obeying, giving Talon a view of his adorable little behind. Like the rest of him, it was pale with a dusting of brown spots. Talon couldn't help getting on hands and knees and licking his way over both cheeks.

“You're a goddamn walking constellation,” he panted, finding the strip Cale had placed on the bed and tearing one free to suit up.

“Talon,” Cale panted, curving his back, presenting, begging with his body.

“Don't worry, honey.” Talon soothed him with one hand down his spine. “I'm gonna take care of you real soon.”

Damn the size of the bed, because he had to stop petting Cale to crawl to the other side to retrieve the lube. He was back behind his soon-to-be lover in no time, slicking his cock with one hand and rubbing lube into that tempting dark pucker with the other. Cale humped that hand, then fucked himself on the two fingers Talon eagerly pushed inside.

“Bet y-you... could fit... a hand inside...” Cale whispered.

It was the dirtiest thing anyone had ever said to him, and Talon's head spun with how much it turned him on. He had to get in this boy, now.

Cock in hand, Talon pulled at Cale's hip to guide his hole against the head, and then pushed forward, watching with hungry awe as it opened up. Cale sat back with a long, low grunt as his ass swallowed the rest of Talon's length. Talon tried to speak, to give voice to how amazing all that tight heat felt from the inside, but there was only need, and he had to obey. His body spoke for him, snapping forward and rocking back, gripping Cale's hips for purchase, leaning back to watch.

Cale's body responded in kind, moving with him, moans growing louder and more frantic with each push back. Moans turned into gasps, and Cale's hand slipped from the headboard to his cock. He wasn't kidding about being close.

Talon started to come before he realized just how close he was as well, forehead pressed against Cale's sweaty back, jackhammering those last few thrusts as if he could force his spunk through the rubber and deep inside. Cale's muscles tensed and trembled against Talon's cheek as he joined him in release, spouting garbled gibberish that could have been his name.

They sat like that, recovering yet again. Talon wrapped his arms around Cale's waist and kissed his spine. "Damn, I never knew you were going to be such a fun fuck."

"...be-tter... than... I-I... dreamed."

And that was the point where Talon's ego grew three sizes that day. Very slowly, they pulled apart and lay under the blanket, sharing a pillow as Cale had shot all over the other one. Talon was more than happy to lie on top, face tucked into Cale's neck, lazily tracing the freckles on his opposite shoulder. It was a comfortable fit. Talon could have dozed off, but there was something he needed to get off his chest.

"Thank you for giving me a second chance."

Cale hugged him even closer, and Talon could feel a smile against his forehead. "Th-thank you f-for giving *me*... a-a f-first chance."

Two years later

Suits were not Talon's friend. Ill-fitting ones made him feel like a kid at church. When he found one that fit, he wore it until the wheels fell off.

Thankfully, the blue-with-pinstripe number he wore did him so many favors.

He settled in his seat as the robed dean droned off a list of names. He was just at the A's and Talon was already bored silly. Was his graduation this boring for everyone else?

Tam sat at his right, playing some game on her phone with Thorn's fiancée Kelly, and he wished he had the insouciance to haul his own out. But with Cale's mom and dad sitting at his left, that wouldn't make a very good impression at all.

Thankfully, Dean What's-His-Name had a short list of A's, and was on the B names in no time. Everyone in his row leaned in close, peering at the antlike faces of robed students lining up, looking for a peek of red curls. Even Tam had put her phone in her lap and waited.

"Cale Anthony Blake," the dean announced and the leaners became the cheerers. The smile on Cale's face grew as he accepted the diploma, then looked up at his family and waved, mouthing, "love you".

It could have been meant for anyone, but each word hit Talon in the heart. No matter if it was mouthed, spoken, or texted, Cale's love always did that to him.

The festivities weren't quite over for their row just yet as they settled down. It would be a great while until they reached the M's, after all.

Thorn and Cale were posing for a selfie when their families found them on the lawn after the ceremony. Cale's mother, a tall and stocky woman with the same red curls, hugged her son close and both Momma Yzma and Calliope squeezed Thorn between them.

"I swear if Martha smiles any harder, she'll burst." Cale's dad, Steven, said at Talon's side.

Talon felt the same way, actually. Between his brother and his boyfriend getting their bachelor's, his heart could barely contain his joy. He nodded. "Hey, it's not every day graduation happens."

"True, true." Steven touched Talon's shoulder, getting his direct attention. "So, two weeks alone together?"

"Yeah. I thought Puerto Rico sounded like a great place for him to unwind."

"D-d-dad, are y-you giving him a haaard time?" Cale was suddenly within reach, but Talon held back as his father shook his hand, and then pulled him in for a hug.

"No, sweetie, he's trying to give the 'what are your intentions towards my son' talk, two years too late." Martha bent down to kiss Talon's cheek. "Ignore him."

Finally, Cale was close, kneeling and uncaring if anyone watched him wrap his smaller boyfriend in his arms and kiss him for all to see. A shutter snapped, and Talon knew it was Tam taking a picture. Good, as long as she sent him a copy.

"Look at that. Just call me a yenta," Thorn crowed, arm around Kelly's waist. "So, Tam, want me to work my magic on you?"

"No," Tam, Momma Yzma, Calliope, and even Kelly replied in unison. Cale laughed the loudest of them all, kissing Talon chastely.

"Aww, come on, we've got two satisfied customers right here." He motioned to Talon. "I'm a genius."

Talon ignored his brother to press his forehead against Cale's. "Congrats. Looking forward to the beach?"

Cale nodded and whispered. "C-can we ditch dinner and go b-back to yooour place?"

"Nope." He laughed at the little pout. "My family would tease us, and yours would be so sad. Besides, tomorrow we'll have all of the time in the world."

"And no one will be trying to open your hotel room door." Tam added with a smirk. "Can we go now? I'm starving!"

Talon rolled his eyes and took Cale's hand as he stood up and followed their little tribe off the green.

The End

Author Bio

Nicole Forcine was born a strange child and former Georgia peach. When she was younger, she was never far from a composition book, a pen in hand, and way too many people in her head (she's even been known to talk back to them). When two or more of them talk loud enough to overshadow the rest, a story is born. After years of writing and storing her tales in those books, she had a revelation: man, there are a lot of dudes kissing in these stories.

Her stories include themes of creating families of choice, how love can come in all forms and supersede all boundaries, and the joys and sorrows of earning a happily-ever-after.

Currently, she resides in Minneapolis with one of the most laid-back men in history and his even more laid-back cat and her adorable kitty Prince who never does anything wrong. When she's not writing (ha!), she's saving the world/galaxy/humanity as we know it in the world of video games and general geekiness.

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