



ADRIAN FRIDGE

High Five Dive

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

HIGH FIVE DIVE

By Adrian Fridge

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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HIGH FIVE DIVE

By Adrian Fridge

Photo Description

Shirtless man standing in front of a classic car holding a wrench and work gloves. He's both sweaty and grimy with a towel on his shoulder and a tool belt at his waist.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

See him? That's Evan. He runs the auto repair shop down the street. He's also my brother's best friend and my arch-nemesis. He's so smug and full of himself. Just because he's got a great smile and the body of a Greek god doesn't mean he's all that. We've been feuding for as long as I've known him. We can't get closer than five feet before going toe to toe, trading insults and snarking at each other. Oh, he infuriates me! I hate him... don't I?

You may have free reign over this story just as long as there is an HEA. Feel free to go all out. Turn it into a paranormal/shifter/sci-fi/cowboy/BDSM/whatever story if you want. I like everything. I especially love humor in my stories.

Sincerely,

Jenni Lea

Story Info

Genre: futuristic

Tags: mechanic, scientist, light BDSM, bullying, enemies to lovers, interracial

Word Count: 10,842

HIGH FIVE DIVE

By Adrian Fridge

Just my luck to have my ship stall in the middle of an interspace throughway. I punched the wheel, releasing all the expletives I knew, before sighing and sending out a distress signal. All the other ships swerved around me and honked as though I did this on purpose. I gave them the middle finger.

While thankful I didn't stall out in the depths of space, drifting into a dark abyss, this ranked high on my 'you have to be fucking with me' scale.

Still, there was the matter of dragging the thing to the nearest cleat on the side of the guard tower. Sweaty and more irritable by the minute, I peered over at the fold in time-space that made up the throughway, a circular doorframe that shed months of travel between Earth and Mars. Not that six hours didn't feel like shit too.

I opened the hood to see if it was a burnt engine. Nothing. I saw fucking nothing out of place. The sides were scratched up from my descent through the atmosphere, but no holes to be found either. I should have shelled out cash for a cab rather than pay for the fire-retardant paint.

My fingers traced the dents before reaching for my sun-burnt nose, the visor a barrier to the sweet relief that would have brought me. Earth was where my parents had raised me, a place where I could overindulge in the fresh, unfiltered breeze as the sun, bright and unregulated, beamed through the irregular shaped clouds. Or at least that's what I did my week back from school, turning a shade of brown darker in the process. Four years away from Earth, and I never ceased to get sentimental. I'd hauled my ass to the colonies because of the full scholarship to Mars University, but the vacuums of space—they were maddening. I didn't care to stay longer than absolutely necessary.

The tow vehicle came, and the screen on my windshield popped up with a blue humanoid face. "Instructions, please."

"Which is the nearest repair shop near Mars?"

"That would be Station 1123."

I nearly gagged on the thought. "How much of a detour is the second nearest?"

“An extra two hours.”

I held back a second wave of expletives. “Fine. Take me to Station 1123.”

I grumbled as I accepted this further inconvenience. It wasn't the desegregation that bothered me. No, I could mingle with the trouwans without mocking them for being aliens or lizard people. I wasn't racist. My problem was with a very particular human who worked at this very particular station who was the last being I wanted to see in my current state of affairs.

There was no avoiding it unless I wanted to spend even more time in the pits of the cosmos. Outside my window, the light of distant stars spread out into infinity. It was nothing compared to staring over the horizon at a cozy town, lines of double-story houses held together by wood and willpower. My brother's wedding had been held at a stylish, but aged, stone church, the roof pointed upward like it was trying to pierce the sky, built hundreds of years ago before the Space War, before the Biotech Revolution, before Earth became that little blue dot my professors called rural middle-of-nowhere as they lectured about the industrialization of Mars.

At the far wall of the repair shop on Station 1123 was a gleaming spaceship the size of a house in the trendy shape of a dildo, the underside of it opened up as mechanics worked their magic. One of them started coming down from a harness—the repair shop's owner. Him.

Evan Mitford. Tall, dark, and jerkass. My brother's best friend and my worst tormentor since we were five years old.

“Oh,” Evan chirped as he wiped his greasy shirt on his face, looking less like he was sweaty from labor and more like someone doused him with oil for a cover shoot. “What's the special occasion?”

I pointed at my ship like I was pointing at a dead fish I didn't know what to do with. I'd bought it at a second-hand shop with my meager stipend, and it'd been nothing short of reliable for the longest time. It was a hybrid car-plane small enough to get me around the city, and it was meant to handle interplanetary travel. Or so I thought.

Evan whistled, exaggerating his motions as he said, “What'd you do, Clark, depress it to the point of attempted suicide?”

Getting angry with him was like pouring fuel on the sun. I breathed in and out before asking, “Can you fix it?”

Evan wagged his brows. “Sure, I'll need a few hours to investigate first. It might be something simple or it might be your lucky day and I could scrap it.”

Bile rose in my throat. Oh how I wanted to nick the smugness off his chin.

He was a bigger fake than my brother, always sweet to my parents, always friendly with my brother. He was a golden boy to everyone, but to me, he was a life-sucking black hole when he got the chance. Knowing him, he'd fix my ship and then, for the fun of it, plant something in it with the sole purpose of making my life hell.

Evan turned his attention to inspecting the ship, pulling up the hood and leaning over in a suggestive way, like he wanted my gaze transfixed on his ass. Baggy uniform or not, he was like the flavor of anti-freeze: delicious if you're into risking death. The fluorescent lights that dangled overhead flooded the shop with a bright white illumination that, while great for finding mechanical flaws, highlighted the human ones as well. My flaw was I *wanted* to drink his anti-freeze.

It made me hate him even more. When my brother, a professional male model, suggested Evan quit working at the auto shop, he refused on the grounds he'd drive all the other models out of business. It didn't stop him from doing the occasional shoot. And I owned every single fucking picture.

His blue eyes were focused on me now, dimples growing with his smile. "Where'd you find this? Behind a dumpster?"

I smiled right back at him. "No, it is a dumpster. A very touching life-affirming story if you ever want to hear it."

Evan shook his head with a tsk. "I'd say it's a tragedy."

A loud beep came from my right and I realized I didn't pay the tow fee. I shoved my credit card under the red light scanner and the beeping stopped. The vehicle left the shop and I grunted.

"How the fuck am I going home now?"

"You want a replacement ship?"

I glared at him, not sure whether to trust that smirk of his. "Not from you."

Evan pouted, an affect he ditched after his reply. "This is why all your friends live in petri dishes."

"Says the guy whose only relationship has ever been with his dick."

"It's an open relationship."

My heart slammed into my throat. "Look, can you repair this or not?"

Evan tapped his fingers against the metal, his attention fixed on the interior grime. He may have been a horrible person, but he was an excellent mechanic. It didn't take a genius to figure out the car parked outside this shop was his, its red polished hide decked out with lights, tails, and arrogance, the interior made from the highest quality parts. It must have been a minute of me waiting before he responded. "I can't promise you anything until we run it through some tests, but based on the model I'd say it's something faulty with the wiring. Probably non-repairable."

"Your optimism is assuring."

Evan ran a hand through his short and wavy black hair, complementing his tanned beige skin as he gave me his prize-winning smile, full of teeth ready to be punched. "Clark, it'll be no fun if you're dead."

I eyed him intensely, a part of me wishing he'd burst into flames if I concentrated hard enough. "Are you saying you can't fix it?"

"Disregarding how much it looks like you abuse it night and day, improper wiring is the leading cause of ship explosions. You're lucky it only stalled."

My face contorted in disgust. "I can't afford a replacement. I probably can't even afford the repairs. I'm fucking screwed."

That fucking smile again. "Hey, maybe I could give you one of the spare ships I've been working with on the side. Perks of childhood acquaintance."

"Why should I trust you? If memory serves me well, that cupcake you gave me for my tenth birthday was made of wax."

"That was a joke. Jeez, you're holding a grudge over that?"

"Then there is the fact that you used to go into my room and randomly hide my shit in other parts of the house. I still don't know what happened to my favorite toy airplane."

"Hey, that one was easy. I put it in the attic on top of some boxes."

"I looked in the attic. Like three times. It wasn't there."

Evan put his hands up. "That's not my fault."

"You put tacks in my sleeping bags and glue to the rims of my hats. You threw my socks into the dryer so they'd shrink, and you cut holes in all my gloves. And there was that time you filled every bottle I owned with mayonnaise."

"Oh grow up, those were funny pranks."

“Right, because it’s all fun to you. Even the time I ended up in the hospital because you slicked the floor around my bed.” I pointed to the scar, a dark brown line that started behind my ear and crept two inches up the side of my head. “And then you make fun of me for having crooked ears.”

Evan’s frown creased every part of his face. “What do you want me to say? I’m sorry?”

“No,” I said with resignation. If my ship was a hazard, I’d find a way to get another. Somehow. Without giving him a chance to gloat about it later to Mom and Dad: look how wonderful I am, I saved your son’s life. “I don’t want anything from you. That’s what I’m saying.”

I left the shop without waiting for his response. I didn’t want to waste any more of my life on him.

But I couldn’t exit Station 1123 without some form of vehicle. I decided on a taxi service on the other side of the station, situated next to a dive bar whose smell seduced my stomach. Figuring since I didn’t need to drive anymore, I may as well drink my tension away.

Upon entering the dive, I counted four trouwans sitting at the bar, none of them interested in my presence as they conversed among themselves, and two humans seated at a table near the back. Otherwise the place was empty.

I walked over to the bartender, youthful and spritely, probably working here part-time to pay some bills. I couldn’t guess trouwan gender from appearance, so I’d taken on the habit of casually asking.

“Use she,” the bartender said with a wink, her eyes a bright yellow with black iris, the pupil a white vertical slit. It went well with her shiny green complexion, the scales of her oblong head smooth and glossy. “The name’s Gable. What will you have?”

I leaned over the counter, trying out my friendliest smile. “The cheapest thing you have, on the rocks.”

Gable giggled. “You sure about that?”

“And the menu please.”

I seated myself at the counter, examining the orange-and-blue decor, the walls spotted with hanging photographs and carvings done by previous patrons.

The menu came on a tablet with a single page of options. I ordered the signature burger and was handed a glass of something that stung my eyes.

My wristband flickered on, the thin plastic band glowing white. I pressed on it and a screen appeared in my palm. Lucas had finally responded to my text about being home late.

It simply said: "You've been evicted."

Lucas wasn't the best conversation partner, but he could have been less of an ass about breaking up. A tremor went through me, making me want to curl up and sleep for the next week. I sipped at my drink. It was bitter and burned through my nose, down my throat and all the way to my stomach, leaving a trail of acidic aftertaste. I coughed and rubbed my eyes.

"Told you," Gable chirped.

"Seems appropriate," I said once my voice was back. "Shitty day."

"Sounds rough. What happened?"

"On top of being stranded here? I've just been thrown out by my boyfriend of two years—through a text."

"Ouch," Gable scrunched up her face before pointing to my drink. "That one's on me."

I half-smiled. "Shit, if I knew that I'd have ordered something less toxic." I gulped more down anyway. "Worst part," I said with tears in my eyes, "is this was my longest relationship to date. With a trouwan no less. We've been going through a rough patch the last couple of months, and there was more sex than actual dating." I sucked in some air as I stared down my empty glass. "Is it wrong if I'm angrier that I got evicted than the fact that we're over? It's like, thanks buddy for not giving me any notice."

"What was the reason for it?"

I shrugged as I was handed my second drink. "Me never having any time for him. Him never appreciating my work. Me disliking his drug habits. Him disliking my uncleanness. Most likely it just came down to his parents. They hate humans, think we're degenerate animals. I suppose it was about time they interfered." Gable silently watched me as I took another sip of the fire. Shuddered. "Sorry, was that offensive?"

"No, just thinking. My friend wanted to get engaged to a human, and both families freaked out."

I snorted. "My cousins are serpophobes. Can't fathom that we're actually the same species. They think *Serpo sapiens* is just a fancy term for lizard-people. Doesn't compute that we're biologically compatible."

Gable shook her head in disgust. "It's a shame."

New patrons entered the bar and I was left to my own thoughts as Gable busied herself with them.

The confrontation with my cousins was always a struggle. It's like they could smell I was dating someone and wouldn't stop until they knew the details, especially now that my brother was married and I was labeled the poor soul missing his other half.

"It must be so sad now that your twin is out of your life," one had said to me at the reception.

To which I responded, "We stopped being conjoined during gestation."

"I can't believe he's married now. Do you have anyone special back in University?"

"George," I said with full confidence.

My cousins waited in anticipation, waiting for me to elaborate.

"George is the name of my experimental control group, a dish of mold I keep for comparison." My cousin's faces dropped as though I hit them with cold water. I smiled and continued, "George doesn't get along with my lab partners, so I have to tend to them myself. George tantrums by killing most of itself off. And I'm here on vacation, so I have no idea if George will still be around by the time I get back."

One of my cousins excused himself politely while the other looked like she wanted to punch me.

"This is why you're still single!"

"He's single because he kills everyone with boredom," Evan said as he appeared out of nowhere as though his Clark-Harassment sensor had gone off on the other side of the hall.

"It's all the aliens," my cousin said with a scowl, crossing her arms. "So glad it's illegal for them to be on Earth, but Clark is surrounded by them. I wish those lizard-people would just leave us alone. Go back to Alpha Centauri. Stop causing us problems."

"That would make a great blog," Evan said as he nudged me with his elbow. "You can call it: Stop Breathing My Air."

It was one of those few accidents in time and space when Evan and I agreed on a topic.

Just great. I was back to thinking about Evan. Why did he have to embed himself into every memory I had?

I kept myself from rolling my eyes by taking yet another gulp of my drink. Either it was starting to taste less awful or it had burned all my taste buds off. Gable was back to me.

"So anything good going for you at all?" she asked with a smile.

I hesitated to respond. "Getting a Masters in Xenobiology. It's sort of a big deal in understanding evolution."

Gable kept smiling as she rubbed a clean glass down to serve another patron, her enthusiasm forced as I watched her try to come up with a response. Her eyes lit up as she said, "Oh! I have a friend who has a friend who's doing Zoology as well."

I snorted as I welcomed her attempt, the drink easing my nerves as my body temperature rose. The burger came and I finally understood why the dive smelled so great. The seitan patty absorbed all the signature juices, the consistency meaty with just a hint of nuttiness. I devoured it, then started picking at the fries, nursing my second glass of fire-piss as I watched the television overhead go on about some celebrity at some game.

A commercial came on, an elaborate sequence to advertise perfume by use of a dancing shirtless man. Whoever produced it must have said, "I'm going to slather you in oil. Then we're going to make it look like you're dripping your sweat into the bottle. We'll call it Essence of Water. It'll be so gay your gay brother will watch it and cringe."

A camera click came from across the room. Then a series of footsteps.

"Oh my gosh," said one of the humans. "I'm sorry if this is intrusive, but are you..." she giggled at her friend, "are you Clarence Waters?"

There was always a part of me that wanted to smack these people, but then there was that equal part that ate up the attention. When I first got accepted to Mars University—on my own merit—there were a few who were convinced I was my brother and followed me around incessantly. The rumor was started by

none other than Clarence, who'd shaved his head, patched on a fake scar, and stole my clothes, becoming my very own doppelganger. He claimed he needed people to think he's secretly a genius so he'd get more interviews. Or whatever crap he was churning those days. Even after the University publicly disproved the rumor, some photographers stayed on me, selling my face as his whenever they were low on integrity.

I flashed my Clarence-like smile. "Some call me that."

"Your hair," the other one commented. "I like it better this way."

"And the scar," the first one exclaimed as she went to prod it. "Are you bringing it back?"

I nudged my head away from the finger, merely shrugging. His fans knew of his fake scar. What they didn't know was that I had an authentic version, and it hurt like a fucker to get.

They swooned, jumped up and down, took some photos with me, got a signature, and frustrated the bystanders. The usual.

I heard an exaggerated gag come from behind me. "Am I the only one who can tell you apart?" Evan said as he draped his arms over the women's shoulders. "This is Clark, Clarence's twin. He's the one with the bigger nose and pointier ears."

I growled a bit as my two fans excused themselves, faking some pretense to leave the dive. "You forgot to tell them the Tooth Fairy isn't real either."

Evan took a seat beside me, sniffing my drink and wincing before he ordered himself a glass of water. "Do you want to know how I found you?"

"A sixth sense for bothering the shit out of me?"

"This bar is next to the only taxi service on the station. When I heard the squeal of dying dreams, I knew I'd find you here."

"Aren't I the lucky one." I finished my second drink in one pull, exhaling with a grunt as my eyes watered up again. Evan had been the best man at Clarence's wedding, winning everyone's praises with his nauseating speech about the power of friendship—and alcohol, for the laughs. Then, continuing with his professed selflessness, he had to get back to Station 1123 several days early due to some big meteor incident. They drank his bullshit act and puked it all over me the rest of the week.

"I came to tell you, you forgot all your crap in your ship."

I knew I forgot something. I was feeling way too light after fleeing the shop. I rubbed my temples as I let out a long groan.

“And also that you shouldn’t tailgate after your brother’s popularity. He’d have more work if you didn’t go around ruining his reputation with your ugly mug.”

In the past this would send me into a spiral of self-loathing: me, making my precious twin’s life harder. Oh the self-pity. Because in no way had Clarence’s escapades made my reputation into that thing my classmates laughed about behind my back. No matter. I was on full scholarship at a prestigious university working in a lab under a media starlet of a professor due to my own efforts. Sure, the hours weren’t great, and my work was consuming, but I had purpose. I was driven. I could afford to look like I woke up on the wrong side of an angry bear.

I blinked, the haze from the alcohol clouding some of my thoughts. I ordered a glass of water, chugging half of it down before turning to Evan. “He’s quitting modeling.”

Evan’s eyes widened. “What?”

And I laughed. “He’s becoming an actor. He made the decision yesterday. He and his wife will be starring in some film in the upcoming year. I don’t need to drag him down when he’s doing a fine job of it on his own.”

He gulped down the rest of his water. “He should keep doing what he’s good at.”

“Which is making people believe he’s something that he’s not. It’s perfect.”

Evan’s face softened into something strange for a second. Was that sadness? The only thing I ever saw him sad about was not having enough mirrors to check himself out in. “Is that why you two don’t hang out anymore?”

I shrugged. “I’m in school and he’s a pop icon. Our schedules don’t exactly mesh.”

Evan sniggered. “How is school, by the way? Xenobiology, was it?”

Of all people, *he* remembered. Well then, I didn’t mind if I bored him with my life story.

“University is fucking insane. It’s five minutes of being a mad scientist and seven hours of waiting to see if maybe, just maybe, the mad shit I attempted worked out correctly. Ninety-nine percent of it fails miserably. Repeat several

times. Spend the next five weeks analyzing that shit. Write a half-dozen papers. Realize somewhere in the middle that two and two are making seventeen, and I'm back to the start." I laughed as I casually circled my finger along the rim of my glass. "This is why my social life revolves around two things: my peers and my mold. Both spoiled carbonated blowholes who refuse to cooperate the second they get a little uncomfortable."

From the side of my vision, I caught Evan staring blankly at me, shaking his head. "Don't know why you continue doing it, then again, my job is its own brand of insanity." He turned to me, his palm going to his forehead. "Do you have any idea how many people insist the best way to travel is to install software with artificial intelligence? They don't want to think for themselves and then I have to act as mechanic and psychologist to get any work done."

I knew a lot of vehicles these days could think for themselves, even had personalities, it was part of an initiative to secure auto-pilot systems for intergalactic travel. Never imagined they'd be a problem to handle during repair... wait... did Evan and I just have a heart-to-heart?

Evan lifted his empty glass, the bottom of it parallel to his eye. "You know, Clark, you don't look half-bad through here."

I raised mine, mirroring him. His head was far smaller through this looking glass, kind of distorted near the edges. "Hmm, you look exactly the same."

Evan batted his eyes. "Why thank you."

My band flashed as another text went through. I winced.

"Who's that?" Evan asked.

"My boyfriend... ex-boyfriend." Evan eyed me weirdly. I couldn't place it, so I clicked to see what Lucas wanted now. "Great. Not only has he kicked me out, but now he says he put my stuff into boxes and mailed them to my lab." I rested my head on the counter. "Jeez, at least you have the decency to let me grab my things."

Evan's hand landed on my shoulder and I fidgeted. Either my sense of time was off or his hand stayed there far past the 'I'm patting you for comfort' phase. He lowered his head to my level. "Did you love him?"

I choked out a laugh. "I wanted to. But it's really hard keeping a relationship going when you're both in the closet about it."

"Everyone knows you're gay."

I opened my band's interface, pulling up Lucas's photo. Evan exhaled like he was a deflating air bag.

"That's him?"

"Yup."

"I always knew you had bad taste in men. You have worst taste in trouwans." He left a tip for the bartender as he started to walk, but not before he turned around to say, "Better hurry back. I have boxes."

With little left to lose, and alcohol not helping one bit, I was beginning to reconsider the anti-freeze option.

The door to my lab clicked as I swiped my finger over the keypad. Good thing the University kept its doors open late and outfitted every lab with couches for those of us who needed to crash between long experiments. Or for those like me who had nowhere else to go.

With neither a ship nor apartment to call my own, I was at a loss for how to feel. Tired. Cranky. The beginnings of a hangover, possibly.

I flung my bags to the floor, groaning with the residual aches from the long trip back from Earth. I'd have to do laundry if I wanted any fresh clothes. Who knew when my boxes would arrive?

As much as I had hoped I would pass out the second I hit the couch, I was unable to rest. I fumbled through the data stored on my wrist device, thinking if I should watch funny videos or read up for the class in the morning. Instead I clicked through the photo gallery.

I had taken a lot of pictures at the wedding, many that Evan had photo-bombed, sneaking his face in behind people or doing something outlandish in the background. I sighed. Even while making the stupidest of faces, he was still loved by the camera. The guy was made to be photographed.

There was one photo of him I always kept ready. It was the one he took for his modeling resume, back when he wanted to prove to Clarence it wasn't hard to be a model. Indeed, the blowhole didn't even try in this one. He had someone at the repair shop snap him in front of what they'd been working on that day, a ship of classic design, brought over by the gal at the modeling agency he wanted to impress.

Topless, his tan, waxed chest was crusted with sweat and motor oil as he held a wrench in one hand and his work gloves in the other. His tool belt hung

over his scuffed jeans while a hand towel hung over his shoulder. Worst of all, his expression was a perfect smolder—lips puckered, eyes narrowed—while his body turned three-quarters to the side, giving just the right angle for both the breadth of his chest and the curve of his ass.

I imagined all sorts of things I could do with that ass as I stroked myself, giving myself the sort of comfort I wished I could share. As I wiped myself with a tissue, I dreaded the thought of Evan discovering what I used this photo for. I'd never hear the end of it. He'd get it engraved on my tombstone—his picture on my gravestone.

I threw the wristband to the other side of the couch, his picture fading from my palm. There were more important things to think about. If only I could think about them.

I gritted my teeth as I crawled over to pick up the band again and call Clarence. I needed to talk to him even if he was on his honeymoon.

"What's wrong?" Clarence asked, his voice sleepy.

"Did I wake you?"

"It doesn't matter. What happened?"

It was nice speaking to the one person who gave me the least bullshit, ironic considering Clarence thrived on it elsewhere. I rubbed at my teary eyes as I explained the situation.

"Shit, man. Where are you now?"

I pinched the bridge of my nose. "In the lab. It's the only place I have left unless they take that away too."

"Hold on." There were murmurs in the background, Clarence conversing with his newly-wed wife. "We can lodge you for a few days at our apartment while we're away but I think you want something more permanent." More background conversations. "Oh right, thanks Viola," he sounded like he was smiling. "Evan told me he's been having a difficult time finding a replacement roommate once his current one moves back to Earth. He needs to fill the space quickly, and I'm sure he'll be thrilled to help you out."

Suspicious didn't begin to describe what this sounded like. I'd told Evan I was kicked out, and he said nothing about it. This may as well be another trap to make a fool out of me. "It's okay. I'm not desperate. I just needed to vent a bit."

“Don’t be stupid. This is perfect. Stop acting like Evan is out to get you.”

Said the guy who believed every one of Evan’s tricks. It was like that time in middle school when Evan told Clarence I should get checked for face-eating bacteria when my acne started, or in high school when he warned Clarence that the muscles in my legs would atrophy because I was sitting so much at my desk doing homework. Not to mention that time when I was moving to University and Evan scared my brother so much that Clarence called Mom, who then had to cause a whole scandal at Lucas’s apartment, all because Evan claimed Mars was infested with bed bugs.

“Thanks for the tip, Clarence. I’ll see what I can do.”

“Oh shut up. I’m calling Evan and you will at least see the apartment before you turn it down.”

I grunted out a sarcastic thank you, holding back my bitterness as we said good night. If he was getting involved, it’d be only more trouble if I refused.

There was no way for my life to get any worse, which made me remember George. I checked on my mold samples. Still alive. Then I checked the rest of my petri dishes. Blooming like it was springtime.

I heaved out a sigh of relief. My lousy day was nothing that hours of mind-numbing analysis couldn’t solve.

The next morning I was cramping in all my joints, but I had fleshed out a solid paper I could show to my professor, long overdue on my end. I went through the motions of going to classes and taking notes, even made small-talk with my classmates without exploding when they asked me about Mid-semester Break.

All that was left was to contact Evan and get it over with.

“I see,” he said over the phone, his tone tinged with satisfaction. “I don’t know, though. They have a strict no-zombie policy over here.”

“Don’t worry, there’s no brains of substance for me to feast on.”

Central got its name because it was the center-point of Mars colonization, and any neighborhood outside of it always made me nervous. The high level of urban development meant Central was the safest, and its combination of human and trouwan technology meant it boasted great buildings such as Mars University, a giant spiral structure nearly touching the air shield, capable of

withstanding a sudden eruption into space and of keeping its thousand or so inhabitants sustained for several years in the aftermath.

The neighborhood Evan sent me to, on the other hand, was on the fringes of the colony. The South Bridge loomed overhead, the highway packed with commuters to one of the five connecting space stations, including Station 1123.

As I waited in the rising elevator, I got a good view of the speckle of old buildings, many over a hundred years old, made of connecting pods, all identical and all capable of surviving independently thanks to their clunky safety air locks and bulbous oxygen and water tanks. The slightly newer complexes such as Evan's were less restrained, with more aesthetic compartments and their emergency systems smaller and tucked between the walls. Development around here was slow, so it made the prices cheaper.

The elevator opened to a narrow hallway, the sides of it curved outwards. I was relieved when Evan appeared to give me a tour. To the far left was the living room. The first entry in was the kitchen. The second a little bathroom. The two doors at the far right were bedrooms. Everything was cramped tight, stuff packed into every available corner, and the room that would be mine contained a bed and dresser that had to be pulled up into the wall or else they took up all the floor space. This was newer construction and didn't consist of an all-in-one pod with retractable kitchen, bathroom, and living quarters. Even the seals connecting the rooms to the hallway were barely noticeable.

I went in slowly, checking my feet, checking the door and ceiling. I ran my hands along the wall, then around the bed frame and mattress, opening and closing every drawer.

"So, yeah," Evan said with a grin. "Sasha left this morning. It's hard to find people who come recommended, so if you can afford the rent, I'll be happy to sign you up."

Happy to sign me up? What was he pulling? "How come I had to find out about this through Clarence? Am I not good enough unless *he* recommends me?"

His gaze was fixed on mine even as he fiddled with the plastic seal of the doorframe. "It's complicated, but since you're already here, I think it'll be worth your time."

I blinked, unsure of how to answer that. He had to be playing stupid. "Ah, but, you missed the part that I don't trust you. And the part that I don't want

anything from you. Have I been too subtle about it? Oh sure, let me sign up now. Then I'll find cups of water littering the outside of my room or an air-horn taped behind a door. You'll draw dicks on my face. Paint over every mirror. Stick ass cream into the soap dispenser. Why else would you want me to live with you?"

"Would you ever notice me otherwise?"

What kind of question was that? He was serious about it too. I'd been stuck between Clarence and Evan like a third wheel on a hover car. I had no choice but to pay attention to him. He had that look like when he used to come over and Mom was baking. He'd stare at the oven as though it were withholding gifts from him, and when Mom would take out her brownies, he'd jump at the chance to eat one, even if it was still burning hot. I was the brownie, and I was burning with fury.

It started in my ears and singed down to my pelvis, to 'why does that turn me on' land. There were so many things I wanted to do to him, but I lowered my head, slowly breathing in and out.

"Something tells me you're better off shoving your cock into an electric socket."

"Sounds tempting, but first I need to be able to pay the electricity."

I burst out laughing. The tension had coiled so deep in my chest that I couldn't help going mad. It was too surreal for me to take seriously anymore. Fucking Evan causing me nothing but headaches. "You know what, tell Clarence this is nice and all, but I'd like to compare it with other options first."

"What options? It's all the same unless you live in Central..." to which I coughed and he started laughing, "Damn, man, you got in good with that dick of yours."

"Not good enough, it seems."

"Well, you'll be glad to know this place has its own charm." He put his hand on the wall, caressing it like a cherished possession. "I'd choose it over those gaudy towers any day."

"They're very functional."

"They don't have anything I can't offer."

I could have sworn he meant it personally, but why did it matter to him what I thought? In fact, why was I even considering this proposition? A day

ago I wanted nothing to do with him, and now we'd be roommates? Was I really that desperate?

Evan crossed his arms as I prodded the mattress, letting the silence simmer. With Lucas gone, I had no excuses, no 'oh sorry, it'll make my boyfriend jealous if I'm living with another dude.' This wasn't a bad apartment either. The price was affordable, and the commute wasn't long. The only catch was Evan, and, damn, he was a catch.

"You know what," I finally said, finding myself at a loss, "Fine. I'll do it—just to prove you wrong. And when I regret it in the morning, I'll just put it down as another reason why you're the bane of my existence."

Evan's prize-winning smile was back. "I'm flattered I matter so much."

"Sure. If that helps you sleep better at night."

He got out the contract for the apartment, a three-month lease that could be extended if necessary.

I signed it, shaking my head the whole time. "I can't believe this is happening."

Evan pat me on the back. "You'll believe it when you get the bill."

Minutes later we were in the kitchen going through his liquor collection in celebration. Some of the bottles were too expensive to be anything but gifts. I opted for the beer in the fridge instead. I made him drink it first, in case it was something foul, and when he didn't convulse in agony, I took a sip myself. He had good taste.

We sat in the living room with our beers, the silence palpable. What were we supposed to talk about now that we lived together? Evan turned on the television, and I didn't have to wonder for long.

It took a week before our schedules aligned again. Evan's work hours started before I awoke, and my lab hours ended after he fell asleep. It was a surprise that nothing jumped at me from the fridge or fell on me when I moved my furniture, but it was unnerving knowing someone was around whenever I wasn't looking, using the soap or shifting the location of food containers. It was almost like living with a ghost. If that ghost was also complaining to me now about restocking toilet paper.

I never realized he could get so wound up about small things like hair in the sink or crumbs on the floor, and it was... hilarious. The more he yelled at me, the more I laughed. The more expletives he showered me with, the more I glowed with pride. If it was this easy to get him fuming, I had a whole list of things to add.

“Are you even listening?” Evan whined. “Because I will throw you out.”

I held my stomach, trying to calm myself so I could give a coherent response. “After all the effort you put into getting me in? I don’t think so.”

Evan clenched his jaw, pushed his hand through his hair, and spun in a circle before beginning his pace around the room for the thousandth time. “You’re not taking this seriously at all.”

“I’ve had a house cleaner do it for the past two years.” I lounged in the recliner. “It’s not a skill I possess.”

“You’re going to have to learn.”

Evan sounded like he was pleading with me, and something about it turned me on. I needed to have a long talk with my dick about what it chose to be attracted to. “You’re in luck. I settle for no less than a B.”

“You mean A.”

“Be pleased to know I stopped being a straight-A student. It’s maddening. I ace tests with 50s when the average is a 42.”

Evan eyed me up and down. “How’d you not go insane?”

“I already went there and back. I’ve settled on luke-mad.”

His gaze met mine. “Can you, in your luke-madness, remember to change the toilet roll next time?”

“Tough job, but I’ll consider it.”

After that began a week of him leaving notes everywhere, asking me to do this or that. The first couple of days I sucked it up and did my best to follow his instructions, but then the notes started to get more involved, asking me to do the laundry for both of us or having me wrap a lunch for him.

I knew he was seeing how much he could take advantage and I had to put a stop to it. He wanted me to grab his suit from the dry cleaner? He’d have to help me restock on my condom supply.

Of course, when I found the condom package the next day, I had no choice but to get to the cleaners. Which made me wonder what sort of game we were playing now. So upon receiving his next note about washing dishes, I told him he'd have to make me a sandwich and buy me flowers first.

And he did.

That weekend we were back to sitting in the living room in silence.

"So..." I began, not really knowing where to take the conversation I thought we should have.

"Did you ever get those boxes from the ex?" Evan said instead.

I nodded. "It's officially over between me and Lucas."

"Then why'd you need the condoms?"

My head swerved to stare him down. I didn't take Evan for stupid. He should have known I asked out of spite, but his expression said something else. Like he was upset. What was his problem? "Are you bothered by sexual relations between humans and trouwans?"

His eyebrows shot up. "What? No."

"Because you're acting awfully sensitive about my sex life."

Evan glared at me. "You're an idiot."

"You're not denying it."

"There's nothing to deny when the claim is absurd. I'm not a serpoprobe."

"You do realize that's what they all say, don't you?"

Evan closed the gap between us, not a difficult feat when he'd sat at arm's length away. "I don't care who they sleep with," he said, so close I could feel his breath on me. "They could have human-trouwans massive orgies for all I care. It's you..." His voice trailed off as though I had to fill in the blank.

"Me? What do I have to do with this? Don't get me tangled in your politics."

"You," he repeated, "are the densest being I have ever had the misfortune of falling for."

Before I could verbalize a response, Evan's arm was around my waist. A second later, his lips connected with mine. A lightning bolt travelled through

my spine as my hand threw itself into action, smacking him across the cheek. Evan cried out and leaned away.

I expected his face to wrinkle into a snarl, but instead he just gazed at me with wet eyes, scanning me slowly as his cheek reddened. "Did that make you feel better?"

I blinked, all my anger turning to a cold spray. Did it? My palm still tingled from the impact. There were days I dreamed of punching him, but it was to stop him from being so satisfied at ruffling my mood. The more he succeeded in aggravating me, the bigger his ego grew. Except I finally snapped.

The cold spread through my veins. It wasn't fair. I wanted him; worse, I wanted him to want me. This had to be an elaborate trick. If I answered him, overwhelmed with emotions and pleading for forgiveness, his sad puppy-dog eyes would disappear and he'd point at me, laughing. "You're so easy," he'd say. "It's why I keep you around."

The more I thought it over, the more the air grew heavy between us. Evan's eyes watered as his gaze fell to the floor. "I guess I deserve this. I'm sorry, Clark. I never meant to make you hate me so much."

"I don't hate you." It left my mouth faster than I could stop it.

"Then why do you never notice me?"

"What kind of question is that? You'd been involved in my life for over seventeen years. It's only been the past four that I haven't seen you practically every day."

"And yet no matter what I do, you've never seen me as anything more than your brother's friend."

"What do you want from me?" I croaked. "Are you saying you want to be with me? How can I believe a flirt like you?"

"You think I'm playing with you?" Evan leaned in close again, his eyes wide and dilated. "I've never given as much of myself to anyone as I have with you. Your attention is the only kind that fills me with any meaning, and I've spent my entire life making sure you remembered me, for better or worse."

He may as well have thrown a bomb at me. Was Evan not the irredeemable douchenozzle I'd pinned him as all those years? The worst best news of my life? I shuddered as I grabbed at the cuff of his shirt. "What's with the confession all of a sudden?"

“If I intend to keep you, I have to pay a price.”

All this effort to dig into my brain, and he had me. I wanted his poison. I wanted this to be real. But I wasn't going to make it easy. “Be with me?” I lifted up my middle finger, making sure I got it right at his face. “Be with this.”

Evan took hold of my wrist as he licked up my finger, his eyes fixed on mine the whole time, “—and maybe more?”

It was hard to conceal my reaction. My dick was straining against my pants, and Evan was just as hard. I knew I'd regret this, but my logic was fucked. I was jumping off a cliff, and if this was how I was going down, I wanted him down on me.

I unzipped my pants with my free hand and Evan, not without a knowing smile, dropped to his knees without another word. This I could get used to.

Evan lowered my pants, pulled down my boxer-briefs, and nuzzled his lips against my erection. I couldn't say I was displeased. I bit my lip to hold in my moan as Evan's tongue licked up my shaft and swirled around the head. Our eyes met for a moment and he grinned, the glint in his eyes making me wary of having him so close to my balls as he cupped them, squeezing suggestively, the pressure somehow both pleasurable and menacing, before he swallowed my cock like a snake with its prey.

With his wet lips expanded around my girth and his cheeks hollowed out, his mouth gave the perfect amount of suction to drive me mad. He bobbed his head up and down the length, my vein-studded skin gleaming whenever he pulled off to suck at the head. I was going to lose it if I let him go at this pace.

“—No,” I took his chin into my hand, knowing this may be my only chance to get what I wanted out of him. “I'm not letting you take over. Strip and get on my bed.”

My cock swayed in the cold as Evan licked his lips and smiled again before he stood and pressed past me to the narrow hallway.

I dropped my clothes, staring at the sight in front of me. Evan was nothing short of professional as he precariously sat on the edge of my bed, naked, his hand gliding up and down his cock—fat in the head and curved to the left. And he knew he looked the part too. It made me want to smack him again, which only made me harder.

In my wallet was a condom and one-use lube packet I kept handy. If I could make Evan squirm for once, I'd tumble down every black hole.

I closed in on him, the force of my palm against his chest sending him down the mattress. He bounced slightly, his expression full of lusty curiosity as I rolled the condom on myself, squirting the lube generously over my taut cock. He grinned and lifted his knees up. At least we were in agreement.

But I wasn't going to play it his way. I looped my arm under his right knee, twisting him to his side as I aligned my cock with his ass. I could have been generous and stretched him first, but he'd use the opportunity to bring things back to his pace, and that would be no fun for me. I pushed my tip at his hole, getting ample satisfaction as his face contorted, his eyes squeezing tighter and his mouth opening wider as I breached the entrance, sliding further and further inside him.

"Yes," I hissed as I leaned closer, "You like my cock buried up your ass, don't you, you filthy cum receptacle."

"Yeah," Evan said firmly, completely confident in his statement. He arched himself up, his mouth meeting mine. I grasped the back of his neck, his tongue hot and firm against mine as his ass tightened around my cock.

Then his head dropped back to the covers and I perched his leg on my left shoulder, my weight on my right elbow as I pumped my hips, ramming my cock against him until all he could do was make unintelligible sounds and thrash against the sheets. One of his hands found his cock and he tugged at it, the purple-pink tip giving out a drop of pre-cum. I thrust harder, my own cock yearning.

"Clark," his voice cracked as his eyes welled up and dripped as he tried to blink the wetness away.

I lifted his head again, my kiss as erratic as my thrusts. Within my undulating motion, my pelvis seared and sparked and sent out a surge. I grunted and grabbed Evan's hair, keeping him close as I pounded through my orgasm. The friction from my chest seemed to help Evan find his own release, and his voice vibrated through me as a hot stream hit my belly.

I dropped to the bed with a thunk, heaving for air as my pulse pounded in my ears. Evan rolled over, draping his arm over me, mumbling something. I wiped the itchy drops of sweat off my brow, acutely aware of the cum on my stomach and the used condom on my cock.

As much as I despised any sort of cleaning, this had to be taken care of or else the cum would congeal into super glue between my hairs. I groaned as I

forced myself to roll off the bed, fighting the intense urge to pass out. At least when I was with Lucas, I had reason to run to the shower. Trouwan cum was like lava and then it congealed into super glue.

Evan was already out of it, his lids half closed and his stupid grin loosening. He was startled by my movements, his hand reaching out to grab mine. "Where you going?" he slurred.

I pointed at myself. "To wash the gift you left behind."

Evan snorted as his tension eased and he waved me away.

Yeah, he had it easy. Bastard.

The steam felt nice against my skin as I flushed the condom and stepped under the rush of water. I lathered the soap and scrubbed from my neck to my toes, my muscles sore from the unexpected exercise.

I still wasn't sure what any of this meant. I didn't go around having one-night-stands, and I surely didn't want my brother's best friend to be my first in that regard. It didn't help that Evan was a crier in bed. My chest thumped as I found myself staring at the mildly yellow tiles. What in the universe did I get myself into?

Before I could answer myself, the bathroom door opened, sending in a quick chill before it closed again. Evan's shadow hovered inches from the curtain as he pulled it to the side, his eyes soft and pleading as he looked me up and down.

"Bored already?" I asked, wondering what he wanted.

Evan stepped inside the shower stall, his chest compressed to my back as he strained to fit. The shower was made for one person at a time. It was worse than being cornered.

He planted his face to the crook of my neck, inhaling me as his hands roamed the front of my body.

I exhaled slowly. "You just love making things inconvenient for me."

"I love you."

I closed my eyes, the steady tap of water drowning out the rapid beating in my chest. Those three words never felt sharper, amplified, echoing through my veins. Every part of him that touched me sent shivers through my spine, coaxing my cock into stirring once more. He had me so wound around his finger, I'd forget to breathe if he asked me to. But love?

There were fantasies I had where we stood like this, exchanging sweet nothings. They never culminated in declarations of love.

“Did I leave you speechless?” He kissed up my neck, sucking at it so hard it’d bruise for certain. His hands reached for mine, gripping them, twining the fingers tight. “You’re just too adorable when you’re agitated. Did you know your nose turns pink when you’re embarrassed or enraged?”

My nose twitched. “I should smack you again.”

His cock grew firm and pushed against me. “I’d like that.”

And my heart didn’t know which way to pump blood anymore. I needed air. I needed to break free of this spell. I needed him to stop feeling so intoxicatingly good against me.

“I love you,” Evan repeated, this time louder. “I’ve loved you since the day we met.”

I sighed. Love was not the right word for what I felt that second. Love was steeped in sweetness and compassion. This meant much more. I could finally show him how I felt about this long pursuit of his, of his need to be obsessed over. He wanted obsession? I’d fill his days with so much of me, he’d forget the rest of the universe. I took his hand and folded it over my cock.

“You’re going to deeply regret seducing me.”

He groaned in my ear. “Clark, you have no idea how long I’ve waited for you to say that.”

“Uh huh,” I merely acknowledged his charming reply. “Your ass is going to memorize the contours of my dick.”

A month into living with Evan, of digesting that we were potentially now dating, I could finally say I understood him better.

There were days when I was absorbed in University work and I’d find his face taped to my books, his photos over my diagrams. I had to encrypt my computer so he’d stop making himself my wallpaper. Confronting him only ended up in hot, angry sex, after which he wasn’t a bother for several days.

In response, I had him wear an ear tag that said, “Property of Clark Waters.” It was supposed to be a one-day joke, but he was so proud of it that it became his most prized accessory.

The one thing that did end successfully, however, was that one time I got really angry at him for hiding my tablet with all my lab notes. I ended up going to a kinky sex shop and asking the clerk for the most torturous device they had. It was ridiculously too sadistic even for me, so I didn't get it. Instead I found a strap-on and my mind did a somersault. That night I cuffed Evan to his bed—cuffs I had bought previously to keep him from wandering into my room at night after I found out he had the key to my doorlock—and attached the strap-on over his underwear. He was confused at first, but once I lubed up the dildo and got myself naked, he was fiercely regretted hiding my things.

"This," I said as I aligned my ass with the dildo, "is what you're missing out on every time you interfere with my work."

And I rode that dildo to orgasm, watching Evan's contorted face as his own appendage got no love that night. After that he treated all my University-related stuff like it was made of uranium.

Today he had something to show me back at the shop. Unfortunately, I still didn't have a ship, so I had to take a taxi over.

He was a hot mess, every inch of him caked with grime, but he was smiling as he wiped his hands on an equally grimy towel. "Remember how I said your piece of shit ship belonged in a dumpster?"

I pinched the bridge of my nose. "I don't think that's how that conversation went."

"Well," Evan said as he pushed his hand through his hair, the ruffle of it reminding me of what he looked like post-sex, "I was planning on disassembling it and selling off the scrap to buy you a new one, but in the process I found the skeleton and exterior to be in recoverable condition—" his smile spanned the width of his face, "—so I ended up gutting it and installing more reliable parts from a different model."

He took my hand and led me over to where a white sheet was laid over something wide enough to be a ship. When he stripped the sheet off, he raised his hands in victory. "It's like your old thing but less of a disgrace."

I blinked slowly, letting the image sink into my head. That was my ship alright, but shinier and less like it was about to break in half.

Evan opened the hood to show off the insides, all brand new, without a spot of dust on them.

"How'd you afford this?" I asked as my finger glided over the curves of the engine.

“It was a bit out of budget, but I plan to downsize the apartment.”

I stared at him in disbelief.

He looked at me all innocently. “After Sasha left, I was planning on doing it anyway. I didn’t actually expect to fill the room, let alone have you live with me. Seems like the extra room is unnecessary again.”

I wanted to be angry, but it served me right to buy into his plea for a roommate. He’d would have said anything to keep me around. Besides, the ship really did look good and it could use some breaking in.

“The backseat converts into a bed,” Evan said with a wink, obviously thinking the same thing.

I exhaled and considered this a draw. I took Evan and kissed him, disregarding the looks from the other employees or customers. There was a picture snapped, a picture I’d find looming online in a few hours. It only served as motivation to kiss him more fervidly. Let everyone know he was mine.

“Lucky day to get stranded in space,” I whispered.

The End

Author Bio

I entertain people with stories. When I'm not writing, I'm out looking for new sources of inspiration. I love adventures, no matter how big or small, and I'm always up for trying something different, perhaps even kinky. I have a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering even though I'm really pursuing a career in writing, editing, and other publishing related fun stuff. I even volunteer my time at an indie bookstore.

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