

















“Sorry,” Wioldy answered, trying not to embarrass himself farther by actually panting over his companion. “Was thinking...”

“Nice thoughts?” Soft, seductive, welcoming as a light in the window.

“Very nice thoughts.” He cleared his throat, more to stopper the words than anything else. Oh, you’ve got it bad, haven’t you? he said to himself, uncaring of whether or not this was desperation or lust at first sight: he was in serious danger of falling for this lovely man with the wonderful laugh and the best bum in the Western Hemisphere. “But as I was saying,” before I almost kissed you right here in front of everyone, “I’ve had sex with blokes,” and he was so proud that he’d actually come right out and said it, flat out, the way he’d never dared before, “but I’ve only just come out...”

“Yes, I thought I could smell mothballs. Oh, don’t look at me like that, I was only kidding and you know it.” A pause, while the waiter fussed over food and plates and glasses. Then: “Look, I’ve never even been in the closet, so I never had to come out—”

“But what about your family? Your mother?” It burst from him, driven by memories of his chapel-going mother and strap-wielding father. “How did she feel when she found out?”

“She didn’t find out, Mac,” Keith said gently, slowly realising how carefully he was going to have to handle this man, “because it was never a secret. I’ve known all my life, and it never even occurred to me to not tell Mum and Dad when I had my first crush.” He stopped then, continuing when he saw the longing in Wioldy’s eyes to hear more about something so wonderfully foreign. “They didn’t bat an eyelash. Accepted it the same way they accepted it when my older sister came home and told them about her first boyfriend. Although,” dimples appeared, inviting Wioldy to share the humour, “they didn’t tell me how not to get pregnant. How did your parents take it when you told them?”

“Never did tell them. They died years ago,” his tone very off-hand, so that it was impossible to tell if he were sad or glad over it, “so it’s only me and my sister now. She’s in Canada, moved there with her family a while ago.”

“So how did she take it?”

Wioldy finished his Brie, sipped at his wine, fidgeted about a bit. “You know,” he finally said, “you’ve got a brilliant interrogation technique. You’d make a great copper.”

“Was hoping I would, tonight.”

Wioldy knew that he had suddenly developed a most fatuous expression, but he was too delighted to care. “I think that could be arranged.”

“I think so too, so go easy on the booze. I don’t mind you relaxed, but I don’t want brewer’s droop getting in the way of my plans.”

All set for a discreetly libidinous chat, Wioldy was very put out indeed when the waiter, all efficiency and smarmy smiling, chose that moment to start them on their main course. By which point, Keith was back on one track Wioldy would happily forget.

“You were telling me how your sister took you coming out.”

He mumbled his answer round a tender chunk of beef.

“Pardon?” Keith asked, not taking the hint.

Wioldy chewed, swallowed, accepted that sex with—and was that really all he was hoping for?—this man was worth being vulnerable. “I haven’t told her.”

Keith simply stared at him. “Let me get this straight, if you’ll pardon the pun. You’ve come out, but you haven’t told your family? What about your friends.”

“Not in so many words, not really, no.” His confession to Fat Andy didn’t count; benign that mad bastard might be, but friend was pushing it. “Anyroad, I tend to keep myself to myself.”

“All the better to hide yourself.”

Shame crept up his spine. “Suppose you could put it like that.” If you were feeling vicious, he wanted to add, not realising that he was, for once, visibly upset.

“Christ, but you’ve had it rough!”

The unexpected sympathy made him jerk his head up, startled him into looking at Keith. “Not as bad as some,” he said, a lifetime of not complaining too ingrained to let sympathy pass.

“But not half as easy as it’s been for me.” A slight shake of the head, barely enough to move the thick, straight brown hair. “There’s a lot you need to tell me, Mac, isn’t there?”

“What? You mean, do I like whips and chains and all that sort of thing?”

“No. I meant why you could never come out. You’re no coward, that’s obvious from what Ellie and Peter have said about you, so it must be something else.”

But the caring comments were lost, drowned out by that one reference. “And what have Ellie and Peter been saying about me? And when did you speak to them?”

“Tut, tut,” Keith said, “you haven’t even read me my rights yet.”

“Suppose I did come on a bit strong there, didn’t I?”







