

## Thanksgiving with the Morgans

On the morning of Thanksgiving, Rory and Maggie were on their way to Rory's parent's house for the four day weekend. Rory had her left hand resting on Maggie's driving leg, where she had found she liked to keep it and Maggie didn't seem to mind, as every now and again, Maggie would take her right hand off the wheel to caress or hold Rory's hand.

"Woman, keep both hands on the wheel, please. Do you know how dangerous distracted driving is?"

"Says the one who is distracting me by fondling me."

"This isn't fondling, you want to see fondling? Cause I could show you some fondling." Rory slowly moved her hand up Maggie's thigh and Maggie quickly grasped Rory's hand in hers to stop its progress. Rory chuckled. "Just trying to get all the fondling in while I can. Just because we'll be sleeping together, doesn't mean anything will happen. I don't know about you, but sleeping under my parent's roof does not turn me on at all."

"Um, going to have to agree with you on that one. But it's nice of them to let us share a room. I honestly didn't expect that."

"I figured they'd be cool with it. But, you were right; it was right to ask and not assume."

"Always is. Gotta admit though, it's gonna be difficult to restrain myself." A grin crept up Maggie's face and she gave Rory a sideways glance.

"Think of it as going back to the early days of our relationship when we were just making out on the couch. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm just content to feel you next to me. It doesn't always have to be about the big show, though I like the big show quite a bit."

Maggie couldn't keep the smile off her face but she was blinking back tears. "Baby, you really need to work on your timing. You can't just say sweet things like that when I'm driving. Now I just want to hug the stuffing out of you and I can't and that annoys me."

"I'm sorry my love, I'll try not to be charming or romantic the rest of the weekend."

"Good, it's all I ask. Just don't hurt yourself. If you feel the charm bubbling up, go with it, just use caution."

"Duly noted."

"I'm so glad you came back that night."

"Of course I came back. There was no other option."

"I've always wondered why you left in the first place, instead of staying and trying to convince me."

"You don't know?"

"I really don't."

"Maggie, what I wanted, there was no question, but it wasn't about me. It had to be your choice. If I had pushed you, that would have been wrong. Maggie, I wanted you from day one, but you had to want me too. If you weren't ready I had no right to force things. I would have been a major asshole if I had and that's not how I wanted our relationship to start. I wanted to start from a good place."

Maggie wiped her eyes. "I thought you weren't going to be charming anymore?"

"Sorry, just slipped out." But she gave Maggie a warm smile.

Maggie slapped the steering wheel. "Why, why do you have to be so goddamn lovable?"

Rory laughed out loud for several moments, somewhat surprised by Maggie's outburst. Finally, she was able to get herself under control enough to say, "It's just the way I'm made, I guess."

"Gah, you're just too much and much better than I ever thought I'd have." Her voice trailed off and she turned her head to look out her window momentarily.

"Maggie, are you kidding me? Why wouldn't you get someone good? You're the best person I know."

"Biased."

"Established. But truthful. I'm the grateful one that you could see beyond my age and student status and see me for who I am. And I know you truly do. Matter of fact, I'm not truly me until you see me. You ever feel that way? That you're just going through the motions of the day to day, not really being seen, to the point that you might as well not even be there, until that one person actually sees you and you suddenly realize you're real. That you're not just a figment of someone else's imagination? I don't know, maybe it's just me." Rory shrugged and turned to look out her window. When she noticed Maggie pulling to the side of the road, she turned back around in alarm. "Something wrong?"

Maggie had tears on her cheeks she didn't even try to wipe away. Once parked, she unbuckled her seat belt and threw her arms around Rory. "You were always real. We just needed to see each other at the right time." Maggie cradled Rory's face in her hands and kissed her lightly on the lips. "Please never doubt you're real again. I couldn't stand it if you weren't here."

"I'll always be real now."

...

By the time they arrived at Rory's parents' house, they were both subdued. Maggie found that she couldn't stop giving Rory light, reassuring touches. A hand to the center of her back as they went up the stairs to drop off their bags, fingers on her arm at random moments at the dinner table, one hand on Rory's knee while they ate. She wanted her to know she was really there. That her being in Maggie's life mattered.

"So, Maggie, has our daughter been treating you well?"

Maggie and Rory exchanged a smile, then Maggie turned to John Morgan. "She's been wonderful, John. She's quite the romantic and she takes good care of me."

Ann smiled at her daughter. "I'm glad to hear it. She knows that if she didn't respect women, I'd beat her with a wooden spoon."

Around food, Rory said, "Wouldn't be the first time."

"Don't talk with your mouth full. But, you always deserved it, too." Ann looked at Maggie across the table. "She was such a willful child. Never wanted to listen to me, only her father. She was Daddy's little girl from day one. This nice, polite, thoughtful girl you see now took years of training." Ann winked at her daughter.

"Well, you did a great job. Thank you."

"I knew that someday she would meet a nice woman who could appreciate all my efforts."

"I most definitely do. I couldn't ask for a better partner in crime."

"Well, if it's mischief you have in mind, you have the right girl."

"Thanks Dad."

"So, Maggie, have your parents met Aurora yet?" Rory and Maggie exchanged a worried, guarded look. "What? What'd I say?"

After an encouraging nod from Rory, Maggie said, "Well, my father died a few years ago and my mother and I don't really speak much, not since I came out."

"That's terrible. How could a mother deny her own child? I always told Rory, I don't care who you love, as long as they are worthy of you."

"She is mom, she is. We were just discussing that on the way here. We were talking about what we're thankful for."

"I'm thankful for pie."

"What is it with you and pie lately?"

"I like pie."

"You're weird," Rory chided.

"Is it weird to like pie?"

"It's okay John, she called me weird the other day. I think it's how her kind shows affection," Ann said.

"My kind?" Rory asked in disbelief.

"You know...a millennial."

"Ah! Mother, how dare you!"

"Well, it's true; you are the age of the millennials. Embrace it, dear."

"That'd be like me calling you a Boomer."

"That'd be a mistake you wouldn't make twice." Ann narrowed her eyes at her daughter. Maggie was trying to suppress her giggles.

"Well, my child, if you're not a millennial, then what are you?" John asked.

Rory looked from Maggie to her parents then said in all seriousness, "I am an experience."

Maggie nearly choked on her turkey and Rory had to pat her on the back.

Her mother didn't seem phased. "Just try to be a good experience or I'll break another spoon over your butt, hmm?" That did not help Maggie's situation at all and she had to lay her head on her arm as she tried to control her giggles.

John arched an eyebrow at his daughter. "Amateurs."

Rory shrugged. "It's her first day, she'll get used to it."

...

After dinner was cleared away and the Bears game was turned on, Maggie was beginning to fall asleep while leaning against the crook of Rory's arm as they sat on the sofa together. It had been a long day full of good food, good conversation, and much emotion. A part of her wanted to drag Rory to bed, for sleep, the other half was enjoying how comfortable it was. The banter between the Morgans was constant, but it was always full of love and good humor.

As Ann had previously mentioned, Rory and her father did indeed bond over a couple of beers as they sat watching the game. Maggie had never been around Rory when she had been

drinking beer before; she'd only seen the after effects. But she had to admit, there was just something sexy about Rory sitting back on the couch with her signature boots and faded jeans, the dress shirt unbuttoned and the sleeves rolled up, her undershirt untucked, beer in one hand—it was iconic butch, Maggie realized, and it had always turned her on. But she kept telling herself to rein it in. Plus, she really was exhausted. She was content to just snuggle up to her love and relax.

Maggie had been dozing on and off, having trouble keeping her eyes open. At one point she thought she heard Ann say Rory's name and Rory ask, "Huh?" but Maggie didn't hear Ann say another word, just Rory's response, so she wasn't sure if Ann had actually spoken or not. The next thing she knew, she heard Rory say to her, "Come on, sleepy head, I think we should head upstairs. You've had a long day."

"I'm not tired. I'm wide awake."

"Uh huh. Come on." Rory gently removed her arm from Maggie's shoulders, stood up, and took Maggie by the hand and pulled her up from the couch.

When she stood up, Maggie stretched and yawned. "I'm sorry to be falling out so early."

"Nonsense, we've all had a long day. We'll probably be turning in soon ourselves."

"Since when do you night owls go to bed before midnight?"

"Your mother and I are old people now, Rory. These things happen."

"Uh huh. I don't buy it."

"You shouldn't," Ann said.

"Come on, Maggie, before he starts talking again."

"You better respect your elders, missy," John playfully admonished.

"Good night, parentals." She waved at them, as she let Maggie go ahead of her. She put her hand on Maggie's back to keep her steady. When they got to Rory's room, a room Maggie hadn't seen yet, as she had stayed in the hall when Rory had put their bags away earlier in the day, Maggie tried to take it all in. She began to walk around the room as Rory closed her door.

"I love your posters."

"Thank you." Rory, unlike most teenagers, had her rock posters framed, so they looked like works of art. Rory's walls were adorned with all the great female rockers that Maggie had grown up with but not really had a connection to: Melissa, Joan, Madonna, Cyndi, and Wynonna.

"Why Wynonna? Isn't she a country singer and not a rocker?" Rory had come up to stand behind her.

"Not a rocker? Are you not familiar?" Maggie gave her a look. "Oh, right. Here. Let me show you and you tell me. Have a seat." So, Maggie sat on the edge of Rory's full size bed while Rory searched through a shelf of CD's until she found the one she was looking for. "Yes, I know, I could have just used my phone, but that would be stupid when it's right here." Maggie just smiled at her. Rory put the CD in her stereo that was under the shelf holding her music and turned the volume up to seven, which was just loud enough to be heard, but not so loud that it would disturb her parents. "Honestly, she should be listened to much louder than this, but whatcha gonna do?"

When the song started to play, Rory began putting on a show for Maggie. She played air guitar and lip synced, much to Maggie's delight, who wasn't sure if she should laugh or not. When it was over, Rory bowed and Maggie applauded. "Thank you, thank you. Don't forget to tip your waitress."

Laughing, Maggie said, “Okay, I can see why she deserves a place on your wall. Do you play guitar?”

“My love, I do not. You want me to?”

“What?”

“Do you want me to learn? It is real sexy.”

“Oh, baby, you don’t need any help in that department.”

“Aww, thank you. But you and I both know that you’re the sexy one in this relationship.”

Rory sat down beside her on the edge of the bed and nudged her shoulder against Maggie’s and smiled.

Maggie snorted. “Oh yeah, I got ‘em lining up at the door.”

“Yeah. I can’t be the only student who wanted you to be their Maggie May.”

Maggie laughed. “You’re sweet, my love, but it’s just not true. I’m just average, you, on the other hand, are a knockout and I know you have way more broken hearts in your wake than I could ever hope to have.”

Rory began to unlace her boots and then put them on the floor next to the bed in front of the nightstand. She was adamant. “Rachel is the only one that I know of. Besides, all I got are long legs and red curls, two things that I really didn’t want but got stuck with. And if people are falling in love with that, they need to reassess their priorities. You, on the other hand, have been blessed by the gods.” She leaned back on her pillows and she brought Maggie with her.

“First of all, that’s not all there is to you. You have the biggest heart of anyone I know and those of us who love you, that’s what we’re falling in love with. As for me, I think you are mistaken, my dear. As I said, I’m just average.”

At the mention of her heart, Rory gave a small smile and blushed, but said, “No, you are anything but average looking.”

Maggie put her hand on Rory’s chest. “Are you about to be charming? Remember what we talked about?”

“I’m sorry, but some things just have to be said. Your beauty is not comprised of your Lady Godiva hair, or your luscious brown eyes, or even your perfect body. Though, I appreciate those things, they’re not what I love about you or find the most beautiful. Pure beauty comes out of you from right about here.” Rory gently put a finger on Maggie’s heart. “I see it every day when you smile at me. I see it when you’re teaching or directing. I see it when you’re not paying attention. That’s when it shines the brightest.”

“Damn you.” Maggie buried her face in Rory’s chest and sniffed back tears. Rory stroked her hair.

“Oops, I did it again.”

Maggie shook with laughter. “Really?”

“Hey, it worked didn’t it? You laughed.”

“Yes, yes it did. Oh, Rory, I love you so much. You surprise me every day with how much you love me.”

“You surprise me by letting me.”

Maggie placed a soft kiss on her lips. “Come on, sweet talker; let’s put our pj’s on and cuddle.”

“Now who’s the sweet talker?”

...

In the middle of the night something awakened Rory from a strange dream. She was dreaming about the play, but she had recast herself as Brick and her Maggie as Maggie the cat. Her Maggie was gorgeous in the ivory gown, with her hair flowing free. But Rory kept screwing up and breaking character. She couldn't stand to see Maggie upset. She couldn't continue to be as indifferent as Brick was to Maggie's suffering. She kept going off script to reassure Maggie she loved her. Every time she did, however, Charles, who was directing, would holler out, "No you don't love her! You're just stuck with her. Start acting like it! Again!"

But she couldn't help protesting, "But I do love her! I want her to know. I do love her!"

What awakened her was not her dream, however, but something that sounded, at first, like a mewling kitten. The Morgans had no pets, though Rory had always wanted a dog. When she came awake more, she realized the noise was coming from right beside her. It was Maggie and she was crying. For a brief, half asleep moment, Rory thought that Maggie had somehow found out about her dream and was upset, thinking Rory didn't love her after all, then she quickly shook that thought out of her head, realizing that was silly. She put her hand on Maggie's shoulder and whispered, "Maggie, what's wrong?" Saying nothing, Maggie just sniffed and Rory brushed a tear off Maggie's cheek. Maggie scooted closer and Rory encircled her waist.

Rory waited for Maggie to be able to speak in her own time. Finally, "I'm sorry I woke you."

"Don't apologize; just tell me what's wrong."

"I miss him."

"Your father?"

"Yes. Being here with your wonderful family..." She couldn't speak any more, words were failing her.

"I should have thought of that. I'm so sorry."

Shifting her body, Maggie turned around in Rory's arms. "It's not your fault. I'm glad to be here, I really am. I love getting to know more about you. But your parents are indeed wonderful and I was just laying here feeling sorry for myself, thinking of all that I have lost."

"I can only imagine what you're feeling. And I know when the day comes and I lose my father," Rory almost choked up on the words at the mere thought, "I will know then what you are feeling now, but until then, Maggie, try to think about what you've gained. As long as you want me, you also have them. We have so much love to give you. I know it's not the same as having your father here, but we'll do our best to make you feel loved and accepted."

Maggie sniffed again. "God, you are so good at this."

"At what?"

"Making me feel better. You always know the right thing to say."

"Only where you are concerned. Other people, not so much."

"I doubt that but I'm glad you're here."

Amused, Rory said, "I live here."

Maggie lightly smacked her on the chest. "You know what I mean; in my life."

"I know, love. This is where I belong."

"Yes, yes it is."

...

On Friday, the Morgans, along with their newest family member, Maggie, did what they do every Black Friday: put up the Christmas tree. Rory helped her father carry the tree and all the decorations down from the attic. Maggie had to leave the room. The sight of Rory sweaty, doing manual labor, was starting to have a strange effect on her, so she went into the kitchen as not to think about all the things she wanted to do but couldn't while she was still under what was beginning to feel like her in-law's house. She tried to help Ann in the kitchen turn the leftovers into something different but she wasn't having much luck.

Ann was at the stove, stirring a pot of noodles that she was going to turn into something wonderful, Maggie was sure, though she had no idea what. At one point, she turned from the stove and said to Maggie, "Can you hand me the colander, please?"

Maggie turned toward the counter where Ann had pointed and saw several items laid out but she wasn't sure what she was looking for. She felt ridiculous. "I have a PhD, for god's sake, I should be able to figure out what a colander is," she thought.

Ann noticed her hesitation and said, "It's the one with the holes."

Grateful, Maggie retrieved it and made to hand it to Ann, who gestured to the sink, so Maggie put it there. "I'm sure you can tell I don't spend much time in the kitchen. If it weren't for your daughter, I think I would starve."

"That's okay, you have other gifts."

"Now you're just being polite."

"Picked up on that, did you?"

Maggie laughed good-naturedly. "I don't know if I'm witty enough for this family."

"So Rory told you about the prereqs to join this family then?" There was a gleam in her eyes when she asked and she couldn't quite hide the smirk on her face.

"No, she hasn't prepared me at all! Not very nice of her." As Ann drained the pasta and transferred it to another bowl, Maggie stood next to the counter, feeling helpless.

"Maggie, can I ask you a question?"

Maggie could detect the change in tone and dreaded what might come out. "You can ask me anything."

Ann stood next to the sink, one hand on her hip. "Anything?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Were you her first? Her first lover, I mean?"

"Wow," Maggie thought, "I wasn't expecting that." What she said was, "Uh, well, yes. Yes I was."

"I thought so. I'm glad it was you and not someone who wouldn't appreciate the gift for what it was."

"Thank you. I know I'm extremely lucky to have caught her eye."

"You've caught more than that, I believe."

A small smile crept up Maggie's lips. "I know. But she caught mine too."

"She tells me she had to chase you, that you resisted. Was that because of your job or were you just not sure if you liked her?"

"My job. Though I kept telling myself it was wrong, I was attracted to her early on. It just felt wrong to pursue it."

"Why did you?"

“At first, I thought it was out of rebellion. My dean had been tipped off that we were having an affair; though at that time we were not. We had gone out for a bite to eat a few times after rehearsal and shared a sunset together once but that was all.” A wistful look came upon her face as she remembered that day.

“Ah yes, she does love a good sunset.”

“Yes. But it wasn’t rebellion, not really. That was the excuse I used to give myself permission to do what I’d wanted to do for quite some time. And I haven’t regretted it. Ann, I truly love your daughter and I promise, not a day will go by that she doesn’t know that.”

Ann looked at Maggie shrewdly, with her arms crossed over her chest and her back against the sink. Finally, she said, “You pass.”

They shared a smile then Ann returned to the food she was preparing and Maggie really needed to find Rory. “Will you excuse me a moment?”

“Go ahead.” Ann smiled at Maggie as she left the kitchen.

Maggie found Rory as she was bringing a box of decorations into the living room. John was nowhere to be seen. Rory saw Maggie as she was setting the box on the floor and she smiled. “Hey baby.” Maggie said nothing, just went up to Rory, not caring that Rory was sweaty, and put her arms around her and pulled her close. Saying nothing, they stood quietly in each other’s arms, just enjoying the moment. Then John walked in carrying a box of lights.

He took one look at his daughter and Maggie and hollered out, “Ann, the young people are touching each other again. I forget, are we encouraging this behavior?”

Ann’s voice came from the kitchen. “She’s not going to get pregnant at least.”

“Mom!”

“Good point. Carry on.”

Maggie collapsed into giggles against Rory’s shoulder.

“There she goes again.”

“I know, it might be incurable.”

“Rory, you really need to bring home women with a stronger constitution.”

“I thought I had!” Maggie laughed out loud and Rory kissed her on the cheek.

“You’re both crazy and I love you.”

“Thanks Doll, but I’m a married man.” John winked. Maggie just shook her head.

...

On Saturday, Ann had coaxed her daughter into going shopping with her, though it hadn’t been easy.

“But I hate shopping,” Rory whined.

“And I hate washing your father’s shorts, but they’re both a messy business that has to be done at least once a week.”

“Okay, ewww. But I’m going to be bored and you know what happens when I’m bored.”

“Yes, you become a major whiner, like you are now,” Ann threw a scarf at Rory. “Put this on, you’ll need it.”

“But I hate scarves. Honestly, it’s just best if I stay home.”

“You are such a baby sometimes.” Ann gave a loud sigh. “Fine, I’ll take you to a book store,” Ann said defeatedly.

"Dammit woman, you know my weak spot."

"I'm your mother, I installed them."

"Fine. You win this time. Can Maggie come?"

"I think she'll be fine spending the day with your father."

"What are you up to, Mommy Dearest?"

Ann smiled coyly. "I don't like what you're implying. I never beat you with a wire hanger."

"Only because we never used them."

"Precisely. Trust your family dear, we mean you no harm."

"Uh huh. That's what they all say."

"She'll be fine. Come on, get your coat."

Rory grudgingly donned her boots and letterman jacket and kissed Maggie lightly. "If you need me, just call me."

"I think I'll be fine. Have fun with your mother." She hugged Rory goodbye and gave her a kiss on the cheek and whispered, "I expected this, it's okay." When she pulled away, she said, "Have fun, love you."

Rory eyed her father with suspicion. "Be nice to her."

"Moi?" John put a hand to his chest in mock disbelief. "Such mistrust from my only child." John eyed Maggie with merriment in his eyes and put his arm around her shoulders.

"Wanna get soused while our women folk are out spending money? I can show you where I keep the good stuff."

"Okay, but only if we can hire strippers." The Morgans all looked at her in shock.

Finally, John spoke. "I think, my dear that we are going to have a hell of a good time." He gestured to Rory and her mother. "You two squares go shopping; we'll stay here and watch naked women dance for us."

"Aw Mom, they're having strippers."

"Come along. Maybe you can stay for strippers next time. Have fun you two," Ann waved.

"But...man, I always miss the good stuff."

"Bye dear." Maggie waved as they left.

Once the door closed, John nodded to Maggie. "Thought they'd never leave. Let's get a real drink, shall we?"

"I thought you'd never ask. Lead the way."

John bowed and said, "Right this way milady."

"Thank you. I can see where Rory gets her charm."

"Thank *you*." He gestured to a stool around the kitchen island and Maggie sat. As he was looking for wine glasses in the cabinet next to the sink, he said over his shoulder, "White or red?"

"White, if you've got it."

"I do." John turned around with two cartoon emblazoned glasses and asked, "Snopypy or Bugs?"

Maggie laughed. "Oh my gosh, are those jelly glasses? I haven't seen those in years."

"Yep. I have almost the whole set. Wilma bit the dust when someone who shall remain nameless was having a tantrum. Last year." He winked. "So, who will it be?" He held the glasses aloft for her perusal.

"Well, no offense to Bugs, but I've always been a Snoopy girl."

“Good choice.” John went to the fridge and pulled out a bottle of wine. As he was pouring her glass he said, “You know this is her favorite glass too. Though I’ve never seen her drink wine out of it. Of course, I could be wrong and it wasn’t really apple juice.”

The mention of Rory made her smile. “I love hearing about her as a child. Tell me more.”

“Oh, well, there are so many good things. You want to hear the proud father stories or the ‘that’s not my child’ stories?” John chose to stand across from Maggie with his drink in one hand.

“I want to hear it all. What games did she play? Did she play sports? What was her coming out like? Did she go to the prom? Did she have girlfriends?”

“Well, she’s partial to board games, hardly ever went outside, easier than she thought it’d be, no, and no. On prom night I took her into Chicago to see a Cubs game.”

“She likes baseball?”

“Can’t stand it.”

“Then why’d you go?”

“I wanted to show her nine guys who were having a worse day than she was.” He waited a beat before he smiled.

“You’re awful.”

“Hey, it worked.”

“So, she didn’t date anyone?”

“No and we used to ask her why. Know what she said?” Maggie shook her head. “She said girls her age were too immature and she couldn’t stand them. She especially hated it when girls acted dumb when they weren’t. So, when she told us about you we weren’t all that surprised. When we thought about it, it was inevitable that she would end up with an older woman.” He shrugged, as he took a sip of wine.

“Still, I’m sure it couldn’t have been easy hearing about me. I might have been terribly upset if it were my child.”

“As a parent you want more than anything for your child to be healthy and happy. The key is accepting the fact that they are going to make choices, pursue paths that you don’t expect. So, we decided when she was still small to not put our expectations on her and instead, let her be who she was meant to be—whoever it was that that turned out to be. In high school she decided she wanted to pursue acting. We saw how much it made her happy and she took to it with real enthusiasm. Then she came out. No surprise there, we had figured that out already.”

Maggie eyed him shrewdly. “How?”

“Oh, you know, the little things: no interest in boys, a big interest in female musicians, and that time she kissed Becky Simmons in our backyard. She was only seven but you should have seen her face. It was like, ‘This is it!’ But poor little Becky didn’t see it that way. She ran home crying and stopped coming over after that. Basically, her mother and I just paid attention.” John took his now empty glass to the sink and rinsed it out and sat it on the strainer.

“Well, I’m glad you did. I’m so glad she grew up here. You guys did an excellent job. She’s thoughtful, romantic, and funny. Knows what to say and do if I’ve had a bad day. And she’s very generous with her love. Believe me John, that’s what I hold most dear.” Silently she handed him her glass and he rinsed hers as well. When she was finished, he turned to face her with a serious, concerned expression.

“Just remember, for her to love that generously, is leaves her heart open and exposed. I worry that she doesn’t have much in the way of self-preservation skills. I guess what I’m saying is, treat her well. Protect her. She needs you.”

Maggie immediately thought back to the incident in her kitchen when Rory had misunderstood an innocent remark Maggie had made. She almost lost her that day. She had spent every day since holding on tighter, loving her more. She knew exactly what John was talking about. It was that tender center that made Maggie love her the most. She wanted to wrap herself around it and keep it safe. She put her hand on John’s shoulder and gave him her word, “I will John, I promise.” They shared a smile before John faked a cough and turned away. “So, want to go in and see if there’s a game on?”

“Do you actually like football?”

Knowing she was caught, she grinned. “I actually know nothing about football. Maybe you could teach me.”

“Oh, well, you have come to the right place.” John led Maggie to the living room and began to explain the fundamentals of football. Maggie did her best to seem interested. She was just happy to know she had been accepted by John and Ann Morgan. She knew she had an awesome responsibility protecting Rory’s heart. She didn’t take it lightly.

...

On the way to what Rory would soon discover to be the mall, much to her disappointment, she was somewhat anxious. “You think Maggie’s okay?”

Her mother chuckled. “Honey, she’s a grown woman and your father’s a push over, you know that.”

“I know, just, what’s he talking to her about? Is he giving her the third degree?”

“I’m sure he’s not. Maybe he’s just trying to get to know her better, you ever think of that?”

“I knew it; he’s giving her the third degree.”

“Will you relax? Maggie can hold her own, I’m sure.”

“She can. She’s a badass.”

There was a smile on her mother’s face. “So, tell me more about her.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I’ve gotten the sense she loves you and that shows excellent taste, but I don’t know much about her or what it was that drew you to her.”

“You want to know that stuff?”

“Yes, my child, I do.”

“But why?”

“Because I want to know what to get her for Christmas, why do you think? When my daughter brings home a woman and says she’s in love for the first time, I kind of want to know all I can about her.

“You want me to describe why I love her?”

Ann shrugged. “If you want. Can you?”

In the consul Rory had found an ink pen and had begun fidgeting with it absentmindedly. When she answered she was staring out her window, watching the houses roll past, tapping her

left knee with the pen end over end. “I could but it would sound so pedestrian. And I hate that I can’t describe it. I want to say more but can’t think of the words. And that pisses me off.”

“So, she leaves you speechless?”

Rory turned her head to face her mother and smiled. “Yeah, I guess I am. I don’t know, she just, she just...she just made her way into my heart and settled there. If she wasn’t there—if she wasn’t there I would hurt for a long time.” Embarrassed by her own emotions, Rory looked away again.

“I know, baby. You’ve always loved with your whole heart.”

“I don’t know any other way to be.”

“And I love that about you, how your love comes so naturally to you.”

“So, do you really like Maggie?”

“Yes. But, I don’t have much choice, do I?” The question was asked with humor.

“What do you mean?”

“What I mean, child, is that I have a feeling if I didn’t approve, I would lose you.” There was real worry in Ann’s voice as she pulled into the mall parking lot.

“You wouldn’t lose me. Granted, it would make things difficult, but I wouldn’t cut you out of my life the way Maggie’s mother did her.”

“I know that, for the most part. But I would never want to make you feel as if you had to choose between us. One of the hardest parts about being a parent is being able to let them go and trust that the people they give their heart too will love them just as much as you do. Every mother’s dilemma. Ah ha!” Ann found a parking spot not too far from the door and pounced on it. “Which is why I just can’t fathom turning away from your child because she’s gay. Republican yes, but not gay.”

As they got out of the car, Rory took on a sober expression. “Then you’re really going to hate to hear who I voted for governor.” Rory smirked at her mother, who chuffed her on the chin.

With her arm around her daughter’s shoulders, Ann said, “Babygirl, there are some things a mother can forgive and even embrace: a gay child, teen pregnancy, drugs, even killing a man depending on the circumstances. But no child of mine will be allowed back in the house if she votes Republican. That is unforgivable. Which reminds me, you used to have a brother. Used to. So, be careful or I’ll make you flash your voter ID to get in my house.”

“God, you’re harsh.”

“I’d say I have my priorities straight. Now, stay close, it’s not going to be pretty in there. I don’t want you to get hurt. If we get separated, try to find your way back to the car. If I don’t make it back, tell your father I love him.”

“God, I have the weirdest parents ever.”

“Thank you, we try. We took a class.”

“So weird.” Arm in arm, they went into the mall, Rory surprising herself by laughing. She thought, “Maybe this won’t completely suck.”

...

Later that night, their last night, Maggie was sitting cross ways on Rory's bed, her back against the wall, her feet dangling over the edge, watching Rory search the over-stuffed shelf over her desk for something. "Baby, what are you looking for?"

"Just something I think will amuse you." After sorting through a pile of books and folders that had been lying on their sides. Rory declared, "Ah ha, found it!" She turned around with what appeared to be a high school yearbook in her hand and made her way to the bed and sat next to Maggie, who scooted closer. "You want to see pictures of a big dork?"

Maggie laughed. "I'm sure you were never that, my love."

"Oh no?" Once settled, Rory thumbed through the hard-backed book until she found what she was looking for then pointed. "Senior year, drama club. I'm the one with the dopey grin and the fuzzy hair." In the picture, a group of boys and girls were clumped together on a stage, all making silly poses, hamming it up. Except for Rory, who stood off to one side with her arms crosses over her chest, wearing faded jeans with holey knees, an old military issue camouflage jacket over a Joan Jett and the Blackhearts tee-shirt. Her hair wasn't quite as long as it was now and she wasn't wearing engineer boots, but some other kind of clunky boots.

"Oh my god, you were so adorable!" Rory blushed but Maggie was still looking at the picture and didn't notice. "What shoes were you wearing, I can't tell."

"What every self-respecting baby dyke is supposed to wear; Docs."

"Ah, I can't see the yellow thread in a black and white photo. But, you were not a dork. You were cute as hell. Full of teen angst, apart from the crowd. Above all their nonsense."

"Biased." Rory kissed her on the forehead. "What you can't see in this photo are the pride rings. I had them tucked under my shirt."

"Why? I thought you were out then."

"I was. I was just going through this thing where I didn't want everything I did to be seen as gay. Like, 'Oh, she's in the drama club, that's so gay.' I guess I cared too much about what other people thought back then. But I got over that. You know, I don't think you would have dated me back then, I was something of a moody little brat."

Maggie took the book and flipped it over to the cover, holding her page with her finger. "2007? You were 17, I would have been arrested. So no, adorable or not, I wouldn't have dated you."

"Too bad, I really could have used some street cred. Dating you would have surely given me that."

"Yes, but I'd look terrible in an orange jumpsuit."

"Everyone does. Do you think that's why they made it orange, as a deterrent?"

"Because looking washed out is worse than getting beat up or raped in prison?"

"Just a thought." Rory grinned then began to thumb through the book again to find more pictures, when a thought occurred to her. "So, where in the world were you in 2007 since you weren't here making a woman out of me?"

A surprised laugh escaped Maggie. "Well, let's see. Seven years ago I was still in Boston. I was an associate professor at a small community college not far from where my parents live. I had been single for a couple of years at that point. My last girlfriend had left me for a man."

"Bitch."

"I know. So, I was feeling a little battered around here," she pointed to her heart and Rory smiled softly and took her hand, "and I felt I needed a change of scenery. So, I started to look for jobs out of state."

“Wait, so you were dating women but you weren’t out to your parents yet, right?”

“Right. I had a feeling I knew how my mother would react, so I kept it from her as long as possible. I think that was part of the reason I wanted to leave, so I could live more openly. It’s easier to hide the truth when you’re thousands of miles away.”

“I’ll bet. So why did you choose our school, anyway?”

“A lot of things. The campus was lovely, Charles seemed like he’d be a good guy to work for, but mainly, it was tenure track, with potential classes I was excited to teach.”

“Were you and Charles, God it feels weird to call my dean that, were you friends once?”

“I used to think so. He was happy for me when I was dating Maxine but he took her side when I wouldn’t leave. He said, ‘There will be other jobs. I would hate losing you, but follow your heart.’ Like he knew what my heart wanted. Leaving just never felt right.”

“Obviously your heart knew you needed to wait for me. I’m so glad you did.” They exchanged a smile and Rory put a soft kiss on Maggie’s lips. She pulled back to say, “Thank you for waiting for me. Sorry I took so long,” then before Maggie could reply, Rory kissed her again more slowly. Maggie moaned into her mouth and grabbed Rory’s shirt at the shoulder and balled it into her fist. Finally, she pushed Rory away to arm’s length.

“I know it’s only been three days since we’ve done more than cuddle, but if you don’t stop—I won’t be able to.”

An evil glint came into Rory’s eyes as her hand made its way under Maggie’s blouse and found its way to her eager nipple. Maggie didn’t try to stop her; just leaned her head against Rory’s and exhaled. Very sensually, Rory asked, “You want me to stop?”

“I never want you to stop.” Suddenly, Maggie reached up to grab Rory’s curls and kissed her hungrily. Then, as she was tearing at Rory’s shirt, trying to get it off, she said, “This is so wrong.” Rory chuckled as she pulled away to take off her shirt and along with it, her bra.

“We’ll just be quiet.” Rory tossed her clothes and the yearbook on the floor, then gently pushed Maggie back on her bed and stretched out on top of her.

As Rory began to adorn Maggie’s body with kisses, Maggie whispered, “So quiet.”

Rory came back up and kissed Maggie on the lips. “I love you, beautiful one.”

Maggie moaned again with just as much love as pleasure. “I love you too,” she whispered. Their lovemaking was slow and tender and when Maggie reached her bliss, Rory covered her mouth with her own and absorbed her cries of pleasure. Afterwards, they lay in each other’s arms, safe and secure and content until morning.

...

Saying goodbye to the Morgans was harder than Maggie thought it would be. She really felt as if they accepted her and she wasn’t sure she could express enough gratitude.

“Thank you so much for inviting me and, and, accepting me.” She hugged them each in turn.

“You are always welcome here,” Ann said, as she hugged Maggie goodbye at the door.

“Yes, what she said. And next time, make sure you bring plenty of singles for the girls. Running out was just embarrassing.” John winked at her.

“Of course.”

“Okay, is the love fest over, can I have my girlfriend back, please?” Rory was smiling as she gently tried to pull Maggie away from her father. John hugged Maggie tighter to himself.

“Nope, she stays here. She can have your room. Run along, dear.”

“Dad, this is kidnapping.”

Laughing, Maggie pulled away. “Thank you, John, you’re sweet. But I must go back. I have plants.”

“And me!”

“I’m sure you can water yourself, dear.”

“Gee, thanks Dad.”

“Don’t mention it.” Sighing, John held Maggie at arm’s length. “You’re officially a Morgan now, don’t you forget it.”

She wiped a tear out of her eyes as she said, “I won’t. Thanks again.” She reached for Rory’s hand and Rory was there to lead her to the car.

“Rory, you be good to her.”

“I will, Mom. Gotta go. Love you, bye.” Rory quickly ushered Maggie to the car without looking back. Once buckled in, Rory turned to see Maggie wiping her eyes again. She brushed a tear off Maggie’s cheek with a gentle caress. “You going to be okay? Do I need to drive?”

Chuckling, Maggie said, “You know, I had gotten so used to you not driving, I’ve never thought to ask if you can.”

“Yes, I can. Driver’s ed was required in my school.”

“I see. Why don’t you drive now?”

“No car. And before you ask, yes, they offered to buy me one but I refused.”

“Why?”

“If I didn’t pay for it then it’s not my car, it’s theirs. My first car will be *my* car. School’s just been more important, so I haven’t worried about it. But, if you want me to, I can drive.”

“No baby, I got it, but thank you.” Maggie put the key in the ignition then turned to Rory and said, “I love you so much. I wish I could think of more creative ways to say it, but that’s all I got. I simply love you.”

“That’s enough. Besides, I’m fully aware that loving me is anything but simple. But you seem to manage quite well. Now, let’s go home...I mean, your house.” Suddenly looking sheepish, Rory tried to cover her slip with a smile.

“Oh honey, you were right the first time.” They shared a smile as Maggie backed out of the driveway.