

And Then We Were Three (Spark & Stone, Aidan x Heathcliff, Patreon Exclusive)

By

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“Building strength is about building character,” Heathcliff said, as he moved slowly in front of the class attendees.

Tough crowd. Aidan would laugh at him and told him he had wanted to do that. And he had. But it was one thing to feel emboldened by good intentions and decide to give fitness classes for free to disadvantaged kids and another to face the said kids.

“Will you teach us Kung Fu?” One teenager in front who seemed jittery for absolutely no reason made Heathcliff kind of nervous. It was like any given moment, the crowd would disperse, and he would have to chase them around to bring them back.

“No,” Heathcliff said while he kept his smiling face on with considerable effort. “I am not a martial arts instructor. I’m a fitness instructor.”

“Guru.” Someone snickered from the left.

Heathcliff turned to see who the wiseass was this time around. He was met by a blank stare. A girl sitting on the side turned her dull eyes from him to her fingernails, painted all black.

Teenagers were hard. Heathcliff had to admit somewhat secretly that he had hoped for boys and girls a bit younger. These young men and women in the making had to be in that dreadful phase when they needed to contest authority at all costs.

“Fitness cultivates important traits. Discipline, planning, achieving goals,” he continued.

“How long will this take?”

This time, it was a lanky teenager who spoke. He looked like an emo kid, his eyes drawn with eyeliner and too big on his gaunt face. Heathcliff had the distinct sensation that the boy was weighing him.

“As long as I decide,” Heathcliff replied promptly. “Now let’s warm up!”

Groans and sighs, along with a few expletives, or what Heathcliff thought could be expletives, followed his enthusiastic encouragement. The bunch of boys and girls seemed so uncoordinated Heathcliff could only hope they would not fall exhausted to the floor just after a few minutes.

He guided them through the paces, ignoring their exasperated stares and annoyed grunts. They needed a bit of shaping up, and Heathcliff had no intention to cut them any slack. At the end of it all, they were all sweaty and tired, but Heathcliff knew it had been a challenge for him, too.

After the class, Heathcliff walked outside and almost clashed with someone. The lanky teenager from before loomed behind the door. “What’s with you?” he asked directly. “It’s getting late. Aren’t you supposed to go home?”

The teenager shook his head and pushed the dark, probably dried, strands away from his forehead. “There’s no one home.”

“You’re in foster care, right?” Heathcliff asked. “Where are your foster parents at this hour?”

The teenager shrugged. “Beats me.”

Heathcliff felt a bit unnerved by the boy’s attitude. He seemed too loose, and Heathcliff felt worried about him. The building hosting the fitness classes Heathcliff had offered free of charge was in a somewhat seedy neighborhood. He had offered to host them somewhere else, at his own expense, but the organizers told him that it was challenging as it was for these kids to come someplace near for them. They wouldn’t trek all over the city for fitness classes.

“But you do have a key, I assume? Come with me. We can share a cab. And don’t worry about the fare. I’ll cover for you.”

“Really? Don’t you want me to blow you or something?”

Heathcliff could feel his lips setting in a grim line. “Why would you say such a thing?” he asked, his voice dropping to freezing temperatures.

The teenager shrugged. His clothes barely kept his bones together, that skinny he was. Heathcliff could feel the unsettling feeling growing as he looked at him.

“Everyone wants that,” the boy added.

“You’re Lane, right?” Heathcliff asked.

The boy seemed surprised to hear his name from a stranger’s mouth. “Yeah, that’s me.”

“Okay, Lane, now tell me who asked you for such a thing.”

Lane rolled his eyes. “Are you going to bust my balls? It’s a way to make an honest buck.”

Heathcliff could feel his stomach riling up. “Do your foster parents know about it?”

Lane threw him a look, the kind that said ‘Are you nuts?’ and ‘Why the hell do you give a damn?’ without words.

“All right. It’s too late for a kid your age to be out on the street.”

“I’m fifteen.”

“Good for you. Now let’s get you home.”

“Nah. I’d rather stay here. You sure you don’t wanna --”

“Why? Because I’m gay?” Heathcliff decided to address the thing that seemed to be on Lane’s tongue. Maybe the boy was trying to annoy him for some reason.

Lane pushed up his shoulders and let them drop. Then he stuck his hands into the pockets of his hoodie. “I heard you’re married. To some dude.”

Heathcliff felt the conversation would continue to take the wrong turn after the wrong turn. But, as long as he kept Lane talking, at least the boy didn’t propose indecent things to who knew who. “Yes, I am married.”

“That’s weird,” Lane said and balanced himself on his feet.

“Weird how?”

“Why would you marry a dude? Can’t you be gay on the down-low?”

Heathcliff wondered if he needed to pinch himself. That was one strange conversation he was having. “No, I’ve always been out and proud,” he replied promptly. “How about you?”

He had a slight sensation that Lane tried to ask something, but he didn’t have the guts.

“What about me? Would I marry a dude? No.”

“But you would offer sexual services to men, which, by the way, you’re not allowed to do. It’s illegal, dangerous, and you’re way too young.”

“Says who?” Lane challenged him from behind the fringes of dark hair getting into his eyes.

“I say,” Heathcliff said and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Are you going to get me in trouble over this?” Lane asked. “So you’re a snitch.”

“I’m not a snitch,” Heathcliff replied. “This can stay between you and me if you promise not to do it anymore.”

“Sure, I can promise. Just that my word means squat.”

So much honesty should have been disarming, but Heathcliff could not help feeling that Lane had a bit too much on his young mind that he spent his time talking to some forty-year-old instead of hanging out with people his age.

“I trust you,” Heathcliff said.

Lane stared at him with his kohl-drawn eyes. “Why should you? I’m trash.”

“Says who?”

“Everybody.” Lane looked away.

“Lane, are you gay?” Heathcliff asked. Could it be that was the problem?

“Not gay like you,” Lane replied. “You’re too gay.”

“There is no such thing as being too gay. You either are, or you aren’t.”

“I’d never marry a dude,” Lane said with finality, dodging the answer.

“Well, you’re only fifteen. There’s plenty of time to change your mind when you get older.”

Lane shook his head and shifted from one foot to another.

“Why can’t you go home?” Heathcliff decided to ask. “Are you afraid of being alone when your foster parents are away?”

Lane now looked at him like he suddenly grew a shiny pack of horns. “Do I look like I’m five to you or something? No. Those assholes didn’t leave a key. And I don’t intend to sleep on the doormat.”

“Wait. Are you trying to tell me you have no place to sleep?”

Lane shook his head. “I’ll find something. I always do.”

“That’s it. You’re coming home with me,” Heathcliff said.

He would text his husband on the way home to tell him about having a guest.

“No way.”

“Do you want me to call someone and take you there then?” Heathcliff asked.

“No. I was saying ‘no way’ in like ‘no way you just asked me to come home with you’. Is your wife away, too, or something?”

“What wife?” Heathcliff asked, his voice irritated now.

“That dude you married. He’s like a wife, right? You look too masculine for that. So he must be.”

“Your head is full of stereotypes. My husband might be home already.”

“I don’t do threesomes,” Lane said.

Heathcliff looked up, stared at the sky, said a small prayer to high heavens, and then spoke again. “Pull your mind out of the gutter, young man. I want to take you home with me so that you can have a meal and a roof over your head this night.”

Lane looked taken aback. “You sure? Do you trust me?”

“I do.”

“You’re stupid.”

“Really now?” Heathcliff crossed his arms over his chest. “Calling me names won’t work on me. I’ll make lasagna.”

Lane made a face like he couldn’t believe it. “Is that healthy food?”

“It is if I make it,” Heathcliff said promptly.

Lane snickered and looked down at his worn-out sports shoes. Heathcliff knew he could not show he was sorry for Lane; most probably, the boy would take it the wrong way.

“So you’re the wife.”

This time, Heathcliff just rolled his eyes. “I’ll call the cab. Don’t give me lip.”

“Is it a vegan lasagna or something? Healthy stuff tastes like crap anyway.”

Now, where had he heard something similar? Heathcliff thought. It didn’t matter. More important was to take the kid off the street and make sure he ate something. Lane looked one step away from fainting of hunger. It disturbed him deeply.

Aidan was at home, as he had suspected. His husband stood up and came to the door with a big smile on his face. “Hey,” he called and pulled him into a kiss.

“Hey to you too,” Heathcliff returned the kiss.

It was one of those things to go back home to. The kiss in the door, as Aidan had coined the term, was just a small brush of the lips, but it was their way of welcoming each other home.

“Are you two for real?” Lane commented. “Seriously, there are no paparazzi to see you smooching.”

Aidan let go of him and turned toward the guest. “Hmm, this must be the kid.”

Heathcliff smiled and began walking toward the bathroom. He only needed a quick shower, and then he would start cooking. He knew for a fact that Aidan wouldn’t attempt to cook, and always waited for him.

As Lane got busy with unlacing his sports shoes and looked down, Heathcliff gestured for Aidan to take over. His husband just smiled and winked at him. That was good. It meant that everything was okay, and Aidan didn’t mind having an unexpected guest.

“Did Heathcliff give you kids a good workout?” Aidan asked as he began fiddling with the remote.

He pretended to be cool but examined their guest from the corner of one eye.

A deep sigh was the answer. "He tries to make us bodybuilders or something."

"I doubt that. And have you looked at Heath? He's nothing like that."

"Yeah. He looks good." Lane was busy playing with a few loose threads from a hole in his jeans. Aidan wasn't sure that was part of the design, or Lane's pants were that worn out. "For a dude his age," Lane added.

"Heath is taking hours off his time to help you out," Aidan said.

Lane cast him a sideward glance. "Fitness is like, the last thing we need."

Aidan shrugged. "Maybe. But you can't tell it is so until you try it."

"How is it like being married to a dude?"

For a moment, Aidan considered whether he should show surprise at that question or not. "What is it that you want to know, Lane?"

"You're kind of annoying --"

"Aidan," Aidan supplied his name right away. So the kid wanted to pick a bone with him, but it was clear that playing that role, of some punk from the wrong side of the tracks, didn't agree well with him. "Why am I annoying?"

"I'm in foster care, you know."

"I don't. Heath only texted me that he would be home with a guest. He didn't forward me your personal file."

"So aren't you sorry now?"

"What for?" Aidan could feel his lips twitching in amusement.

"For ... I don't know. You're just annoying." Lane grabbed his knees with both hands.

"Ah, well, it doesn't matter, is it? You're not the one married to me," Aidan replied.

This time, he didn't hide his smile. If Lane wanted to ask something, he would have to come out and say it.

"I propositioned your husband, you know," Lane said, after a few seconds.

"Propositioned? What a big word for a teenager," Aidan said with a small snort.

He needed to be tough here a little. Now he understood Heath's text from earlier better. 'Tough cookie. Or he pretends to be.'

"I do know words," Lane said, somewhat miffed. "I'm not stupid."

"Of course you're not. Now, what was that proposition all about?"

Suddenly, Lane appeared shy. He even blushed and sank into the sofa. "It doesn't matter." He pushed the hair over his face, to cover his eyes, and looked away.

Aidan laughed. "Are you trying to make the wrong impression here? Let me just make it clear for you. It's not working."

Lane made a small sound like he suddenly choked.

"Do you want some water?" Aidan leaned forward and turned to watch Lane, assuming that his comical posture will thaw some of the ice balls the boy was trying to hurl at him.

"Yeah."

"Then go get it. The fridge is over there if you want something cold, but there's also bottled water on the counter."

"Aren't you going to fetch it for me?" Lane asked.

"Nope," Aidan said with satisfaction, and leaned back into the sofa, stretching his legs.

To get a rise out of Lane, he chose a channel broadcasting a classical music concert. The teenager scoffed but got to his feet and went to take a bottle of water. Aidan watched him as Lane navigated the kitchen area as if he were afraid his clothes would stain the furniture.

Heath felt for this kid; Aidan could tell. And he could understand why. He hadn't been as surprised as Lane might have expected at the 'propositioning' part. Lane looked like a lost child, but Aidan could tell that he would not admit he needed help in a million years.

That's why he needed to continue to annoy him a little. Maybe Lane had heard plenty of so-called kind words in his life. Or maybe he had heard too many bad words to believe that other things existed.

Lane returned and plopped himself down on the sofa. He straightened up and smoothed down a wrinkle in the comforter thrown casually on the couch. Aidan had learned plenty during the time he had been in charge of their company, especially about reading people. Lane was pretty much an open book, too young and vulnerable to hide what he was thinking.

Right now, Aidan could easily imagine, he was impressed with his surroundings and also a bit nervous. Or maybe plenty nervous, Aidan thought as he continued to examine Lane, who took measured sips out of the water bottle.

"Is this the only thing on TV?" Lane asked, after a couple of minutes of staring blankly to the screen.

"Is there something, in particular, you want to watch?" Aidan asked.

"Cartoons," Lane replied promptly.

"Aren't you a bit old for that?" Aidan asked.

Lane blushed and pulled at his knees. "I'm talking about *Rick and Morty* and edgy stuff like that. Not kids' stuff," he said quickly.

"Edgy. Right," Aidan said. "I'll give you the remote if you answer a few questions."

Lane seemed to ponder. "All right," he said but didn't appear much convinced.

"How is it like being in foster care?"

Lane snorted. "Seriously? Is that your question?"

"Humor me," Aidan said. "I've never met someone who's being raised by foster parents."

Lane shifted in his place. "It's, um, I don't know."

"Hmm, until two minutes ago, you seemed like a very opinionated young man. Come on, make an effort."

"Young man." Lane echoed his words and snickered. "You and your husband talk the same."

"I can call you 'kid'. Is that better?"

"Lane will do."

"Okay. So, how's life, Lane?"

"Isn't it rude to ask such a thing?"

"Why would it be? Is it taboo?" Aidan asked.

The arpeggios in the background worked with their conversation like clams with peanut butter. Aidan knew he had to be really hungry to think of such similes.

"No. But most people just say 'poor you', shake their heads, and move on."

"Well, I'm not most people."

"Yeah, I see. You married a dude."

Aidan couldn't keep from smiling. So there was a bit of an obsession there, and it had to have a cause. "Are you out to your parents?"

Lane huffed and puffed his cheeks. "What of how I look makes you think I'm gay? Not everyone is. Like you and your husband."

"Hmm, maybe the fact that you 'propositioned' my husband?" Aidan did the air quotes.

"Ah, that. I was just pulling your leg. And his. I don't do that." Lane shook his head and looked away. "Can I have the remote now?"

"So you lied about that?"

“I did ask your husband if he wanted me to blow him,” Lane said quickly. “But I just wanted to see his reaction.”

“Which was?” Aidan asked.

“He brought me over to dinner.”

Aidan could tell Lane couldn't quite wrap his head around why he was there. For the moment, he was satisfied with the boy's confession. “So you lied about it. Do you often lie about your sexuality, Lane?”

The teenager looked at him from behind that dark curtain of hair. “There aren't enough people for me to lie to that often.”

Aidan nodded. “I see. Here's the remote.” He passed it over to Lane who caught it quickly and began zapping through the channels in search of something more appropriate for his age.

“So, how have the two of you gotten along?” Heathcliff asked.

Aidan was making himself busy, pretending to help. “Don't worry so much about this boy. He likes to lie a lot. Whatever he tried to shock you with earlier was nothing but bravado.”

“Still, he might lie about lying,” Heathcliff pointed out. Aidan put one hand on his shoulder and snatched a bit of cheese from the plate. Heathcliff swatted his hand playfully. “Wait until I set the table. And really, how could I not worry? Look at him.”

“Yeah, I know. But pity won't work with him. I bet he tried to make himself appear edgy, just for the sake of it. Or maybe you're too cool, and he felt the need to compensate.”

“Aren't you quite the personality reader?”

“Of course,” Aidan replied and kissed him quickly on the cheek. “I do think he needs help. I can't imagine what the deal is with his foster parents. Lane doesn't want to talk about them at all. Or about his being gay. He tries to fish for info, though.”

“That's exactly what I thought, too,” Heathcliff's confirmed his husband's suppositions. “He's dying to ask things, but he's afraid to do so. And do you really believe him? That he's not --”

“What? Selling himself? I doubt it. He blushes while trying to ask how come you and I are married.”

“I didn't see this blushing side of him.”

“It seems he's a bit more impressionable when he's in my company. For some reason, he feels the need to challenge you.”

“I have no idea why,” Heathcliff said as he prepared the food.

“Seriously? You’re just so easy, babe,” Aidan said and laughed. “You have that ‘I’m going to save the world today’ look all over you.”

“I don’t,” Heathcliff protested.

“You do, and I love you for it. But, compared to you, I’m the simple guy. The kind Lane might want to talk to.”

“Then what are you doing here? Go entertain our guest.”

“I’m starving, and this takes forever,” Aidan complained.

“Stop being a spoiled child. I can’t believe that you stubbornly refuse to learn how to cook.”

Aidan scrunched up his nose in the same way Heathcliff still found cute after all their years together. “And miss on all the good cooking that you do? No way.”

“Some things never change.” Heathcliff shook his head.

“All right, I’ll go pester Lane some more. But you owe me one.”

“Sure, sure.” Heathcliff sent Aidan back to their guest with a quick kiss on the lips.

Now that he looked, Lane seemed to steal glances in their direction while pretending to be entirely absorbed by something on TV.

“So where were we? Ah, you wanted to know more about being gay,” Aidan said as he sat down.

Lane rolled his eyes. “I don’t care, dude. But I’m not going to stop you from talking,” he added quickly. “It’s your house.”

Aidan could feel his lips twitching. “Well, what do you want to know?”

“I don’t want to know anything,” Lane said defensively. “But how come you two married?”

“It’s simple. We love each other, and it came as a natural step.”

Lane said nothing. His eyes were glued to the TV, but Aidan could tell he was all ears.

“And how did you know? I mean, there are so many other dudes.”

“I didn’t care for other people, and Heath didn’t, either. We couldn’t see each other with anyone else.”

“Ah,” Lane said like he finally understood something.

“Is there a boy you like, Lane?”

“No!”

The reply was too quick not to hide the truth.

“A girl then?” Aidan decided to tease him.

Lane threw him a displeased look.

“So it’s a boy.”

Lane sulked a little more and pretended to be absorbed by the TV. Aidan decided not to bother him for the moment.

“How do you, um, you know, know?” Lane eventually asked.

“Know what?” Aidan feigned being surprised by the question.

“Ugh, don’t make me say it.”

“All right, I’ll help you out. Do you want to know how to tell if the other guy is into the same thing as you?”

Lane made himself little into the sofa, but he was so tense Aidan could only assume that he was all ears.

“Well,” Aidan decided not to wait for a reply, “you cannot truly know unless you ask.”

“Really?” Lane seemed terrified by the prospect of asking anyone such a thing.

“But, of course, there are signs. And you shouldn’t bother if the person is gay or not.”

“You shouldn’t?”

“No, you should worry, though, whether he’s into you or not.”

“I’m worried enough,” Lane said and snickered.

Aidan had a feeling he would like this kid very much. “So, is this guy in the same class as you?”

Lane blushed. “Yeah.”

“Are you two friends?”

“No.” A vigorous shake of the head followed.

“You should start with being friends.”

“I don’t know how to make friends,” Lane said.

“Hmm, I don’t think that’s true,” Aidan replied. “Here you are, talking to me, and you seem to me like a really friendly guy.”

“I say the wrong thing all the time. Like how I told your husband ... that.”

“Why did you?”

Lane looked away. “I wanted to draw attention or something.”

“That sure did it,” Aidan said and laughed.

“C’mon, don’t laugh. It’s stupid, right? I thought I was cool. But I’m lame, right?”

Most probably, Lane thought he would not meet Aidan again after tonight, so he could afford to be sincere.

“You’re not lame. Seriously, people who try to be cool are actually lame. Do you know who’s really cool?”

“Who?”

“People who are themselves,” Aidan replied promptly. “Is there something you have in common with this boy? Do you two play the same video games or something?”

“Yeah.” Lane’s face was suddenly animated. “He’s good. But I’m good, too.”

“At video games,” Aidan supplied the information Lane skipped. “So, talk to him about that. Look at things this way. If he’s not into you, at least you gain a friend.”

“That would be nice, yeah. What does it mean that he looks at me like this?” Lane was trying to present an impersonation of the boy he was talking about, making his eyes wide and staring.

“That he thinks he might have seen a ghost?” Aidan joked.

“Cut it out, dude. I’m like, serious here,” Lane protested.

“And I am, too. I think you might be a bad impersonator, that’s all. Just break the ice with this boy. Play some video games with him. Remember. It’s more important to be friends first.”

“Were you friends with your husband, first?”

Aidan threw a look at Heathcliff who was busy taking the food out of the oven now. Good, he was so starving. “Not quite. I used to be his babysitter.”

“His what?” Lane expressed his surprise at that.

“I’ll tell you that story one day. Not the X-rated version, mind you.”

“Why not? Am I a kid to you or something? You look pretty young. How old are you?”

“I’m thirty-two, and yeah, you are a kid to me.”

“That’s not fair,” Lane moaned.

“Now let’s eat, and leave that for another time.”

“Okay,” Lane agreed and followed Aidan as they got up from the sofa.

“So, can you tell me now what the two of you talked about?” Heathcliff asked.

“Lane is crushing on some boy at school. He just wanted a little bit of advice,” Aidan replied.

“So he’s actually shy?”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

Aidan kissed him, and Heathcliff pulled him on top of him. “This is pretty nice. Are you crushing on me, bunny boy?”

Aidan grunted. “Seriously, just how old must I get for you to stop calling me that?”

“Hey, we’re alone, I can call you whatever I like.”

“Hmm, do I really need to be on top tonight to remind you I’m far from being your fluffy pet?”

“I don’t mind you tending to your husband duties,” Heathcliff replied.

“I know you don’t. Who knew you’d like it so much?” Aidan shivered as Heathcliff kissed his neck and began licking it.

“I sure didn’t.”

“That’s good,” Aidan said. “You kept your ass in top shape for me.”

They exchanged kisses as Heathcliff made himself busy with their nightclothes. There were few things he enjoyed better than feeling his husband’s skin on his like that. What was he thinking about? There was nothing he loved better.

Or maybe, the thing that followed could top that. Aidan had taken to his duties as a top, when that happened, with much enthusiasm. Throughout the years, Heathcliff had come to like it more and more.

Right now, Aidan nuzzled his neck as he pushed himself in slowly. That was the preview. Sometimes, Aidan liked to be vigorous, and Heathcliff had joked about it, always, the next day when he couldn’t quite sit properly.

“Your ass is so nice,” Aidan murmured in his ear. “I can’t get enough of it.”

“I’m glad,” Heathcliff replied. “I surely can’t get enough of your cock, either. Although I’m afraid, you still have a growth spurt or something.”

“Hey, it only grows this hard and big because of you. Seriously, all the guys that had ever been in your bed before me had no idea what they were missing. Your bottom is amazing.”

“You’re just saying,” Heathcliff teased.

“That’s enough. Do you want me to get all serious? On all fours,” Aidan commanded.

Heathcliff had no issues with following that command. Soon, he was with his ass in the air, wiggling it for good measure.

“Damn, Heath, this look from up here, is like, one of a kind,” Aidan said.

“Like?”

“Ah, I must have contaminated my speech with some teenage mannerisms,” Aidan replied.

“Now, please stay like this, husband. I want to do you so damned hard.”

Heathcliff helped by pulling apart his buttocks. “Here. It’s all yours.”

“And so fine,” Aidan added, and plunged into his husband’s ass in one go, making Heathcliff grunt.

His ass was stretched well enough, but still, he could feel Aidan’s hard cock. Who would have thought he could have it so badly for this bottoming role? But tonight, he wanted to be inside his husband’s hot body, too.

“Hmm, so good,” Aidan purred into his ear, as he glued himself to Heathcliff’s back. “Want me to give you a hand while at it?”

“Not really. I want to save that all.”

“Hmm, what for?”

“Your round ass.”

“That sounds sexy. Here you go, then,” Aidan said and started pounding Heathcliff’s ass hard.

Heathcliff pushed to meet his thrusts and did his best to keep his promise. Aidan was, indeed, really good at this. He was also getting closer, which Heathcliff wanted, his well-hammered prostate in much need of sexual gratification, too.

He didn’t allow his husband any reprieve and the soonest Aidan got off him, Heathcliff just flipped him on his back and did little in terms of preparation, too eager to be inside.

“Oh, fuck, so raw,” Aidan commented, pulling hard at his legs and helping Heathcliff get more inside him and penetrate him.

They always made love with the nightstand light on. Heathcliff could see Aidan’s still glistening cock, slamming helplessly against taut belly muscles, not yet fully withdrawn from the earlier erection.

“Love you so much,” Heathcliff said through his teeth as he started coming hard, in waves, making the bed rattle with them.

“Love you more,” Aidan joked and pulled him close for a kiss.

“Really, how so?” Heathcliff caressed Aidan’s neck, enjoying how sweaty it was.

“I was more tender,” Aidan replied and laughed when Heathcliff pinched his nipples.

“You don’t say.”

They kissed for a while longer, as they cooled down. Heathcliff could not remember at all his former life, the one he had led before meeting his husband, during those moments after making love. With a clear head, sure, he could recount his adventures, but they meant nothing to him.

“Do you think Lane is comfortable?” Heathcliff asked, while still caressing Aidan’s sweaty forehead.

“He insisted on sleeping on the sofa downstairs. Don’t worry about him. He probably wants to watch more TV and jerk off.”

“Jerk off to what? It’s not like we have the porn channels included in the plan.”

“He wouldn’t need those anyway. Like all kids, he probably jerks off to something on his phone.”

“So, it won’t be a good idea to check on him.”

“No, it won’t,” Aidan confirmed. “Just let the boy be. He’s already probably scared of all your good intentions.”

“What good intentions? I only offered him a meal and a place to sleep tonight.”

“For him, it may be a lot. In the morning, I’ll take him home.”

“Didn’t you have a meeting with the guys who are supposed to show us the new t-shirt design?”

“It got rescheduled for ten AM. So my morning is free. Just remember to tell your subscribers about the new clothing line drop. It’s always good to have a little bit of hype building first.”

“You can count on me, babe,” Heathcliff said and kissed his husband. “You’re not bothered by all this thing with Lane, right? I sprang it on you without prior notice.”

“Hey, it was a last-minute thing, and I trust your judgment. You saw a kid in need and helped him out.”

“Thank you,” Heathcliff said and kissed Aidan quickly.

As much as he loved drifting off to sleep with his husband in his arms, Heathcliff could not stop thinking about the boy downstairs. He appeared to be just so vulnerable. There had to be something he could do to help Lane more. He only needed to think about it.

Aidan couldn’t help noticing how Lane grew pensive as they appeared to approach their destination. “Will your parents be home now?”

Lane grunted a reply and kept looking out the window. From his place behind the wheel, Aidan could only see the dyed hair draping Lane’s ear and most of his face from that angle.

“Not a morning person, are you?” Aidan tried again.

A small rise and fall of the gaunt shoulders was the reply.

“You might not think it, but I’m not crazy about waking up early either. Heath had to put up with me more than once.”

“You’re kidding, right? You were making noises in the kitchen before the sun was up.”

Aidan laughed. “Sorry about that. We don’t usually have guests who prefer the downstairs sofa instead of one of the bedrooms upstairs.”

“Do you often have guests?”

“Sure. Heath’s brother has three children, and there’s a full house with two extra adults and them included. And there are also Michael and Jess who have twins. Also, we like throwing parties once in a while --”

“Michael and Jess? Like another gay couple?” Lane interrupted him, but Aidan didn’t mind.

“Yes. Michael is Heath’s childhood friend, and Jess is his husband.”

“And they have children? Where did they come from?” Lane asked, turning toward Aidan.

“The children? They adopted them.”

“Ah,” Lane said. “They must be little.”

Aidan had a suspicion why Lane’s eyes traveled out the car window again. But he was not one to pry, not under the circumstances, at least. “Michael and Jess want three children.”

“Would they be interested in adopting an old kid?” Lane asked.

Aidan’s ears prickled. What was that all about? “Why are you asking?”

“Never mind,” Lane said quickly. “Can you just leave me here, at the curb?”

“I can leave you in front of the house.”

“I can walk.”

“Okay,” Aidan admitted. “Lane, don’t be a stranger, okay? I have a feeling we could be friends.”

Lane was already half out. “Okay.”

The reply had been quick and nervous. Aidan waited for Lane to take off, and, after a short moment of deliberation, he ignited the engine and followed the teenager from afar.

The house where Lane must have lived appeared to be partially run by weeds, its lawn in a sorry state, with old junk thrown haphazardly around. Aidan waited, telling himself that once he saw Lane going safely inside, he would feel that his work was done for the moment.

There was just this gut feeling that wouldn’t go away. Lane did go inside, after what seemed to be a couple of moments of hesitation in front of the door.

Aidan was about to start his car again when the door burst open and Lane with it. He stumbled, walking backward, and a man dressed in a dirty wife-beater followed. He held a belt in his hand and appeared to be going after Lane. The teenager landed on the ground, his leg caught in a damaged tire.

Aidan had no idea how he got out of the car.

“You fucking faggot! Where you been all night? Eh?” The man raised his hand, and Lane put one hand up in defense.

“Hey!” Aidan called.

His voice must have been loud enough because the man stopped, his arm in mid-air. He turned and stared at Aidan with blood-filled eyes. “Who the fuck are you? Get off my property!”

“I am on the sidewalk,” Aidan pointed out. “Lane, come here.”

Lane got to his feet and stumbled toward him like his feet were tied up. He must have hurt himself during his fall.

“Get back here, punk!” The man called out.

“Keep walking, Lane,” Aidan said, seeing how the boy appeared to hesitate under the man’s ugly words.

“Are you fucking him? Is that it? You a faggot, too?”

Aidan had a mind to tell that disgusting man a few things that would cut deep, but he had no time for quarreling with a sub-human. He also doubted his irony would reach anywhere that lay underneath that lizard skin.

“Get in the car.” He kept his eyes on the man, but he pointed with his chin at Lane.

Without a word, Lane scurried toward the car door.

“If you’re leaving, you’re never coming back!” the man yelled.

“Don’t worry. He won’t,” Aidan said in a cutting voice.

The ice cap temperature in his tone must have been enough to keep the ogre to his cave because the man didn’t move or say anything.

Aidan pretended to be completely calm as he walked to the car and got inside. His hands were trembling in anger as he began driving.

They were at a safe distance from that house, when Lane buried his head into his hands. “Fuck.”

“Well, I suppose that was your foster dad,” Aidan said. “Why didn’t you tell me he was homophobic? Was this why you didn’t want to go home last night?”

“I guess,” Lane mumbled. “He just found ... some stuff.”

“All right. I won’t ask about that. But I need to ask other things. Has he taken the belt out of you like this before?”

Lane laughed, but without one trace of humor in his voice. “And other things.”

Aidan pursed his lips. “Well, you can’t go back there.”

“I guess not. Well, it’s back to the system for me.”

By how strained Lane’s voice was, Aidan could tell he tried to put on a brave face.

“Not if we can help it. For now, you’re coming with me.”

“Where?”

“Back home,” Aidan said right away.

“All right,” Lane breathed out like he had been keeping from exhaling for a while now.

“I got your text. What’s going on?” Heathcliff hurried to meet them at the door.

“Lane’s foster father is a homophobic prick. Lane can’t go back there.”

“All right. You two, take a breather. And now explain everything.”

It was a tad unsettling to see Aidan so rattled. He had matured a lot over the years, but, in some circumstances, he still ran to him for advice. Heathcliff liked that very much. Seeing how Aidan was mostly in charge of the company so that Heathcliff could see about what he loved, as usual, it was nice to have his husband rely on him once in a while.

Aidan spoke hurriedly and brought him up to speed.

“Well, it’s an unusual situation,” Heathcliff commented.

“Unusual? People like that --” Aidan started.

“Hey, hey, I’m on your side. We need to contact a social worker. Who’s in charge of you, Lane?” Heathcliff directed his question to the boy who was standing just a little away from them and appeared to have issues what to do with his legs and arms.

“That would be Mrs. Tate,” Lane replied. “I should go talk to her, I guess.”

“Not alone,” Aidan said right away.

“No, not alone,” Heathcliff confirmed. “But you have meetings scheduled. I’ll go.”

Aidan stopped and stared at him. “I can’t think of anything else. I’ll reschedule everything.”

“No. I’ll take care of this.”

Aidan looked at him and frowned. “Why?”

“You’re a bit too emotional right now. Sorry for pointing it out. Mrs. Tate needs to see eye to eye with someone who knows how to charm the pants off a nun.”

Lane snickered. Aidan huffed. “I can’t believe you just said that. And I’m plenty charming.”

“With all due respect, babe, you look like you’re one second away from strangling someone.”

Aidan opened his mouth, ready to argue some more, but eventually, he closed it and smiled. “Just keep me posted, okay? If I don’t get a text every, let’s say, half an hour, I will lose my mind.”

“Aidan, chill a little. We must play this right, okay?”

“Okay. Lane, will you be okay with Heath?” Aidan turned toward the teenager.

Lane nodded. "Yeah. I think so. But you guys shouldn't worry about me this much. I can just go to Mrs. Tate and tell her I botched things. She'll just put me back into the system, and that's all."

"I can't agree with that," Heathcliff said. "Let's just see what Mrs. Tate has to say about placing a gay teenager with homophobic foster parents."

"Seriously, guys --" Lane started.

"We're serious, don't worry," Heathcliff said with a smile. "Now let's go."

"What about your livestream?"

Both Aidan and Heathcliff stared at Lane in surprise.

"I had no idea you followed it," Heathcliff said.

"I kind of know about it. And some other stuff," Lane replied and looked away. "It's all online, right?"

"Right," Heathcliff admitted. "I'll tweet about having something personal to take care. People will understand."

Aidan insisted on driving them, and Heathcliff decided that was the least he could do for his husband, seeing how he couldn't be directly involved.

"Lane is not the kind of child to bond well with foster parents," Mrs. Tate told Heathcliff while looking over her glasses.

"Sure. It's certainly hard to bond with people who hate you for your sexuality," Heathcliff replied and smiled.

Mrs. Tate licked her dry lips and seemed a bit disturbed by that comment. "Lane is a bit too young --"

"For what? For knowing who he is?"

"That's not what I meant," Mrs. Tate said sharply, trying to gain back some of the authority she seemed to have lost from the moment Heathcliff had stepped into her office.

"From this side, it appeared all loud and clear."

"All right, then, Mr. Stone. Lane doesn't have to go back to his foster parents, in the light of this situation."

"What will happen to him?"

Lane hadn't been allowed to be part of the conversation, which Heathcliff found unfair. However, he was bent on winning this war and had no interest to bother about small fights.

"He will be put back into the system."

"What are his chances of finding another home?" Heathcliff asked.

Through the glass window that allowed the people inside to watch the hallway, he observed Lane. His shoulders were hunched, and he was staring at his sports shoes, seemingly resigned with whatever grownups had in store for him.

"Slim. He will most probably age out of foster care, as he is. Not many families want teenagers."

"Then I want to apply to become Lane's foster parent," Heathcliff said promptly.

"Mr. Stone, that's highly unorthodox. You can't just come in from the street and pick a kid --"

"Unorthodox is what happened to him," Heathcliff insisted.

Mrs. Tate pursed her lips. "There are training classes and, of course, the home study --"

"What if we adopt him?" Heathcliff asked, all of a sudden.

Maybe he was getting a bit ahead of himself, but theoretically, he had talked to Aidan about the possibility. This was taking another step. The right step.

"Mr. Stone, I can't agree with someone who just came in and thinks --"

"What? That we can provide for this child? That we can offer him the right environment where he won't feel threatened and repressed?"

"Who's this 'we' you're talking about, Mr. Stone?" Mrs. Tate asked, her irritation growing.

"My husband and I," Heathcliff replied.

"Does he agree to this?"

"He will."

"I won't base my decision on what you believe your spouse might or might not do, Mr. Stone," Mrs. Tate continued.

Heathcliff began texting fast. Mrs. Tate stared at him, her hands linked in front of her. The clock on the wall seemed to move too damned slowly. Suddenly, his phone went off.

'SORRY FOR ALL CAPS, BUT YES! GO AHEAD AND BRING THE BOY HOME!!!!'

Heathcliff smiled. He showed the phone to Mrs. Tate. "My husband," he said proudly.

In the end, it still took a couple of months to deal with all the formalities. But, at least, they both got to know Lane a little more. Heathcliff had an entire list of the boy's favorite foods, and Aidan had been in charge of remodeling the room that would end up being Lane's bedroom.

Still, as Lane stepped over the threshold, despite having done the same so many times before, he seemed suddenly shy. He wore much better shoes and new clothes, but he appeared to be out of his element. He still hid behind a curtain of dyed hair.

Heathcliff could still recall the heated argument between Lane and Aidan. His husband had insisted so much for Lane to get a different haircut, to show his nice face and also to allow the sun to see him a little.

Apparently, nothing had worked. Heathcliff was well aware there would be kinks to work out, and battles both he and Aidan had to prepare to lose. The most important one had already been won.

"I'm so glad you're here with us."

Heathcliff made a gesture for Lane to come inside and make himself comfortable.

"Will I have to call you 'dad'? And your husband?"

"Heath and Aidan will do," Heathcliff replied promptly. "Just as you have done until now."

"It's not like I don't want to," Lane explained. "But it would be fake, you know? My dad --"

Heathcliff waved. He knew all about Lane's old history. His parents had died more than ten years ago, and there had been no other relatives to take care of Lane. Both had come from foster homes. Heathcliff wasn't sure he wanted to protect Lane from hurting over his natural parents, or he was the one hurting over it all.

"Hey, you're a young man already. It's not like you must pretend to be someone you're not."

"Are you sure you didn't want a small baby? Someone who would follow you around and call you 'dad'?"

"Lane, you don't have to worry about a thing. And we're both cool, Aidan and I. You will see that we can be pretty flexible."

"Not sure about that." Lane scratched his head. "I'm afraid Aidan will come cut my hair in my sleep."

Heathcliff laughed. "He wouldn't do that. But he will insist until he takes you to the hairstylist and gives you a makeover."

Lane snickered and looked down at his shoes. Heathcliff noted how, while that was a habit from the old days for the boy, he no longer did it with the same forlorn look on his face. He was even smiling.

“You’re no better. I might become too healthy for my emo look,” Lane joked. “So much healthy food and I might wake up one morning, looking like a jock. Maybe my voice will become thicker, too.”

“That would be a surprise,” Heathcliff replied.

Lane cocked his head. “Good or bad?”

The boy seemed to be fishing for info. He didn’t look completely sure that he belonged there. Heathcliff wanted to put his peace of mind to rest. “You can’t disappoint us, Lane.”

By how Lane’s eyes darted sideways, Heathcliff could tell his adopted son was pleased with that answer, but still too shy to show it.

“Where’s Aidan?”

“He will be home shortly. We should wait for him since he wants to inaugurate your new room.”

“Aidan is pretty good at keeping secrets,” Lane said. “It’s like there was an invisible police line with ‘do not cross’ on it around that room.”

Heathcliff laughed. “He tends to be hyper focused sometimes.”

“He’s awesome,” Lane said and then pulled one strand of hair to chew it with his teeth. “You, too, Heath.”

“I don’t think you should cut your hair, but I can’t agree with human follicles as part of your diet,” Heathcliff said.

Lane moved his hands away quickly, and then he pushed the strand of hair away from his face. “Sorry about that.”

“Don’t worry. You might not think of us of that awesome once we start nagging you for every little thing.”

“I can’t wait,” Lane replied. He snickered some more and blushed while looking down.

Heathcliff had a mind to tell Lane to correct his posture, but maybe he could spare the boy a lecture or two until later.

Aidan came in through the door like a tourniquet. “What did I miss?” he asked.

Heathcliff hurried to him and kissed him. “We just arrived, so nothing. We were making conversation about how Lane shouldn’t eat hair.”

“Ah, why did you tell on me?” Lane asked, pretending to be hurt.

Over the last few months, Heathcliff had discovered that Lane had a great sense of humor. Maybe it was sometimes misplaced and awkward, but he had a penchant for telling jokes. He could be a stand-up comedian, Heathcliff thought. But it was not yet the moment to think of a career choice for Lane. They had time to figure that out.

“Leaving your strange conversation aside,” Aidan intervened in their banter, “let’s see Lane’s room. If anything is missing, anything, you just tell me, Lane, all right?”

“The chances are that there might be too many things in there,” Heathcliff said airily.

His husband shot him a half-amused, half-murderous look. Aidan took Lane by the shoulders and Heathcliff followed. He wouldn’t do anything to make less of Aidan’s bragging rights. After all, he had put his heart and soul into that project over the last months.

Aidan opened the door to the bedroom and invited Lane in. Heathcliff stood in the doorway and threw his husband an encouraging look. In the off chance that he imagined things, Aidan wasn’t worried right now. Why should he? The room was any teenager’s dream, Heathcliff thought.

There were posters on the walls with the latest comics heroes, and the most important thing, there was a shiny new computer placed on a desk with a novelty design that Heathcliff liked instantly. He had to ask Aidan where he got it from. It looked like the epitome of ergonomics.

Anything in terms of electronics that a teenager might have wanted was there: a smartphone, wireless headphones, a tablet, and even something that Heathcliff wasn’t sure what it was. Some small robot, the kind that worked with voice recognition software?

“So, what do you think?” Aidan asked Lane who was conspicuously silent.

And took both of them by total surprise when he buried his face into his hands and started crying. Heathcliff hurried to embrace him while Aidan stood there, stunned, for a couple of seconds.

“Did I fuck up? Oh, damn, I did,” Aidan said.

Lane left Heathcliff’s arms and threw himself at Aidan, almost making him lose his balance, and cried a little more. Heathcliff patted him on the back. “Don’t worry, babe. He’s just a little emotional and overwhelmed, I think. And you should buy me a new desk like that, too.”

“I will,” Aidan said, relieved.

Lane wiped his tears with the heels of his hands and blew his nose a bit unceremoniously, but who cared? “Thank you, guys. I told you. You’re awesome.”

“Good. Then stop crying,” Aidan said, always the practical man. “Is it okay if we leave you a little, to get accustomed to the room?”

“We’ll call you downstairs when the table is set,” Heathcliff added.

Lane nodded and wiped his eyes a little more, now a bit embarrassed over having cried earlier. By how fast he took to exploring his new electronics, he would not stay sad for too long, and that was good.

“What do you think?” Aidan asked, as soon as they were both on the other side of the door. “Did he like it?”

“I think he’s over the moon. He wouldn’t have cried otherwise,” Heathcliff said. “Now help me fix dinner.”

“Hey, I’ve just slaved for your lavish lifestyle until earlier,” Aidan replied. “I think I earned my right to doze off in front of the TV until the food is ready.”

“Doze in front of the TV? What are you? Eighty?”

“Hey, I’m just trying to fit into the role of a dad with a teenage son. In sitcoms, they always look so haggard, as if the entire life were sucked out of them.”

“I think the atmosphere will get pretty lively with someone like Lane around.”

“You’re kidding, right? He’s quiet as a mouse.”

“I think he just needs a bit of time to adjust.”

“If you say so,” Aidan replied but didn’t sound particularly convinced.

“Just leave the door to your room open,” Aidan called from the foot of the stairs.

“Okay,” Lane shouted back.

“You know, you should let the boy be a little,” Heathcliff commented.

“Hey, they’re teenagers. Too young to fool around,” Aidan replied. “I’m just more at peace if they keep the door open.”

“Are you channeling your mother? No wonder you were a virgin until twenty-two,” Heathcliff teased his husband.

Aidan threw him a loaded look. “I thought you were happy about that.”

“Sure thing I was.” Heathcliff laughed. “But if I met you when you were fifteen --”

“It would have been illegal to jump my bones,” Aidan pointed out right away.

“Well, it could only mean that I would face three years filled with sexual frustration while I let you grow up,” Heathcliff said right away.

“Ah,” Aidan said, seemingly pleased with that answer.

“Let the boys be. They’re just playing video games.”

“Lane understood,” Aidan said, and looked up. “The door is open,” he said with satisfaction.

“It wouldn’t hurt to show him a bit of trust,” Heathcliff pointed out.

“Are we having a parenting fight? Because I listened to about three dozens of audiobooks on the topic. I can take you.”

“Nothing beats practice,” Heathcliff said and smiled.

Aidan sighed. “I know. I can’t believe you managed to have Lane exercise every day. I still can’t convince him to get a new hairstyle.”

“Do you want me to convince him for you?”

“No! I can do it!”

Heathcliff started laughing and ruffled Aidan’s hair. “You never give up, do you?”

“You know me,” Aidan said and embraced him. “But I still think the door to his room should stay open while he has a boy he likes there with him.”

“You’ll learn, too.”

“Um, what?”

“You’ll learn how to be a parent.”

“Wait, are you trying to tell me you know already?”

“No, but it’s something we will figure out.”

“So, how did Cal like your room?” Heathcliff asked.

“He said it was awesome,” Lane replied with a huge smile.

“Sorry I told you to leave your door open,” Aidan said, a bit chastised after his conversation with Heathcliff from earlier. “I should have trusted you.”

Lane snickered. “That’s okay. We only played some games.”

“So there’s nothing we should worry about?” Aidan said.

Heathcliff shot him a pointed look.

Aidan cleared his throat. "Sorry, what I meant to ask was if you figured out if Cal is gay, too."

Lane moved his head first toward one shoulder, then the other, as if he was deliberating. "Well, he did say something like 'your dads are hot', so there might be a chance."

Heathcliff choked with his smoothie. Aidan patted him on the back in sympathy.

"And what did you say?" Aidan asked.

"What could I say to that? I could not say the same thing."

"What? Whether we're hot or not?" Heathcliff asked.

"Yeah. I mean, what kid thinks of his parents like that?" Lane joked.

Aidan didn't seem to understand the joke. He beamed at Heathcliff. "Did you hear how he called us? His parents."

"What? You're not? Was the adoption a prank? Oh, yes, I'm going to be on TV! I'm going to be rich!" Lane laughed.

Aidan made a sour face. Heathcliff laughed his ass off, joining Lane.

"Seriously, guys, you two are awesome. Sorry for my bad jokes," Lane said. "I can't really help it."

"I'd call it a gift," Heathcliff said.

"I'd call it a weapon," Aidan added. "But it's okay. It's good to be well-armed."

Lane and Heathcliff laughed again. Aidan frowned.

"Hey, we're not laughing at you," Heathcliff said. "You told a pretty good joke, too. Isn't it, Lane?"

"Isn't it, Lane?" Aidan mirrored his words. "It's Team Lane Heath against me or something?"

"No," Heathcliff said. "It's a three-person team. Right, Lane?"

"Sure thing," Lane confirmed. "You two are the greatest dads in the world! Wait, are you two going to cry that I called you my dads?"

"Punk," Heathcliff said and swatted his son playfully upside the head.

This time, Aidan laughed the hardest.

THE END