

Patrick waited a few days before calling Mother Rosetta. Primarily because he'd been working all Friday at the junkyard, and then the weekend was busy for him and her. He also wanted to give himself time to think on what had happened, get some distance.

But he hadn't meant to call her quite this late, it was almost five. Joey had called at ten, waking him, and needed his help with a surprise load of lumber. He'd just gotten home from that. He had some food slowly cooking in the oven, and by the time he was done with his calls it would be ready.

"St-Benedict," she said.

"Good afternoon Mother Rosetta."

"Patrick, how are you doing? how is your shoulder?"

"It's good. I'm basically all healed. One more visit with the therapist to go."

"I'm glad to hear that. Did you go to the bar like you intended?"

"I did."

"How did that go?"

"Not how I hoped it would."

"What were you hoping for?"

"Something normal," he sighed. "Instead I got this guy all over me, grabbing my ass and groping me even after I tell him I'm not interested and I've left the bar."

"He followed you out?"

"Yeah, he was pretty sure that what he wanted was what I needed."

"Oh my. That certainly isn't an appropriate behavior. What did you do?"

Patrick sighed again. "I decked him. That's when he groped me, I didn't think, my fist just flew of its own accord."

She was laughing, holding the phone away. She cleared her throat. "Yes, I hope you realize that wasn't an appropriate response either."

"You might want to avoid laughing next time."

"I know. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have." She paused. "I guess that soured you on the idea of being part of the gay community."

"Actually, no. I mean I don't want to have anything to do with guys like him, but this other guy who was heading for the bar stopped to make sure I was okay."

"That's certainly good of him."

"Yeah, and it made me realized that I had this single

image of how gay people had to be, they were either all good or all bad. It made me realize that people aren't that way, some are good and some are bad. I can't hold the whole community accountable for the actions of a few assholes."

"That's a good start, but you must realize that it's still not quite that simple. Even individual people aren't all good or bad. We're all shades of the two."

"Yeah, I know I'm over simplifying it, but it really helped me accept who I am, it's weird, isn't it? What I was afraid of was that by saying I was gay, I'd have to fit into this image I had on some level of what I thought that meant. if they ended up being bad, I'd have to be that way. Now I know what others are doesn't define who I am. I get to decide if I'm going to be a sleaze or a decent guy."

"Yes, you do. I'm happy you've been able to see that. Does that mean you're ready to tell someone?"

"Yes. I'm actually going to call her once we're done."

"I thought it was something you wanted to do face to face?"

"I'd prefer it that way, but I don't want to wait until she's back. I'd like her thoughts on some things."

"Alright, then I'll let you get to it. God bless you."

"You too."

He got up and walked around for a bit and stretched. He checked on dinner, the lasagna was coming along nicely. He was in the middle of ordering the shelves in the living room when he realized he was procrastinating.

He went back to his room and called her.

"Hey Natalia."

"Patrick? wow, I never expected you to call."

"Yeah, sorry. Are you busy?"

"No, I just got back from classes and my roommate's off with her boyfriend. Look, I want to apologize for not staying while you were in the hospital."

Patrick laughed. "Nat, I already got the six messages you sent me to apologize, and like I said on all of them, it's okay. I understand you had to go back."

"I still felt bad about leaving you there."

"Don't, at least you got to miss the media circus. I had half a dozen stations wanting to interview me. Even after I said no some were still trying to pressure me in giving them my side of the story, like it would be different from what I told the police."

"Did they call you a lot?"

"No. one of the doctor told me it's illegal for them to do that, and if they call I can sue them for harassment."

"I didn't know that."

"Yeah, but turns out they lost interest in me after Ken talked with them. To hear him say it, he took down Emilio."

"Yeah, that sounds like Kenneth, conveniently forgetting that Bruno and Trevor were part of that."

"Yeah, and now he's something of a social media star, If you look online you'll find dozen of interviews he's given. He showed up on at least one family show, and he's lined up for a few more."

"Wow, he's really milking it for what it's worth."

"Yeah, well, they say everyone gets a week of fame. He's welcome to mine."

"And mine. That isn't how I want to be known. So, did you just call to bring me up to date on what's going on in the Brownstones? That doesn't sound like you."

"No, I have something to tell you."

"That sounds serious, is your arm okay?"

"Yeah, it's fine. The doctor did a good job. I wore a healing bandage for a few weeks and now the scar isn't even visible. I haven't lost any flexibility or strength."

"That's good. So what do you need to tell me?"

Patrick had done it again, he'd found something else to talk about. He took a breath. "I'm gay."

"Okay." They were both silent for a moment. "Wait, that's what you wanted to tell me? Not, you're gay and you have a boyfriend?"

"Hell no," (sorry) "I'm nowhere near ready for that. You're not surprised?"

"That you're gay? I guess. To be honest I never thought about it."

"How about when we were thirteen. Our moms kept putting us together, hoping we'd become interested in each other."

Natalia laughed. "Is that what that was about?"

"What did you think it was about?"

"I just thought my mom brought me over because she didn't want to get a babysitter or deal with the kind of troubles I'd get into without supervision. And she had us play together because that way I was out of her hair while she talked with your mom."

"Huh. I never considered it could be anything other than a matchmaking attempt."

"I never even thought about it that way. I was happy to be your friend, but I never considered anything more serious, did you?"

"No. like you said you were my friend, and there were enough people our age in relationships in the neighborhood

that I could see I didn't want anything like the nightmare it seemed to be for them. At least that's what I told myself. maybe I was just justifying my lack of interest in you that way."

"You didn't know you were gay?"

"No. I don't think the thought even occurred to me back then, and if it had, it wouldn't have stayed. Not the way our moms went on about sin and God."

"Yeah, my mom was devout to the extreme. Is yours?"

Patrick thought about it, how she'd reacted to his father's visit. "Well, she is devout." He left it at then, not wanting to be unkind to her.

"My mom flipped when I told her I was becoming a witch."

Patrick sputtered. "You're a witch?" He and an immediate image of Natalia being burned at the stake.

"Yeah. I got into it on my first year here. It's a more tolerant belief system."

"So, no spell throwing?"

She laughed. "No, this isn't like in the entertainment shows. We just pray differently." She went on to explain her religion to him, and Patrick found himself intrigued by it. Not that he had any interest in abandoning God, but he'd never had someone describe a different belief system to him with such intimate knowledge of it before.

He had to stop her when he smelled the lasagna start burning. He took it out just in time, only the edges had burned. He promised to call her again then set the table. His mother arrived moments later and they had a pleasant meal.

After he'd done the dishes and put the leftovers away he took the phone to his bedroom. His mother was watching a show in the living room, so she wouldn't hear him.

He dialed the number.

"Hello?" a man said.

Patrick hesitated for a moment. "Hi, it's Patrick."

"Patrick? Hi, it's Donald. How are you? his your shoulder doing better?"

Patrick felt his eyes getting wet. "It is. I should have called sooner. I was touched that you called."

"I'm just happy you're okay. I'll get the others."

"No, don't. I just... I just wanted to say thank you for calling."

"You're welcome." The sound of a chair scraping against the floor. "Will... will you be visiting?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

"I understand."

"I'm not... whatever I was when I left that time, you can

tell them that. I think Arthur would like to know that."

"I'll make sure to tell him."

"Dad, I just... I mean..."

Donald was sniffing. "I'm sorry," he said. "I never thought I'd hear you call me that."

"You're my dad, you and Daniel, you're my dad. I dreamed of having one for so long and now I do. I don't want to lose you. Yes, I'm going to visit again. I just have to figure out when it's going to be."

"Thank you, son. I don't know if you realize how much that means to us." Patrick couldn't reply, he was sobbing now. He was someone's son. "I should probably let you go. It's a school night, you probably have to study, and I should share the news with Daniel."

Patrick didn't tell Donald he wasn't in school. He dried his eyes and wondered how they would take the fact he'd dropped out. "Okay. I'll try to call again at some point."

"We can call you. I know the kids would love to talk with you."

"I'd rather you didn't. It's my mom's phone, we both use it and there's no telling who'll have it when you call."

"Alright, I understand. Have a good night son."

"Have a good night dad."

Patrick cried for sometime after that. He hadn't realized how desperately he wanted a father until now. After he was done crying he erased the call from the history and returned the phone to the kitchen table.

His mother was still watching a show. Something more recent this time, a police drama from what he caught.

He was surprised at his lack of anger at her for keeping his father secret from him. As angry as he had been on learning about the lie, he'd imagined that the day he accepted his father in his life he would hate her for keeping him fatherless for so long, but he didn't feel that. She was his mother, and he loved her. She had her faults, but he loved her anyway.

But she wouldn't keep him away from his father. It was his life to live and he wanted his father in it. She'd have to find a way to deal with that.

He bent over her and kissed her head. "I'm turning in. Joey needs me to come in the morning, we still have a lot of stuff to move from today's delivery."

she smiled at him. "Alright. you sleep well I'll see you in the morning."

"You too. I love you mom."

"I love you too Patrick."